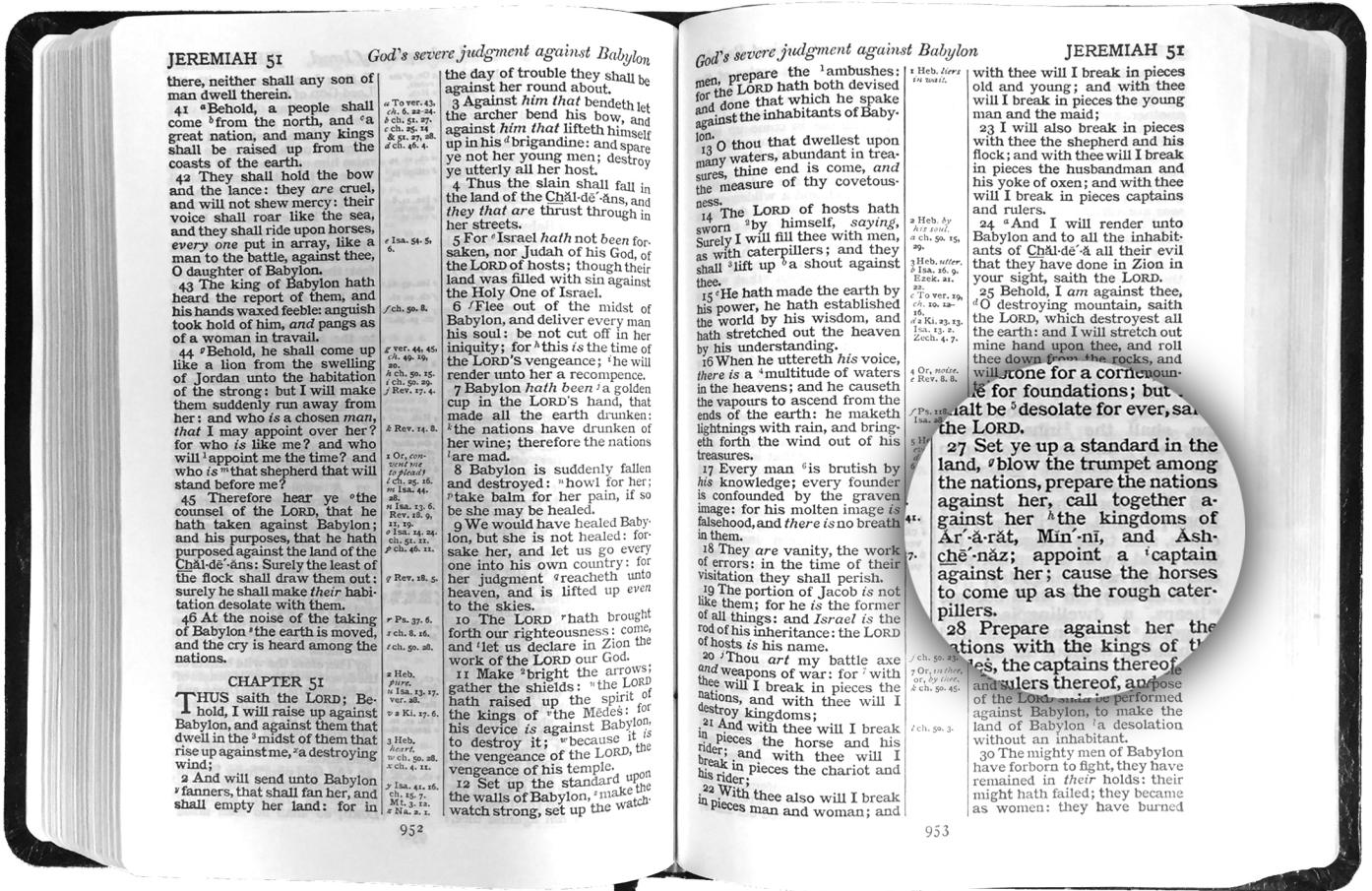


# SET YE UP A STANDARD IN THE LAND

## (JEREMIAH 51:27)



**JEREMIAH 51**

*God's severe judgment against Babylon*

there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.

41 Behold, a people shall come from the north, and a great nation, and many kings shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.

42 They shall hold the bow and the lance: they are cruel, and will not shew mercy: their voice shall roar like the sea, and they shall ride upon horses, every one put in array, like a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Babylon.

43 The king of Babylon hath heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble; anguish took hold of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail.

44 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan unto the habitation of the strong: but I will make them suddenly run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me?

45 Therefore hear ye the counsel of the LORD, that he hath taken against Babylon; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitation desolate with them.

46 At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations.

**CHAPTER 51**

THUS saith the LORD; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind;

2 And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in

the day of trouble they shall be against her round about.

3 Against him that bendeth let the archer bend his bow, and against him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine: and spare ye not her young men; destroy ye utterly all her host.

4 Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and they that are thrust through in her streets.

5 For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the LORD of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.

6 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the LORD'S vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence.

7 Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

8 Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed.

9 We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies.

10 The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

11 Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple.

12 Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watch-

*to ver. 43, ch. 5, 22-24; ch. 51, 27; ch. 52, 14; ch. 51, 27, 28; ch. 48, 4.*

*Isa. 51, 5-6.*

*ch. 50, 8.*

*2 ver. 44, ch. 49, 19, 20; ch. 50, 39; Jer. 17, 4.*

*2 ver. 44, ch. 49, 19, 20; ch. 50, 39; Jer. 17, 4.*

*2 Rev. 14, 8.*

*1 Or, come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.*

*1 ch. 29, 16; Rev. 18, 9, 21, 22; Isa. 24, 24; ch. 46, 11.*

*2 Rev. 18, 5.*

*2 Pa. 37, 6; ch. 8, 16; ch. 50, 30.*

*2 Heb. 11, 13; 15, 17, 18; 16, 17, 18; 17, 19, 20; 18, 21, 22; 19, 23, 24; 20, 25, 26; 21, 27, 28; 22, 29, 30; 23, 31, 32; 24, 33, 34; 25, 35, 36; 26, 37, 38; 27, 39, 40; 28, 41, 42; 29, 43, 44; 30, 45, 46; 31, 47, 48; 32, 49, 50; 33, 51, 52; 34, 53, 54; 35, 55, 56; 36, 57, 58; 37, 59, 60; 38, 61, 62; 39, 63, 64; 40, 65, 66; 41, 67, 68; 42, 69, 70; 43, 71, 72; 44, 73, 74; 45, 75, 76; 46, 77, 78; 47, 79, 80; 48, 81, 82; 49, 83, 84; 50, 85, 86; 51, 87, 88; 52, 89, 90.*

**JEREMIAH 51**

*God's severe judgment against Babylon*

men, prepare the ambushes: for the LORD hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon.

13 O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.

14 The LORD of hosts hath sworn by himself, saying, Surely I will fill thee with men, as with caterpillers; and they shall lift up a shout against thee.

15 He hath made the earth by his power; he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding.

16 When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

17 Every man is brutish by his knowledge; every founder is confounded by the graven image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them.

18 They are vanity, the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.

19 The portion of Jacob is not like them; for he is the former of all things: and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts is his name.

20 Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms;

21 And with thee will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider;

22 With thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and

*1 Heb. 10, 11; ch. 50, 15, 19.*

*2 Heb. 10, 11; Ezek. 21, 22.*

*3 To ver. 19, ch. 50, 38-40; 51, 23, 24; Isa. 43, 2; Jer. 4, 7.*

*4 Or, voice; Rev. 8, 8.*

*5 Pa. 118, 118; Isa. 43, 2.*

*6 Heb. 10, 11; ch. 50, 15, 19.*

*7 Or, voice; Rev. 8, 8.*

*8 ch. 50, 23; Or, voice; Rev. 8, 8; ch. 50, 45.*

*9 ch. 50, 3; Or, voice; Rev. 8, 8.*

with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid;

23 I will also break in pieces with thee the shepherd and his flock; and with thee will I break in pieces the husbandman and his yoke of oxen; and with thee will I break in pieces captains and rulers.

24 And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD.

25 Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will rone for a corner-stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the LORD.

27 Set ye up a standard among the nations, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ar-rat, Min-ni, and Ash-che-naz; appoint a captain against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillers.

28 Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the earth, the captains thereof, and rulers thereof, and those of the land: make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant.

29 The mighty men of Babylon have forborn to fight, they have remained in their holds: their might hath failed; they became as women: they have burned

Set Ye Up A Standard  
In The Land  
(Jeremiah 51:27)

Michael Hatcher, Editor

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# Set Ye Up A Standard In The Land (Jeremiah 51:27)

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# SET YE UP A STANDARD IN THE LAND

*Bruce Stulting*

*Christian* brings to mind various things to different people. Some of the things that would come to mind would be that a Christian is: (1) a child of God, (2) faithful, (3) a disciple, (4) obedient, (5) saved, etc. However, many would never think of a Christian as being a spiritual soldier. Yet whether we realize it or not, when anyone renders obedience to the Gospel in becoming a Christian, he also becomes a soldier of Christ and is thus in His army. He must be ready to “earnestly contend for the faith” and “fight the good fight” against every evil way (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:12). The text for our study comes from Jeremiah 51:27 which reads:

Set ye up a standard in the land, Blow the trumpet among the nations, Prepare the nations against her, Call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; Appoint a captain against her; Cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillers.

In this lesson, we will examine Jeremiah’s use of *standard* and what it means to raise it up. In doing so we will discuss: (1) What is a standard? (2) Where is the standard raised? And (3) Who will answer the call today?

## WHAT IS A STANDARD?

The primary meaning of *standard* in the *Webster’s Student Dictionary* is, “A flag, ensign, or banner, used as an emblem of government, body of men, head of state, etc.” (208). It is used in various ways in the Scriptures with the meaning being determined by the context.

### A Family Banner or Crest

Moses assigned areas around the Tabernacle for the twelve tribes to set up camp and instructed:

Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father’s house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch (Num. 2:2).

In this case, *standard* is used in reference to a banner of a certain family. This would be an easy way to locate someone among a city of tents.

### A Standard for God’s Army

Our text uses *standard* as the emblem for God’s army. The standard is raised to indicate the enemy of God and as a rallying point for the army to attack. When the *standard* is raised, the army moves in for the kill.

## WHERE IS THE STANDARD RAISED?

### Babylon Is an Example

Because of her wickedness, Babylon incurred God’s wrath and He determined to utterly destroy her. First, God sets forth a challenge.

Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, Make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, Prepare the ambushes: For the LORD hath both devised and done That which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon (Jer. 51:12).

Then God commands:

Set ye up a standard in the land, Blow the trumpet among the nations, Prepare the nations against her, Call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; Appoint a captain against her; Cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillers (51:27).

Both references are to raise a standard, but Babylon’s is in vain.

This would serve as a rallying point for the surrounding nations to attack. We understand this to be a figurative *standard* rather than a literal one. Nevertheless, this is how God chose to call His troops and point their way to the battle. With the standard set against Babylon, there could be no doubt that she was God’s enemy and worthy of destruction.

### Amalek Is an Example

And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out

the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn *that* the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation (Exo. 17:14-16).

Although *standard* does not appear in this text, the idea is implied. The judgment against Amalek was carried out hundreds of years later during the reign of King Saul. God commanded Saul:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember *that* which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid *wait* for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass (1 Sam. 15:2-3).

Notice, the command was the utter destruction of Amalek. Nothing less would be sufficient in dealing with God's enemies. However:

Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all *that was* good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing *that was* vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly (15:9).

Saul's disobedience cost him dearly.

The conversation that ensues between Saul and Samuel is very revealing about how serious God is regarding the destruction of His enemies.

And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed *be* thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What *meaneth* then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear (15:13-14).

In a vain effort to defend himself, Saul blames the people for saving the best of the animals to be used as a sacrifice to the Lord (15:15). In response, Samuel declared:

Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *And* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, He hath also rejected thee from *being* king (15:22-23).

To punctuate his point, Samuel hacked King Agag to pieces with a sword.

The lesson in all of this is that there can be no quarter given when the standard is raised against God's enemies. There are no exceptions for family, friends, or colleagues. Nor will any excuse be accepted for non-compliance. God's enemies must be utterly destroyed.

### There Is a Standard Raised Today!

We must understand that the battle rages on today. Paul informs Timothy:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places* (Eph. 6:12).

It was not uncommon in war that an army would put a lot of emphasis on its banner. Soldiers are needed who are willing to put the banner first and are willing to pick it up and use the Word of God to defend it against all enemies.

We cannot pick and choose our battles. When the banner is raised, the Christian soldier must respond without hesitation. A Christian cannot be a pacifist and refuse to fight in the battle. Nor is the Christian a spectator sitting on the sidelines. Rather, we must all engage the enemy and fight until the battle is won or there is no life left in our bodies. At the end of our lives, like Paul, we must be able to say, "I have fought a good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7). Only then are we assured of receiving a "crown of righteousness" (4:8).

We must be willing to make sacrifices for God's sacred cause. Paul encouraged Timothy:

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

When we live the Christian life, there will be a time when we have to be willing to endure and fight the good fight of faith. The old devil wants us to give up and yield to our temptations, but we must not listen to him, and we must not listen to the world. Instead, we should focus our attention on being pleasing to our captain, Jesus Christ. As James says:

Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (Jam. 1:12).

The cares and pleasures of this world serve only to distract us from the battle at hand. The Christian soldier must recognize that he is fighting in a foreign land and that his reward is waiting for him in heaven. Paul wrote:

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:16-17)

He also wrote:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

The apostle Paul is a great example of a Christian soldier. He was willing to give up everything and press toward the mark of the high calling of God.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ...Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:8, 13-14).

We must keep moving forward in our battle against the devil and sin. We must never stop putting one foot in front of the other regardless of the sacrifice because the minute we do the temptations of life will start gaining power, and they may overcome us and cause us to sin. When this happens, the battle is lost.

### WHO WILL ANSWER THE CALL?

There are many today who are willing to fight the good fight of faith against unnumbered foes. However, our ranks are getting thin because many have deserted their post and joined the enemy. Furthermore, many great soldiers of the Cross have passed on to their reward. Likewise, many more are getting up in years and may soon be gone. Although we hope and pray that these stalwarts of the faith will live for many more

years, we are concerned about who will take their place. Where are the young men who are devoted to Christ and willing to make the sacrifices necessary to become personal workers, Bible class teachers, preachers, and elders? Where are the members who are willing to defend the Faith to their families, friends, neighbors, and the stranger on the street? It appears that the Lord's church is becoming more and more like the denominations surrounding it. The church is becoming (1) content to let the preacher/teacher/elders do their studying for them, (2) content to let others work for them, (3) content to let others defend the Faith for them, (4) content to let others evangelize for them, and (5) content to let others worship for them.

### Unqualified

Some may feel that they are unqualified to defend the truth. If that is the case they have no one to blame but themselves. It is incumbent upon each and every Christian to develop his/her talents. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). It takes hard work and many hours of study to become proficient in the use of God's Word. We can do it in other fields of study, why not the Bible? Paul instructed Timothy, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). Every Christian must make his/her own preparations to defend the Faith.

### Afraid

Many are afraid to defend the truth. That there are cowards in the church is an unpleasant truth. However, fear must be overcome. There can be no retreat! The army of the Lord must constantly advance upon the enemy. To do so, God's army must be fearless. We should all be training and working to become strong and courageous spiritually. As Paul said:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places* (Eph. 6:11-12).

The better equipped we are at handling God's Word, the more courageous we will become. God's Word is called the sword of the Spirit (6:17), but if we do not train with that sword, we might as well go to battle with a butter knife.

Every Christian must do his/her best to aim for the heart of the sinner with the Truth of God's Word. We need to take the advice God gave Joshua:

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Jos. 1:7).

### Disqualified

Many are disqualified from serving in God's army. Sin is an ever-present threat to the Christian soldier. If we are not paying attention, the enemy can sneak up on us and destroy us. Jesus gives us some good advice when He said, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly *is* ready, but the flesh *is* weak" (Mark 14:38). As good soldiers, we must pay attention to our surroundings and renew our strength by praying to God. As Paul said, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5).

Not only do we need to remain alert for our own selves, we need to remain alert for our congregation. The minute we let our guard down, sin can enter our lives and hinder the cause of Christ. Those in sin are ineffective guards and they allow sin to gradually creep into the congregation. Elders are especially responsible for guarding those under their oversight (Acts 20:28-31). Failure to stay aware of the battle raging around us could lead to sin and neglect which weakens God's army and could allow sin and corruption into the church.

### CONCLUSION

There is no greater service than to serve in God's army. We are fighting for God Almighty and for the salvation of the souls of men. It is this writer's heart's desire and prayer that this lesson will help the reader become a better soldier in God's army. If we take the time and put forth the effort to make the necessary changes in our lives, we can be faithful Christian Soldiers for the Lord. I want to end my lesson with the words of Paul in:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:10-18)

When the Standard of God is raised against sin, everyone must rally to the trumpet sound and fight the good fight of faith until the victory is won.

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.  
 "Standard." *Webster's Student Dictionary*. N.p.: Trident Press, 2002.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of *standard* as used in Jeremiah 51:27?
2. What lessons can be learned from the example of Amalek?
3. Who is required to answer the call to defend the Truth?
4. What kind of war are we waging?
5. What is required to be a good soldier?

# ARE WE CARRYING THE RIGHT BANNER?

*Gene Hill*

There's a royal banner given for display  
To the soldiers of the King;  
As an ensign fair we lift it up today,  
While as ransomed ones we sing.  
Marching on, Marching on,  
For Christ count everything but loss!  
For the King of kings toil and sing  
'Neath the banner of the cross!  
(Whittle #671)

## WHO IS THE 'WE'?

It would seem otherwise obvious but for the sake of clarity, we will define *we*. In this effort *we* are those who make up the church (Acts 2:47), that body of those washed (22:16; Rev 1:5; 7:14) and sanctified in the blood of the Lamb (Heb. 13:12; 9:12; 10:22). The church is that “called out” body of believers which Jesus promised to build (Mat. 16:18-19). These believers are they who make it a practice to follow those words of the Master which will judge all souls on that last great day (John 12:48-50), doing so out of love for Him and what He has done for us (Gal. 5:5-6).

As faithful members of the church/kingdom of Christ (Mat. 16:18-19; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14; 12:28), we are involved in spiritual warfare with the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:13-14). We are soldiers in the cause of Christ against evil and the forces of evil (Eph. 6:10-18; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12). Because of that fact, we are to make certain that the banner under which we fight is the right one and that it is upheld at all times.

## WHAT IS THE BANNER WE ARE TO CARRY?

A *banner* is a piece of cloth attached by its edge to a pole or staff and used as a standard by a king. A *standard* is something elevated as a signal or beacon. Such symbols are used for purposes of identification (Num. 1:52; 2:34), for direction (10:34). God has even used an ensign to call the enemies of Israel upon them as punishment (Isa. 5:26).

It is also the case that the Ark of the Covenant itself was used inappropriately as either an ensign or even talisman to rally the troops or to ward off evil.

And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies? (1 Sam. 4:3).

It is interesting to note that in their view the Ark would save them. Other words used are *standard*, *ensign*, *sign* (Jos. 4:6). *Banner* is used in these passages—Psalm 20:5, 60:4, Song of Solomon 2:4, 6:4, and Isaiah 13:2.

What of us now living under the New Testament of Christ? Has God given to us a banner or ensign around which we can rally today? The answer is a resounding “yes!” We sing the hymn, “The Banner of The Cross,” which illustrates it wonderfully. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die” (John 12:32-33). The cross of Christ is that which draws the lost sinner, the weary Christian, as well as the eager saint to the cause of Christ.

The Banner we carry and under which we fight against the power of darkness (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7) is the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14). The importance of this fact is better appreciated when one understands the cross is part of God's eternal plan for the salvation of man. In giving the facts of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul says twice that the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ was “according to scripture.” The scheme of redemption, God's plan for the salvation of the soul of fallen man is a plan formulated by God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; Mat. 25:34; John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:18-21).

### WHERE DOES THIS BANNER LEAD US?

When we consider the totality of Biblical teaching, we are led to at least the following: We are led to the one body (Eph. 1:4) prophesied of in Isaiah 2:1-4 and promised by Jesus in Matthew 16:18-19. Isaiah tells us of the Lord's house being established, and Paul gave Timothy instructions on how to behave in the house of God which he also calls the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). Isaiah tells us we will be taught of His ways, and Jesus assigned that task initially to the apostles (John 14:16, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7, 13; Mat. 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-47).

Jesus taught that there is a way to enter into that church. It is narrow and straight (Mat. 7:13-14). It is exclusive in nature (John 14:6). There is water in the entry way designed to keep out unbelievers (3:3-5; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). We find that this entry way, through the watery grave of baptism, accomplishes a number of objectives. We contact the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:21-22; 10:9-10, 21-22), obtaining cleansing (Acts 22:16), sanctification (Rom. 6:3-4, 16-18; 1 Pet. 1:22), and addition to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27), which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Acts 2:47).

Following that banner, we also learn how to worship God acceptably (2:42): the proper day (20:7), exclusively vocal music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), through prayer (Acts 2:42), by giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2), weekly communion in the supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34), and preaching (Acts 20:7).

Jesus teaches emphatically that His Way is the exclusive way in all things pertaining to faithfulness in faith, work, and worship to obtain heaven.

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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

This way included a lifestyle that is and was easily identified and identifiable. Saul of Tarsus was empowered by letters from the high priest to find disciples of this way in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). This way, opposed by Saul, is that for which Stephen was martyred in Acts 7, Saul persecuted in Acts 8:1-5, which Philip preached in Samaria (8:5-25), to which Philip converted the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40).

That way, when faithfully practiced, demonstrates a wide distinction between it and all other religious worldviews. It teaches that the church is a religious institution formulated in God's mind as an essential part of the scheme of redemption. When only the New Testament is used as guidance, the church has a unique set of entrance requirements, worship practices, government standards, a moral discipline by which society notices as unique among religions claiming the Bible as a source of guidance.

This banner, when followed, leads its soldiers into direct confrontation with the forces of darkness. We vigorously oppose so-called denominational Christianity as that which, when followed, condemns its adherents to eternal darkness. We condemn all sexual relations other than those between a man and woman in a divinely joined marriage as being immoral and sinful. We adhere to the New Testament's definition of marriage as an exclusively heterosexual relationship entered into by a man and a woman who have never been married, or those who have lost their spouse, or whose spouse is guilty of adultery.

While we are good citizens (Rom. 13:1-7; 2 Pet. 2:13-16; 1 Tim. 2:1-2), we oppose evil in high places (Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; Tit. 3:1; Mark 6:16-17). We use every lawful means to oppose darkness (Acts 25:11). We maintain the purity of the faith despite any efforts at intimidation or threats (Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4). It should be noted that the armor Paul describes is typical of the Word of God (Eph. 6:10-24) and only a soldier on active duty needs armor.

The faithful profession of our faith on a day in and day out walk will in fact bring persecution on some level from those round about us. The persistent effort by our first century brethren

brought them into direct conflict with the powers that be (Acts 2:46-47; 5:42). People do notice the faithful living and the faithful proclamation of the Gospel (19:21-27).

Carrying the right banner in the correct manner, will cause us to be humbled and the Christ to be lifted up, drawing all men unto Him.

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### QUESTIONS

1. Who is the *we* that is identified as carrying the banner?
2. What is identified as being the banner under which we are to fight and live?
3. List the things listed into which we are led?
4. What obstacle is in the door to the kingdom that keeps out unbelievers?
5. What direct confrontation does following the banner lead us to, and what are some of the things listed that bring the confrontation?

# STUDY TO SHOW THYSELF APPROVED

*Johnny Oxendine*

**S**tudy to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

The focus in this chapter will be developed from the word that is translated in the King James Version as *study* (“diligence”). It is generally defined as to be “diligent, serious, to do wholeheartedly, to expend oneself, to treat seriously or respectfully,” but is significant in that it also lends an increased emphasis *to show thyself approved unto God*.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2 Timothy (generally assumed to be Paul’s last writing to appear in the New Testament) he is encouraging his younger child in the faith (Timothy) with regard to how one might best handle those in the church who are fighting over words (2:14) and those who are the enemies of the cross (2:17—Hymenaenus and Philetus, among others), by providing a seminal primer imparting how to conduct himself in general as a servant of the Lord and as a leader among the brethren.

The passage that we are looking at is one of the most well-known and often quoted in the New Testament. There are good reasons for that (which we will address shortly), but we must also be reminded that the impetus for Paul’s exhortation here to the younger brother in Christ has a relevance (that can be utilized) and permanence (reliability) that should be preached from our pulpits today if we desire the Lord’s church to continually be strengthened from within to guard against attacks internal and from without.

## **STUDY TO SHOW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD**

Paul is exhorting the young preacher to be mindful of the fact that though he might need to respond to men whose actions are reproachable (2:14, 17), his primary responsibility is to be conscientious of how those actions are/will be

viewed not only by men, but by God Himself. There is an extraordinary implication in this message because we (New Testament Christians who would be making that effort to defend the Gospel) are often embroiled in issues that can upend and overthrow the faith of our local brethren or the brotherhood at large, and thus how we conduct ourselves in approaching problems could overshadow the explicit manner in which those issues might need to be addressed.

The Greek *spoudason* is rendered in the King James Version “study,” which does give the overall sense or idea that Paul is presenting. It is a term that also carries nuanced definitions like “being eager,” “zealous,” and “making an effort.” Paul is charging young Timothy to do his very best, to try as hard as he can to insure his actions are presentable, respectable, with humility, and acceptable to God.

He is to present (“show thyself”) himself as one who has been (and will continue to be) tested and found sincere (or genuine with respect to faithfulness, moral, and doctrinal purity) by the standards that God Himself has established. The word further reveals a particular quality being exhibited in the effort undertaken to be well-pleasing before God. Paul in Romans 14:10, speaks of having to appear “before the judgment seat of Christ,” which certainly gives another understanding/perspective of what it means to present oneself before God for examination.

This coincides well with Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:1, where one is presenting himself to God by revealing a commitment to holy living and sacrifice. This also speaks to our present-day responsibility as New Testament Christians to make every effort (simply do all that is possible) to be pleasing to our Lord and Master. This exhortation was, of course, to Timothy, but the implications for us today should be clear enough. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:10: “Wherefore the

rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

### **A WORKER WHO DOES NOT NEED TO BE ASHAMED**

This phrase suggests the idea of one who is, in fact, a worker (the view of a laborer who works the soil) not ashamed to have his *work* inspected, or of one who has passed some type of test. One might remember the Lord’s reference to laborers and harvest (Luke 10:2; Mat. 9:35-38). In addition to referencing “a worker,” it carries the connotation of one who actually is engaged in the work and effects an outcome as a result of that work. The obvious intimation here is that when one is engaged in a work that **positively** reflects the effort that worker puts in, he is not ashamed of what has been completed/accomplished and feels validated/gratified by that work as well.

Paul in Romans 1:16, stated that he was “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” as it was “the power of God unto salvation,” and that understanding (in the “power of God”) propelled him to deliver a treatise on the necessity of compliance and clearer comprehension of God’s righteousness.

Earlier we see Paul using the word with regard to the testimony about the Lord, for the reason for his faith, and for one who was not ashamed of Paul’s chains:

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... 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... The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain (2 Tim. 1:8, 12, 16).

Often these are the areas people do become ashamed of the confession made at baptism. Some become ashamed of (and refuse to defend) the Gospel when confronted by mainstream liberalism. Some are ashamed to admit their faith (in contrast to agnostics or atheists) to those around them whereby it might jeopardize friendships

and other relationships, leading to isolation and withdrawn acceptance. Finally, some are ashamed of others for their outward show and announcement of faith (sometimes in public places when they pray or speak of the Bible). Each of those instances illustrate how one might be ashamed of some aspects of the Gospel.

Here Paul seems to give the encouragement to Timothy that his work for the Lord should not be such that he (Timothy) himself should be ashamed of what he has done (what efforts he has made) in service for the Lord. Of course, one would not be ashamed of the Gospel (or its proclamation), but we would also hope that we might not ascend before the throne of God to give an answer for our deeds, being ashamed that our deeds/service for His cause are lacking as a result of those meager efforts, either.

### **RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH**

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17:11).

Properly handling God’s Holy and Divine Word comes from the idea of cutting a straight path or holding a straight course. The primary thought Paul is wanting to get across is that the minister of the Gospel is to present the truth rightly, not abridging it, not handling it as a charlatan (see 2 Cor. 2:17), not making it a matter of wordy strife (2 Tim. 2:14), but treating it with an honesty and comprehensiveness, in a straightforward manner, insuring that it is understood properly by others. This would naturally include the proper translation of words, and the application of those words in the proper context they are found within the text. There is also the importance of grammar, the contemporary usage of the Greek, and of course making the effort to provide the proper hermeneutic (which employs a methodology or theory of interpretation). New Testament Christians generally (and in this instance, Timothy specifically) **must be** workmen **who study** God’s Word, laborers who study diligently: who unashamedly (we would expect joyfully)

correctly analyze and accurately divide (rightly handle and skillfully teach) the Word of Truth.

Christians must be set for the defense of the Gospel as mentioned in Philippians 1:17, and that verse extends tremendous responsibility to the Christian (though we know this is Paul speaking for himself, but in a context that includes all) to understand our role (being **placed** to take a stand for God's Word), and part of that defense must include **being properly armed** with the Word of Truth. This would represent one not only being ready to defend truth, but also being able and capable **in** the Word with regard to knowledge, and willing to put aside any presuppositions and biases with respect to the presentation of the Gospel to others. To cut a straight path for the truth to travel from one vessel to another. We must teach the Scriptures correctly, giving them the proper interpretation as a result of diligent study insuring the message of salvation is not confusing or contradictory in any way to the hearer.

At times this will put us at odds with friends, family members, co-workers, and neighbors, but we will, in the end, be pleasing to our Creator. This may be one of the more disappointing aspects of complying with the message Paul delivers to Timothy (and every Christian) in that the

straight cut truth is often the point of departure for so many in the world (and now brotherhood) because the standard requires adherence.

The reason there are denominations at all is because they have not "rightly divided" the Word of Truth (whether intentionally or not). There has been the unrelenting effort to move away from the words of Scripture to *create* man's own religion: "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). These men are bent and content to view God's Word as nothing more than "love letters" or an irrelevant relic of the past.

Paul reminds Timothy that the Word of the Lord must not only be defended, but also preserved. Its adherents and defenders must not cower in the face of its enemies or detractors. That demands of us the unashamed diligence to handle His Word with care, consideration, and resolve. That would be pleasing to God.

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#### QUESTIONS

1. What was Paul exhorting Timothy to do and why?
2. How can it be known if a person is diligent in his efforts for the Lord?
3. Why do we need God's approval?
4. Can a New Testament Christian be ashamed of the Gospel? How can we tell?
5. What assurances do we have that passages have been "rightly divided"?

# GROWING IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE

*Daniel Denham*

Peter commands, “But 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). With these words the apostle Peter closes his second epistle.

The Second Epistle of Peter, similar to the first epistle focuses in some measure on the necessity, course, and purpose of growth, especially in 2 Peter 1:1-11, which discusses the blessed condition of the saints in the “like precious faith,” the Christian graces as they relate to those blessings, their benefits, and thus sets the tone for the book regarding personal conduct. This section may be summarized as The Faith and Growth. The remainder of chapter 1:12-21 deals with the Foundation for Growth, which are the Scriptures. Peter emphasizes the certainty of that foundation. Chapter 2 concerns the danger of False Teachers to that Growth. Second Peter 3 discusses the ultimate Future in view of that Growth.

In 2 Peter 3, the apostle stresses the righteous, godly manner of life that ought to attend the saints as they wait for the Lord’s return. He states that they must “account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation” (3:15). He says that Paul teaches the same thing “in all of *his* epistles” (3:16). This implies the possibility of delay, i.e., that the Lord may rightly delay His return in judgment due to His longsuffering nature (cf. Mat. 24:48).

He warns against “wresting the Scriptures,” while pointing to some who were doing just that. He calls those who do such things “unlearned and unstable” (2 Pet. 3:16). He reminds them that they already know these things and to “beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (3:17). It is then that the exhortation to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” is given.

Let us now turn our attention to this exhortation in our study. In examining the text, we see:

## THE COMMAND FOR GROWTH

The word translated *grow* is the Greek verb *auxanete*. It is the present active imperative of the verb *auxano*, which means in its intransitive use, as here: “to increase, to grow.”

The *present tense* shows that the growth is to be **persistent**. It is progressive in nature, as that is the essential idea of the present form here. The Greek present tense denotes primarily the idea of imperfective action, or action in process. In many texts, like this one, it especially carries the nuance of progression. We never reach a point in which we should stop growing spiritually. Like reptiles which keep growing until they die, Christians are to be people who persist in seeking to grow until the Lord calls them home.

The *active voice* shows that the subject, which subject is *you* implied in the verb, is to do the action. So, growth itself is a **personal** obligation. One cannot blame others for his own failure to grow, if he fails to put any real enthusiasm and energy into it.

The *imperative mood* of the verb stresses the idea that the action is **prescribed**. It is obligatory, and not optional. To be a faithful child of God the Christian **must** grow. If he ceases to do so, then he withers and dies (cf. John 15:1-8). One needs to grow. It is imperative. He needs to **make a practice of growing**, which is the force of the present imperative in Greek.

We see:

## THE CROWNING PURPOSE OF GROWTH

First, the crowning purpose of growth is given by Peter. It is the aim of growth. We are not exhorted or commanded to grow simply for growth’s sake. Growth has a high and noble purpose.

Atheists speak of growing as a person, but for what ultimate end or purpose? Their concept of growth ends in a dank, dusty tomb! According to Atheism, when one is dead, he is dead like Rover—dead all over! One has to invent his own

purpose in life, whatever it may be. To the Atheist the Universe is purposeless, uncaring, and unfeeling. It just is, and that by total accident. Human beings are viewed as just matter in motion with even their thoughts being the result of the accidental, chance combination of atoms and sub-atomic particles of matter. In other words, thought itself is viewed as a biochemical process void of genuine free will. Humans are automata of Nature, as per this tripe!

Growth must be focused on Divine “favor” or “grace” (Gr. *charis*). He needs to strive to draw closer to his God. To grow in God’s loving kindness, unmerited favor ought to be his aim in life. To put God first should be his passion (Mat. 6:33). Every Christian should so live that if but one person were to go to heaven he would be that person. It is not a phony self-righteousness, but a genuine submitting to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3; 1 John 3:7).

We must ask ourselves in view of this command: Do we really want to go to heaven? And then: How much do we really want to go? Are we determined to go the distance? Do we love the Lord more than anyone else on earth (Mat. 10:35-37)? Are we ready to take up our cross daily and fully follow Him (10:38; 16:24ff; Luke 9:23)? Are we ready even to die for the Lord to go (Mat. 10:28, 39; Rev. 2:10)? Peter’s command requires full devotion in our growth.

Those who draw closer to the Lord will also necessarily draw closer to one another (cf. 1 John 1:3-7). They will have that “same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.” They will be genuinely concerned about one another and humble in their attitude and actions (Phi. 2:1-8).

We also see—

### **THE CHRIST-CENTERED FOUNDATION OF GROWTH**

The child of God must grow “*in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” This contemplates our knowledge of His Word, by which He—including His nature, attributes, example, mission, and character—and His will for us have been revealed to us. As Roy C. Deaver often said, “God reveals, and man responds!”

Jesus said: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). He is the One who has “the words of eternal life” (6:68). His words will judge us in the last day (12:48). Growing Christians are ardent students of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 4:11). They are also defenders of that Word (3:15; Jude 3). They spend much time in their studies (1 Tim. 4:12-13, 16), as they know of the great value the Scriptures provide for their souls (2 Tim. 3:16-17). They love and appreciate the power of God’s Word to save (Rom. 1:16-17; Jam. 1:21; Eph. 6:17). Christ is the Vine and we are the branches; apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:1-8).

However, they also know that knowledge that is not acted upon is useless. They apply what they know in their lives and in teaching others. They are “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (Jam. 1:22). They have faith that works by love (2:18-26; Gal. 5:6). They know that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

They also will have a real, meaningful relationship with the Lord. They will know Him in His own self-revelation. It is not a better-felt-than-told *experience*, but a walk with Christ following His footsteps through life, knowing that He is with us on our journey, even **as** He promised (Mat. 28:20). It is also the knowledge that He is coming again to take us home on high (John 14:1-3)

Growth naturally requires certain things. It requires especially—

1. Time—We need time to grow in physical life, and also in our spiritual life. “When for the time ye ought to be teachers” (Heb. 5:12).

2. Good Nutrition—Physical growth requires good food. We need to start with “the sincere milk of the word” and grow into being able to handle the “strong meat” of the Word (1 Pet. 2:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14; Tit. 2:1; Mat. 5:6).

3. Exercise—We have to exercise in our daily lives to be fit and to grow up strong and healthy. Even so we need to exercise our senses “to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). We need

to heed Paul's admonition to "refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7).

Each of these entails the study and use of the Scriptures in everyday life. Exposition without application is meaningless.

### CONCLUSION

We have seen that the apostle Peter emphasized and commanded all Christians to grow. In fact, all accountable persons are amenable to the command to "grow in grace and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

We have looked at the Command for Growth, the Crowning Purpose of Growth, and the Christ-

Centered Foundation for Growth. We need to heed Peter's command.

Ironically, we live in an era with so many tools to aid us in both the study and application of God's wonderful Word; yet, so few really know it. Brethren, are you growing or are you dead on the Vine, just waiting to be cut off and cast into the fires of eternity?

### WORK CITED

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

### QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the context of 2 Peter 3:18.
2. What things are needed for proper growth both spiritually and physically?
3. What is the force of the present active imperative word translated "grow" in 2 Peter 3:18?
4. How does one grow in God's "grace"?
5. List several ways in which one can grow "in the knowledge" of Christ.

# WHEN IS AN EXAMPLE BINDING?

*Terry M. Hightower*

## INTRODUCTION

The Bible authorizes by **direct statement**, **implication**, and **example**. In fact, those who attempt to do away with *example* have been “weighed in the balances and found wanting.” In 1974, Reuel Lemmons published Milo Hadwin’s infamous 1972 ACU thesis for the MA degree titled, *The Role of New Testament Examples as Related to Biblical Authority*. His conclusion involves so much error it is difficult to know where to begin one’s refutation:

Those within the Restoration Movement who have written on the subject usually have assumed that at least some of the New Testament examples are binding. In contrast, the New Testament seems to provide no basis for this conclusion. It does not speak in terms of a pattern of examples. Neither churches nor individuals in the New Testament are presented as patterns to be imitated in specific detail. There is no evidence that the New Testament writers exercised selectivity in choosing particular actions or patterns to be copied. The New Testament contains no rules for distinguishing important from unimportant examples. Rather than standing beside the teaching of the apostles as part of a divine pattern, the New Testament churches seemed to stand on the same level as churches today, beneath the pattern of sound doctrine of the apostles. The conclusion of this study is that New Testament examples have no role as related to Biblical authority. The acceptance of this conclusion would seem to require no change in the general practices of churches of Christ (Hadwin Foreword).

First, we all know that the Bible is the authority and **not** what brethren have done in the past or do now. Yet, when one finds that a majority of those who are responsible for the existence of ourselves as believers in Christ’s church uphold a particular doctrine, it ought to give us *pause* before we simply commit *chronological snobbery* whereby (allegedly) “new is good, old is bad.” I have always been constantly amazed at how ac-

curate the students of God’s Word of yesteryear have been, especially on thorny subjects like this one. No one informed them that they needed to wait for a New Hermeneutic to correctly obey God. Did they make mistakes? Yes, but in the main, they truly desired to ascertain the Word and in their common-sense way did so. At least they went about it realizing that Biblical interpretation involved direct statements, implications, and examples. On the other hand, I am amazed today at how woefully lacking in reasoning ability many degreed *scholars* are who go around inflicting their ignorance on God’s flock.

Second, notice Hadwin’s usage of the tentative, ever-so-timid *seems* which prefaces his entire work, thus leaving it *open* that there might just be some New Testament “examples” which **are** binding. My friend, what if these are required of God?

Third, he egregiously reveals his own invented or made-up human philosophical ground rule (Col. 2:8) that the New Covenant “does not speak in terms of a *pattern* of **examples**” (emphasis added)! The New Testament does not speak of a *pattern* of **commands** either! Neither does the New Testament speak of a *pattern* of **implications**!

Though Hadwin disregards implications altogether, he still quite contradictorily **infers** and maintains that direct commands are the only way to prove any Bible teaching to be “binding”! But where-oh-where, we ask, is the direct command that **explicitly** tells those of us living today (or anyone) that **only** direct commands are binding? In discussion with him in Florida, he tried to use Matthew 28:20, but this verse was not written directly to him, thus requiring inference. Mark this down: You cannot get *home* if you cannot get to first base! Besides, *teaching* is **not** being restricted to mere *imperative* statements and ends up meaning all Biblical direct statements, impli-

cations, and examples. In fact, Hadwin uses such inferential reasoning not only on Matthew 28:20 but throughout his writings—as do all of the more recent and even more radical New Hermeneutikers in our brotherhood. It is impossible to get away from one's logical deductions regarding: (1) God's existence, (2) the Bible's inspiration, and (3) our interpretation of explicit verses which in fact are from Scripture itself (Hightower 87).

Fourth, to say, "Neither churches nor individuals in the New Testament are presented as patterns to be imitated in specific detail," ought to cause you to ask: "Then why was the material about them included in the canon of the New Testament?" Note that Hadwin leaves *specific* undefined! If he means that we must put on robes, baptize in the Jordan, or wear veils, then we answer **No!** However, if he means that we do not follow the pattern of immersion in water for the remission of sins as did those individuals and churches, then the answer is **Yes!** Folks, we do exactly the same thing in rightly dividing the Word about **commands!** Even a man as old as Jerry Brewer knows that he does not need to obey the *direct* command, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7), but I trust that he **has** obeyed the command (*indirect* to him and thus requiring inference on his part) of Acts 2:38.

Fifth, the following statement is the most disturbing of all: "There is no evidence that the New Testament writers exercised selectivity in choosing particular actions or patterns to be copied." Wow! This strikes at the very heart of verbal, plenary inspiration (1 Cor. 2:13) and is to, in effect, destroy the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42)! Luke falsified this statement in Luke 1:1-4! I know Milo personally, and I cannot believe he understood the implication of his words here, though many of our more recent college professors I *cannot* say this about!

The Acts of the Apostles volume is more accurately described as Some Acts of Some of the Apostles! Also, written by Luke, Acts contains accounts of conversions that were selected by him to bring out "particular actions or patterns to be copied"! Think of it! Were there other cases of Biblical conversions accomplished during this period

of time by inspired teachers? Yes—all over the world and by the thousands! But are all of them found described in the New Testament books? **No!** Therefore, those we do have recorded are exactly what the New Testament writers, guided directly by the Holy Spirit, selected or particularly chose for us to possess in written form over 2000 years later. The seven churches of Revelation were notably chosen from a much larger group of congregations to bring home to readers certain truths so we could legitimately say: "to make an example of them."

Insofar as "*approved* examples" are concerned, even an example by an individual or a group can be a learning moment! Please notice that all of these cases found in Acts, Revelation, the Gospel accounts, or anywhere else can involve both **positive** (i.e., approved) and **negative** (i.e., disapproved) teachings "for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). Like John said about Christ's miracles (John 20:30-31), they have been winnowed or *hand-picked* from a much larger pool!

Sixth, he observes that "The New Testament contains no rules for distinguishing important from unimportant examples." If he means a specific criterion set out in a neat, numbered list of rules, he is correct; but, if he means a methodology learned or gleaned from rules of literature and grammar, plus from logic, he is sadly mistaken. Where does the New Testament contain rules for distinguishing important from unimportant **commands?** for **implications?** In reference to the latter, did the Lord really give us a book wherein we cannot use our brains to realize (i.e., deduce) that Roman Catholic doctrine is false concerning Peter's domestic life by putting together the fact that he was an elder (1 Pet. 5:1) with the fact that all elders had to have children (Tit. 6; 1 Tim. 4:4-5).

As to the level of "importance" in categorizing (1) examples, (2) "commands" (better to say *direct statements*), or (3) implications, I will leave to your discretion: "But solid food is for fullgrown men, *even* those who **by reason of use** have their senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). Certainly everyone should recognize that though all Scripture is inspired, some verses have

more “relevancy” to us and our situation than others. Even old Jerry Brewer knows that Paul’s graphic actions of self-defense as demonstrated in Acts 23 authorizes him and ourselves to use civil government in a similar fashion to protect ourselves from harm and/or death, even if it puts others at risk of death (cf. 1 Pet. 2:14; Rom. 13:1-7). This lesson by example must be factored in with the usage (i.e., misuse) by some of the direct command in Matthew 5:38-39, along with the account of Jesus’ action in dealing with the Temple money changers. Jerry also knows that certain aspects of our situation today do not have to be exactly parallel in every way to Paul’s situation for certain behavior to be bound on us (1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4). Folks, what is at stake here is whether the Old and New Testaments are our religious authority in 2017 (cf. Paul’s use of the Old Testament in 1 Cor. 9:8-10).

Seventh, “Rather than standing beside the teaching of the apostles as part of a divine pattern, New Testament churches seemed to stand on the same level as churches of today, beneath the pattern of sound doctrine of the apostles.” While it is true that both then and now churches stand “beneath the pattern of sound doctrine of the apostles,” Hadwin fails to see that part of the very **vehicle or procedure** of the apostles’ doctrine is revealed or set out through New Testament accounts of action that resulted from the oral and written instruction given by the apostles and other inspired individuals to individual and to churches. Churches of today are *not* so immediately instructed and therefore are **not** on the level of first century churches! They are not *examples* except as they are judged now by the written New Testament which includes accounts of what early Christians and congregations did or said. First century churches and individual Christians were under the oral presentation of the Gospel, but today we are under the written record of the New Testament which was gradually written and accumulated. We have no one since the first century who has this ability to be directly guided by the Spirit.

Eighth, it is astounding to read Hadwin’s conclusion that New Testament examples have **no**

**role** as related to Biblical authority and to follow his thinking that such would require “no change in the general practices of churches of Christ.” One immediately thinks of Acts 20:7 concerning the time and regularity of the Lord’s Supper.

### NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES AND INDIVIDUALS

The apostles had the promise of the Holy Spirit’s direct guidance as the Comforter (John 14:16-17, 25-26) and had been urged not to fear speaking truth:

But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you (Mat. 10:19-20).

Contrary to the New Hermeneutic’s “Love Letter” error, the apostles had this view of their own words:

If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

In reference to his teaching on marriage, Paul said, “**And so ordain I in all the churches**” (7:17)! Even in regard to the future Second Coming, Paul was authoritative: “For this we say unto you **by the word of the Lord**” (1 The. 4:15; cf. 2 The. 2:2). On Pentecost after approximately 3,000 new members were added, “they continued steadfastly **in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship**, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Was this not taught to every church? To the church at Philippi, Paul said:

The things which ye both learned and received and heard **and saw** in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you (Phi. 4:9).

How could this instruction be reduced to exclude Paul’s actions and involvement with churches, and to include only his direct commands? Was there a uniform doctrine that went out which was reflected in the behavior of these New Testament congregations? Yes!

**As in all the churches** of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches: for it

is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law (1 Cor. 14:33-34).

Paul urged Timothy: “Hold the **pattern** of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13; cf. Heb. 8:5). To the church at Corinth, Paul gave clear instructions:

I beseech you therefore, be ye **imitators of me**. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in remembrance **of my ways** which are in Christ, even as I teach **everywhere in every church** (1 Cor. 4:16-17).

While Paul does deliver commands to churches (2 The. 3:6, 10, 14), he goes beyond this mode in using his own physical labor as an “**ensample**” worthy of imitation for them to keep from walking “disorderly” and “not after **the tradition** which they received of us” (3:6-15). Whether by a **command** or by **example**, he **binds** the practice of all able-bodied persons working for their daily bread. He requires a specific action and attitude of those in the Thessalonian church and establishes a pattern which requires the same specific action and attitude of people today! Timothy was told:

And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

In view of all this uniformity in matters of Christian life and worship, why would we think that the teaching done by Paul and company in Troas about the Lord’s Supper would not be universal as reported by Luke (Acts 20:6-7)? If Paul can **bind** by example in reference to working for a living, why would anyone think that his (or any other inspired person such as Luke!) descriptions of or about churches could not contain binding examples? How dare anyone (in effect) discard the above evidence regarding examples (or implications)! While specific details of how and when implication and/or accounts of action relate to us must be “rightly divided,” erroneous and foolish reductionism eliminates these altogether as con-

stituting binding teaching and therefore should be opposed by us all.

**Note:** In the New Testament, the example or “the pattern is nearly always established by a person whose words and actions provide a living expression [i.e., example—*tmb*] of that which Scripture calls for from all believers” (Richards 256). For example, an examination of the Lord’s **parables** *bring home* lessons in *personal technical* or that sometimes might be less clear if set forth in other ways (cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-7; Mat. 21:33-41).

### THE WARREN CORRECTION

Thomas B. Warren has helped us concerning narrowing down our issue to answering the more pointed (i.e., precise) question: “When is an account of action, set forth in the Bible, binding on men living today?” (Warren 3). He substitutes “account of action” for “example” due to the relevant definitions of *example* inherently involving *essentiality* or “that which is a model or pattern and, thus, is to be imitated or followed.” The use of “account of action” does not involve this question-begging assumption. So, an account of action simply means:

“the description, in the Bible, of what some individual did or group did.” (The historical account of what someone *said* is included.) (Warren 106).

It is strongly suggested that the reader purchase this book to study, especially the material most pertinent to this chapter.

### ALL SCRIPTURE IS VALUABLE AND CAN BE BINDING

1. If it is the case that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work, then sections of Scripture which are “accounts of action” by individuals and groups can be teaching binding instructions for those of us living today. (This is a Modus Ponens form of argument where **A** implies **B**.)

2. It is the case that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Psa. 119:151, 160; Deu. 8:3; 32:46-47; Mat. 4:4). (**A** is true.)

3. Therefore sections of Scripture which are “accounts of action” by individuals and groups can be teaching binding instructions for those of us living today. (Therefore, **B** is true.)

### WHEN IS AN ACCOUNT OF ACTION BINDING?

One must do more than merely read the explicit statements which make up Scripture to know you are “handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). One must analyze each specific

statement, including its words (i.e., definitions), grammar, and syntax. There must then be a logical inspection of **total context**, which includes the (1) explicit statements making up the *account of action*, their (2) immediate context, and (3) the remote context, drawing only such conclusions as are warranted by this evidence. The explicit statements constituting the account of action may be in nature: Imperative, Declarative, Interrogative, Hortatory, or Conditional (Warren 47-86). The immediate context consists of the “verses before and after” as evaluated concerning their logical connection to the explicit statements, and remote context consists of any Bible verses logically connected to the subject of the account of action.

### HOW DO WE CLASSIFY ACCOUNTS OF ACTION?

by Thomas B. Warren (see pages 123-24)

#### Actions Classified:

Acceptable To God (authorized)

Obligatory? (must be done)

Optional? (may exercise freedom of choice)

Unacceptable To God (not authorized)?

Explicitly forbidden (in so many words)

Implicitly forbidden (not God authorized)

Forbidding what God’s Word allows

Binding what is not Biblically essential

Permanently Sinful—sinful for New Testament characters or churches and sinful for us today

Optional and Temporary—optional for New Testament characters but not optional for us today

Optional and Permanent—optional for New Testament characters and also optional for us today

Obligatory and Temporary—obligatory for New Testament characters but not obligatory for us today

Obligatory and Permanent—obligatory for New Testament characters and also obligatory for us today

Many brethren still do not realize how these categories also apply to **imperatives** (i.e., commands) which some claim are the only way to establish binding truth, and also (believe it or not) to **implication/inference**. See Warren’s volume in which he takes the reader through a Scripture presentation of each category listed in both the Old and New Testament. This is a veritable *how-to* self-teaching treasure chest!

### JOHN 13:1-20: WHAT WERE THE NEW HERMENEUTICERS THINKING?

To discard “examples” or maintain the view that no one can legitimately decipher (i.e., *interpret*) them reduces the Bible into a mutilated fragment of itself! There are those who not only attempt to maintain the view of Hadwin that **only** direct commands are binding today, but vigorously disparage and ridicule the “old herme-

neutic’s” use of implication/inference. Amazingly, it seems to never dawn on the professed *scholars* among us that their foolish attempt to maintain that “examples” have no binding power just how absurd their newly discovered position really is. Are **all** accounts of action in Scripture to be jettisoned? For instance, what do we do with John 13:1-20 which includes the Lord’s own admonition in the form of a declarative statement: “For

I have given you an **example**, that ye also should do as I have done to you (13:15)? Here we have an account of action that constitutes an example world without end—and it is only one of many! Once again, even Jerry Brewer—or *maybe* even Johnny Oxendine—can figure this out. Remembering that the definition of *account of action* is the description in the Bible of what some individual did or group did, we all can read and know the **explicit verses** making up this “Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet” episode.

Once again, *account of action* includes the historical account of what someone **said**, which in this case contains the interchange between Jesus and Peter (13:6-11) and between Jesus and all of the apostles (13:12-20). The **immediate context** includes the Lord’s summary of His claims (12:44-50), and as the account begins, it describes His mindset just before the Passover feast (13:1) on the night before His crucifixion the next day. Then it continues with Judas’ contemplation of betrayal (13:2). Luke 22:7-23 and Matthew 26:17-29 provide more details as to the setting. Plus, a further series of events continues, starting with His anguish over the betrayal (John 13:21-30).

The **remote context** would include any verses from the Old or New Testament which show this to be, not an act of worship, but of a menial (i.e., lowly) task of hospitality, hygiene, and humility (e.g., Gen. 18:4, 8; 19:2-2; 24:32; 43:24; Exo. 40:31-32; Jud. 19:21; 1 Sam. 25:41; 2 Sam. 11:8; Luke 7:44; 1 Tim. 5:10). These verses help *set up* John 13:1-20 by demonstrating that (1) the primary purpose of feet-washing was to cleanse the feet, and (2) that we must take into account **who** washed feet—especially that it was not the person of prestige but rather a mere servant.

On this very evening there was disagreement among the Lord’s disciples as to who would be “the greatest” (Luke 22:24). There is no indication that the disciples washed their feet when entering the upper room. Jesus’ statement in John 13:10 would imply that this likely did not happen. Therefore, we conclude that the Lord took the most memorable means to remedy this issue which reared its ugly head at other times

(cf. Mark 9:34; Luke 22:24-27; Mat. 20:20-28). The topic is so important that He cannot afford to allow any confusion as to what His kingdom/church is all about. Being the Master Teacher, did Jesus know that a demonstration is better than a sermon and would *run an arrow* through the minds of His followers? Yes! So, John reports that He

riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded (John 13:4-5).

The servile or *lowly* status of feet-washing explains Peter’s rash response in John 13:6-9. One can, of course, be clean in a physical sense but remain *dirty* on the inside (cf. Mat. 23:25-28)! That He was here teaching a great lesson ought to be quite evident (even to a New Hermeneutic!) from the context since He previously said: “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter” (John 13:7). It is obvious Jesus was physically washing their feet, yet He asks them: “Know ye what I have done to you?” (13:12). The meaning is: “Don’t concentrate on what I am doing, but rather on what I am **teaching!**” (13:13-16). What a well-deserved, but unspoken (at first) rebuke for this group of proud men! He was vividly—**by example**—teaching the humility He taught elsewhere by declarative statement:

whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mat. 20:26-28; cf. Phi. 2:3-8).

**Note:** Even when the Lord set out the truth in a direct (declarative) statement, He still included Himself as the graphic and definative example! Christ here is saying:

If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do **as** I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, a ser-

vant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them" (John 13:14-17).

Observe now: Jesus said *as* and not necessarily the *what*. In other words, He instructed them and us to follow an example of **service**. Our abundance of paved streets, sidewalks, and closed shoes have somewhat changed the equation. It would only be under a similar cultural setting wherein one would be obligated to literally wash feet (I have done the cultural equivalent in working 20 minutes getting chewing gum off the tennis shoe of a visitor's child!). Contrary to our 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist friends, there is not the slightest indication that feet washing was ever practiced as a ceremonial rite or act of worship in the New Testament church.

Then the Lord uses the physical washing or bathing to move the issue from servanthood, humility, and regarding others as better than self (Phi. 2:3) into a discussion involving **spiritual** cleansing (John 13:18-20). Returning to the thought mentioned earlier involving Judas (13:10-11), Jesus recognizes and applies Psalm 41:9 to Judas to make the predictive prophecy regarding his subsequent betrayal a faith-building piece of foreknowledge (John 13:18-19).

They will need that strengthened, solid faith to carry out the Lord's later instruction to them to take the Gospel throughout the world. Whoever *receives* them, receives the Christ, and whoever receives the Christ receives the Father! This is still true and **binding** today, as are so many other teachings of Christ by means of such accounts of action, unless like a few of our brethren say—nothing occurring before the day of Pentecost can be part of the Gospel. I suggest to readers that they go through Warren's chart and ask on each point therein how and what Jesus taught from the account recorded in John 13:1-20. Is there anything in that text that is Permanently Sinful for us? Optional and Temporary? Optional and Permanent? Obligatory and Temporary? Obligatory and Permanent? I have tried to provide evidence which will help, but the rubric is now yours.

## THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

I have studied New Hermeneutic materials and upon occasion been able to discuss Bible interpretation with devotees of it. This might involve rehearsing John 13:1-20 as above with their underlying false view in regard to these verses being refuted as demonstrated. Another one of my favorites is in reference to the account of action recorded in **Acts 5:1-11** about Ananias and Sapphira. Ask: "Given the statement of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, is there anything taught in Acts 5:1-11 that could be bound on anyone living today?" (Let me advise and urge you to *bite down like a pit bull* on this section of Scripture, which is an **account of action** occurring after Pentecost that is for some reason recorded by Luke as part of Scripture!) As we have done with John 13:1-20, read and dissect these verses in fulfillment of the total context procedure. You might even begin by asking if the New Hermeneutic individual has ever taught a class or perhaps preached on this account of action. If you get an affirmative response, ask: "Why?" Given his presuppositions, nothing in it can be binding—so what is the point? Ask if the sin of this Christian couple was merely on the spur-of-the-moment or premeditated (Acts 5:9). Then ask: "Which is worse?" Ask them if it teaches that lying, at least to the Holy Spirit, is sinful for us today (5:3-4). Or was it just wrong for the persons in the recorded incident and therefore only good as a quaint New Testament story or maybe *cannon fodder* for us? Ask them if a person selling property **must** give **all** the sale funds to the church, or is it Scriptural to optionally decide how much the church may get (5:4). Ask if it is a binding truth **taught** here that to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to Deity (5:4). Ask things like: "Does the death of this couple teach us that no one **today** can hide knowledge of the facts from God?" They will normally attempt to use other remote verses on each point, but do **not** let them do this! Always watch to see if the "Hadwins" of the brotherhood **only** use **imperative** verses! They will not! Do not allow them to even mention anything other than imperatives and then press them to explain how they know such commands apply to today! Press for "Yes" or

“No” answers. Ask: “Does this set of verses (5:1-11) teach us that even those who sin still deserve our respectful treatment (5:6, 11)?” Ask if there is anything in this account that would authorize a woman to speak with men present in certain settings and situations (5:7-8). Ask if the scenario as described here teaches that each person involved in sin must answer personally for self. Ask if this text teaches and binds the notion that the Holy Spirit is **equal** to the Spirit of the Lord (5:3, 9). Ask if someone **refuses to believe** that Ananias or Sapphira “gave up the ghost” in that their human spirit departed their body, if such refusal would be a sin today (5:5, 10). Ask this: “Despite the fact that this episode of direct death as punishment for sin occurred during the apostolic age and is not occurring today, were those who were Christians and non-Christians correct in being fearful concerning themselves as to the standard of morality of this new religious group?” (5:11). You get the idea here! Even Jerry Brewer and Johnny Oxendine can follow it!

### CONCLUSION

The New Hermeneutic has been weighed in the balances and found wanting! Hadwin’s cri-

tique of the role of New Testament examples as related to Biblical authority is faulty, especially in view of his insistence that we discard implication and cling to the foolish notion that only “direct commands” are (or can be) binding. This is contradictory to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and would virtually eliminate Scripture from being a revelation from God to anyone living after the first century. As with direct statements and implication, accounts of action must be studied in total context as described, and be finally classified as to which of the five categories they fit.

### WORKS CITED

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### QUESTIONS

1. In what three ways does the Bible authorize? Explain using Bible illustrations.
2. What is Milo Hadwin’s **primary** error?
3. Is it true that, though all Scripture is inspired, some Scriptures are more *relevant* to us than others? Explain your answer.
4. Why is it important to use “account of action” instead of “example”?
5. Which of the two accounts of action, John 13:1-20 or Acts 5:1-11, is the more powerful in teaching the truth about *examples*? Explain your choice.

# MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

*Jess Whitlock*

**M**y 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 also will forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

Earlier, Hosea had penned:

Hear the word of Jehovah, ye children of Israel; for Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land (4:1).

When I teach the message of Hosea, I call it: "Hosea and His Hussy." Hosea prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-726 BC). Israel had rejected knowledge and forgotten God's law (4:6; 8:11, 14). Hosea wept over Israel's sins seven centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ wept over the sins of Jerusalem, and today we weep over the sins of spiritual Israel, the church.

Jeremiah is the "weeping prophet" of Judah whereas Hosea is the "weeping prophet" of Israel. Hosea's heartache focused on Israel's materialism, idolatry, and lack of knowledge of God and His Word. The late brother Johnny Ramsey commented on the message of Hosea, saying, "Moral integrity disappears where the knowledge of God is lacking." There was "no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land" (4:1). Just as Hosea's wife, Gomer, had become unfaithful to him, Israel had become unfaithful to God. Hosea uses *whoredom* 16 times in his writing. Apostasy from God is spiritual adultery (4:15-18; 5:4; 9:1).

God had allowed His will to be made known. "For I desire goodness, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings" (6:6). Christ used those very words at a feast in the home of Matthew (Mat. 9:13; cf. 12:7).

What terrible consequences plague the church of my Lord when we drift into spiritual adultery today!

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first (2 Pet. 2:20).

Later, Peter wrote:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (3:9).

Jesus said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3). The message of repentance has always been the Lord's will and wish for His people. The message of Hosea was "repent" (Hos. 13:14). The message of John the baptizer was "repent" (Mat. 3:2). The message of Jesus Christ was "repent" (4:17; 9:13). The message of Pentecost was "repent" (Acts 2:38). The message of today must be "repent" (17:30; Luke 24:46-47).

The lack of knowledge will cause many to be lost in eternity. We must, therefore, study. God has commanded us to study His Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Pet. 3:18). Let us study:

**S** - ystematically > regularly, do word studies, character studies, outline chapters, acronyms, etc.

**T** - horoughly > consider the source of study (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 4:13-15)

**U** - nderstanding > (Eph. 5:17; Neh. 8; Luke 24:45; Acts 8; Psa. 119:144).

**D** - evotedly > emulate the Psalmist (Psa. 119:11); it is God's inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16)

**Y** - earning > (Mat. 5:6; 1 The. 2:13; Psa. 119:105; Pro. 3:5-6). Let us yearn to learn!

To reject knowledge is to reject God; to reject God is to reject knowledge (Hos. 4:6). I once read a sign in a local library: "He who will not read is no better off than he who cannot read!"

That would apply to the study of the Bible. What if we substitute “study” for “read”?

Hosea 4:9 warns, “And it shall be, like people, like priest; and I will punish them for their ways, and will requite them their doings.” Did you catch that? “Like people, like priest?” Do you remember hearing years ago, “As goes the eldership, so goes the church”? So, should this passage read, “like priest, like people”? No! In the message of Hosea the people and priest share equally in the blame.

The verb is *plural* both in the Hebrew and the English versions, “are” not “is.” The *plural* implies that the *individuals* as well as the collective whole “people” were one and all void of knowledge of God (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown 2:470).

In many instances the priests and prophets of old were influenced by the people for evil.

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:31).

That say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits (Isa. 30:10).

“As goes the eldership, so goes the church.” Is it possible that in far too many instances today the truth of the matter has become, “As goes the church members, so goes the eldership”? Could it possibly be the case that in many instances it is “As goes the church members, so goes the pulpit”? Can we think of any modern-day applications of just such a travesty happening?

Allen Highers quoted from “A Report on Women’s Participation in Public Worship” dated March 5, 1989 regarding the Bering Drive congregation in Houston, Texas.

On July 31, 1988, the elders presented a statement to the Bering family...expressing our conviction that it is scriptural and appropriate for sisters as well as brothers to serve in Sunday morning worship roles...reading Scripture, leading prayers, leading singing, and serving communion (“Winds” 2).

From there things mushroomed, with women leading prayers and even prophesying in wor-

ship (University in Abilene), women serving the Lord’s Supper (Highland in Abilene), and the Brookline congregation in Brookline, Massachusetts announced that women would lead prayers and lead singing, serve communion, teach adult classes, and actually **preach!**

Finally, the Cahaba Valley congregation in Birmingham, Alabama issued a document dated January 1990, and declared that they “will appoint deacons for this church on Pentecost Sunday, 1990. Deacons will be **male and female**” (emphasis added) (Highers “Winds” 2). This document indicated that women would be allowed to read Scripture, serve communion, lead prayer, lead singing, and speak to the assembly (of worship) in sermon! Alas, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

Today, such congregations are found in abundance! What if they had followed the example of the noble Bereans and “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11—KJV)? If only they had studied Scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (KJV). *Teach* in the Greek is *didasko*, which means to deliver a didactic discourse. Hence, the woman cannot *usurp* authority over the man in an assembly where men are present. *Silence* comes from the Greek *hesuchia*, which means “quietness,” which is the rendering of the ASV (1901). It is my conviction that the assembly of 1 Timothy 2 deals with a regular worship assembly, whereas the meeting in 1 Corinthians 14 is a special assembly where miraculous gifts were practiced. We have no such assemblies today!

The Brown Trail congregation (Bedford, Texas), not once, but twice (1990 and 2002), enacted the travesty of what has been called “Elder Reevaluation” or “Elder Reaffirmation” and you can study all about that doctrine in Titus 5:19. My dad had an old saying, “Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me.” It is utterly amazing that after their first “repentance” of this doctrinal error, they decided to go back and do it yet again! If only those brethren responsible

for this denominational practice had taken the time to investigate the Scripture, this unscriptural practice could have been avoided on both occasions. Godly elders will have met the Divine qualifications as plainly revealed in God's Word (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:3-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

The late brother Bill Jackson observed:

The work of the eldership is permanent—the congregation will always need elders. The men appointed were appointed because they met the qualifications set forth in the Bible.... There is absolutely no Bible or justification, for that matter, of “reconfirming, reexamination or reevaluation” as to either elders or deacons. It smacks of political maneuvering (Personal letter).

There is no Biblical authority for this process. The late brother Garland Elkins commented:

I do not know of any Bible authority for “electing” elders as if it were a political process. Neither do I know of any Bible authority for “reconfirming” existing elders (Personal letter).

Years ago, a bulletin crossed my desk with a cartoon, picturing a business meeting (I supposed in a man-made church). The man in charge addressed a group around the table stating, “So then, it is decided, the will of God cannot be overturned without a two-thirds majority vote.” That was years before the Brown Trail congregation (Fort Worth, Texas), employed this unscriptural travesty that has come to be known as “reevaluation or reaffirmation of elders.”

Today, an unknown number of “churches of Christ” have introduced the mechanical instruments of music into the worship services. Their number is myriad and increasing day by day. In April 1984, brother Alan Highers met Given O. Blakely in debate. Brother Highers affirmed:

The use of mechanical instruments of music as an element of Christian worship is without scriptural authority and therefore sinful (Highers and Blakely 17).

Brother Highers correctly pointed out that mechanical instruments of music in worship to God are **not**: commanded, by faith, in the name of Christ, in the doctrine of Christ, in Truth, by hearing, apostolic, practiced in the New Testa-

ment, nor mentioned in the New Testament. Mr. Blakely was unable to meet any one of those sound and solid arguments. Proponents of instruments of music in worship today, are likewise, unable to refute such logical and solid reasoning from the Divine and authoritative Word of God.

If anyone had told me forty-seven years ago, when I was a “boy preacher” that the time would come when professing New Testament Christians would introduce the mechanical music into worship to the one true God, I would have told them to take a long walk on a short pier!

Just over ten years ago, the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Texas opted to add instrumental music into their worship (December 2006). *The Christian Chronicle* reporter, Bobby Ross, Jr., wrote:

The Richland Hills church in Texas...has decided to add an instrumental worship assembly with communion on Saturday nights.... [the] elders “fully and completely” endorsed the decision.

*Chronicle* editor, Lynn McMillon, thought that needed to be emphasized as the “Nation’s Largest Church of Christ Adding Instrumental Service.” Yet, in January 2007, when the Quail Springs congregation followed suit, the *Chronicle* was as silent as the proverbial tomb. On February 2, 2007, the chapel speaker at Oklahoma Christian University was Mark Henderson, the pulpit preacher at Quail Springs at the time! The late brother J. D. Tant often warned, “Brethren, we are drifting.” Today, the cry must be altered, “Brethren, we have drifted.”

“I see my time is up!” Time fails us to mention congregations of the Lord’s church by the hundreds that have departed into error in so many areas: i.e., the Holy Spirit leading separate and apart from the Word, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the AD 70 heresy, salvation by faith only, salvation by grace only, salvation by saying the “sinner’s prayer,” children’s church, Christians in all the churches made by men, everything done in life is worship, and ad nauseam.

“The prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and **my people love to have it**

so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5:31).

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### QUESTIONS

1. Jeremiah was the "weeping prophet" of \_\_\_\_\_, whereas, Hosea was the "weeping prophet of \_\_\_\_\_."
2. Do your own acrostic of the word:  
S ~  
T ~  
U ~  
D ~  
Y ~
3. What Scripture(s) show the woman is not to usurp authority over the man in public worship services today?
4. What must be done to overcome the lack of knowledge of God's Word today?
5. What proposition did Alan Highers affirm in his debate with Given O. Blakely? (Discuss)

# AND HAVING DONE ALL, TO STAND

*Roelf L. Ruffner*

**W**herefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:13).

As I read my assignment for this lecture, I thought upon who wrote this verse—the beloved apostle Paul. I thought upon the many places this servant of Christ had *stood* during his time as a Christian. He stood before howling heathen mobs in Antioch of Psidia, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Ephesus and a stoning mob in Jerusalem. He stood against misguided brethren, such as Peter in Antioch of Syria (Gal. 2:11-15). He stood before the educated, philosophizing, scoffing, heathen elite on Mar's Hill in Athens. He stood before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem—the same folk who had spat in the face of his Lord and Master before turning Him over to a heathen judge to be crucified. He stood before two Roman procurators, Felix and Festus. He stood before Herod the Great's scion, King Agrippa, and his sister Bernice. He stood before the murderous, paranoid Emperor Nero once—just him and the Lord. He stood before countless synagogues and Gentile gathering places “standing on the promises of God.” Someday he will stand with the faithful before the throne of the Prince of Peace and may hear these words, “Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant” (Mat. 25:21).

Today, we, the children of the Bible, need to stand also. Once we were united behind the Gospel—standing on the promises of God—and we grew spiritually and numerically. Yet, the forces against the churches of Christ seem mighty and imposing. Some want to compromise and concede territory to the enemy. Others want to keep silent about *issues* so they may keep their jobs and real estate. In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul and the Holy Spirit show us the way to stand.

## **“BE STRONG IN THE LORD, AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT” (EPH. 6:10)**

Paul extols his readers firmly with *finally* in verse 10. Having the Word of God which he has written to them before them, they should remain firm and resolute. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Christians must stand firmly with the Word of God in every decision they make. The church of Christ must be known again as the “people of the Book.” Today, many congregations stand strongly on their attendance numbers to back up decision making, as if the kingdom of Christ was a democracy. Individual brethren stand strongly on their own selves as if their opinion is foremost in any decision. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Pro. 28:26). Former brotherhood schools stand upon the shifting sands of religious pluralism rather than the bedrock of God's Truth.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand (Mat. 7:26).

## **“PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD” (EPH. 6:11)**

Paul must have seen many Roman soldiers throughout his life marching to and fro, fully equipped in their armor, prepared for battle. He thought of himself and other Christians as Christ's soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4). However, even the hardened Roman soldier did not go into battle without his armor, confident in its protection from any weapon of the enemy. Likewise, the Christian faces the foes of the Truth with both defensive and offensive armor.

## **“Loins girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14)**

The belt in ancient armor kept all the other parts in place. The world and false religion does not have **the Truth**—the Word of God (John 8:31-32; 17:17)—protecting it from evil.

### **“The breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14)**

The breastplate protected all the vital organs of the soldier. *Dikatosunē* or “right action” (Vine 535) is rightness gained by doing the will of God (1 John 3:7). David Lipscomb commented, “Then to put on the breastplate of righteousness is to obey God (131).

### **“Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15)**

The *caligae* or Roman hobnail boot-sandal was made so the soldier could stand his ground in battle (“Caligae”). The modern-day Christian must be prepared to stand his ground in defense of the Gospel of peace against warlords of false doctrine (Gal. 2:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:12).

### **“The shield of faith” (Eph. 6:16)**

The *thureos* (Greek) or *scutum* (Latin) was a large oblong shield carried by the left hand which protected almost the entire body and left the right hand free to fight (“Scutum”). Covered in leather combined shields could form a human wall to hide behind from the enemy’s missiles or “fiery darts.” The Christian’s shield is their faith strengthened by the promises of God (Rom. 10:17); which is another reason to study and know the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).

### **“Helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17)**

The brass or leather helmet was not only used to protect the head but often had a crest on its top to denote courage and leadership. Paul would refer to a “helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 The. 5:8)—the hope of the resurrection of the dead. The Christian should realize that their battles are already won by the Lamb of God, “Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” (5:10).

### **“The sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17)**

*Machaira* may refer to the Roman short, two-edged thrusting sword or *gladius* (“Gladius”). It was both an offensive and defensive weapon used for close in fighting. Paul identifies it as “the word of God.” The Word of God or the Holy Bible is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21). It can be used to probe the conscience

of the hearer and subdue sin (Heb. 4:12). With it Jesus subdued Satan in the wilderness of Judea (Mat. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). It pricked the heart of many in world of the first century AD (Acts 2:37; 5:33; 7:51-54).

A good spiritual warrior does not go into battle unprotected. He must be prepared to go forward on the offensive and to protect himself. There is little protection when one flees backwards from battle or ignores the armor. A Roman soldier knew his life depended upon the upkeep of his armor and sword. All of the armor listed by Paul has its origin in the Word of God. Do you know the Bible or is it just an ornament on your coffee table along with a bowl of wax fruit?

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that *ye* should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

### **KNOW YOUR ENEMY**

Paul knew who his enemy was that he stood against—Satan. In Ephesians 6:11, he writes of “the wiles of the devil” or the craftiness of Satan. No one can match the father of lies in deception and falsehood (John 8:44; 1 Pet. 5:8). He lied to Adam and Eve and to countless men and women through the ages. The thousands of denominations and false religions in our world can trace their lineage to the lying words he uttered to Eve:

Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [“God”—ASV], knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4-5).

His strategy is to use the noble impulse of humanity to seek after God (Acts 17:26-27) and mix it with falsehood. His goal is to take as many as possible to Hell with him (Rev. 12:12; 20:10-15). The Gospel can free us from Satan’s grasp.

To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:18).

Paul and the Holy Spirit reveal that the Christian and the church's battle against Satan shall not just be physical but spiritual.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12).

Speaking of Satan's fiendish fiefdom, brother Burton Coffman writes:

It is a fact beyond denial that the ancient pagan world was organized along patterns of evil, and the whole pagan complex of antiquity was fitted together, dovetailed and interwoven in such a manner as to forbid the notion that such a sprawling, powerful, effective and arrogant pagan society was merely accidental. Satan had organized it. Furthermore, evil is still organized; and organization presupposes an organizer.

This is why they had to be "strong in the Lord and the power of his might" and to have their spiritual armor prepared for battle.

Our nation is in the grip of the Satan's kingdom. Almost two generations of religious, cultural, and political progressivism have left it a shell of the God-fearing nation it once claimed to be. Satan's allies are atheistic judges, pandering politicians, greedy businesses, vulgar entertainers, atheistic educators, agnostic religionists, and weak-kneed, compromising brethren. The church today faces a world almost as ungodly and Hellish as the first century AD. It is also becoming as anti-Christian and Satanic as it was 2,000 years ago.

In battling this foe, we must employ the tactics our spiritual ancestors used—confront the enemy with the Word of God and prayer.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:18-20).

More than a century before Paul wrote these words the Roman legions had gradually conquered the known world—from the Euphrates River in modern day Iraq to the Atlas Mountains in Africa and north to England. In the first century AD the church of Christ spread the Gospel to the world they lived in standing on the Word of God and using the same spiritual armor we have today. We can do the same in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Satan has done much damage to the Cause, but he is a conquered beast, mortally wounded by Jesus Christ. Let us confidently take up the challenge and stand upon the promises of God.

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### QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to compromise the Gospel of Christ?
2. What should Christ's soldier put on before he goes into battle against evil?
3. What did all of the Christian's armor Paul listed in Ephesians 6 have as its origin?
4. In Ephesians 6:14 what does it mean to "put on the breastplate of righteousness"?
5. What does it mean to be an enemy of the individual Christian and the church?

# AS HARD AS AN ADAMANT STONE

*Danny Douglas*

**T**he topic of this study is taken from the words of the prophet of God, Zechariah:

Yea, they made their hearts *as* an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, And the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts (Zec. 7:12).

The Book of Zechariah, filled with Messianic prophecies, here deals with the kind of heart that would later result in the rejection of the Messiah!

## CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

The context of Zechariah 7 is in the fourth year of Darius's reign, and almost two years since the prophet had received the eight night visions. The building of the temple after the exile seems to have been going well at this point, and the Lord was prospering their work (cf. Hag. 2:19; Zec. 8:10-13) (Hailey 355). The prophet Zechariah declares:

And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of Jehovah came unto Zechariah in the fourth *day* of the ninth month, even in Chislev. Now *they of* Beth-el had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech, and their men, to entreat the favor of Jehovah, *and* to speak unto the priests of the house of Jehovah of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? (Zec. 7:1-3—ASV).

This was:

Two years after the series of visions, shown to him, and two years before the completion of the temple. Chisleu being December, it was the end of B.C. 518 (Pusey 378).

They of Bethel inquired whether they should continue to keep the fast in the fifth month, as they had done for the seventy years of captivity. The Lord responds:

Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye

fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *month*, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even* to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat *for yourselves*, and drink *for yourselves*? *Should ye not hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain? (Zec. 7:4-7).

Jehovah God rebuked them for the fact that they had not kept these fasts for Him, but out of selfish motives. Their real need was to heed the words of the Lord, which the “former prophets” had declared unto them, during the time of prosperity. Had they done this, Jerusalem and the temple would not have been destroyed, and they would not have been taken into Babylonian captivity! Concerning the “former prophets,” Burton Coffman states:

These included a number of names besides those of contributors to the sacred Canon. Dean provided this list of the former prophets: “Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1), Ahijah of Shilo (1 Kings 14:2,4), Jehu, son of Hanani (1 Kings 16:7), Elijah, and Elisha, Hosea, and Jonah, Iddo, Shemaiah, Hanani, and Huldah.” There were also a number of the other Canonical prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Haggai, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Amos, Micah, Joel, Malachi, Nahum, and the one we are studying, Zechariah. Not all of these were “former,” for some of them were contemporary with Zechariah. The prophetess Deborah should also be added to this list, and perhaps others. God had abundantly provided witnesses to the requirements of his sacred Law.

The next thing that the Lord has to say is a continuation of what had been said by the former prophets (cf. Isa. 1:16-17; Amos 5:14, 24; Mic. 6:8) (Coffman). This is presented in past tense, “Thus *hath* Jehovah of hosts *spoken*” (Hailey 357). Zechariah states:

And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, And shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; And let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, And stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts *as* an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, And the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, *that* as he cried, and they would not hear; So they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: For they laid the pleasant land desolate (Zec. 7:8-14).

Zechariah's message was in accord with that of the prophet, Micah:

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *Or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? 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. 6:7-8).

Yet, rather than being receptive to their Lord God, they had been willfully disobedient to Him. Their hearts are compared to the hardest of stones, "an adamant stone." As a result, they incurred the great wrath of God, and many horrible consequences followed.

These warnings are given at this time to show the consequences of such a heart for them, and for people in any age!

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).

### TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Zechariah symbolizes their stubbornness as: pulling "away the shoulder" (Zec. 7:11).

Like a restive animal, which would not endure the yoke, dull and stupid as the beasts:

as Hosea says, "Israel slideth back like a backsliding heifer" (Hos 4:16). Nehemiah confesses the same; "they gave a backsliding shoulder and hardened their neck and would not hear" (Neh 9:29) (Pusey 381).

They gave a *cold shoulder* to the Lord, by resisting His Word. Likewise, Jesus warned:

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).

They had "stopped their ears" (Zec. 7:11), like those who rejected Jesus, of whom He spake:

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. 13:14-15; cf. Isa. 6:9-10).

Those who rejected the preaching of Stephen "stopped their ears." Their hardened hearts resulted in the murder of this man of God:

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul (Acts 7:57-58).

Their hardness is described by Stephen: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do ye*" (7:51). By denying the Word of Christ, they resisted the Holy Spirit, Who brought it down to man (1 Pet. 1:12)! The Lord had sent His Word to the prophets by His Spirit: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). In rejecting His words, they resisted the Spirit:

Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore there

came great wrath from Jehovah of hosts (Zec. 7:12—ASV).

They made their hearts as an adamant-stone, as a diamond, the hardest of stones to be wrought upon, or as a flint, which the mason cannot hew into shape as he can other stone out of the quarry. Nothing is so hard, so unmalleable, so inflexible, as the heart of a presumptuous sinner; and those whose hearts are hard may thank themselves; they are of their own hardening, and it is just with God to give them over to a reprobate sense, to the hardness and impenitence of their own hearts (Henry).

The consequence of their hardened hearts was that they faced the wrath of Almighty God: “therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts” (Zec. 7:12). Like the disobedient children of God in Isaiah’s day, and like those of Jeremiah’s day, they were cut off from the Lord, and He would not hear their cry (Isa. 59:1-2; Jer. 7:13-16). As a result of their being cut off from the Lord, the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, and they went captive into Babylon.

Moreover, God: “scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not” (Zec. 7:14). Jehovah had warned Israel, through Moses, that this would happen, if they became disobedient unto Him (Deu. 4:27; 28:64). It is a well-known fact that the Jews became scattered among the nations because of their rebellion to God. Coffman notes:

This was by no means to be the end of the “scattering of Israel,” which would occur again after their final rejection of the Messiah, the destruction of their temple, their capital, their political entity, and the dispersion of the Jewish population all over the world throughout history.

They had “laid the pleasant land desolate” (Zec. 7:14)—that is, “the glory of all lands” (Eze. 20:6, 15).

### LESSONS

If one’s attitude toward God is wrong, and the treatment of his neighbor is unjust, then his religion cannot be right. Jesus spoke of the supreme importance of loving God first, and secondly, of loving one’s neighbor:

Jesus said unto him, 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).

Jesus strongly exemplified and taught the principle: “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” (7:12).

A stubborn, disobedient, and obstinate heart is repulsive to God as any sin, as Samuel said to Saul:

For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, He hath also rejected thee from *being* king (1 Sam. 15:23).

Those in the “Israel of God” today, the church (Gal. 6:16), whether congregations or individuals, who refuse to do what God says, in the way He says to do it, will also be rejected by Him (Mat. 7:21-23)! True obedience to God is “from the heart” (Rom. 6:17). Likewise, disobedience begins in the heart. This was true of ancient Israel, who grieved the Lord, provoked Him to wrath, and fell in the wilderness (Heb. 3:7-19; Psa. 95:7-11). Why? “They do alway err in *their* heart” (Heb. 3:10). Likewise, the writer of Hebrews warns Christians: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” The hardening of the heart is caused by the “deceitfulness of sin.” Thus, we need to: “exhort one another daily” (3:12-13)!

Before Jesus healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue on the sabbath day, He was “grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5). The Jews, who were ready to accuse Him, did not accept His power, and they did not care for their fellow man! Likewise, Christ is grieved today with those who are cold, who reject Scriptural evidence, and who refuse to: “Prove all things,” and to, “hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21).

God will refuse to hear the prayer of the disobedient: “He that turneth away his ear from

hearing the law, Even his prayer *shall be* abomination” (Pro. 28:9; cf. John 9:31). Yet, He will hear the cry of the righteous, and those of a lowly, meek, and contrite heart:

For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil (1 Pet. 3:12; cf. Jam. 5:16; Psa. 34:15-19; Isa. 66:2; Jam. 1:21-22).

One of the greatest lessons from Zechariah 7:12 is that when man becomes hardened against God’s will, he will face “great wrath from the Lord.” This is true concerning all unfaithful children of God:

for we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:30-31).

Christ will also take vengeance on those who obey not the Gospel:

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 The. 1:8-9).

There: “let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God *is* a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29).

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### QUESTIONS

1. God indicted the people for keeping the fasts for the wrong reason. Do you see any parallel of that in the Christian age? If so, what?
2. What from the context of Zechariah 7:12 showed God’s goodness toward the people?
3. What blessings are lost to the child of God when his heart becomes like an “adamant stone”?
4. Why is the Lord always grieved when people have such an attitude toward Him?
5. What are some examples in the church today of preachers, elders, and people generally being hardened against the truth?

# IF YOU ARE WEARY RUNNING WITH THE FOOTMEN, HOW WILL YOU CONTEND WITH HORSES?

*Gary W. Summers*

The sense of the title statement under consideration has not proven to be enigmatic or peculiar in any way; it is straightforward. The idea of it is, “If you can’t handle the lesser problems, what will you do when greater challenges come along?” A variation of this theme Jesus used when He said, “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?” (Luke 16:11). One must first successfully master matters of inferior importance before facing the giants seeking to defeat us.

## THE TEXT

However, like all great principles, the reader finds a background out of which it comes. The preceding six verses (Jer. 11:18-23) interrelate to Jeremiah 12:1-6. Is it not interesting that men like Max Lucado are almost universally loved? Not only is he adored, but his books are almost as revered as the New Testament itself. Joel Osteen addresses each week thousands of people in Houston Compaq Center, which he purchased for \$7.5 million dollars. Billy Graham is considered by many to be **the** evangelist of the last half of the twentieth century. Do the words of Jesus come to mind, as He said: “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26)?

Adoration is one problem that Jeremiah never had to deal with. The men of Anathoth, his home town, told him, “Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, lest you die by our hand!” (Jer. 11:21). Does that sound familiar? Yes; when Jesus went to Nazareth, read from Isaiah, and then proclaimed, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21), some protested that He was Joseph’s son. When He added, “Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country,” and added a few comments about the fact that God is concerned about Gentiles, they

were filled with wrath and tried to throw Him off a cliff (4:16-30). Later Jesus would say, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” (Mat. 13:57). Perhaps not coincidentally, this is precisely the challenge that Jeremiah faced.

Jeremiah 12:1 begins with the prophet pleading with God to hear him about the condition of the nation. He acknowledges that God is righteous, but he does not understand why the way of the wicked prospers. (Anyone who has trouble understanding this point should consider Dennis Rodman, Madonna, and George Soros.) Why are those who deal treacherously so happy? Do they not fear retribution? Do they not believe in God? If so, their version of Him is not one in which He administers justice. Perhaps, like those described in 2 Peter 3, they think that, since nothing has happened to them thus far, nothing ever will. Jeremiah is not the only one who has ever wondered about such matters. Asaph, the penman of Psalm 73, claimed that he almost stumbled when he saw “the prosperity of the wicked” (Psa. 73:1-3). Habakkuk protested that violence so dominated society that “the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous” (Hab. 1:4).

Everyone agrees that conditions are the exact opposite of what one would expect in a nation allegedly being led by God’s holy law. Jeremiah acknowledges that God planted them and that they have taken root. Unfortunately, their familiarity with God was, more or less, limited to their mouths—not their hearts (Jer. 12:2). Does this not sound like the Lord quoting Isaiah in Matthew 15:8-9? In America today, many are the same way. They seem to think that if they have heard of Jesus, such is sufficient to save them. The ability to invoke His name does not prove that one is a whole-hearted follower.

Jeremiah's observations continue in verses 3-5. Expositors have very little agreement on the meaning of these verses; various explanations have been offered. Below is what seems most reasonable. Jeremiah notes that God knows his heart and has tested him (12:3a). Therefore, he knows that God will not think he has the wrong motivations by asking for the wicked to be pulled out and prepared for the Day of Slaughter. Every culture has leaders to whom people listen. Perhaps if these were punished, the others would repent (12:3b). Would that this were the case! However, the problem runs deeper than just the people of influence. The whole nation is corrupt. If the most wicked fell prey to God's wrath, others would immediately step in to take their places. As Isaiah wrote, "The whole head is sick" (Isa. 1:5). He also declared that no soundness could be found in the body (1:6).

In Jeremiah 12:4, the prophet seems to attribute the drought to the wickedness of those dwelling there. God had punished Israel in the day of Ahab because of his and Jezebel's exceeding wickedness. Elijah prayed that it not rain, and it did not do so for three years and six months. James calls attention to this fact in James 5:17-18. God could have reacted similarly to the sins of the leadership of Judah at this time, also. The birds, the beasts, and the herbs were all suffering due to the spiritual transgressions of those prospering. God had brought this punishment upon them because they said, "He will not see our final end" (Jer. 12:4).

Who is the "he" of verse 4? The only two choices would appear to be God and Jeremiah. The people might have been conceited enough to think God would not see their end—even though He was the One Who would bring it about. But they are likely referring to Jeremiah. Why would they say that? Two reasons come to mind: (1) Jeremiah had been the one speaking to them in the name of the Lord and talking about the future punishment they would receive; (2) They were plotting his death and did not expect that he would be around to see the fulfillment of his prophecies (which they did not necessarily believe, in the first place). Since the men of Ana-

thoth were planning to kill him, Jeremiah would not see their end—whatever it turned out to be.

The plot to terminate Jeremiah's life needed to be dealt with. Therefore, Jeremiah makes this request—that God punish the leaders of the conspiracy to prevent its success. God has already said that He would punish the men of Anathoth (11:21-23). But He is not going to prohibit the men from trying to kill Jeremiah! The prophet will have to face that threat. In fact, God tells him that he should be up to the challenge by saying in 12:5: "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses?" In other words, if you cannot handle adversity on a small scale, how will you withstand worse situations? Worse? What could be worse than those of your own town trying to kill you? God answers the question without being asked:

For even your brothers, the house of your father, Even they have dealt treacherously with you; Yes, they have called a multitude after you. Do not believe them, Even though they speak smooth words to you (12:6).

In other words, should they try to flatter you, do not trust them.

### **THINGS CAN ALWAYS GET WORSE**

Jeremiah would, in fact, receive much more mistreatment than the men of Anathoth would dish out. His own brothers would desert and betray him. Jesus would later find out the disappointment of that reality. Not only did His hometown of Nazareth try to throw Him off a cliff, but at one point in time, his own brothers did not believe in Him; in fact, they mocked Him (John 7:3-5). They grew up with Jesus; how could His perfection have gone unobserved by them? Or maybe that was the problem. He was the perfect child who never got in trouble. Later, Jesus would be betrayed by one of His own disciples (Judas)—one who ate His bread but lifted up his heel against Him. Rejection by anyone is never pleasant, but it especially hurts when experienced by someone very close. Ultimately, the whole multitude rejected the Lord and crucified Him, thus combining physical and spiritual agony with their fickleness.

For men to seek Jeremiah's life probably seems about as bad as it gets, but the rejection of one's own family cuts even deeper; however, even then the prophet was not yet competing with the horses entirely. Consider what else happened. Imagine that the Word of God is sent to the king, and he takes out a penknife, cuts it up, and casually burns it in the fire on the hearth! How could a descendant of King David act so out of harmony with the love and respect he should have had for the Almighty? One wants to shout at him, "Foolish king! God's Word cannot be destroyed—even if His messengers can" (Jer. 36:20-24). God supplied the evil Jehoiakim with a few more choice words that would stand and be fulfilled, also (36:25-32).

The horses of adversity began to gallop when the people prevailed with King Zedekiah and Jeremiah was taken to a dungeon and let down by ropes into the mire (38:4-6). Had Jeremiah ever experienced such great hostility? Of all things, an Ethiopian eunuch pleaded for the king to rescue the prophet, which request was granted. They had to use rags and old clothes to put under his armpits to pull him out (38:7-13). Perhaps Jonah being inside the belly of the great fish was more horrifying. Even Edgar Allen Poe would have had trouble matching the terror of these events.

At last, King Zedekiah called for Jeremiah to find out the future; the answer was, "Surrender to Babylon, and you will live" (38:17-23). How heartbreaking—that although the prophet had apprised the king of the truth, the king ignored what he said. Zedekiah suffered just as Jeremiah had foretold. The horses ran so furiously that Jeremiah could not keep up with them. The king chose foolishly, and the city lay in ruins; all that was left for the prophet to do was to weep and record the overwhelming sadness in his lamentations. Jesus too lamented even prior to His crucifixion:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate (Mat. 23:37-38).

Oh, sure, the people remaining asked Jeremiah to pray to the Lord about their course of action, promising to do whatever He told them. When the answer came and Jeremiah communicated it to them, they rebuffed him one final time: "*As for* the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you!" (Jer. 44:16). So, what else is new? One would think that since everything Jeremiah said had always come to pass, he might have had some credibility by now. No, they rejected him and made him go to Egypt with them. However, this foolish action cannot compare with the destruction of Jerusalem he was made to endure.

### APPLICATION

All preachers are going to experience adversity; it may seem like the worst problem any preacher has ever faced at the time, but what seems so gigantic may only be a skirmish with footmen compared with what is to follow. Although aware of the plight of many fellow preachers, this writer can only truly speak of himself, if the reader will indulge him.

When I began working with my first congregation, I had no idea what to expect. I asked the men if they had any guidelines, and they answered, "Do whatever it is that preachers do." Apparently, neither one of us had any measure of expertise in the matter. After being there a few months, one of the leaders of the congregation (well-educated and a song leader, thus constantly before the congregation) invited me to come visit a Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI), which I had never heard of. After posing a few questions, he confided that they did use instruments of music, which was not acceptable. Eventually, I observed a meeting and came close to throwing up afterward. It was Pentecostalism masquerading as a legitimate ideology. Attending the Freed-Hardeman lectures in 1973 opened my eyes about what these brethren were involved in (as well as learning about Max King-ism). Later I discovered why I had been hired to work with this congregation. I had not been to a school of preaching or a Christian college. The neo-Pentecostals talked the congrega-

gation into offering me the work because they hoped they could convert me (and ultimately the rest of the church to the charismatic movement). They failed. After agonizing meetings, it became apparent that we had to withdraw fellowship from them, which we did. We felt as though we had been through the wringer, but it turned out only to be footmen.

In the next congregation, we experienced apathy on the part of the members. We would begin a work and have a measure of success—only to have everyone quit. We set up five Bible studies the first time out, using a technique I had developed. Seven teams went out that first time, the next month only five, and the third month only three. It might have been understandable if we had not set up any studies, but people quit when the fields were ripe. We started a (Scriptural) bus ministry with four drivers, but even though we had about a dozen regular riders, they all quit at various times, leaving yours truly to drive the bus and take care of the program. The brother who printed the bulletin each week also quit. How did this compare with the first problem? They were different, but this one was even more discouraging. The three years there was the shortest time I ever worked with a congregation, and it ceased to exist within two years of leaving it.

In our third work, which was with our home congregation, I immediately became involved with a Christian school which was begun a few weeks after we moved there. It was an area-wide school in which three congregations were involved. The elders who allowed their building to be used initially said, “You men on the board take care of everything. Just consult us if you need to do anything to the building.” About halfway through the first year, they hired a new preacher who insisted that the elders should run the school. The school’s existence was threatened, but 26 families of that congregation said they would leave if the elders ran the school; so, they backed down. In our third year, we had grown from 31 to 67 students, but we had no principal. The board chairman said, “Gary, you’re our ace in the hole. If we can’t hire someone, we need you to do the job.” The congregation I was working

with allowed me to do so, cutting my salary by the amount I would be paid to be principal.

About halfway through the year, the horses of adversity started feeling their oats because two of our teachers had different teaching styles. Only one style was allowed, apparently. The upshot of the problem was this: the board fired one teacher whose methods they disliked (without whom the school would not have existed), along with the School secretary (ditto)—both of which were their own members, two assistant teachers, and me (the ace in the hole). They took this action with seven weeks left in the school year. The following year they had only Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and the year after that, they closed down. We continued five years on our church property before most of the students graduated. The tragedy of it all we knew at the time. It has been thirty years, and no Christian education has ever been discussed since in that area. What could have been good for our students and as an evangelistic tool was permanently disabled.

But none of those things can compare to having your best friends whom you have known for more than seven years suddenly turn against you (without provocation) in a vicious manner. We all know what the devil is capable of and that when brethren target us, they may not intend it as personal, but it is. Having been wrongfully fired, I tried to help the congregation make a smooth transition anyway and was succeeding fairly well until being gone three consecutive Sundays. For some reason that still remains a mystery, the elders determined to savage both mine and Dub McClish’s names even though we were not present nor creating any disturbance. At that point, having been left with no other choice, I sent letters to the members, giving a defense even though uncertain as to what we had been charged with. We had been extremely close with the college students; only two of them would talk with us. The congregation lost nearly half of their members. I had been told two years earlier that the congregation would not survive without my wife and me. I was told two months earlier that I would not be fired. Is it not strange how indispensable one can become—and so quickly, too? Within two years,

this group hired Mac Deaver, who is in error on the Holy Spirit, and when he left, they hired his son, who holds the same views.

Some nights, during this trying time, I only slept three hours. There is no way I can calculate the amount of tears shed. But while the horses had a good pace going there, even that was not the worst. The point made thus far is that, even though today's preachers are not inspired prophets, nevertheless many have striven to preach the Word in its simplicity. As a result of that, in many instances, they have been fired or coerced into leaving for standing for the truth. In my personal circumstances, that was not the case. Most preachers will have clashes with the footmen. As painful as these situations can be, the fact is that the horsemen are always waiting nearby. All must be prepared for personal rejection, as well as members repudiating the Word of God.

### THE WORST

The worst burden we have all had to endure is the division among once faithful and conservative brethren. None of us desired it; no one campaigned for it, but we are saddled with it (sorry about the subconscious pun). In addition to fighting the ever-encroaching liberalism that has invaded the church for decades, we have now ceased to communicate with ourselves. Brethren who have stayed in my home during lectureships will no longer correspond. Some with whom we have previously been close have turned and attacked. This fracturing has occurred despite the commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-34; 15:12-13) and the Lord's plea for all to be one (17:20-21).

No, it is not the case that wrongs have not been committed or that there are not problems

to be resolved, but who is working on a solution? After more than a decade, communications are at a standstill while Satan drives the wedges of division ever deeper. No, compromise can never be the answer, but if we are on the same page concerning respect for the authority of the Scriptures, there ought to be a way to achieve harmony (such as following Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15-17). Should we not pray for improved conditions among brethren? Should we not pray for wisdom? Should we not pray for healing in a fractured brotherhood? Should we not work for the restoration of unity? We should pray that it is not too late to do so. Above all, we should pray, "Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven" (6:10).

Having emphasized the importance of the willingness to communicate and seek resolutions, it is nevertheless the case that both parties involved in a problem must be willing to honestly assess whatever damage has been done and look for remedies acceptable to all. If that kind of cooperation is lacking, then no progress can be made. After Israel left Rehoboam to follow Jeroboam, the deserted king planned to go to war against him, but God told him not to fight with him. "Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me" (1 Kin. 12:24). What thing was from God? The division was. It has been prophesied by Ahijah in 1 Kings 11:31. While division seems like the worst possible circumstance, it is possible that it comes from God—and for a reason similar to that of 1 Kings 11:33.

May God strengthen each of us to meet every challenge (no matter how severe) with love, compassion, integrity, steadfastness, and faithfulness.

### WORK CITED

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

### QUESTIONS

1. What problem did Jeremiah never have to face?
2. Name at least three men who wondered why the way of the wicked appeared to prosper.
3. What is the value of experiencing heartbreaking situations?
4. Describe parallels between Jeremiah and Jesus.
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the current climate in the church?

# WE WILL COME NO MORE UNTO GOD

*Jess Whitlock*

Generation, see ye the word of Jehovah. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? or a land of thick darkness? wherefore say my people, We are broken loose; we will come no more unto thee (Jer. 2:31-32).

Jeremiah prophesied some forty years during the reigns of the final five kings of Judah (626-586 BC). His name means, “exalted of Jehovah.” In chapters 2-6 of his book, we discover a series of indictments against Judah and Jerusalem. The apostasy of Israel is his concern in chapter two and the words of our text. In Jeremiah 2:28, Jeremiah queried:

But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.

Notice please, the children of God had as many gods as they had cities! The questions of Jeremiah 2:31 are rhetorical inasmuch as God had blessed His people abundantly in forty years of wilderness wandering (Psa. 78:52-54; Num. 21; Exo. 14:11-ff; 15:22; 16:2-ff; 17:1; Acts 7:36; 13:18; Heb. 3:17; etc.).

Yet, in spite of God’s love, care, protection, and guidance, Israel had become as an unfaithful wife, saying, “we are free to roam and **we will come no more unto Thee!**” The prophet points out that the virgin would not forget the ornaments (compare to engagement ring), and a bride would not forget her wedding attire (many brides today keep their wedding dresses). Examples include Isaiah 49:18 and Ezekiel 16:10-12. The people of God had forsaken God! They had forgotten God, “days without number”—i.e., continually! Earlier, Jeremiah had lamented:

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

A broken cistern is of no value and there are many broken cisterns today: denominationalism, humanism, worldliness, compromise, etc.

The Lord pleaded:

Return, O backsliding children, saith Jehovah; for I am a husband unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion (3:14).

Still, the people forsook God and forgot God. “This is thy lot, the portion measured unto thee from me, saith Jehovah; because **thou hast forgotten me**, and trusted in falsehood” (13:25). God punished His people through the coming of Nebuchadnezzar. “For my people have forgotten me” is reiterated in Jeremiah 18:15. This is a constant theme of the prophets of God.

For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength; therefore thou plantest pleasant plants, and settest it with strange slips (Isa. 17:10).

The ASV (1901) has the footnote for “strange slips” as being “vine slips of a strange god.” Israel’s neglect of God had removed her far away from Him into idolatry (17:8; cf. 27:9; 2:8, 20; 30:22; 31:7).

Israel had forgotten all that God had done for them. Our nation has obviously forgotten God “days without number.” Years ago, when Jay Leno hosted *The Tonight Show*, he sometimes did man-on-the-street interviews. He questioned some college students with some Bible questions. He asked two young ladies “can you name one of the Ten Commandments?” One of them replied, “Freedom of speech?” He then asked the other lady, “Complete this sentence: Let him who is without sin...?” Her response was, “Have a good time?” He asked a young man, “Who according to the Bible, was swallowed by a whale?” The man answered confidently, “Pinocchio.”

Think about this: there has never been a time in our history as a nation when we have had more

access to the Word of God (cell phones, copy of the Bible at Dollar Tree for one dollar, the internet, in motel rooms, etc.). Nevertheless, it would appear that there has never been a time of more Biblical ignorance than we see in our nation today.

Hosea wrote:

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 also will forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

How do we account for such a lack of Bible knowledge? In a nutshell, a failure to study the Word of the living God! We must study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15), we are to grow in that knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), let us search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:10), and seek to prove all things (1 The. 5:21). There is a dearth of Bible study throughout the land today.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah (Amos 8:11).

This prophecy was given to the Jewish nation of old, but it certainly seems like it could make an appearance in church bulletins today, does it not? The so-called Supreme Court of our nation has done all within its power to remove God and His Word from our midst. It all began by abolishing prayer in school, then the infamous Roe versus Wade decision to kill the babe in the mother's womb, and its approval of so-called *gay* marriage! While the Bible is excluded from the education system almost entirely, that same system allows and encourages the teaching of Islam and the so-called "Holy Qur'an." May God forgive us for our stupidity as a nation!

And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 The. 2:11-12).

Perhaps such a time is upon us in America today! It is so sad that wicked men and women have

destroyed the moral compass that America once enjoyed.

Jeremiah warned:

the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and **my people love to have it so**: and what will ye do in the end thereof (Jer. 5:31)?

The prophets used the priests to their best advantage. False prophets and religious leaders continue to prophesy falsely from their false pulpits today.

Jeffrey Hadden, sociologist, sent out a survey to 10,000 Protestant preachers in 1982, and made the results known in 1998. Some of the results garnered from 7,441 responses were quite revealing as to why the religious world is in such a state of Biblical ignorance today (Hos. 4:6). Consider some of those questions and responses to them:

1. Is the Bible the inspired and inerrant Word of God? 67% of Baptists said, "No." 82% of Presbyterians said, "No." 87% of Methodists said, "No." 95% of Episcopalians said, "No."
2. Was Jesus Christ born of a virgin? 34% of Baptists said, "No." 44% of Episcopalians said, "No." 49% of Presbyterians said, "No." 60% of Methodists said, "No."
3. Do you believe that Christ lived a sinless life? 45% of Baptists said, "No." 55% of Adventists said, "No." 67% of Catholics, Lutherans, and Methodists said, "No."
4. Do you believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ the third day? 30% of Episcopalians said, "No." 33% of Baptists said, "No." 35% of the Presbyterians said, "No." 51% of Methodists said, "No."
5. Do you believe in the existence of Satan/devil? 51% of Baptists said, "No." 62% of Methodists said, "No." 68% of Catholics said, "No." (McBride).

As I pondered these disturbing statistics, I wondered "Why are these men standing in their various pulpits?" If I did not believe the Word of the living God to be inspired, I would not have

devoted the past forty-seven years to preaching the Word!

This problem is not entirely reserved for the man-made churches of our day. Many years ago, the late brother Guy N. Woods surveyed incoming freshmen at Abilene Christian College. It was a simple survey made up of basic Bible questions: e.g., name two apostles, three judges, etc. Some of the answers included: "The exodus was the return of the Jews to Palestine after World War II." "Some of the wisdom books of the Old Testament are Acts, Lord of the Flies, and Paradise Lost." "Jesus gave the ten commandments on the mount of Olives." The average grade was ten percent!

I submit to you that those young people had been fed a steady diet of spiritual "junk food" for the past 17 to 18 years of their young lives. They had taken too many trips to Six Flags Over Texas and not enough trips to the Book of books (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; Eph. 6:17). A lot of preaching heard today amounts to nice little "sermonettes" being delivered by "preacherettes" delivered to "Christianettes" that smoke "cigarettes." The truth is, that same lesson could be delivered to any denomination in town or the local civic clubs and the people would say, "What a nice little talk." When a man enters the pulpit and preaches that old-time Jerusalem Gospel message, the *itching ears* cry like Amaziah to Amos:

O thou seer, go, flee thou away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house (Amos 7:12-13).

God's prophet was invited to go somewhere else to preach. Today it is not unusual for a faithful man to stand against sin in the camp and then be invited to go somewhere else to preach the Word of God!

Amos queried, "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed" (3:3)? The late brother Albert Trent had gone to the post office one day and was asked a question, "Do you believe that the man is the head of the home?" Brother Albert said, "Yes" and then quoted Genesis 2:24 and

Ephesians 5:22-23. The man responded saying, "I do not agree with you." Brother Albert then retorted, "Sir, you are not disagreeing with me, but with God." To walk with God one must agree with God, and God wrote only one Book, which is the Holy Bible. When a preacher preaches the truth and anyone disputes that truth, the dispute is not with the preacher, but with the Lord God (John 12:48-50; Luke 10:16; Mat. 12:30; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 8:32). Remember, I am not asking do you agree with me, but the important question is **do you agree with God?** Years ago, at camp, I taught, "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it!" A wise elder corrected me as he explained, "If the Bible says it, that settles it, whether or not we agree" (Amos 3:3).

Max Lucado concluded a radio program over KJAK, Lubbock, Texas, in December 1996, saying, "All you have to do is call Him Father" (and in his version of sinner's prayer) told his listeners to pray, "I ask you Father to receive me as your child" that they might receive salvation. God has revealed what all men **must do:** hear and believe (Mark 12:29; John 6:44-45; Rom. 10:17; John 3:16-17; 8:24); repent and confess Christ as Lord (Acts 2:38; 3:19; Luke 13:3-5); be baptized into Christ for remission of sins (Col. 2:12; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-6; 1 Pet. 3:21; Gal. 3:26-27). **Do you agree with God?**

Max R. King and a whole host of his followers teach that the Lord's church was not fully established (Acts 2) until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, thereby removing the cross of Christ as the focal point of the Gospel. What is more, they insist the final judgment took place (past tense) in AD 70. God's Word prophesied the coming kingdom and reveals when that day occurred (Dan. 2:44ff; Isa. 2:2ff; Mat. 16:18; Acts 2). **Do you agree with God?**

Rick Atchley of the Richland Hills church in Fort Worth, Texas, now has Saturday worship services with two departures from the truth: instrumental music and the Lord's Supper! The Bible authorizes singing only (Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The Lord's Supper is to be observed regularly and steadfastly on the first day of the week only by New Testa-

ment Christians (Acts 2:42; 20:7), and not Saturday! **Do you agree with God?**

Dave Miller continues to disagree with God in holding to his unscriptural practice and endorsement of what has come to be called “elder reaffirmation or elder reevaluation,” which you can also read about in Titus 5:19. Divine qualifications are set forth for a man to serve as an elder (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Nowhere in the Word of the living God can we find the right nor the authority to dismiss scriptural and Godly elders based on the whims of majority vote! If so, where? **Do you agree with God?**

Mac and Weylan Deaver continue to advocate that in some manner the Holy Spirit works separate and apart from the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit guides to **all truth** by His written Word (John 16:13; 20:31). The Holy Spirit works only through the Word

(John 6:63; Eph. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). **Do you agree with God?**

Remember the liberal discussion of so-called lower case “f” fellowship and upper case “F” fellowship? The plain truth of the matter is that when a man is no longer in fellowship with God, we cannot be in fellowship with that man, and remain in fellowship with God (2 John 9-11).

When these, and countless others, make it well known that they are not in agreement with God, are they not then guilty of saying to Him, in essence: We Will Come No More Unto God?

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### QUESTIONS

1. What two evils did Judah commit against God, and are those two evils being committed today?
2. Hosea said the people of God were destroyed for a lack of what thing?
3. While the prophets prophesied falsely and the priests were bearing rule, what did God’s prophet say concerning the people themselves?
4. Amos asked, “Can two walk together they be agreed?” By what one source can we know that we are agreed with God today?
5. Several false teachers and their doctrines were mentioned in this lesson; can you name others in your area today? (Discuss)

# GOD HATH SPOKEN BY HIS SON... REFUSE NOT HIM THAT SPOKE

*Michael Hatcher*

## INTRODUCTION

**H**ebrews is a wonderful book but without an understanding of the Old Testament, we will never glean from it the beautiful truths revealed. The author, whom I believe to be the apostle Paul, begins with the premise that God is, but then he declares the fact that God has spoken—He has revealed His Will for mankind. He begins by saying:

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).

The inspired author establishes that Jesus the Christ was superior in every way to the Jewish (and any other religious) system. Since He is superior and God is speaking through Him, we need to make sure we listen to Him. Thus, he writes:

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not* we *escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven (12:25).

These are the two verses upon which this title and our lesson is based upon. Prior to making application of the principles we find here, let us consider God's attitude toward what He spoke "in time past."

## PATRIARCHY

From the beginning, God spoke. After creating Adam and Eve and placing them in the garden, He spoke to them and told them to be fruitful and multiply, to tend the garden, and they could eat of all the trees of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God expected His Word to be respected: "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen.

2:17). When they ate of the tree (3:1-6), God cursed them (3:14-19) and cast them out of the garden and the right to the tree of life (3:22-24). Man had no right to refuse what God said.

After Cain killed his brother because Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice and he did not, God says that Cain is cursed from the earth. His response was to say, "My punishment *is* greater than I can bear" (4:13). God punished Cain for his wickedness. He also promised blessings if he would do what was pleasing to Him: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (4:7).

During the days prior to the flood:

GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually (6:5).

As a result, God destroyed the world with a flood. However, God spared righteous Noah because he did "according to all that God commanded him" (6:22). God demanded that man not refuse His Word, and when man did, God punished him. God also dispensed blessings to Noah because he did not refuse Him that spoke.

## MOSIAC

Moses encouraged the people of his day:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deu. 4:2).

This admonition was repeated numerous times by Moses and the prophets. Did God care as to whether they obeyed or disobeyed? Were there any consequences relative to one who refused God's Word?

In giving the Ten Commandments, God said "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exo. 20:8). He went on to state they were not to work on the Sabbath day. Later Moses wrote:

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it *is* holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth *any* work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh *is* the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death” (31:14-15).

Yet we find in Numbers 15:32-36 a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath. They brought him to Moses and Aaron who put him under guard till God instructed them: “The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp” (15:35). God insisted His Word be respected, and when this unnamed man failed to, he was put to death.

God records concerning Moses:

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel (Deu. 34:10-12).

Yet, this great prophet and leader of Israel, sinned. The Israelites were murmuring for lack of water. Moses goes to God on their behalf and God instructs him:

Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock (Num. 20:8).

However, instead of speaking to the rock, Moses “smote the rock twice” (20:11). Because of this transgression, God told Moses: “ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (20:12). When Moses refused God, he suffered the punishment of not being able to enter the land of Canaan.

God spoke to king Saul through Samuel the prophet. Samuel began by saying:

therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.... Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they

have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass (1 Sam. 15:1, 3).

God’s words were very understandable and explicit, yet God said to Samuel about Saul:

It repenteth me that I have set up Saul *to be* king; for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments (15:11).

When confronted by Samuel, Saul passed the blame to the people:

They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed (15:15).

The result of Saul refusing him that spoke, Samuel gives the penalty by saying, “Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king” (15:23).

The Philistines had taken the ark of God but sent it away. It had resided in the house of Abinadab in Gibeah. David decides to bring the ark back to Jerusalem, so he builds a new cart for it. As Uzzah and Ahio drive the new cart, the oxen pulling the cart shook it, so Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the ark. The Scripture reveals:

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for *his* error; and there he died by the ark of God (2 Sam. 6:7).

David was upset with God; so he left the ark at the house of Obededom the Gittite. However, God had spoken as to how to transport the ark and all its vessels with a warning that “they shall not touch *any* holy thing, lest they die” (Num. 4:15). Uzzah did not heed what God said. David later brings the ark back to Jerusalem in the way God spoke concerning transporting it and noting that Uzzah died because, “we sought him not after the due order” (1 Chr. 15:13).

## CHRISTIAN

In Hebrews 1:2 we find that God has spoken in the last days through His Son. The last days began on Pentecost and will continue till our Lord returns and time shall be no more. During this

dispensation, we must look to Christ and what He says for He is speaking for God. 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).

Our Lord spoke of the church. When He asked His apostles who they thought He was, Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mat. 16:16). Based upon this confession of faith, Jesus said:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (16:18).

We immediately observe the church's uniqueness. There is only one church (although many pretenders). Paul revealed there is one body (Eph. 4:4) and that the body is the church (1:22-23); Christ gave Himself for that one church (5:25) and is the savior of it (5:23). We also learn from Christ that those religious groups that are not the church will be destroyed. "But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Mat. 15:13).

Jesus spoke of the worship of that one church when He told the Samaritan woman at the well:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

As we continue to study the Scriptures, we find that God has authorized five avenues through which we worship Him: singing (accapella), prayer (to the Father through the mediatorship of Christ), partaking the Lord's Supper (unleavened bread and fruit of the vine), giving, and preaching. All these are to be done with the proper attitude of heart ("in spirit").

That one church is to be organized the way God intended. It is to have elders (a plurality of men who are also called pastors, shepherds, overseers, or bishops) who meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Then there are deacons who also meet the qualifications given for their *office* in 1 Timothy 3. These men serve as special servants in the work of the church as directed by the elders. Paul mentioned this organization in writing to the Philippians:

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (1:1).

Jesus also spoke concerning the terms of entrance into the church. He taught that we must upon hearing and learning (John 6:44-45) believe in God, in Christ as the "I am" (John 14:1; 8:24), and the Gospel (Mark 16:15-16). Upon that faith, we must repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5). We must be willing to confess Him (Mat. 10:32-33) and to be baptized for salvation (Mark 16:16) into a relationship with the Divine Three (Mat. 28:19).

After gaining entrance into the church, we must continue in His Word, being His disciple: "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). This lifestyle or continuing in His Word is going to be a walking in the light as God is light (1 John 1:5-7). God through His grace teaches "us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"—and that we are "zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:12-14). We are going to add the Christian graces to our lives (2 Pet. 1:5-7) so we can be partakers of the Divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust (1:4). We will avoid the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) and add the fruit of the Spirit to our lives (5:22-23) so we will walk in the Spirit (5:25).

## CONCLUSION

Since Pentecost of Acts 2, Jesus' words are going to judge all men (John 12:48). It is because

God is speaking by His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). In previous dispensations, God demanded man's obedience, and when he failed to obey, God punished him. After reminding us that God speaks through His Son during these last days, the writer establishes that Christ's message is superior to the angels' message because He is God. As we turn to chapter two, he writes:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him* (2:1-3).

It only stands to reason that since the message delivered by the Son is a greater message, then we best not neglect that salvation of which He spoke. When the message of the inferior (angels) was transgressed and disobeyed, they were punished (received a just recompense of their disobedience); it will be impossible for us to escape punishment if we neglect the message of the Superior.

Later he reminds them:

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:28-31).

Those who refused to hear God's Law spoken through Moses died without mercy (there must be at least two or three witnesses for the death penalty). Yet the Son of God is superior to Moses, thus having a superior message. If they died without mercy under the inferior Law, then those who reject the Son of God and the blood which

He shed will receive a sorer or greater punishment than death without mercy. God will take vengeance upon them. No wonder the Hebrews' writer says it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands (10:31).

In comparing the Israelites with Christians, the Israelites came to Mount Zion after leaving Egyptian bondage and were instructed not to touch the mountain lest they be put to death. Christians have instead come (1) to Mount Zion, (2) the city of the Living God, (3) the heavenly Jerusalem, (4) an innumerable company of angels, (5) the general assembly, (6) the church of the firstborn ones, (7) God who is the judge of all, (8) the spirits of just men made perfect, (9) Jesus who is the mediator of the New Testament, and (10) the blood of sprinkling. Based upon these things, Christians are encouraged:

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not* we escape, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God *is* a consuming fire (12:25-29).

While all these previous things to which the Christian has come should motivate the Christian to hear Christ's Words (revealed in the New Testament), the writer concludes with another aspect of God's nature—He is a consuming fire. That nature is certainly one of the reasons that "*It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31); thus we had best not refuse Him that speaketh from heaven.

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

**QUESTIONS**

1. Is sincerity of heart important?
2. If a man is sincere, will God be pleased with what he does?
3. What type of punishments did people receive under the former dispensations?
4. What can be worse than death without mercy (Heb. 10:28-31)?
5. In God speaking through His Son today, how does He authorize actions for man today?

# WHO DID HINDER YOU THAT YOU SHOULD NOT OBEY THE TRUTH?

*Philip Smith*

**T**ext: “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal. 5:7).

## INTRODUCTION

Paul, along with Timothy and Silas, went through the region of Galatia on Paul’s second evangelistic tour (Acts 16:6). It is likely that this is the beginning of the churches in Galatia (Gal. 4:13). He returned on his third tour and strengthened the disciples (Acts 18:23). Later, after this epistle was written, while Paul was in prison, he sent Crescens to Galatia (2 Tim. 4:10).

Paul is the penman (Gal. 1:1), and being an apostle of Jesus Christ he did not write from his own wisdom or memory but was directed by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13). As a result, we understand that Paul’s writings (like his words) were the words of God (1 The. 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:37) and must be obeyed (2 The. 3:14).

The purpose of the Galatian epistle is to bring the Galatian congregations back from apostasy. Judaizing teachers were leading them back into the Old Law (Gal. 6:12-13). They were in great danger of falling away from the Truth of the Gospel (3:1). In view of this, Paul warns them not to believe any man or angel who preaches any other *gospel* than that which had been preached to them (1:8-9). All who preach anything else are accursed.

Paul, in Galatians 4, taught the allegory of Sarah and Hagar (4:21-31). He stated that Sarah was the freewoman and Hagar was the bondwoman. Sarah was Abraham’s wife, while Hagar was Sarah’s handmaid (Gen. 16:1). Isaac, who was born of the freewoman, was the child of promise; Ishmael, who was born of the bondwoman, was born after the flesh. Paul concluded by stating that we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Paul wrote this allegory to show that the Galatian saints were not of the Law given on

mount Sinai (as represented by Hagar), which bears “children unto bondage” (Gal. 4:24—ASV). Paul points out Old Testament Law could not free anyone from sin (3:11), but being Christians, they were of the Gospel (as represented by Sarah), which is of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is free and so makes us free from sin and death (4:26; John 8:32).

Beginning in Galatians 5, Paul exhorted the Galatians to stand fast in the freedom for which Christ had made them free (Gal. 5:1). Paul then proceeded to show that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails in pleasing God under the New Testament (5:2-6).

With this background let us now examine our text.

## YE DID RUN WELL

The word translated, *ye did run*, is in the imperfect tense in the Greek, which indicates that the action is in the past, but with no assessment of the action’s completion (Heiser). The ASV translates it. “Ye were running well.” Vincent states concerning this word:

Better, as giving the force of the imperfect, *ye were running*. You were on the right road, and were making good progress when this interruption occurred (158).

*Well* means “fitly, appropriately, in the right way, splendidly” (Heiser). The Galatian Christians had been running appropriately. To run well, it was necessary that they did so according to God’s Word. It is just as necessary that we, today, run according to the Word of God. This means that we must obey the Word of God. We cannot please God if we refuse to obey His Word. Samuel told Saul: “to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *And* to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). Peter and the other apostles emphasized the importance of obedience in responding to the Jewish council who had commanded them

to not teach in the name of Jesus: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The Hebrews’ writer states that Jesus is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9).

In an age where so many preachers and elders are willing to do almost anything to attract as many people as possible and hold them on the church role, the principle of “running the race” apparently has fallen by the wayside. It is truly heartbreaking that so many once-faithful congregations are now apostate. Many who had at one time defended the Truth on TV, radio, in newspapers, and in debates have ceased doing so. We have seen once-faithful congregations accept neopentecostalism, children’s worship, simultaneous worship, drama, family life centers (i.e., gyms), praise teams, instrumental music, re-evaluation of elders, a multitude of errors on Divorce and Remarriage, and numerous other unauthorized doctrines and practices into congregations that were “running well,” but that no longer are. Like the Sardis congregation, many of these congregations have a name that they live, but they are dead (Rev. 3:1).

### **WHO DID HINDER YOU**

The word translated *did hinder* means to “beat back, check” (Thayer 39). They were running appropriately, but are now being beaten back by false teachers.

This is what happened to the young prophet who prophesied against the idol in Bethel (1 Kin. 13:1-24). God sent him to prophesy against the idol that Jeroboam had erected. God commanded him not to eat bread, drink water, or return by the way that he came. He was following God’s commands faithfully until he received word from an older prophet of God who claimed that an angel had spoken to him the Word of the Lord commanding him to bring back the younger prophet to his house for refreshment. The young prophet was deceived by the lie and went to the older prophet’s home where he ate bread and drank water. This young prophet was later killed by a lion as he was returning home. Even though the young prophet was running well at first, the

### **Who Did Hinder You That You Should Not Obey the Truth?**

older prophet hindered him (beat him back) from obeying the Word of the Lord.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders of grievous wolves who would enter in among the flock of God to destroy and devour it (Acts 20:29). He said that even of their own selves some would arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples of Christ after themselves (20:30). Paul commanded the elders to watch for deceivers (20:31). These false teachers that Paul warned against would, if allowed, hinder the Ephesian Christians just as the Galatian Christians were being hindered.

Faithful Christians will watch for anyone who might hinder them in their race. Sometimes we are hindered by elders who care more about pleasing the people than pleasing God (Gal. 1:10). Also, preachers who have not been taught the Truth or who have departed from it will hinder us if we are not alert and willing to search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11; cf. Mat. 7:15; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1). Members who have not been grounded in the Truth and who want to excuse their own sins or those of their friends and relatives will hinder us in running the race if we permit them to do so. It is tragic that in some congregations one will not hear the Truth preached concerning such things as fellowship, denominationalism, divorce and remarriage, drinking beverage alcohol, gambling, dancing, and mixed swimming. “The whole counsel of God” must be faithfully proclaimed if congregations and individuals are to be protected from those who would hinder us in our race (Acts 20:27—ASV).

### **THAT YE SHOULD NOT OBEY THE TRUTH**

Men have always had difficulty obeying the Truth. Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, having been deceived by Satan, while Adam followed her even though he knew better (1 Tim. 2:14). Their failure to obey the Truth brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12). Eve was hindered by deception while Adam was hindered, apparently, by a desire to please his wife. A generation of Israelites wandered forty years in the wilderness and were there consumed because they did not obey the Truth (Jos. 5:6). Saul was rejected from being

King because he did not obey the Truth (1 Sam. 15:23-24). The Northern Kingdom was carried away into Assyrian captivity because they obeyed not the Truth (2 Kin. 18:11-12). Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity because they refused to obey the Truth (2 Chr. 36:11-21).

Now we read that the Galatian Christians were hindered by Judaizing teachers who were teaching that Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (Gal. 6:12-13, 4:21). The Galatians had to reject the false teachers and their doctrine so they could return to the Truth of God's Word to be saved (5:4). Today, we must be watchful and willing to warn our brethren about false teachers (Rom. 16:17). We must not have any fellowship with those who pervert the Gospel (Gal. 1:7; 2 John 9-11) lest we, like the Galatians,

find ourselves hindered in our obedience to the Truth.

### CONCLUSION

If we allow anyone to hinder us in our spiritual race so we do not obey and faithfully continue in the Truth of God's Word, the price is much too high, for it is our souls (Mat. 16:26; Luke 6:39; 2 The. 1:8).

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### QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the Galatian epistle?
2. How does one run the Christian race well?
3. Given an example of someone who was running well until hindered by a prophet of God.
4. What was being taught among the churches of Galatia that was hindering them?
5. Name some things that will help us avoid being hindered from the truth.

# GO STAND AND SPEAK

*Gene Hill*

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life (Acts 5:17-20).

The immediate context of this passage is Acts 5:1-11 in which Annanias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit about the amount of their gift and died as punishment. The manner of the passing of this couple had a profound effect not only on the church but the community as well (5:11). The work of apostles was so magnified by this event (5:11) that the opportunities to demonstrate signs and wonders increased (5:12) and church membership multiplied. Note the credibility this gained the apostles amongst the local population (5:15-16) which drew the attention and response of the Jewish leadership (5:17-18).

Let us note the purpose of miracles. They were to prove the Deity of Jesus (John 3:1-3; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22), to confirm the Word to hearers (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4), to verify a true apostle (2 Cor. 12:12), and finally, to fulfill prophecy (Mat. 8:17) (*Fishers of Men*, Lesson Three). The miracles performed by the apostles in Acts 4 and 5 plainly achieve the intended results with no room for misunderstanding (4:12-22; 5:28; Mat. 27:24-25). Remember how the Jewish leadership responded to the healing of the lame man (Acts 4:13-22). They saw the change in Peter and John (4:13), knew they had been with Jesus, could not gainsay the miracle even acknowledging it (4:14, 16), but refused to respond to the testimony of the evidence literally standing in front of them.

So far in Acts we have two public sermons preached by the apostles: the founding sermon in Acts 2:14-40; the sermon following the healing of the lame man (in the temple) in Acts 3:11-4:2, which brought about the first confrontation

with the Sanhedrin as recorded in Acts 4:3-22. In these events, we find three records of explosive growth. First, in Acts 2:41, of some three thousand souls being added. Next, we find the number increasing to, or by, five thousand in Acts 4:4. *Multitudes* is used to gauge the increase of souls in Acts 5:14. What did the angel of the Lord tell the apostles to preach when he said, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life?” (5:20). Whatever it was, it must be according to Scripture (Luke 24:44-48; 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The manifestation of the miraculous was the ongoing proof that the messenger and the message was from God (Mark 16:17-18; Acts 2:4, 6, 22; 3:7, 12-13; 4:9, 14; 5:5, 10, 12, 16). The manifested ability was consistently attributed to the working of God (2:14-22; 3:6; 4:10; 5:30-32). It follows then that the message they preached in all situations, was in fact from God (John 14:16, 26; 15:26-27; 16:13). In freeing the apostles from prison, the angel admonished the apostles to reenter the temple and speak “all the words of this life.” We now turn our attention to that topic.

The apostles merely continued the practice of Jesus speaking in the Temple (Mat. 21:23; John 18:20). It is also accurate to state that they continued His preaching. Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68; 14:26). Peter, standing up with the eleven in Acts 2, sought to answer the question, “What meaneth this?” (2:12), which was asked about the outpouring and manifestation of the Holy Ghost in verses 1-11. He told them that the events of which they were witnesses were a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:28-32, that in the last days the Spirit would be poured out, that wonders would be seen before the great and notable day of the Lord and that those calling on the Lord would be saved (Acts 2:16-21).

Peter then charges his Jewish audience with cruelly murdering Jesus of Nazareth, one who was approved of God as they knew (2:22). Their cruel hands were used by God to carry out His counsel (2:23), and God raised Him up (2:24). Peter even calls their King David as witness that the Lord would be resurrected and not see corruption (2:25-28). Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that the fruit of his (David) loins would sit on David's throne. Peter applies this to Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and coronation (2:30-35). Given this, it would then be reasonable to conclude that the words of this life the apostles were commanded to preach would include at least the following information.

Paul teaches that death, by sin, entered upon the whole of the human race (Rom. 5:12-14). The occasion was the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:6-8). The consequence of that sin involved the immediate loss of fellowship with God (Isa. 59:1-2), spiritual death (Rom. 5:12), and being cut off from access to the Tree of Life, which resulted in the loss of physical immortality (Gen. 3:22-24).

However, reading the account in Genesis 3, we see the beginning of the unfolding of the Scheme of Redemption. The coming Seed of woman would defeat Satan after receiving a minor wound but would crush Satan in the process (Acts 3:15). We likewise see, by implication, the first blood sacrifice for sin in Genesis 3:21, which God used to dress Adam and Eve with coats of skin. It is safe to say that skin generally comes from the bodies of animals. Since the blood of animals would be used to atone for sin (Heb. 9-10), which were only offered in prospect of the sacrifice of Jesus (9:11-15; 10:9-10, 22; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:22), and since God assured them death would follow transgression, and they did not die, it can be inferred that an atoning blood sacrifice for their sin was offered.

Imagine yourself standing at a vantage point that provided you a clear view of either the door to the Tabernacle or, later, the appropriate gate to Solomon's Temple. In this scenario, you are in a time when Israel, as a whole, was reasonably faithful. What you would see would be an on-

going stream of supplicants arriving with animal sacrifices for sins and even for peace offerings or sacrifices of thanksgiving. Think of the number of animals being offered. The blood that flowed from that stream of animals was tremendous. The point of all of this was to illustrate the sinfulness of sin and the need to be assured of sanctification and fellowship with God (Rom. 7:7-13). The Law demonstrated the sinfulness of sin. What is more, every year the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies twice on the Day of Atonement: once for his own sins (Lev. 16:1-14) and then for those of the nation (16:15-16). Somewhere in all of this, the faithful perceptive Israelite would have to proclaim as did Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

The plan of God from before the foundation of the world was for man to be restored to fellowship with God his creator as Adam was in the Garden (1 Pet. 1:13-21). Only the holy can stand before God and be in fellowship with Him (1:15-16; Hab. 1:13; Exo. 33:1-11).

Jesus is preached as the quickening force bringing all that are dead in sin into spiritual life (Eph. 2:1; John 10:10). All accountable humans are lost because of their life choices based on fleshly desires (Eph. 2:3-4; Rom. 6:23). God quickens us (makes us alive) and raises us from being spiritually dead in Christ (Eph. 2:4-6; 1:19-20). How is this done?

Paul says we are chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth by being called by the Gospel (2 The. 2:13-14). Being taught of God (John 6:44-45) and believing in Jesus as the Christ (8:24), we willingly repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), confess Him as Lord (Mat. 10:32-33), and are immersed for the remission of sin (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). When we obey the Word of the Lord (16:30-31), He becomes the author of our salvation (2:47). We are saved from our sins because He has washed us from our sins in His own blood (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4, 16-18). We are sanctified by the Lamb in His blood through obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22; Heb. 9:21; 10:22; 13:11-12).

Just prior to the Lord's ascension, He charged His apostles that they were to speak His Word throughout all the world and that He would be with them (Mat. 28:18-20). Part of that commission was to teach the disciples what He had taught them and would, through inspiration, yet teach them. Paul commanded Timothy to find and teach faithful men able to teach others also. The command to go and teach is just as valid today for us as it was for the apostles and Timothy. We are to stand and speak only those things and all of those things commanded for mankind to become faithful Christians and to be able to work and worship as God has directed and then to gain heaven.

To go stand and speak all the words of this life is simply to sow the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of as many as we possibly can. It is done by literally standing and speaking, but also by any and all methods that do not violate any other command of God.

The church is a teaching institution with a message imparted only by teaching. May each of us realize our task and privilege to speak forth the unsearchable riches of Christ.

### WORKS CITED

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

*Fishers of Men, Search For Truth*. Lesson Three. Hernando, MS: Fishers of Men, 2001. 18 Apr. 2017. <<http://www.fishersofmen.net>>.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the immediate context of Acts 5:17-20?
2. List and discuss the four purposes of miracles as mentioned.
3. How did the Jewish rulers react to the miracle of the lame man?
4. What purpose did the multitude of sacrifices serve as mentioned?
5. What was God's plan from before the foundation of the world? List Scriptures.

# THE BOOK OF EZRA

*Jerry C. Brewer*

## INTRODUCTION

**M**ore than a century before the Chaldeans besieged Jerusalem, laid it waste, destroyed Solomon's temple, and led Judah captive, Isaiah prophesied Judah's return to their land. His prophecy is one of the most remarkable in the Old Testament in that he called the name of the Persian king who would release them after 70 years of captivity.

Thus saith the LORD, . . . That saith of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd*, And shall perform all my pleasure: Even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; And to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid (Isa. 44:24, 28).

An identical account of the king's decree, which was issued in 536 BC, is recorded in Ezra 1:1-3:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up (see the parallel in 2 Chr. 36:22-23).

Judah's return to their land took place in three expeditions over a period of about 100 years. That return is chronicled in Ezra and Nehemiah, with the events of Esther being contemporary with the first expedition's return. The return of the first expedition is the subject of Ezra 6, and Cyrus gave the returnees the items which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple, which numbered 5,400 (Ezra 1:11). With the items they needed for temple worship, 42,360 Jews and 7,337 "servants and their maids" (2:2, 64-65) began their journey home. Their sole task was to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem:

And *some* of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which *is* at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place (2:68).

## THE ALTAR ERECTED AND THE TEMPLE FOUNDATION LAID

Zerubbabel, an ancestor of Christ, of the tribe of Judah, led the first wave of returnees. The priest, Jeshua, was in that company, whose purpose was to rebuild the temple (2:2), and in the seventh month after their return, they built the altar of burnt offerings and offered morning and evening sacrifices as required in the Law of Moses (3:2-3). This they did in the midst of hostile people who surrounded them (3:3).

There has never been a time when the world surrounding God's people was not hostile to them, and that is no less true in our day. Jesus told His apostles:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:18-19).

The world hates us because we are not **of** this world.

The builders laid the foundation of the new temple with the priests and Levites praising God and giving thanks for his mercy:

And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (Ezra 3:11).

But that day was filled with mixed emotions.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the

people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off (3:12-13).

### ENEMIES OPPOSE THE WORK OF RESTORATION

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye *do*; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither (4:1-2).

The proposal to “let us build with you” came not from a friendly disposition. Those people were “adversaries” of the Jews, and their intent was to thwart the work of restoration. But Zerubbabel and the others wisely replied:

Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us (4:3).

God has **always** demanded a separation of His people. We are, today, called a “peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness” (1 Pet. 2:9), and, “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). The Jews’ adversaries practiced a corrupted form of Judaism, as denominations today practice a corrupted form of Christianity. Denominations are no more interested in aiding us in the work of the church than the adversaries of the Jews were interested in aiding them. Their adversaries and today’s denominations were, and are, agents of the devil, whose aim is to destroy God’s work.

The Jews’ adversaries were a mongrel race of people, known in the New Testament as Samaritans. They were descended from Jews who had intermarried with heathen inhabitants of the land after the northern tribes were carried away by Assyria, and their religion was a mixture of Judaism and heathen practices (2 Kin. 17:24-33). That is precisely the nature of today’s denominational religions. They are a mongrel spiritual race, mingling some truth with men’s doctrines and opposing the true religion of Jesus.

When they were rebuffed by Zerubbabel, the Samaritans turned to legal means to oppose the Jews’ work. They “hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia” and continued until the reign of Darius (Ezra 4:5). When Artaxerxes came to the throne, they wrote him a letter, falsely accusing the Jews of sedition, and succeeded in persuading him to stop the work (4:7-14).

The rebuilding of the temple stopped for three years, until the second year of Darius’ reign when Haggai and Zechariah prophesied (5:1) and urged the work to be finished (Hag. 1:12-15; Zec. 1:1-17). The Jews heeded the prophets and resumed the work, only to be opposed again, by Tatnai, the governor, and his allies (Ezra 5:3). “But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease” (5:5). After his inquiry of the Jews, Tatnai wrote a letter to Darius giving the particulars and background of the Jews’ work. The letter included the Jews’ account of their captivity and the decree of Cyrus. Upon receiving this account, Darius made a search of the rolls of law in Babylon and found that Cyrus had issued such a decree. In his reply to Tatnai, Darius ordered that the Jews be given whatever they needed to finish their work. That included not only money and materials for the work, but animals for their sacrifices as well (6:6-10). Darius further decreed:

that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this (6:11).

A long period elapses between Ezra six and seven. During that period, Artaxerxes ascended the throne of Persia and the events of Esther took place. Ezra 6 begins when Artaxerxes is king and the rest of the book describes Ezra’s return and subsequent events.

Some 79 years after the first wave of Jews returned under Zerubbabel, the scribe, Ezra led the second contingent in a journey that took four months (Ezra 7:8-9). Much like the Israelites who fled Egypt with jewels of silver and gold (Exo. 12:35-26), Ezra carried a letter from Artaxerxes, decreeing his return, providing money and goods

for it, and ordering aid from the inhabitants of the land “beyond the river” (Ezra 7:11-26). During that long journey, Ezra was

ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God *is* upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath *is* against all them that forsake him (8:22).

Because of this, Ezra proclaimed a fast at the river Ahava:

that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.... So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us (8:21, 23).

Upon arriving at Jerusalem, Ezra was met with grave news. The princes informed him that the people had not separated themselves from the land’s inhabitants, practiced idolatry, and intermarried with the heathen around them—the **very practices** that led to their captivity 70 years earlier—and that “the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass” (9:1-2). Ezra’s response was to pluck his hair and beard and sit down astonished at their transgressions. Those who, “trembled at the words of the God of Israel” assembled to him until the evening sacrifice (9:3-4). At that time, he arose in his mantle and garment which he had rent, fell upon his knees, spread out his hands to God and prayed a prayer of confession, beginning, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee” (9:6). He confessed the sins they had committed and concluded, “behold, we *are* before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this” (9:15).

Ezra immediately instituted reforms after Shechaniah admitted their sin in taking strange wives and promised to put them away, along with the children born of them (10:2-5; 9-17). Those reforms need to be closely studied in our day of unlawful marriages among Christians. Ezra spoke plainly, saying:

Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives (10:10-11).

The people did not protest Ezra’s command. They requested only that the matter to be done in an orderly fashion. Ezra agreed and the process of separation took place immediately (10:16-17).

While God does not demand that Christians marry only Christians today, He **does** have a law of marriage that says one man and one woman are to marry for life, and the only God-ordained reason for breaking that marriage is fornication (Mat. 19:4-5, 9). The principle laid down in Ezra 10 is as valid today as when it was practiced in Ezra’s day. Marriages that are not approved by God must be dissolved if those who are in them want to please God and go to heaven. There is no other alternative. Gospel preachers today cannot ignore unlawful marriages, saying, “They are just too widespread,” or “So many in the church are in that situation,” or “We cannot ask people to break up their homes.” What Ezra said of the Jews in unlawful marriages is just as valid today. If the marriage is unlawful in the eyes of God, it must be dissolved and that is the message preachers ought to convey.

Those “things...written aforetime” (Rom. 15:4) in Ezra are valuable to all Christians in our century. God is unchanged and unchangeable (Mal. 3:6), and His law of marriage established in the beginning (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:4-9) has never changed. Unlawful marriages, whether those of the Jews to the heathen, or those contracted today by persons who have divorced without Biblical authority, **must** be dissolved if one is to become a child of God. No one today can repent and remain in an adulterous marriage.

### WORK CITED

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

**QUESTIONS**

1. Which two Bible passages contain identical accounts of the decree of Cyrus?
2. Who led the first expedition of returnees back to Judea, and what was their task?
3. What reason did the Samaritans give in their offer to aid the Jews in rebuilding the temple, and why was it rejected?
4. Which king ordered the rebuilding of the temple to resume, why did he so order, and what was included in the order?
5. What lessons can be drawn from Ezra's reforms in the marriage practices of the Jews who had returned?

# THE PROPHECY OF HOSEA

*Philip Smith*

## INTRODUCTION

The theme for this lectureship is, *Set Ye Up A Standard In The Land*. It is from Jeremiah 51:27 where the Medes and Persians are called to set up their standards in preparation for destroying Babylon. I have been assigned, “The Prophecy of Hosea.” Hosea foretells God bringing the armies of the great and ruthless nation of Assyria against Israel to destroy her cities and bring her into captivity in a foreign land.

God chose Abraham and his descendants, through Isaac and Jacob, to be His own chosen people out of all the earth. God renamed Jacob to Israel who had twelve sons whose progenies became the twelve tribes of Israel. In time, God sent Israel and his family of approximately seventy-five souls into Egypt where they would prosper and grow into a great and numerous people until a king came into power that feared a rebellion from the Israelites. His solution was to put them into slavery where they remained for approximately two hundred fifteen years until God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt to a promised land, the land of Canaan.

God, through Moses, delivered Israel out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness to a land that would be their own. During their wanderings through the wilderness God gave them the law, a priesthood, and a tabernacle in which to worship; fed them with manna and quail; preserved their shoes and clothing; fought their battles so they defeated those nations that fought against them. He then brought them into a land which was prosperous—a land where the cities were already built, crops growing, and livestock all waiting for them to take over.

God promised that if they would love and obey Him that He would bless them and give them great prosperity in their new land, but if they rebelled and disobeyed He would remove them from their land and make them a hiss and a by-

word (Deu. 28). The Israelite people had periods when they served God and received God’s blessings and periods when they rebelled and brought upon themselves oppression and poverty.

The time came when they asked for a king to be like the nations surrounding them. God granted their desire though it was a rejection of God being king over them (1 Sam. 8:1-9). The first three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon reigned over a United Kingdom. After the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was divided, and Rehoboam (Solomon’s son) was king over the Southern Kingdom which was called Judah while Jeroboam became king of the Northern Kingdom, which was called Israel. While Judah had some good kings, Israel never did. Jeroboam introduced idol worship and Israel drifted further and further from God with each passing king until the Northern Kingdom was destroyed and taken into Assyrian captivity by Sargon (2 Kin. 17:6).

Hosea’s prophecy took place in the latter period of the Northern Kingdom during the time of Jeroboam II (Hos. 1:1). Jeroboam died in 743 BC while Israel was destroyed in 722 BC (Robertson 1425). It is not unreasonable to place the time around 750 BC (Hailey 129), shortly after the time of Amos (Hailey 129). The name Hosea is the same in Hebrew as Joshua and the Greek name of Jesus (Num. 13:8, 16; Heb. 4:8). The name Hosea means “Jehovah saves” or “Salvation” (Smith 106).

The reign of Jeroboam II was one of prosperity and territorial expansion (Amos 6:1-6; 2 Kin. 14:25, 28; 10:32-33; 13:1-9). Sadly, it was also a time of idolatry and moral decay. It was, no doubt, difficult to believe that the kingdom was soon to end; we must understand that prosperity alone will not preserve a nation. God will not long tolerate a nation given over to wickedness (Pro. 14:34).

In the prophecy of Hosea, we see a nation brought into being by God, blessed by God, preserved by God, and that appears prosperous but whose unfaithfulness to God is pictured as that of a beloved wife who became an adulteress against her husband—a husband that had greatly blessed her with the prosperity she valued so highly.

### HOSEA AND GOMER

God commanded Hosea to take a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms. In obedience to God, he wed Gomer. Some contend this did not really happen but is simply a vision (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown 650). However, there is nothing in the text to indicate such. This is told as a narrative intermixed with the fact that this marriage is symbolical of God and Israel.

There are also some who contend that, because Hosea was commanded to marry “a woman of whoredom,” that Gomer was already a harlot before her marriage to Hosea (Pusey 20). If that is the case, what about the children of whoredoms? They had not yet been born. Homer Hailey is spot on when he states:

Hosea was directed to marry “a woman of whoredom”; that is, a daughter of the age, one brought up under the influence of idolatry and in whose character would have been planted the seeds of immorality. She was not unchaste at the time of the marriage but was a maiden of such background that in later conduct the fruit of idolatry was fully borne (128).

After Hosea’s marriage to Gomer, they had a boy named Jezreel. God chose this name for their son because He will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu and cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease (Hos. 1:3-5). This was in reference to God having commanded Jehu to smite the house of Ahab and his family (2 Kin. 9:1-10). In a battle at Jezreel, Jehu smote Joram who was Ahab’s son. He later killed the rest of Ahab’s descendants so none remained (9:10). The reason for the punishment pronounced upon the house of Jehu is that he obeyed God from his own ambitions and not to serve or please God. One may do the right thing, but if it is done for the wrong reason, it is unacceptable to God. It is

apparent that Jezreel is Hosea’s son as the text informs us that Gomer “bare him a son” (Hos. 1:3).

The next child was a daughter. God commanded that this daughter be named Lo-ruhamah which means “no mercy” (Strong). The reason for this name is that God would no more have mercy upon the house of Israel but utterly take them away (1:6). God is a merciful God and has been longsuffering with Israel in her sins (2 Pet. 3:9; Exo. 34:6; Psa. 86:15), but sin will not forever go unpunished (Rom. 2:6-11; Luke 13:6-9). It is important to note that this time the text states that Gomer “conceived again, and bare a daughter.” This statement along with Lo-ruhamah’s name makes it apparent that Lo-ruhamah was not Hosea’s child. Gomer has become unfaithful and committed adultery against Hosea (Hos. 1:6-7).

Gomer gives birth to a third child, another boy. The text does not say that Gomer “bare him a son.” This fact along with the boy’s name, Lo-ammi, which means “not my people” (Brown, Driver, Briggs 520), implies that he is the product of adultery. He was not Hosea’s son. Lo-ammi’s name sent a clear message to the people of Israel. They had rejected God, and He was clearly telling them that He had rejected them. They were no longer His people. Yet, even in this condemnation God promised a blessing which foretold the time when Israel and Judah were to be gathered together and called the sons of the living God (Hos. 1:10-11). This promise found fulfilment in the New Testament (Rom. 9:24-26).

In chapter two, we clearly see that Israel is under consideration. The allegory continues as we see a loving husband’s desire to bring an adulterous wife back home. A plea is made for Gomer to repent of her adulteries. She is no longer Hosea’s wife, and he is no longer her husband (Hos. 2:1-2; Mat. 19:9). If she will not repent, she will be rejected and set in a dry land where she will be slain with thirst (Hos. 2:3). Likewise, God desired Israel to repent so they would not be carried away as captives into Assyria.

Once Gomer was no longer Hosea’s wife, she sought her lovers, but they were not to be found. She believed that her lovers were her providers,

but she was wrong. It was her husband who had blessed her with all the good blessings she enjoyed so much. Likewise, Israel credited its idols for the prosperity and protection it enjoyed, but it was really God who provided these blessings (2:13, 15-23).

We find a prophecy of restoration in Hosea 2:14-23. These passages were clearly speaking to Israel. This prophecy pictured Israel as being restored to God and again receiving the blessings that she had enjoyed before her spiritual adulteries with idols. However, restoration was conditional upon Israel's returning and remaining faithful. God has the power to restore those who repent and obey whether they are Jew or Gentile (2:23; Rom. 9:25; 1 Pet. 2:10).

In chapter three, Hosea was commanded to love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress (Hos. 3:1). It is clear from "beloved of *her* friend" and "according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel" that this is speaking of Gomer. Hosea, in obedience to God, redeemed her for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley (3:2). Again, we notice that redemption is not without conditions. She must remain with him and not commit adultery again (3:3). Gomer's redemption is a picture of Israel's return in the latter days (3:4-5). The Scriptures teach us that the latter days are the Christian dispensation (Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:1-2). In the Christian dispensation, obedient people from all nations become the Israel of God (Mat. 28:19-20; Gal. 6:15-16).

### GOD AND ISRAEL

God had done much for Israel. God loved Israel before Israel was a nation and while they were still in Egyptian slavery (Hos. 11:1). God brought Israel out of Egypt where they had been enslaved and oppressed (12:13, 13:4). God, in His great love, had sent prophets with visions and used similitudes to teach Israel that which is right and bring her back home to the Lord (12:10).

However, Israel despised God's love and protection as is seen from this list of sins.

1. There were falsehoods, no mercy, and no knowledge of God in the land (4:1).

2. Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, and bloodshed followed bloodshed in Israel (4:2).
3. They did not take heed to the Lord (4:10).
4. They practiced the occult (4:12).
5. Idolatry was prevalent in Israel (4:13, 17; 8:5-6; 10:1; 11:2; 13:1-2). Notice that Israel is also called Ephraim (4:17; 13:1).
6. They had broken the covenant with God as did Adam (6:7—ASV).
7. They turned to Assyria for help instead of God (5:13; 8:9; 12:1).
8. They rebelled against God (7:14).
9. They forgot their maker (8:14).
10. They were bent on backsliding (4:16; 11:7).
11. They have destroyed themselves (13:9) because of a lack of knowledge (4:6).

God will not long tolerate any nation that is evil continuously. The principle of sowing and reaping applies to all. Israel had sown to the wind and would reap the whirlwind (8:7). God said that He would devour them like a lion (5:14-15; 13:7-9), make them like the morning cloud, the early dew, the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. Their king was to be cut off, and they would return to Egypt (captivity) in Assyria (13:3; 10:7; 9:3; 11:5). In other words, their time was coming to a swift end.

However, if they returned to the Lord, they would be healed and raised up (6:1-3; 14:4). God promised them a restoration where they would no longer call God "Baali" which means "my lord" but Ishi which means "my husband" (Orr 1509) (Hos. 2:16). In the restoration, they would lie down safely and be betrothed unto God in righteousness, lovingkindness, mercies, and faithfulness forever (2:16). A promise of prosperity is made that ends with the promise of mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy. A time was coming when God would say to them who were not His people that they are His people (2:18-23). This prophecy of restoration foretold the Christian age during which people from all

nations flow into the household of God (Rom. 9:23; 1 Pet. 2:10). Hosea prophesied of a return from captivity in which the children of Israel would return and seek the Lord and David their king (Hos. 3:5). The fact they were to seek David their king indicates that this was a prophecy of Jesus Christ and His church (Isa. 55:4; Jer. 23:5).

Israel had turned their backs on God who had done so much for them, but God was willing to forgive and save them if they would repent and turn back to Him. Hosea's prophecies not only foretold Israel's destruction but contained a promise of redemption that was not just for Israel but for all people who would come to God through Jesus Christ. God was and is still willing to forgive and bestow showers of great spiritual blessings (2 Pet. 3:9; Eph. 1:3).

### CONCLUSION

Hosea is a book of love betrayed, a book revealing terrible consequences for Israel even though God loved Israel and had done so much for her. Israel was destroyed, and her people taken into captivity by a cruel and merciless nation. Samaria, Israel's capital, was destroyed in 722 BC after a siege of three years. It was Sargon who was king of Assyria and commander in chief of the Assyrian army that carried the people away into captivity (Easton) (2 Kin. 17:1-6, 23-24; 18:10-12).

The prophecy of Hosea was both a warning and a call to repentance for a people who had rejected the knowledge of God. Their refusal to

repent resulted in their destruction. The message contained in this book is also a lesson to nations today to know the Word of God and follow that which is right (Pro. 14:34). It is an admonition to congregations to know God's Word and never stray from it (Rev. 2:4-5). It is also a message to every one of us to learn the Word of God and follow God's revealed will that we might enter into an everlasting home in heaven (Mat. 7:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:1).

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### QUESTIONS

1. What was God's command to Hosea concerning marriage?
2. What were the names of Gomer's children?
3. How many of these children were Hosea's?
4. Did Hosea ever forgive Gomer and take her back after their divorce?
5. How did the account of Hosea and Gomer relate to God and Israel?

# THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

*Harrell Davidson*

**M**icah's name means "who is like God." Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos according to Micah 1:1, Isaiah 1:1, and Amos 1:1. Isaiah prophesied longer. The difference is

- Micah prophesied to both kingdoms
- Joel prophesied to Judah
- Jonah prophesied to Nineveh (preaching to those outside of Israel and to the Gentiles)
- Amos prophesied to the Northern Kingdom
- Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom.

Hosea sees Israel going into captivity, Micah sees Judah going in the same direction as Israel, and Micah sees the Babylonian captivity coming though it was fulfilled years later.

Micah is identified as being from the city of Moesheth-gath which was about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem on the border between Judah and Philistia. It is possible that he was of the prophet's school due to the fact that his parents are not mentioned.

The background of Micah is 2 Kings 15:32 to 2 Kings 20:21. It begins in 2 Kings 15 with the reign of Jotham and continues to 2 Kings 20 with the reign of Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 16:1-3 Ahaz begins to reign. We need to consider some things about his reign. We observe the influence of Israel on Judah. In 2 Kings 16:5, Syria and Israel went to war against Judah. In verse 7, they became allied with Assyria. There was the influence between Syria and Assyria. In verse 10, Ahaz saw the idolatrous altar and had the priest make one like it. (Also, note Jeremiah 26:18-19.) 2 Chronicles 29-31 will refresh our minds and let us see again Hezekiah's activities.

In 2 Kings 16:12-13 offerings were made in Jerusalem. In verse 15, Ahaz commanded the priest to inquire at the altar. So, when he wanted

information about Judah, he would come here and get it from the priest. In 16:20 Hezekiah is mentioned as reigning after the death of Ahaz. In 2 Kings 17:1, we note the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Ahaz, Hoshea began to reign as king of Samaria, and he reigned for nine years. In verse 3, Hoshea became a servant to the king of Assyria. In verse 4 he conspired against Assyria, and in verse 5 Assyria besieged Samaria for a period of three years. In 2 Kings 18:1 Hezekiah began his reign on down through 2 Kings 20:21. This is the background—history.

Now we introduce the book of Micah. Knowledge of God is essential in everything we do. We must remember that facts of the Bible must be understood and change the way we live. Sometimes we refer to the facts of the Gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Do we stop there or do we look at the real meaning of His death? Men were hopeless and hapless with regard to sin—lost and without hope (Eph. 2:12). When we do this, we have made known God in our lives in these matters. Why did Paul mention this in the first verses of 1 Corinthians 15? It was to show the resurrection of the dead, and in verse 58 he urged men to be steadfast and unmovable. He was presenting facts that would lay hold on their hearts. It must be that way with us. If the chapter headings are removed, the teaching on giving is next (16:1-2). When the facts of God lay hold on us, we will have no problems with giving.

Now comes repentance and it is the same. Facts should be presented and laid on the heart. In doing so, it will produce a change of conduct if we will listen and heed. According to the last chapter of Micah there is a turning and a coming back to God. There was only a confession of sin, but a confession of what he had given up to accept the world. Repentance is not misery. Many people experience misery, but this repentance grew out of the knowledge of God and

His majesty and holiness. Out of His love comes a change of values. We come to have a change of values. We come to a new mind. Repentance comes about when there is as a matter of guilt. In Psalm 51, David tells of being a sinner. He realized his guilt.

Love is like repentance in that knowledge is essential as well. Love is set forth in Hosea and is the very heart of religion. That is true in Deuteronomy and Matthew and wherever it is found or demonstrated. What is the first commandment? We need to consider that love is associated with pain and grief. Think of a mother and her child. It is natural that she suffers and this is out of love that she does so. God is grieved over man's sins. Jesus was grieved in John 11:33-38 in the matter of Lazarus. There is the pain and suffering when we love someone so much that we want to help them, and in doing so we grieve with them out of love.

The theme of Micah is found in two verses.

Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, And passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, Because he delighteth *in* mercy (7:18).

Who is like God, and then he describes Him in 6:8:

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?

The God of redemption, and He expects the redeemed to walk uprightly before Him. This is what we want to discuss in Micah.

Micah presses the argument made in Joel, Amos, and Hosea—the oppression of worthlessness with sins of every kind and character as Hosea pointed out. Micah will show the relationship between character and conduct. This will go throughout Micah. Our worship is to affect us and determine how we live while we work. If worship does not affect us then we are just like the people of Micah's day. Worship must influence our work. The end of Israel is presented in this book. The digression of Judah is told. Then a new kind of government would come which

points to Christ. Micah confesses the sins of people and there is repentance. This is the faithful remnant that Isaiah began to write about.

Micah should serve as a warning to what happened to the northern kingdom and how it could happen to Judah. Judah felt as though Jerusalem could not be touched. This is seen in 3:12:

Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, And Jerusalem shall become heaps, And the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

If Judah falls what is going to happen to the seed promise? The northern kingdom could all depart and not even a remnant would be left, and it would not alter the seed promise that led to Christ. Christ would be of the tribe of Judah; so if Israel falls, the seed would come anyway. However, they were not aware of that evidently.

The fourth and fifth chapters help us understand the problems they faced. We are reminded that both the kingdoms wanted a king. They both had a literal king, but because it was never God's will this would be the way that the promise to Abraham would be kept. The ultimate failure of the kingdom of men is the import of chapter 3 because it shows the complete failure of the kingdom due to the lack of leadership. Chapters 4 and 5 should forever serve as a reminder of what happens when men do not do things by God's way. The kings failed because they were not of God.

The prophecy of and the need for salvation was given by Micah as well as Isaiah.

But in the last days it shall come to pass, *That* the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, And it shall be exalted above the hills; And people shall flow unto it (4:1).

Last days in this verse does not, in my judgment, refer here primarily to the last dispensation. It rather reflects the last days of the Jewish dispensation. We must remember that all the work of Christ was during the last days of the Law of Moses. He never lived in the new dispensation era. The kingdom was set up in the last days of the Jewish kingdom. There would be a new king, and this is why we can see three governments in

these studies. Christ would come near the end of the Jewish age.

The Jewish age was never intended to last forever according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11 where he wrote:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

The new kingdom would have its beginning in Jerusalem. This is the King and the kingdom that God promised in Genesis 3:15. The earth would never be a paradise for man again. It once was, but was lost in Adam because of sin. The paradise we read of in the New Testament will be heaven. Earth could not be a paradise because of sin. It is sheer folly to think that this earth would be God's kingdom.

Mountain of the house of the Lord shows the government. That is what *mountain* refers to. It would be exalted about the hills. This shows how much better the new kingdom would be. The government set upon Pentecost was the greatest kingdom ever and greatest government ever. It would be a permanent government. The Law was never intended to be permanent.

The new kingdom would be spiritual and not physical. People flowing into it shows the universal nature of the church. It was not for one group of people, but it was for everyone. This new kingdom would have drawing power. God intended Christ, the only begotten Son, to be the magnet that would draw all men and show men the way. When we use anything else we will always have problems. The church today continues to have problems while overlooking the One that can attract. Part of the problem is we think we have to attract people. Jesus Himself was rejected by the masses. We look for the things that might drive men away and avoid teaching of some things so we can have members. The Gospel will attract the

right kind of people and save them from sin and ruin.

And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, And to the house of the God of Jacob; And he will teach us of his ways, And we will walk in his paths: For the law shall go forth of Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Mic. 4:2).

This takes us back to the time when Jacob was running from Esau. This also helps us understand a little better Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:10-17. His dread had reference to the house of God. This would become important terminology as time goes by. He will teach us His ways is the work of the church today. How does the church work today? His ways and not our ways are important to this study and those related to it regarding the church. There is no other way in the Scriptures for the Lord's way and will to be done.

Jesus did this very thing through the apostles. Every one of those who obeyed the Gospel were taught. Teaching is therefore the work of the church. We ought to remember that God's ways are not our ways nor His thoughts our thoughts as Isaiah wrote. There is no way for man to follow God's way unless he is taught, and God's ways are only revealed in the Bible. It is difficult to get brethren sometimes to remember this. Some think that whatever the church thinks is God's law, but that is error. It is what God says that makes the difference.

Jerusalem was the place of the temple and the seat of the Law of Moses. It was also to be the location where the new law would begin. The truth would be going out from Jerusalem. In Acts 2 Peter did not bind one Law of Moses on the people in the sermon. It was a new system and a new way of life wherein there was/is complete forgiveness.

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

**QUESTIONS**

1. What does Micah's name mean?
2. What is the background of Micah?
3. What other prophets was he contemporary with?
4. Did Micah foresee Pentecost?
5. What New Testament event happened on Pentecost in Acts 2?

# THE CHURCH IS PRECIOUS IN GOD'S EYES

*Jerry C. Brewer*

## INTRODUCTION

There is no greater institution upon the face of the earth than the church of Christ. It is God's kingdom (Mat. 16:18), His vineyard (21:28-44), His spiritual temple (Eph. 2:19-22), His locus of salvation for men today, and the body and bride of His Son (1:7, 22-23; 5:23). Existing from eternity, the church was purposed and promised by Him, foretold by the Old Testament prophets, prepared by John the Baptist, perfected by Jesus Christ, and is precious in God's eyes.

## THE CHURCH IS PRECIOUS IN GOD'S EYES BECAUSE IT CAME FROM HIM

The church had its origin in the mind of God. He is its Great Architect Who purposed salvation in it from eternity.

And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:9-11).

The salvation which God purposed in Christ is salvation that is in the church. Salvation, Christ, and the church cannot be separated. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (1:3), and those blessings are enumerated in Ephesians 1:4-11. God's chosen people are in Christ (1:4). Those in Christ were predestinated to be children of God (1:5). Men are made acceptable to God in Christ (1:6). Redemption through His saving blood is in Christ (1:7), and our inheritance is in Him.

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (1:11).

To be in Christ, where all of these spiritual blessings are, is to be in His body which is the church. Paul wrote that God's mighty power was

wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (1:20-23).

## THE CHURCH IS PRECIOUS IN GOD'S EYES BECAUSE IT COST HIS SON'S BLOOD

Jesus Christ suffered the agony of scourging and the excruciating ordeal of Calvary's cross to provide salvation in the church. Paul told the Ephesian 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).

He further told the Ephesians:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

The church is precious in God's eyes because the supreme price was paid for it—the sinless blood of His own Son. In the annals of mankind, there has never been such a price paid for any institution.

## THE CHURCH IS PRECIOUS IN GOD'S EYES BECAUSE OF ITS FUNCTION

The denominational industry denigrates and dismisses the church as irrelevant in God's scheme of redemption with the age-old cry that,

“The church doesn't save.” We are in agreement with that statement, but not as denominations use it. It is **not** the church which saves. It is Jesus Christ. However, that **which** He saves is the church (5:23). The church is the body of Christ (1:22-23), and Christ saves His body. The church **is** the saved.

Denominations teach their doctrines of salvation without the blood of Christ. The church is the Divine institution in which God's eternal purpose is accomplished. It is the fullness of Christ (1:22-3), and as His fullness, one cannot be saved without being in it. To be in Christ is to be in His church. The two cannot be separated. In Him is where man has “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (1:7). Denominations teach that one is first saved, then “joins” a church. They teach a bloodless religion in that (according to their erroneous claim) one is saved by “faith only.” “Faith only” does not put one into Christ. Baptism does that (Gal. 3:26-27). The saved are added to the church of Christ (Acts 2:47), and those who are added are in Christ where His blood redeems from sin.

To denigrate and dismiss the church as unnecessary to salvation is to oppose Christ Himself. That whatever is done to the church is done to Christ is plainly indicated by Jesus' question to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (9:4). Saul had never before seen Jesus, but he persecuted the Lord because he persecuted the disciples (the church) of Christ (8:3; 9:1-2). The denominational world, which teaches a bloodless religion of salvation outside of Christ, is as guilty of persecuting Christ as was Saul of Tarsus.

### **THE CHURCH IS PRECIOUS IN GOD'S EYES BECAUSE OF ITS MISSION**

The church's mission was given by the authority of its King, Jesus Christ.

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

whatsoever I have commanded you (Mat. 28:18-20).

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

The mission of the church is singular—to preach the Gospel that men might believe and be saved. In my youth, I heard fine old Gospel preachers say, “The mission of the church is three-fold—evangelism, edification, and benevolence.” Over the years, I have concluded that this statement is not quite correct. There is a vast difference between the “mission of the church” and “the work of the church.”

A grocer's *mission* is selling groceries to the public for a profit, but his *work* may encompass several things, such as pricing the items, sweeping the floor, keeping the books, depositing money in the bank, cleaning the windows, hiring help, paying his bills, and a multitude of other tasks. All of these things are necessary, but do not constitute his mission.

The church's singular mission is to preach the Gospel of Christ (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:1, 4ff). There is no other given to the church in the New Testament, and evangelism is its sole “ministry.” That is the “ministry” of which Paul spoke when he wrote, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim. 1:12). Paul did not refer to multiple “ministries” but to a single “ministry,” or mission. Paul's mission was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, as he told the Corinthians: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

Paul did many works in conjunction with his mission, such as making tents, and raising funds for the poor saints of Judea among the Gentile Christians but those were not his mission. That was preaching the Gospel of Jesus (Rom. 1:14-17).

Benevolence is a good thing, but there was benevolence before Jesus died on the cross and vast numbers of organizations in our country practice

benevolence today. Most denominations practice it, along with a myriad of secular organizations—including the federal government. Jesus did not die for benevolence. He died for His church to save men from sin (Mat. 1:21; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). The church should be benevolent and care for those who cannot care for themselves (Gal. 6:10; Jam. 1:27), but that is not its mission.

It is argued that, “If we feed and clothe people, we can make them more receptive to the Gospel.” Jesus said, “Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Mat. 5:6). It is not the church’s mission to *motivate* people to hear the Gospel. It is our responsibility to preach that Gospel to those who desire it. Jesus rebuked a multitude for its motivation to follow Him for “the meat which perisheth” (John 6:26-27). When Jesus fed the 5,000, He did not do so to “make them receptive” to His teaching.

The third thing which is often touted as the church’s mission is “edification.” To “edify” simply means “to build up.” The church needs to be constantly edified in the Lord’s cause, and Paul said that comes through the Word of God (Acts 20:32). That is an excellent **work** of the church, but not its mission.

### **THE CHURCH IS PRECIOUS IN GOD’S EYES BECAUSE IT IS HIS SPIRITUAL FAMILY**

*Family* is one of the sweetest words in the English language. A Biblical understanding of that word immediately brings to mind parents who cared for us when we could not care for ourselves and their loving sacrifices to feed, clothe, shelter, and teach us right things. That is a description of God’s family, of which every Christian is a member. To Timothy, Paul wrote, “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of

God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:14-15). “The house of God” is God’s family, as the house of Cornelius was his family (Acts 11:13-14).

Nothing is plainer in the New Testament than that God has only **one church**, hence He has only one family. The claim that God has children in all denominations is blasphemous and charges God with adultery. God does not have children outside of His family.

God loves all men (John 3:16) and dispenses His material blessings to all, without regard to character (Mat. 5:45). But He loves His family—the church—in a special sense and provides all spiritual blessings to them (Eph. 1:3), which are not provided to those outside of His family. The church is precious to God because it constitutes His spiritual family.

### **CONCLUSION**

The church is precious in God’s eyes because it was built by His Son (Mat. 16:18), a feat which not even Christ’s death could prevent. Religions of men were established while they lived, but those who built them are still in their graves. Mohammed is, as is Joseph Smith, William Miller, and every other maker of men’s churches. However, the church of Christ was established **after** He died and left His tomb empty. God annulled the Jews’ covenant with death and hades by the resurrection of His Son from the dead (Isa. 28:15-18), and 50 days later the church came into existence (Acts 2).

The church is precious in God’s eyes, not because it is part of His plan to save men, but because it **is** His plan of salvation, and it is without peer.

### **WORK CITED**

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

**QUESTIONS**

1. Where did God place salvation?
2. How does denominational teaching affirm a “bloodless” salvation?
3. How do you answer one who minimizes the importance of the church and says, “The church does not save, Christ does”?
4. How are some of the ways religions (even churches of Christ) seek to attract people today, and is this our mission in light of Matthew 5:6 and John 6:44-45?
5. In light of the death of Christ, what is the significance of the church's establishment in Acts 2?

# THE SYSTEM OF SALVATION

*Harrell Davidson*

We are writing, talking, thinking, and preaching about the system of salvation. When man sinned in Genesis 3, God started running toward Pentecost. Man could not undo by himself the awful mess that he had gotten into in the garden and subsequent generations who fell even further away from the holiness of God, could not rid themselves of the catastrophe of sin. God devised a method, a system wherein salvation may be procured and revealed such in the New Testament which is sealed by the blood of the Son of God.

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Eph. 2:5). This verse plainly declares that one is saved by grace. Look a little further “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God” (2:8). This is clear evidence that one is saved by grace, but there is *through faith* whatever that means. Is grace all in the equation? Is it grace plus nothing minus nothing, is that the answer? Does grace alone save? Is “once in grace, always in grace” a truthful statement? Does grace demand anything?

*Grace* is described by various sources as “favor,” and sometimes we refer to it as “unmerited favor” because man did/does not earn it. It is God’s gift. In Genesis 6, when the thought and imaginations of man’s heart was only evil continually and it repented God that He had made man and thought to destroy man that He had made, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). This is the beginning of a litany of things that is taught throughout the length and breadth of the Scriptures.

If grace alone saved, then Noah had nothing else to do because God saved them and the problem is solved. However, we know that Noah had to go to work. He built a mighty structure, the ark, and through that coupled with God’s grace, he and his family were saved by water (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21). This narrative shows completely that

Noah had something to do because of God’s grace to save him and his family—even though Noah was a preacher of righteousness, according to 2 Peter 2:5. Surely if grace only saved, a preacher of righteousness would be included. Then why did he have to build the ark? Was God’s grace lacking in some way? We aver that it was not lacking in any respect.

Fast forward through the books of law all the way down to Joshua and read the thrilling record of the children of Israel being on the East side of the Jordan River ready to go into the land that flowed with milk and honey—the land of Canaan. Obstacles were in the way. The Jordan was flooding from the mountains and hillsides above Jericho, and they were to follow the Ark of the Covenant wherever it went. Through the handiwork of God demonstrated by Joshua, His chosen leader, commands were given and promises made. They were told how to cross over the Jordan, and they were eventually told, “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, *and* the mighty men of valour” (Jos. 6:2). Please notice with me that God said that He had “given” Jericho to Joshua and the people. Surely if God had given the city over to the children of Israel, it was a gift given. Not by any stretch of the imagination would anyone agree that the children of Israel deserved or had earned Jericho and the land which flowed with milk and honey.

Was there more? We think most students of the Bible know and understand what happened in the subsequent days of marching around Jericho one time a day and on the seventh day march around the walls seven times. It was only after the latter was done that the walls came tumbling down. Yet, God said that He had given them the city just like He would give them Ai. Ai brings on more thought because Israel fell in the first battle because of a lack of something called **obedience**. What, you mean there was more than grace? Obviously there was more. On through the Scrip-

tures this is found over and over again and demonstrates from the outset that grace plus nothing minus nothing does not save our souls from death and demonstrates that there are things that men must do to appropriate God's grace or favor.

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

This passage teaches more than many want to admit. Please notice that God's grace appearing to all teaches us. Why would grace instruct us if we needed nothing outside of grace? We notice that there is something to do. We must deny ungodliness; abstain from worldly lusts which include the lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, and pride of life. Furthermore, we are told to live soberly and righteously, which is right doing, right thinking, and doing this in a godly way or manner and that is to be done in this present world. If grace only saved, then all we would need is Ephesians 2:5 because that is what it states, but other Scriptures, as well as Ephesians 2 shows or demonstrates there is something for us to do to apply the saving grace to our souls.

I worked as a line mechanic for Ford Motor Company in my early years, rebuilding various engines. An engine has many parts that are essential. An engine will not run correctly if one lifter is defective. In a V8 engine, there are at least 16 lifters; so, each depends on the other as well as all the other working parts. I have said this to indicate that salvation also has several parts, and every one of them is vital to our salvation. Paul mentions faith in Ephesians 2:8. Whose faith is that? Is it the Lord's faith or man's? Obviously, it is man's faith coupled—one of the parts or system of—that point toward salvation.

Paul wrote in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing while he wrote to Titus saying that

grace teaches. The teaching produces faith that leads us to an understanding that Jesus Christ is God's Son, which we must confess as did the eunuch in Acts 8:37 where, "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The eunuch expressed his faith in Christ and was baptized.

The baptism that Philip preached was/is for the remission of sins (2:38) and baptism washes sins away (22:16). We preach and encourage everyone, at an accountable age, to do exactly as they did in New Testament times. Salvation was accomplished only when people obeyed the Gospel, even though some were at different stages in their obedience. For instance, a person who already believes with all his heart that Jesus is God's Son does not need teaching on this stage of obedience, yet it is a part of the total or overall system of salvation. Paul and Silas instructed the jailer in Acts 16. He showed or proved his penitence by washing their stripes after they had been beaten. In each case, it can be demonstrated that all had to do the exact same thing to be saved. It was a part of the system that our Lord designed.

Some deny baptism in different ways. One is not saved before baptism. At least one denomination teaches that baptism conflicts God's doctrine of grace. They teach that it is by faith only one is saved. If baptism, as a work, conflicts with grace, then why do they baptize individuals that they may be a full member of that denomination? Would it not conflict with grace after they are baptized? Of course, it would! On this basis they could baptize no one and should eliminate baptism altogether. If we would be saved we must do so according to the God's system of salvation. He owes us nothing! It is up to us to obey.

### WORK CITED

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

## QUESTIONS

1. Does “grace alone” save?
2. Does “faith only” save?
3. Can one in grace fall from grace?
4. In the New Testament was there any accountable person saved without baptism?
5. Is it not the case then that faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are necessary to our salvation?

# THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD

*Paul Curless*

## INTRODUCTION

In John 13:34-35, we read:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

“A new commandment” was *new* due to the divine standard attached to it: “love one another; as I have loved you.” God knew the difficulty His people would have with the command to love. We find *love* used 180 times in the New Testament. *Charity* is used 28 times in the New Testament. Paul refers to love as “a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). He also calls love the “greatest” thing. “And now abideth faith, hope, charity [love—ASV], these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity” (13:13).

*Love* has become a great part of our vocabulary. People often use *love* to describe their affections toward their spouses, relatives, or a close friend. *Love* is also used to describe man’s affection toward Deity. Americans often remark how they *love* their pickup trucks and apple pie, so it is apparent that *love* is used loosely and can have a variety of meanings. Everyone desires to be loved and usually proclaims to love someone or something. Some so-called “youth ministers” are instilling in our young people that Bible love would include “overlooking” or “tolerating” certain worldly activities of the younger generation. After all, you are only young once, so enjoy life, get along, and have fun with whomever. I fear some would advocate that the older Gospel preachers are so negative and condemning, so narrow-minded, and so out-of-touch with reality. Today, as before, there seems to be a “love movement” among the younger generation. There is a great deal of misunderstanding concerning the subject of love, especially Bible love. There is no better place to go to find out about the *agape* love

God has for His children than an epistle of love from the apostle of love, John:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us (1 John 4:7-19).

## JOHN, THE AUTHOR OF FIRST JOHN

His name means, “Jehovah is gracious.” His brother was James, the apostle. He was not only a fisherman but also a man of position and means who had hired servants (Mark 1:20), owned his home (John 19:27), and was a pillar in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). He is referred to as the “Apostle of Love” because he informs us of what true love really is. He also enjoyed the closeness with the Lord Jesus as he was one of Christ’s inner-circle along with Peter and James (Mat. 17:1-8). He was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:26). He was the last apostle to die, being

nearly 100 years of age and dying a natural death. He authored the Gospel According to John, three epistles that bear his name, and the Revelation.

The book of 1 John is called the “Epistle of Love” because *love* (or some form thereof) appears 51 times in the book. It was written between AD 90-96 as a general, circular letter to the churches of Asia where he was well-known. John wrote to refute the false teachers and to strengthen the faith of the Christians in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He taught of true love which is the Love of God.

### **DIVINE LOVE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AVAILABLE TO ALL**

“IN the beginning God [Hebrew *elohim* meaning God is a plural noun] created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). In verse 26 we read, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” God had a plan from the foundation of the world that all who were in the kingdom (the church) would be blessed (Mat. 25:34). As God the Father loved Christ the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:24), He also loved us by providing a plan where His creation could be saved. God’s plan for making salvation attainable and the hope of Heaven a reality was finished before the foundation of the world (Heb. 4:3). Our Heavenly Father loved us by providing the perfect sacrifice even before the foundation of the world: “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20). God foreordained the death of Christ before the world began. Revelation 13:8 mentions the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. So, God had a plan which required great love toward mankind, His creation, by offering His only begotten Son (1 John 4:9). *Only begotten* appears several times in the Bible; it is from the Greek *monogenes*—*mono*=only and *genes*=begotten. There are Bible liberals and skeptics, even in the Lord’s church, who deny this correct rendering of the Greek. Someone has said “only begotten” signifies “the-only-one-of-its-kind.”

Those who have the proper love toward one another and toward God knoweth God (4:7-8). All those born of God must love because God

is love. On the other hand, he who knows not God does not love. One may say he loves God, but if he is not willing to obey God’s instructions, his love is as phony as a three-dollar bill. Jesus said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). True love requires one who calls upon the name of the Lord to obey Him (Mat. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9; Acts 22:16). If one truly loves God, one will obey Him—“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Only those who love God and obey Him are His friends—“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (15:14). Some people refer to John 3:16 as “The golden text of the Bible”—“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.” It is a wonderful verse that is unfortunately very misunderstood in the religious world. It is true: God’s love is universal, but salvation is conditional. Let us look at the phrase, “whosoever believeth” and remember that the Bible speaks of two kinds of belief:

#### (1) Inactive:

Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue (12:42)

and

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble (Jam. 2:19).

#### (2) Active:

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by [working through—ASV] love (Gal. 5:6).

Now let us look at John 3:36 from the ASV:

He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The obedience under consideration is “Gospel obedience” (2 The. 1:8-9) which includes baptism (Mark 16:16). One should not think the apostle John has ruled out repentance and/or baptism—“For this is the love of God, that

we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). *Should not perish* is used twice, in John 3:15-16. *Perish* is full of meaning.

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:3).

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee (Acts 8:20).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

In these examples, *perish* is the opposite of being saved. One should never forget that without God's love and the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, all mankind would perish.

*Should not* also reminds the serious Bible student that God's love has a restraining influence about it (Rom. 2:4). Truth will lead one to repentance. The text does not say "shall not perish." The bottom line is that if one truly believes God and His Word (which is complete, 2 Tim. 3:16-17—ASV), he will obey the teaching recorded therein. God's love brings to us "Eternal Life." Eternal life is more than an eternal existence. It is the great promise of the Gospel (John 10:10). It is a promise now—and to be enjoyed in the world to come (1 John 2:25; Tit. 1:2).

### THE LOVE OF GOD PROVIDED THE PERFECT SIN OFFERING

Christ is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). *Propitiation* simply means, "A way to render God favorable to man." Christ's death, the propitiation, makes it possible for all men to be saved (Heb. 2:8-9) and salvation become a reality to all who allow themselves to be reconciled to God through obedience (2 Cor. 5:19, 21). Paul writes:

For he [God] hath made him [Christ] *to be* sin [offering] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

We, as faithful Christians, are to continue walking in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21): loving God, one another, and our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31) which is not always easy. All those

who are of God must love one another and that love is shown, "neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). In other words, our love must not show itself in empty expressions but by our actions.

### GOD'S LOVE IS SECURED IN OBEDIENCE

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15). Many religious people mistakenly interpret this verse as saying all they need to do is acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God or believe in Jesus and they are saved. Jesus said in Luke 6:46: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" One cannot give lip service only and expect God to be dwelling in him and he in God. Jesus sets the record straight in Matthew 7:21-23. Very little love is shown with mere lip service. Jesus makes it crystal clear:

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:23).

God abides in us as we obey His teaching of the Gospel Truth. Only then do we enjoy fellowship with Him and other faithful Christians (2 John 9-11). True love of God will cause one to obey Truth which saves (1 Pet. 1:22-23; Jam. 1:21-22). While living upon this earth, if we obey the Gospel, always obey God's will, love one another and our neighbor, and repent when the need arises, then we can rest assured that we need not fear the judgment of Christ (Acts 17:30-31; John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10). Let us never forget true love is expressed in our treatment of others (Mat. 25:34-40).

### HOW THE LOVE OF GOD IS PERFECTED IN US

God's love is seen when we love our leaders—elders who oversee the local congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Heb. 13:17). The men are to be esteemed and loved by the members:

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake (1 The. 5:12-13).

We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Pet. 1:22), love the work of the Lord (1 The. 1:3; Heb. 6:10), and love the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). We must continue loving God first (above all) (Mat. 10:37) with our total being (22:37), with all our heart: feelings, desires, emotions, and affections. We must love God with all our soul, mind, and strength (22:37; Mark 12:30). God's love demands that we speak out against all false doctrine, liberalism, and all who are no longer abiding in the doctrine of Christ (Rom. 16:17; Eph. 5:11; 2 The. 3:6; Tit. 3:10; 2 John 9-11). We must earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3).

## CONCLUSION

Loving one another is not always easy. There are numerous obstacles that can hinder us from loving as we should such as personalities, indifference, prejudices, busyness, sin, doctrinal error, etc. Love, however, is essential to our spiritual life and pleasing to our Heavenly Father. "And above all these things *put on* charity [love—ASV], which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14). To sum it all up: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

## WORK CITED

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## QUESTIONS

1. Define *Bible love*.
2. Define *Monogenes*.
3. We are friends of Christ if we do what?
4. Define *Propitiation*.
5. Which men were considered the inner-circle with Christ?

# THE NEW BIRTH

*Daniel Denham*

In John 3:5, Jesus said: “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.” With these words Jesus summarizes the essential points involved in the doctrine of the New Birth.

No single verse has been subject to as much misinterpretation and abuse as this text on the subject of salvation, except possibly John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8. The false doctrines of faith-only salvation, grace-only salvation, baptismal regeneration, the Neo-Pentecostal ideas concerning salvation, and, in more recent years, the false doctrine of Deaverism, which posits a non-miraculous Holy Spirit baptism as being essential to salvation, have all arisen to create confusion in the religious world.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT

The occasion of John 3:5 is a visit by Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, to see Jesus by night. The specific reason is not given. Neither is the reason for coming by night. However, Nicodemus states that he knew that Jesus had to be a teacher sent from God, as it was the case that no one could have done the miracles that Jesus had performed “except God be with him” (3:1-2).

John the Baptist had been preaching a “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). All of this was done to prepare the way for Christ, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Multitudes were taught and then baptized of John in the Jordan River in preparation for the establishment of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:5). Jesus also came preaching that “the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (1:15).

So, the concept of immersion in water “for the remission of sins,” which phrase in both Greek and English is the same construction used in Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38, was well-known in

ancient Israel during the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Matthew 26:28 intimates that the meaning of that construction was “in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins,” and Acts 2:38 shows that the practice later was also enjoined by the apostles. Thus, baptism for the remission or forgiveness of sins was a key to any discussion pertaining to salvation or right standing with Jehovah God. Nicodemus would be well familiar with this fact.

## A PARALLEL TEXT

Nicodemus was immediately perplexed by this enigmatic statement. Thus, Jesus responds to Nicodemus in John 3:3: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus asks: “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (3:4). It is then that Jesus answers with the text that serves as our lesson text (3:5).

Immediately, one is drawn to the parallel statements of verses 3 and 5. Each is introduced with the solemn exclamatory, “Verily, verily,” or “Truly, truly,” as in many versions. Each stresses the significance of what follows. In verse 3, Jesus states, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” while in verse 5, He says, “Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

The exceptive clause means “if—and only if such and such occurs.” There are two parallel parts to each statement. In the third verse, one must “be born again.” This is paralleled by the statement “be born of water and *of* the Spirit” in the fifth verse. These are coequal expressions. To “be born again” is the same thing then as to “be born of water and *of* the Spirit.”

The next parallel between the two verses involves the expressions “cannot see the kingdom of God” in verse 3 and “cannot enter into the kingdom of God” in verse 5. To “see the kingdom

of God” is the same as to “enter into the kingdom of God.” So, when one is “born again,” it follows that he enters “into the kingdom of God.” When one is “born of water and *of* the Spirit,” he *sees* the kingdom of God. Being born of water and of the Spirit is then essential to being “born again.” Further, one who has not been so “born again” has not entered the kingdom of God.

The particulars of these parallel points are essential to grasp to understand the New Birth—being born again. Failure to maintain these parallels in teaching has contributed to the rise of much error on the New Birth. If one is to enter the kingdom of God and thereby become a citizen of that kingdom with all the rights and blessings pertaining thereto, then he must be born again and that entails being “born of water and *of* the Spirit.” If—and only if one is born of water and of the Spirit is he born again and enters into the kingdom of God.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS THE CHURCH OF OUR LORD

It must be noted also that “the kingdom of God” refers to the church of our Lord. These terms are used interchangeably by the Lord (Mat. 16:18-19, 28; Mark 9:1). The kingdom and church are one and the same when referring to God’s people under the New Testament. *Church* refers to the assemblage of all those “called out” to worship and serve God. *Kingdom* describes the nature of the government of the church. It is a monarchy, not a democracy. Jesus Christ is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

Those who were in the church in the first century AD were in the kingdom (Col. 1:12-13; 1 The. 2:12; Rev. 1:4, 9, 11). Those in the church are the recipients of “all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ” (Eph. 1:3), which includes forgiveness of sins (1:7) and an inheritance in heaven (1:11). They are part of the Israel of God today—spiritual Israel, the church (Gal. 6:16).

So, the New Birth is essential for one to enter into the church, the spiritual body of Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:20-23), of which Jesus is the

Savior (5:23; Acts 20:28). No one can enter into the church but by being born again. The expression “born again Christian” is then a redundancy entailing an idea contrary to the Scriptures. If one is a Christian, it is because he has been “born again.” If one has been “born again,” then he of necessity is a Christian.

### TWO ELEMENTS BUT ONLY ONE BIRTH

The New Birth has two elements. One must be born both “of water and *of* the Spirit.” The conjunction shows that two things are co-equal and are involved in the process of being born again. These cannot then constitute two different births occurring at separate times or even simultaneously, as the Deaver doctrine holds. The grammar does not permit either. Rather it is **one birth** with **two elements**.

While Nicodemus was confused about the nature of being born again by assuming that it was a physical birth, Jesus corrected him by noting that (1) the New Birth entails being born of both water and of the Spirit (John 3:5), and that (2) “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:6). Thus, Jesus in John 3:5, which parallels John 3:3, is not referring to a physical birth in its construction. **Both elements** (water and the Spirit) are involved in the **one birth**—the New Birth.

It is therefore not the case that the water in verse 5 refers to a physical birth, as taught by some. Grammatically, it simply cannot do so.

The old dodge that Jesus was talking about a physical birth in John 3:5, then, will not hold up to scrutiny. Keep in mind that Jesus is explaining by parallel language the process of being “born again,” which He introduced in verse 3. Whatever is contemplated in verse 5, being born of water is **necessary** for one to be born again and enter the kingdom.

If taken to contemplate a physical birth, then anyone who is born physically (and that is the entire human race) is already half “born again.” That is a ludicrous conclusion. If one says that the water refers to the “bag of waters” in physical birth, the same conclusion follows concerning everyone who has ever come out of the “bag of waters” to

be physically born in the natural process. Also, the “bag of waters” is really an amniotic fluid. It raises a problem for those who are born physically by caesarian-section (c-section) too. The position would imply that they can never be born again.

There is clearly but one birth of which the Lord is speaking in John 3:3, 5 concerning the New Birth. It is a spiritual birth and not a physical one.

### THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

The Lord notes that Nicodemus should not be confused concerning the New Birth. Read verses 7-8. He uses the *wind*, which is the same word in Greek for “spirit,” to illustrate the point.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (NKJV).

Just as the functioning of the wind is known by its effects, so those born again are known by their actions. There is a necessary change that occurs in the New Birth that entails a reformation of one’s life, a demonstrable change in behavior. The effects bespeak of the birth. In his first epistle, the apostle John makes the observation plainer (1 John 3:9).

When Nicodemus continues in his confusion by asking, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9), Jesus chides him, asking rhetorically, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (3:10—NKJV). He then proceeds to preach concerning His purpose for coming into the world to save souls (3:11-21). Jesus does not detail specifically why Nicodemus should understand the nature and significance of the New Birth. Instead He addresses the fact that he is in confusion, when he should not be. As a teacher in Israel, Nicodemus ought to have been aware of the many things that pointed by type and shadow aforetime in the Law of Moses to the cleansing and salvation of souls, which are the focal points of the New Birth.

Nicodemus surely knew too of the work of John the Baptist, as well as the teaching of Jesus to this point, which teaching was being confirmed by the very miracles that Nicodemus noted Him

to be doing by the power of God (3:2). The Lord clearly wanted him to do some deeper thinking on these things.

### THE NATURE OF THE BIRTH

A birth has two main parts that Jesus’ words actually play upon in the imagery of the New Birth. A birth has both a **conception** and a **delivery**. The expression “born of water and *of* the Spirit” reflects both when understood in their proper relationship to the person being born again. Though the portrayal is not perfect, as the conception is completed in the delivery, it serves as an illustration of the relationship of the two.

One is first begotten (conceived spiritually) of God by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and then delivered through the act of water baptism for the remission of sins. That we are begotten by God by the Word is affirmed in the Scriptures. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (Jam. 1:18). We are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23).

Paul declared to the Corinthian Christians that, “I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). If that factually could be said by Paul, guided and directed by the Holy Spirit who inspired him to write it, then it certainly was also just as factually true that the Spirit begat them through the Gospel. Paul preached by the inspiration of the Spirit (2:7-16).

The Spirit, operating through the Word which is His sword (Eph. 6:17), convicts the sinner (John 14:26; 16:8-13; cf. Acts 24:24-25). Faith is produced through the Word (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 18:8). The sinner complies with the terms of the Gospel to become right with God (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:1-3) Repentance, a change of life, is thus brought forth (2 Pet. 3:9). He confesses faith in Christ (Acts 8:37). He then submits to water baptism to obtain the remission of sins (2:38; 22:16). He thus enters into Christ and puts Christ on, spiritually speaking (Gal. 3:26-29), which means that he becomes a child of God and is to be led by

the teaching of the Spirit in his life (4:4-7; Rom. 8:14-17).

His baptism is the delivery act. He is brought out of the watery grave to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5). Being in Christ, he is now a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17) and has “all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ,” including forgiveness, an inheritance in heaven, and the Spirit as an earnest payment for that inheritance (Eph. 1:3-14). He is also sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13), showing that he belongs to the Lord who bought him both body and soul (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In fact, the work of the Spirit through the Word in convicting, converting, sanctifying, directing, and leading the individual runs throughout the whole process of the New Birth and His work through the Word continues in the life of the saint in guiding his steps aright.

Why does Jesus give being born of water first in the construction rather than that of being born of the Spirit? In Greek constructions most often what is posted first is being stressed. Thus, Jesus is emphasizing the point of delivery, when the New Birth is complete. By placing the work of the Spirit afterward, Jesus also shows that the Spirit’s work is not only to initiate the beginning of the process but also to see it through to completion. When one arises from the watery grave, he is raised spiritually to walk in newness of life. God thus raises us up with Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; Eph. 2:1-8; Col. 2:12-13).

Christians are washed, sanctified, and justified by the authority of Christ by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:11). The church is sanctified and cleansed “with the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26).

Paul says:

according to His [God’s] mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom [or, more precisely, “of or out of whom”] He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Tit. 3:5-6—NKJV).

The hendiadys construction stresses the process of salvation under two images. The first is that of the washing that regenerates, which stresses baptism. The second is that of the renewing that is

done by the Holy Spirit who directs and guides the process to completion having the blessings of salvation being poured out from His largess for the benefit of the obedient. One should note the ablative use of the genitive in this regard in verse 6. Blessings from or out of the Spirit of God are bestowed in the process of salvation.

### AN ARGUMENT AND ILLUSTRATION OF THE PROCESS

Those who were saved on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). As they entered into the church, and as the church is the kingdom, and as only those who would be born again can enter the kingdom, then it must be the case that they were born again.

If they were born again, then it must be the case that they experienced the New Birth. They were born of water and of the Spirit. That being so, then it follows as well that whatever they did or went through in entering into the kingdom and being born again is what the New Birth and, therefore, being born of water and of the Spirit entails.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, upon the apostle Peter reaching the climax of his sermon concerning the resurrected and reigning Savior (2:22-35) that, God has made Him whom those standing before him had crucified “both Lord and Christ” (2:36), some were “pricked in their heart” by what they heard and cried out, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37). Peter’s inspired answer is given in verses 38-39. They were to repent and be baptized by the authority of Jesus Christ to obtain the forgiveness of sins (cf. Mat. 26:28).

Peter exhorted them with “many other words” to save themselves “from that untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). Those who gladly received his words, an expression referring to their obedience to his message, “were baptized,” and it is then and there at that point they are said to have been added (2:41).

Inasmuch as the New Birth concerns what human beings must do to be saved, then it must be the case that what these people did on Pentecost was what was needed for them to be saved.

### CONCLUSION

The Lord placed these people in the kingdom, because they were now saved. It therefore follows that they had been born again.

The Spirit revealed the Word of God to Peter who then preached it. When one responds to the Word of God as these people did and consummates his obedience to the Word by being baptized as they were, then one is born of water and

of the Spirit. They have heard the words of the Spirit, believed those words, and obeyed them. The Spirit pricked their hearts and guided them through the whole process by His words to the waters of baptism in obedience.

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

### QUESTIONS

1. What are the two elements of the New Birth?
2. Which two verses in John 3 concerning the New Birth are parallel to one another?
3. Give an example of some who were “born again,” and explain how each of the two elements was involved in their New Birth.
4. Why is *born again Christian* redundant?
5. What purpose did Jesus’ reference to the wind serve in His response to Nicodemus?

# BE THOU AN EXAMPLE

*Johnny Oxendine*

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

## INTRODUCTION

The letters that Paul writes to Timothy give New Testament readers great insight into the challenges and expectations the younger colleague faced as he endeavored to serve in various capacities for the apostle (as a messenger) and the local congregations (preacher). Taking this into consideration, we are given particularly personal, professional, and doctrinal thoughts Paul wanted to pass on and that he felt would be helpful for Timothy and, as we now know, for future readers of those epistles (Rom. 15:4).

In the earlier verses of 1 Timothy 4, we read Paul's warnings and what to anticipate from those who would "depart from the faith" (4:1) and some of the methods they employ. Timothy was to extract himself from all diversions and remind the brethren to focus on godliness (4:6-7), knowing there would also be some who would likely point to his own youth and inexperience as a reason to dismiss his efforts to "command and teach" (4:11).

The emphasis in this chapter finds its fundamental foundation emanating from *example* (the Greek transliterated word is *tupos*), which literally refers to a blow to strike a die, model, impression (from/of a blow), copy, outline, standard, and, of course, example. Paul is exhorting his younger brother in Christ (the word used in the "be thou" of the verse is an imperative, so somewhat stronger than a simple exhortation) to not be deterred by those attempting to undermine him, but rather to set the proper example/standard among the believers, those among whom Timothy lived and labored, to more effectively do his (more correctly, the Lord's) work. His pattern (of Christian living) would be one that encouraged imitation

by others as it is continually in the state of "becoming" or growing deeper spiritually.

An incident takes place in Numbers 25 that may serve as an appropriate lead in to the exhortation that Paul is giving to Timothy. As that narrative unfolds we find that Israel (which abode in Shittim at the time—25:1) was committing fornication "with the daughters of Moab," and had also committed themselves to their idolatrous practices (25:2).

God instructed Moses how to address this situation (25:4-5). Yet, seemingly before anything could be done, one Israelite man brought a Midianitish woman (25:6) in the midst of the congregation with the apparent intention of committing adultery/fornication with her in a tent.

Immediately offended by this overt display of conscious rebellion, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, did not wait for those who were older to act upon the matter, but rose himself and brought swift judgment on the couple with his spear. This brought the plague that God had levied to an abrupt stop. Phinehas had, in effect, become an example (**of upholding righteousness**) worthy of emulation.

Timothy also represents for the Christian the example of one exhorted not to give ground to, nor be intimidated by, those who engage in sinful activity or perpetrate error. In this specific instance, we understand the import of Paul's encouragement (whereby he might have been reluctant to provide the authoritative teaching required/necessary for the church because of his youth), but in the broader sense, we all are always to be set for the defense of the Gospel.

## AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS IN WORD

*In word* (transliterated *en logos*), is used broadly here to convey the idea of Timothy's speech or general conversation. The Christian is to be mindful not only of what he says, but also how he says it. Those who profess to follow Christ

cannot exemplify Christian faith by the use of unbecoming language. This is, essentially, what a self-controlled tongue should be:

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. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter? (Jam. 3:5-11).

The impression many form (of us, of the church) is often derived as a result of our speech and the manner in which it is delivered. Though it seems to refer to speaking (conversation) in general, it no doubt would also carry a tacit implication of the expectations (of faithfulness) inherent in preaching the Gospel. His example must be impeccable and worthy of imitation by others. Since this is to include teaching and verbal intercourse of all kinds, its expansiveness cannot be underestimated or overvalued: “Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6).

The Christian understands the importance of **words** (meaning not only maintaining doctrinal truth) as they are also related to (play a role in) salvation:

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).

When Paul wrote to Titus he addressed the need for our speech to be “sound” to prevent there being **any** allowance of accusations:

Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Tit. 2:8).

### AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS IN CONVERSATION (CONDUCT)

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:12).

Paul also wants Timothy to understand the significance of his overall conduct as a Christian in a role of **leadership**, (which should be considered not only from the vantage point of an elder), as **what one does** must align consistently with **what one says**. The Christian is to be acutely aware of how every aspect of his lifestyle is viewable by all. The word translated *conversation* in the King James (now having an obsolete meaning in English) is translated “manner of life,” “conduct,” “way of life,” and “behavior” in other translations, all pointing to something simple and fundamental (yet encompassing all manner of life).

We often think of the first two items together as “word and deed” because they complement each other if we are sincere and consistently doing what we say or practicing what we preach. This is regardless of whether we are shopping for groceries, getting gasoline, at a sporting event, or even in our own backyard: “That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phi. 1:10).

Lives that do not reflect a coherence of speech and behavior are truly chaotic and recall what used to be described pejoratively as “fake,” hypocritical, or “phony,” but even more importantly for the New Testament Christian this character trait is better understood in the context of leaving that former life in sin. When we lay aside the old man (Eph. 4:22) to be renewed in our minds by the Word of God (Rom. 12:1-2), there is the anticipated consistency of “Word and Deed” above all else. Paul explained this clearly when he wrote to brethren in Philippi:

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phi. 1:27).

The Christian lifestyle is not to cross the line into that hedonistic culture of **any** current generation. Paul's instruction viewed the life in Christ as one that is both disciplined and controlled, not one eager to push liberal or progressive social boundaries. If we are to demonstrate that we truly are followers of Christ (and congregational leaders), our living must be for the Lord, not ourselves, in all humility, meekness, godliness, and righteousness.

### AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS IN CHARITY (LOVE)

Timothy is also encouraged to demonstrate the Christian standard that we are to embody regarding an unconditional love for mankind (and especially the brethren among whom he labored) based on the pattern set forth by God and Christ. The term (*agape*) is inclusive of the concept of benevolence in that there is no expectation of reward or recompense. It is selfless and directed toward others for their eternal benefit. God showed His love toward us "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Paul began to delve into this for Timothy from the very outset: "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5). The apostle informs Timothy that love should emanate from a sincere, genuine, unhypocritical faith. Timothy's opponents have seared their consciences and have become so hypocritical that they are driven to teach solely by the motive of making money (6:5, 10). This helps one see that the opponents of God not only were insincere but were deliberately and purposefully deceiving the church.

Of course, who said what love is better than Paul in his first Corinthian epistle?

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And

though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth (1 Cor. 13:1-8)

### AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS IN SPIRIT

What exactly does being "an example" to brethren "in spirit" actually mean? The Christian is to keep his mind upon spiritual things: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). It means spiritual-mindedness. We can get an even clearer idea of what the apostle has in mind by looking at what he writes to the Galatians:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (5:22-25).

Of course, we know that "the fruit of the Spirit" is put in stark contrast to the "works of the flesh" (5:19-21), but there is more to the comparisons than simply that. Paul enumerates, rather, what results from a spiritual mind: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness," etc. It appears that Paul is not so concerned to detail precisely how each of these matters works out in practice here, but with the underlying orientation of selflessness and outgoing concern for others. For in our commitment to God through Jesus Christ we discover a new orientation for life, which is an orientation that reflects that selfless and outgoing love of God Himself.

### AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS IN FAITH

Certainly, the Christian is to always portray exemplary faith (that is, faithfulness). Paul describes Timothy in the opening passages of the book (1 Tim. 1:2—ASV) as a “true son in the faith,” which attests to his faithfulness, and here in verse 12 it likely represents an attitude of faithfulness or trustworthiness rather than right belief in **the faith** (though that would of course be implied). Nowhere is the testimonial description of faith in the Scriptures more comprehensive than in Hebrews 11, which begins with subtle eloquence: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report” (11:1-2)—and ends with an elegant reminder of how much better the new covenant is for us:

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect (11:39-40).

Between those verses is a veritable history lesson of those who have been faithful to God throughout the centuries, who comprise that cloud of witnesses watching us run a similar race with Jesus as both the author and the consummator of our faith (as the One who brought faith to its complete expression).

### AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS IN PURITY

“For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; Yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear” (Job 11:15).

The last of these exhortations from Paul to Timothy is of utmost importance (and inseparable from his faith). “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned” (1 Tim. 1:5). The Christian is always expected to project spiritual (thus moral) purity. With Timothy being a younger man this would be especially prudent advice so as no action he would undertake (whether governed by morals or motive) would seem inappropriate. Paul was reminding Timothy that he was to live a moral and clean, just, and honest life. This life was one that required him to be free—completely free—of coveting, lust, worldliness, self-seeking, immorality, and all other known sins. Paul expected Timothy to comprehend the seriousness of complying with the standard God set for Christians (then and now) to live a life of purity that far exceeded the standards of the world. His heart and life were to be pure (perfectly pure)—a pattern, standard, and example for all Christians today.

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### QUESTIONS

1. What things must one be aware of to be an example in word?
2. Does our lifestyle really affect others? If so, how?
3. What are some of the tangible qualities of faithfulness?
4. How involved is the church to be in the lives of our youth regarding moral purity?
5. How influential can love be in the local congregation? Give examples.

# LIVING SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY, AND GODLY

*Roelf L. Ruffner*

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Tit. 2:12).

Inspired of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote these words to his beloved fellow laborer Titus whom he had sent to the isle of Crete to “set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city” (1:5) in the churches of Christ. There was much that was *wanting* in the church and in the Gentile society of ancient Crete. There was paganism and the accompanying sexual immorality, drunkenness, and superstition. There was slavery which fostered brutality, laziness, pilfering, fornication, and lying among slave and master. This Godless society lacked civility, respect for others, and decency. “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons” (1:12—ASV). Even the Jewish influence seemed corrupted by false doctrine and worldliness (1:14-16).

Yet, consider our own “enlightened age.” In spite of our technological accomplishments our nation is turning into a spiritual, ethical, and moral cesspool. Any influence the Bible once had on our land has vanished. Public profanity, lasciviousness, adultery, fornication, homosexual *marriage*, transgenderism, abortion-on-demand, drunkenness, immodesty, and nudity—behavior once considered shameful and perverted—are now “out of the closet” and “in your face.” Purveyors of lust, who once sold their filth under the counter or in brown paper bags, have now infiltrated every home via the internet, television, movies, and DVDs. Those still embracing Biblical morality and ethics are considered oddities at best and threats at worst.

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 conver-

sation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds;) (2 Pet. 2:6-8).

The society of Crete had so corrupted itself or degenerated that even Christians needed reformation—a complete makeover. Notice the agenda Paul commanded Titus to carry this out:

Aged men and women, young men and women were to be serious in their outlook on life. All ages were to take their Christian life seriously. In Titus 2, words and phrases like “sober, grave, patient, discreet, keepers at home, good and sober minded” are used.

All age groups in the church were to be concerned about doctrine or teaching.

1. Older men were to be “sound in faith” (2:2).
2. Older women were to be “teachers of good things” (2:3) to the younger women; which meant that they had to know and practice these “good things” themselves.
3. Young women were to fulfill their God given roles as wives and mothers “that the word of God be not blasphemed” (2:4-5).
4. Young men were in doctrine to show uncorruptness (2:7) so the world might not have bad things to say about Christianity (2:8).
5. Slaves were to obey their masters “in all things” that “they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (2:9-10).

Paul knew that the only way to reform these brethren’s lives was with the Word of God. “Order my steps in thy word: And let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa. 119:133). They had to live lives which brought glory to God and His Word.

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).

This is exactly what the world and many brethren need today. We need to preach the “words of this life” (Acts 5:20)—the Gospel of repentance for the remission of sin (2:38)—rather than silly sob stories and sophistry. The church needs to have her Bible classes filled with real Bible study (including memorization) rather than puppets, play acting, and adults sharing their mutual ignorance of the Scriptures. She needs to have members who are **daily** students of the Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

### WHY?

The question the church of Christ in Crete would ask of Titus is the same question people of our rebellious age ask—“Why give up our past way of life?” Paul answers this question in Titus 2:11. The answer is found in the form of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Jesus came to this sin-sick world not only to offer Himself as the sacrifice for sin but to reveal to us the new way of living—a reformed life (1 Pet. 1:18).

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly (John 10:10).

Jesus showed us by His example and Gospel the fullness of God’s grace. He opened up the door of salvation for an undeserving humanity. We should live His way with deep gratitude and love. As the old hymn goes, “Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe.”

### TEACHING US TO DENY

New Testament Christianity involves denial or refusal. “And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The Master Teacher instructed us by His Divine example to deny self for the Father. “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). Our world has never liked this doctrine.

But what do we deny? Paul makes it clear that the Christian must once and for all deny “ungodliness” (Tit. 2:11) or rebellion against God.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

Brother Burton Coffman defined *ungodliness* as “a life of irreligion.” In the United States and in Europe a growing number of the population are classifying themselves in religious surveys as “nones” or non-religious.

The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God*. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, *There is none that doeth good* (Psa. 14:1).

We should also once and for all deny “worldly lusts” (Tit. 2:11). *Lust* is the root of much of the world’s ills and will end only when this world is over.

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 2:16).

The patriarch Job overcame the lust of the flesh by rejecting it (Job 31:1). The Son of God defeated worldly lusts by using the sword of the Spirit. “Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Mat. 4:7).

Many Christians succumb to the wiles of the devil and sin; whether it is the filth offered up by our pornography-saturated society or the desire for more and more (covetousness) or the craving for popularity and power. They fail to be warned and armed by the Word of God and prayer.

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).

### HOW WE SHOULD LIVE

A Christian is a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) having been “born of water and *of* the Spirit” (John 3:5). We have denied this transient world with its many temptations and determined

to prepare ourselves for the Judgment Day and eternal life. Yet, how are we to live as a New Testament Christian in the ungodly 21<sup>st</sup> Century world? Some would say: “Don’t worry, be happy! You have been saved by grace/faith alone. You will always be a sinner. Just sit back enjoy this life because your salvation is assured.” This falsity has seduced many.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phi. 2:12).

Paul wrote to Titus that Christians should live “soberly...in this present world” (Tit. 2:12). Brother David Libscomb defined *soberly* in this verse as meaning, “to discharge the duty one owes oneself” (277). “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). Since we have been created in the image of God **and** ransomed from Satan by the Son’s blood, we are worth a lot. With that preciousness in view, let us restrain our passions and take seriously what we think, do, and utter. This includes the teenager as well as the seasoned preacher. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure” (Phi. 2:13).

Paul also admonishes Titus to have Christians live “righteously...in this present world” (Tit. 2:12). Building upon *soberly*, Paul and the Holy Spirit require that Christians not only discharge

their duties to themselves but their duties to their fellow man as well. Brethren, do you and I love “thy neighbor as thyself” (Mat. 19:19)? Are we concerned about the physical **and** spiritual needs of those precious souls we live among each day? Often Christians and congregations make benevolence seem the sole message of the Gospel by promoting a false social gospel. Yet, others of us seem to turn inward regarding benevolence, failing to help the truly needy while claiming to teach the Truth of God’s Word (cf. 25:31-46).

Finally, Paul writes Titus to have the brethren live “godly...in this present world.” What was it like to live as a faithful saint in such a pagan, immoral land? “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” (Acts 17:16). “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” (Eph. 5:12). I once shuddered at such a thought until I realized that I now lived in an ungodly place. Our *civilization* has gone beyond the tilting point. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one” (1 John 5:19—ASV).

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### QUESTIONS

1. What was “wanting” (Tit. 2) in the churches of Christ in Crete?
2. Why were young Christian women to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers (Tit. 2:4-5)?
3. What should Christians deny in this world (Tit. 2:12)?
4. How are we to live as a New Testament Christian in the ungodly 21<sup>st</sup> century world?
5. What is involved in Paul’s admonition to live “righteously?”

# RESTORING THE ERRING

*Paul Curless*

## INTRODUCTION

In Jude 20-23, we read:

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. And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

The text sets forth at least two responsibilities Christians have to one another. In verse 20, we should edify and build up the faithful in Christ. We read in Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Also, we read in Hebrews 10:24: “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” Some of these “good works” should include our second responsibility: to rescue those who have fallen away from the faith (Jude 22-23).

God’s Word is crystal clear.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

Who is to restore the erring? “Ye which are spiritual,” the faithful Christian, not a lukewarm one. How is this to be done? “In the spirit of meekness.” Why? Because it could be you!

The unfaithful Christian must realize the consequences of his/her unfaithfulness! The church must also realize its responsibility to the unfaithful and exercise that responsibility.

## THE CHRISTIAN CAN FALL AND BE LOST

Apostasy is more than a possibility; it is a reality! It is not like the false doctrine of Calvinism, which teaches one cannot fall. In 2 Peter 2:20, Peter writes:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome.

The Hebrews’ writer informs us:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:26).

To sin willfully means voluntarily sinning, which means one can fall! In Hebrews 6:6, we read:

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

According to the Greek translation, this verse should be written in the past tense and would state “having fallen away.” Galatians 5:4 refers to those who had formerly been enlightened and had tested the blessings of truth: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” In 2 Peter 1:5-10, Peter informs us of what will happen when we Christians cease to grow and add the “Christian graces.”

Who could be classified as erring? One walking disorderly (2 The. 3:6), one overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1), one who is no longer following Christ (John 6:66), one causing divisions and offences (Rom. 16:17), one who is a willful, neglectful sinner (Heb. 10:25-26), one who has left his first love (Rev. 2:4), one who has forsaken Christ (2 Tim. 4:10), one who is no longer endeavoring to walk in the light (1 John 1:7-10), and one who is bidding God speed to false teachers (2 John 9-11).

Now that we have established from God’s Word that Christians can and often fall (even though we do not have to fall), let us look at some reasons some do.

### The Love of Money

In Acts 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira lied about the price of the land they had sold. Matthew 13:22 speaks of the Parable of the Sower who sowed among the thorns, “that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” Luke 8:14 also speaks of those who once they have heard God’s Word turn away and become consumed by the riches, cares, and pleasures of this world.

### The Pleasures of Sin Cause Many to Fall

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

The pleasures of this life are another reason Christians fall. Demas was such an example. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10).

### The Belief and Practice of False Teaching

We often hear Christians say, “I don’t teach false doctrine on such things as marriage, divorce, and remarriage; Christians in denominations; saved by grace only; using mechanical instruments while singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; women preachers; hand clapping; Holy Spirit baptism; the plan of salvation; etc.” Here is the problem. Often these folks may not be teaching false doctrine themselves, but they are bidding God speed to those who are! Therefore, they are in complete fellowship with false teachers and guilty by association (2 John 9-11).

There are many in our brotherhood who are proclaiming another gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul further states that many will turn away from God’s Word and will follow the false doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3-4). So, one can see many will leave the truth for popular things, unscriptural things, entertainment, and following after something new!

## BIBLE ANSWERS FOR RESTORING THE ERRING

The Christian’s duty to the erring is clear; they need to be restored (Gal. 6:1). Jude 22-23 states that different methods may be used in restoring fallen brethren. “And of some have compassion, making a difference” (Jude 22). We understand that some fall into sin through ignorance or weakness where there is no premeditation or hardness of heart—with such be gentle (Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 4:21).

We treat differently those who have an attitude problem and are mean-spirited. “And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire” (Jude 23). This type is corrupt of heart, ungodly, and calloused; we save these by stern rebuke and fear of punishment.

The Christian is bound by the teachings of Christ, and he does not ignore it lest he be found guilty. We must try to reclaim the erring, but we must also be content with and follow God’s Word or pattern for restoring them.

### THE MEANS TO RESTORING THE ERRING

The Lord gave not only the command to restore the fallen but the means as well. He provides the power, the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). God’s Word is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Heb. 4:12). God’s Word also contains the power of fear (2 Cor. 5:10-11). Let us never forget that the erring must be taught the truth (John 8:32).

Let me be perfectly clear about something. We are to restore erring members of the Lord’s church—not the religious people in the denominations of man, such as those in the Christian church denomination. As I understand history, they broke off in 1906 and became just another denomination. They need to be taught and obey the Gospel to become a member of the Lord’s church.

To be successful in reaching the lost among us, we must have great love for them (John 13:34-35). We also must be determined to succeed. In Luke 15, we have three parables which show the

value of the lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost (prodigal) son. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (15:4). Matthew informs us that having love for just one soul is important (Mat. 16:26). After all, the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10). We also must have a great sense of urgency in restoring the lost. Luke 15:4 implies one should go after the one lost soul without delay. I fear that oftentimes the brethren wait too long before much concern is shown. James informs us that people do fall, and the faithful Christians are the ones who must convert them back to faithful service (Jam. 5:19-20).

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THOSE WHO SIN

We should pray for his conversion (1 The. 5:17; Jam. 5:16). The faithful would need to rebuke some erring members in love: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). Paul tells us to rebuke with the doctrine of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 4:2). Our rebuke must be with meekness (Gal. 6:1), always remembering our goal is to convert him back to the faithful service of God (Jam. 5:19-20). At the time the erring member repents, the church is to forgive and welcome him back into the fold (Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:7-9).

However, if a congregation has done all they can, in light of God's Word, to restore an erring member and he will not repent, they must implement church discipline. I know this is the forgotten commandment in most congregations. However, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 still says:

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.

Of course, we realize that much time is involved before such action is taken.

Thus far we have noted several points that are indisputable according to the Bible. Christians sometimes err from the truth. When this happens, the church must encourage them to do

as Peter instructed brother Simon in Acts 8:22. As pointed out, restoring them must be accomplished by faithful Christians. Our guide/means for reaching the erring has been provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember this: as long as members follow His steps, we have done all that is humanly possible. I am reminded of the passage in Jeremiah 6:16:

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*.

Unfortunately, some erring members no longer have a desire to walk in the "old paths," just like the Jews of old!

### CONCLUSION

All that remains is to answer three questions: (1) Will we reach out to our erring brethren and do all we can to bring them back into God's fold, the church? (2) Do we have enough love? "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). (3) Do we have the desire, as Paul said in Romans 10:1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved"?

Restoring the erring is not always easy, nor are we always successful. However, this good work is necessary and rewarding (Jam. 5:19-20). We Christians must do the best we can and remember that the time to be concerned about the erring is now! We must not wait until their hearts have hardened against the truth or until they have been disfellowshipped.

The Bible tells us, "Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother" (2 The. 3:15). It is our prayer that erring members would humble themselves, repent, and pray that they too might hear these words someday:

Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord (Mat. 25:21).

### WORK CITED

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

## QUESTIONS

1. Define *Repentance*.
2. What are some sins which cause Christians to fall?
3. Is it possible to fall and be eternally lost?
4. What is God's plan for restoring the erring?
5. How is the church to treat those who have fallen and been restored to faithfulness?

# CONFESS YOUR FAULTS ONE TO ANOTHER

*Danny Douglas*

The topic at hand is a very important one, and one that affects every Christian. The essentiality of understanding the topic, “Confess Your Faults One to Another,” cannot be overstated. Why? (1) God commands Christians to “Confess *your* faults one to another” (Jam. 5:16), and (2) Christians do sin. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). One who denies that he has sinned is condemned: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1:10; cf. Rom. 3:23). This is why we need the blood of Christ not only to wash our past sins away when we are baptized (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5), but, after becoming Christians, we need the continual cleansing of His precious blood:

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 (1 John 1:7).

## WHAT IS GOD’S PLAN FOR THE CONFESSION OF SINS?

God has given a pattern and an example in the New Testament for Christians to be forgiven when they have sinned. This is often called, “the Second Law of Pardon.” The “First Law of Pardon” is obviously when an alien sinner comes to Christ in obedience to the Gospel, and thereby he is pardoned or forgiven of his sins by: Hearing the Gospel; Believing the Gospel; Repentance; Confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and Baptism for the “remission of sins” (cf. Acts 18:8; 8:35-39; 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 1:16; 10:17).

Yet, when one is baptized into Christ and saved (Gal. 3:27; Mark 16:16), he may fall into sin and need the forgiveness of God. According to the New Testament pattern (2 Tim. 1:13), he is not to be baptized again but to repent, confess his sins, and seek the prayers of the faithful. We have such an example in Simon of Samaria, who heard Philip preach Christ and obeyed the Gospel (Acts 8:5-13).

Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done (8:13).

Shortly thereafter, Peter and John, apostles came down to Samaria to lay hands on the infant church that they might receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit (8:14-17). When Simon saw this, he sought to buy the gift of God with money, for which Peter sternly rebuked him:

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God (8:14-21).

Peter commanded him what to do to be forgiven of his sin:

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity (8:22-23).

Gladly, Simon complied with the will of God. “Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me” (8:24). Implied in this, is the fact that the prayers of the faithful were to be requested, as James implies:

Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The

effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man  
availeth much (Jam. 5:16; cf. 1 Pet. 3:12).

### REPENTANCE IS NECESSARY

Before a Scriptural confession of faults (i.e. “sins”—Jam. 5:16—ASV) may take place, repentance must occur (Acts 8:22). Repentance is a change of the mind, in which one decides to go in a different direction, turning away from sin and unto God. It is the resolution in the heart to cease disobeying God, and to obey Him with all of one’s being. A confession of sin apart from repentance is worthless. The example of king Saul proves this:

And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice (1 Sam. 15:24; cf. 26:21).

Although he did acknowledge his sin, Saul obviously did not repent, because later God refused to hear him, which He would have done had the king truly repented (28:6; 1 Pet. 3:12). Saul’s deplorable condition is further seen in that he visited the witch at Endor for guidance (1 Sam. 28:7-25), which was an abomination before God (Deu. 18:10-12). Amazingly, God, by His power and not the witch’s, brought up Samuel from the dead to appear to Saul, in which he said to him: “Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?” (28:16). On the other hand, David truly had a repentant heart when he confessed his sin, because God forgave him:

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die (2 Sam. 12:13).

For repentance to be made, one must have a godly sorrow:

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

It is not the “sorrow of the world,” like Judas had (Mat. 27:3-5; Acts 1:16-20), but that sorrow which is God-ward in nature, which led to Peter’s repentance (26:69-75; Acts 2:14; 4:19-20; 5:29). Genuine repentance is followed by “works meet for repentance” (26:20), or works which prove that one has truly turned to God, and whose life is proof of such a change. When a true confession of sins takes place, sin will be forsaken and the confessor will be blessed! “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: But whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy” (Pro. 28:13). The prophet Joel well describes the nature of godly sorrow, genuine repentance, and turning to God:

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, Turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, And with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, And turn unto the LORD your God: For he *is* gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness, And repenteth him of the evil (Joel 2:12-13).

### PUBLIC CONFESSIONS AND PRIVATE CONFESSIONS

According to New Testament principles, a sin should only be confessed as widely as it is known. If it is known to one, two, or a few, it should be confessed only to the one, two, or the few, provided the report of the sin has not circulated publicly. The principles enjoined by Jesus regarding personal offences show this:

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 (Mat. 18:15-17).

The fact that the first step is to “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone,” proves that there is no good purpose served in going and publicizing a private trespass that is only known privately. This step in the process, and if necessary the second step of taking “one or two more”

witnesses to resolve the matter, imply that it is the Lord's will that these matters are not to be broadcasted publicly but taken care of involving as few people as possible. Of course, if the second step does not succeed, then the matter is to be told before the church, that the church might bring its collective influence to bear upon the offending brother, that he might repent and confess his faults. Therefore, a private trespass may eventually become known publicly if, the offender refuses to repent in the first two efforts in the process which Jesus lays down. Last, if one refuses to hear the church and will not repent, then he is to be withdrawn from by the Lord's church (18:17; 2 The. 3:6).

Obviously, the process set forth by Jesus in Matthew 18 applies only to private offences, and not to one who sins publicly and falls away from the church. Such a person would need to be dealt with by the church collectively right off. The case of a false teacher (Rom. 16:17-18), fornicator (1 Cor. 5:1-13), or anyone else openly transgressing the doctrine of Christ and bringing reproach on the Lord's body (2 John 9-11; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23-25).

The command is to confess our faults to "one to another." This does not authorize the Roman Catholic practice of demanding confessions to a Catholic "priest," or the "Crossroads/Boston/Discipling Movement" of requiring the confession to made to a specific individual. We are all "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

A public sin should be confessed in a public manner. Obviously, all sins must be confessed to God (Acts 8:22). We have the precious promise: "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). God's Word declares: "Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16). Brother Guy N. Woods in his commentary on James states on this Scripture:

There is nothing in the word "confess" itself which indicates whether the confession is *public* or *private*; but the context in which it appears does, inasmuch as it is to one another;

and this, by implication, means that the confession is to be as public as the sins committed. The reason for this is obvious. We are to pray one for another. We may, however, effectively do so, only when a brother confesses his sins and turns away from them (1 John 5:16)... It is necessary in the nature of the case that those who have known of the sins should have equal knowledge of the penitence. But, this we can know only through a confession of the brother involved. *It is, therefore, a practical rule that the confession should be as public as the sin* (305).

Any sin that one refuses to repent of, and confess, will result in the loss of fellowship with God and His church. This is a "sin unto death."

If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it (1 John 5:16).

Guy N. Woods in his commentary on 1 John comments on this, saying:

1. The Lord will forgive every sin, of whatever nature, that a brother confesses (1 John 1:8.)
2. There is, however, a sin which the Lord will not forgive (1 John 5:16.)
3. Therefore, the sin which the Lord will not forgive, is simply *a sin, any sin, all sin that a brother will not confess!* (322).

Therefore, "a sin which is not unto death," is the one which a brother confesses and receives forgiveness for. He is, therefore, restored to Christ and escapes death!

It sometimes is the case that a brother is overtaken in a fault privately, and needs the strength and prayers of the faithful, by privately confessing his faults to a faithful brother in Christ. This is authorized by James 5:16: "confess *your* faults one to another."

Obviously, when one is overtaken in a fault, spiritual brethren are to restore this individual to Christ, by leading him to repent, confess his faults, and by praying for him, which is a great blessing to the fallen:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's

burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-2).

Converting the erring brother or sister in Christ back to the truth (which involves confessing faults one to another) will: “save a soul from death” and “hide a multitude of sins” (Jam. 5:19-20).

God has provided a great blessing to Christians by enabling us to confess our sins to Him and to one another, and to “pray one for another” (5:16; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-2; Gal. 6:1-2). Christ, the

Lifter of burdens, has made a way for man to be forgiven. He said: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat. 11:28)!

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

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### QUESTIONS

1. How would you answer one who has sinned publicly, and refuses to confess his faults, and says: “My sins are between me and God”?
2. Would the Lord’s church have authority from Christ to withdraw from one who acknowledged his sin, but continually proved that he had not repented?
3. How is God “faithful and just” in forgiving our sins when we confess them? Is the blood of Christ involved in this?
4. In what ways is the ability to confess our faults (sins) a great blessing?
5. Who are some great men of the Bible who sinned, repented, and confessed their sins, as is either recorded or implied?

# MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

*Terry M. Hightower*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the striking differences between churches of Christ and most other religious groups is the fact that faithful churches of Christ do not use mechanical instrumental music (hereafter MIM) in worship to God. Many people are surprised to discover when visiting our services that we sing a cappella—making the melody with the heart—without mechanical accompaniment. Sometimes even those who are members of the Lord’s church in effect offer *apologies* for our disuse of pianos, organs, guitars, and the like! We have absolutely nothing to apologize for concerning this subject! Each New Testament Christian ought to be able to explain to our friends what the **Bible** teaches about music in worship and also the importance of why we maintain strong opposition to the presence of another type of music as being unauthorized. When you send your wife to go in for a “tune-up” on your vehicle, and she tells him to “do an engine tune-up,” this does not mean that he is authorized to rebuild the transmission! (Now if you do not *follow* that, you may just get up and leave now—since you have apparently not reached the age of accountability.) The *key* here is the difference between a generic statement like “work on the car” and a specific statement: “do an engine tune-up.” The difference? About \$3000.00! However, there are some other matters that, if misunderstood, will cost you your soul!

## THE BASIC ARGUMENT:

### Major Premise

1. If it is the case that (A) the New Covenant authorizes singing in worship to God, and (B) there is no New Covenant passage authorizing any co-ordinates to singing, then (C) the New Covenant authorizes singing in worship to God exclusively as the music God demands. (A and B imply C). (This is a *Compound Modus Ponens* argument where the hypothetical Major Premise

asserts that if the antecedents “A” and “B” are affirmed then the consequent or conclusion “C” is so connected to them that if they are true, then the conclusion **must** follow. Thus, it is a **valid** argument.)

### Minor Premise: Part A

2-A. It is the case that (A) the New Covenant authorizes *singing* in worship to God.

And when they had **sung** a hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives (Mark 14:26; Mat. 26:30).

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing** hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).

Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, And **sing** unto thy name (Rom. 15: 9).

I will **sing** with the spirit, and I will **sing** with the understanding also (1 Cor. 14:15).

Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing and making melody** with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, **singing** with grace in your hearts unto God (Col. 3:16).

I will declare thy name unto my brethren, In the midst of the congregation will I **sing** thy praise (Heb. 2:12).

Through him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, *the fruit of lips* which make confession to his name (13:15).

Is any among you suffering? let him pray. Is any cheerful? let him **sing** praise (Jam. 5:13).

Is this authorizing Vocal (i.e., singing) Music or MIM? From these passages, we are clearly instructed to **sing** praise unto our God! This is **not** my opinion nor yours—this is exactly what the Bible says! The above verses include all those

New Testament passages that mention music in reference to worshipping Deity and in every one, even in the first two in which the disciples are still under *Judaism* (Col. 2:14), the specified music is *singing*. Is there any question as to what *sing* authorizes in these pertinent verses? No! Does *sing* or *fruit of lips* imply or include *playing* music? No! By the Law of Identity—singing is singing!

### The Minor Premise: Part B

2-B. It is the case that (B) there is no New Covenant passage authorizing any co-ordinates to singing.

**Now here is where our opponents must produce their Biblical evidence for mechanical instruments of music! Note:** All it would take is just **one** New Covenant verse! Ask, where is the New Testament passage (or its equivalent) which says: “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing *and playing* hymns unto God and the prisoners were listening to them”? Until they do so, we refuse to accept their one, presumptuous demand: “**We like it, we want it, and we’re gonna have it!**”

**Note:** The claim has often been made that *sing* or its derivative found in the verses listed above somehow prohibits or excludes *play* or its derivatives. Technically this is not true just as I have demonstrated with the fabricated verse where I added “and playing.” If MIM proponents could find even **one** verse authorizing their contention, it is not countermanded by verses authorizing *singing*. Therefore, why not more accurately call for Bible interpreters to understand the Law of **Inclusion** instead? It is no different from our insistence concerning precision about *baptize*!

The wrong question over the years has been asked by denominationalists and even by some *baby food* (Heb. 5:12-14) members of the church: “Why do you **disallow** mechanical instruments in worship?” I usually ask them: “Why do you **allow** it?” Do not permit others to merely assume their position! Ask them: “Exactly how does the New Covenant authorize **anything** we do in Christianity?” Here is where **they** must produce a Direct Statement, Positive Example, or show by Implication that **playing** music is approved

by God: “Prove [test or try] all things; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil” (1 The. 5:21-22). Ask: “Under the New Covenant law (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; Jam. 1:25) do we have to have Bible authority for **anything** we do?” Where in the 10 verses listed above does a Direct Statement, Positive Example, or Implication occur which justifies anyone to make melody with a mechanical device instead of “singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord”? This hermeneutic could rightfully be referred to in judicial terms as *originalism* or *textualism* where restraint and fidelity to the originally intended meaning is honored.

Just here the MIM adherent will usually attempt to give *philosophical* statements which they claim allow another type of music to be *grandfathered in* with the **Bible** verses listed. I do not want a humanly derived philosophy! I am going to follow Paul’s inspired edict: “Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8).

Interpretive fidelity is at stake here! MIM advocates are parallel to liberal judges (i.e., judicial activists) in our civil government courts who pay no real attention to the text of our Constitution or Bill of Rights and who allow their **personal views or desires** to guide them. Seldom, if ever, will they cite other verses from the New Covenant which they then allege will prove that playing a guitar, piano, organ, or any other mechanical instrument is thus *koshered* or approved by God. Even when they do so, this gets them involved in a multitude of **unintended consequences** or quite unanticipated and **undesirable** drawbacks occurring in addition to the **desired** effect of their hermeneutic policy. Even if foolishly unforeseen by MIM devotees, faithful brethren in debates have demonstrated just how such an interpretive procedure concludes and it is not a pretty sight! Examples of this include: (1) opening the floodgates to any and every type of Old Testament worship, (2) requiring that everyone must play in addition to singing (*psallo* arguments), or (3) having to provide verses *explicitly condemning* baptizing

infants (or burning incense in worship, praying through Mary, smoking dope, using “holy” water, etc.) which MIM advocates foolishly demand of us about MIM.

Our answer here is generally in the mode and method of Jesus which promotes **consistency**: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things” (Mat. 21:24). His repeated call for God’s truth to be compatible with itself is significant (12:27; 22:41-45) and agrees with the very nature of Deity (Isa. 1:18). Following Christ’s technique, Paul would later even apply the principle to personal behavior (i.e., *walking-the-talk*) by pointedly asking: “thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” (Rom. 2:21). There is not a MIM advocate on God’s green earth who does not violate the Law of Non-Contradiction! However, **God** is not the author of such confusion (1 Cor. 14:33)! This type of confusion (i.e., contradiction) is caused by human ignorance and how much humans are prone to self-deception, especially in their failure to give “diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The ASV footnote on this verse of “*holding a straight course in the word of truth*” implies this central tenet of the proper hermeneutic: **consistency**—wherein all the components *fit together* harmoniously. When the total context approach is used, truth always agrees with truth (John 8:32). This is the background for our Lord’s approach to His Father’s Divine Word (Mat. 4:3-4, 5-7, 8-10).

### Conclusion

3. Therefore, the New Covenant authorizes singing in worship to God exclusively as the music God demands.

The Major Premise (1) is related to the compound (A and B) Minor Premise, and (2) if the affirmation of both parts (antecedents A and B) is true which comprise that Minor Premise, then this consequent or conclusion (3) is also true. The Modus Ponens form is a valid one according to any standard logic text and is used in argumenta-

tion by the Holy Spirit Himself (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:4-9). In Matthew 7:11, Jesus used it to argue: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, [then] how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” The Lord’s use of the hypothetical syllogism in Matthew 22:42-45 by means of Psalm 110:1 as His minor premise proved that the Messiah more than a mere son of David; He was also David’s Lord, or God. Thus, our argument is sound, being constructed in a valid form and with true premises.

### DOES IT MATTER—TO GOD?

Many people are simply indifferent to which type of music ought to be offered in worship, even including some modern-day New Testament Christians. Warnings exist all through Scripture that such ignorant persons are playing with fire: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deu. 4:2—NKJV) and this is reiterated in the last book in Rev. 22:18-19. But let us ask a few people whether they think it matters or not if men follow their own plans in religion:

#### Cain And Abel

Cain, what do you think? And you, Abel? (Gen. 4:2-12; Heb. 11:4). Come on, Cain! Your stuff is as good as your brother’s offering and, after all, you are still worshiping the one God Jehovah! Is God that *technical*? (In discussing MIM, one dear sister in Florida said that God was not!)

#### Abraham

Abraham, what do you think? Are you really claiming that *faith* means “doing what God tells you to do”? (Gen. 22:1-17). Okay, I get it: You knew that God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), He promised that you would have a multitude of descendants (Gen. 17:2, 16-19) through this son Isaac (21:12); so when He ordered you to kill Isaac, you simply thought reasonably about this and realized that He would have to raise your only son from the dead; so without totally understanding it—you were willing to do it! (Heb. 11:17-19).

Was this type of strong faith in God worth it, Abraham?

### Nadab and Abihu

Nadab, and your brother, Abihu—what do you men say? What does *profane* mean in front of *fire*? Is *profane* the same as “God-authorized”? (Lev. 10:1-3). Did God let you off because you were drunk? (10:8-10). Do you think it really matters to God that you *distinguish* between the holy and unholy and between unclean and clean?

### King Saul

How about you, King Saul? Is worshipping as God instructs all that important? Is paying attention to the details of that instruction so crucial? Saul, Saul, why are you looking at me like that? Study carefully the accounts in 1 Samuel 13:5-14 and then in 15:8-22, 23-26; 16:14; 31:3-6.

### Priests of Jehovah in Malachi’s Day

You *priests* of Jehovah in Malachi’s day (Mal. 1:6-14), are you claiming that your leading the Jews into unauthorized *giving* is a capital offense? Really? Were you not just being “gracious to the brethren” of your day? You **actually believe** that God’s high standards set for the offerings to be brought to Him **must** be kept? Come on, what is a blind, or lame, or sick animal, or even a blemished or stolen one gonna hurt (1:8, 13)! You fellows have turned into old-fashioned nit-pickers! (**Note:** *say* does not mean one has to sin with one’s lips necessarily in regard to worshipping God—all you have to do is *say it* by your actions—1:9-10—which are opposed to His will in the sense that He never legislated it.) **What?** You now realize that God’s name (1:11, 14) deserves R-E-S-P-E-C-T? You actually maintain that God will not allow Himself to be dishonored and despised in this way, but will regard such as evil deception? (cf. 2:1-8). Surely you know by now that the Deity is not as stringent under the New Covenant!

### New Testament Jews

Exactly what do you New Testament Jews say about your elevating your traditions or “com-

mandments of men” up to the same level as the Mosaic law? Did the Son of God Himself reject you over this *worship thing* (Mark 7:13)? Okay, have it your way, but Matthew 15:9 says: “But in vain do they **worship** me, Teaching *as their* doctrines the precepts of men.”

### Ananias and Sapphira

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), why are you weeping? No matter how you do it, your giving is just between you and Deity. So *stand your ground*, you did far better than a lot of your fellow believers and Mr. Peter should not be allowed to push you around!

### CONCLUSION

The religious world of so-called *Christendom* has been characterized by some of the weakest principles of interpretation that can be imagined in the minds of (uninspired) men, whereas the concept taught in Scripture and by strict logical “laws of thought” involved in total context is what is demanded of the follower of God (cf. Psa. 119:160). Authority does not come from man-made philosophy (Col. 2:8; Acts 17:16-31), but rather from the direct statements, implications, and examples making up the New Covenant. We not only have authority for singing in New Covenant worship, but in the absence of any authority authorizing MIM it is therefore forbidden. Tell me, would you strongly contend with your mechanic who was sanctioned by you to do a “tune-up” on your vehicle but who *added in* an unauthorized “transmission job”? Would you then refuse to contend for the faith (Jude 3) with reference to how we worship the great God of the universe? A mix-up with the mechanic may not end up good for your pocketbook, but “will-worship” (Col. 2:23) is not good for your soul (3:17; 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9; John 4:24; Heb. 7:13-14). “The word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

### WORK CITED

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

**QUESTIONS**

1. Exactly what is the point of the *tune-up* and *rebuild transmission* illustration?
2. Which verse listed as authorizing singing is worded a bit differently than the others?
3. Why is it better to use the term *inclusion* rather than *exclusion*? Explain.
4. What is a central tenet of Christianity—perhaps **the** central tenet of hermeneutics?
5. Authority does not come from man-made philosophy but rather from what?

# SPIRITUAL GIFTS

*Bruce Stulting*

There seems to be a keen interest in spiritual gifts today among students of the Bible. However, this interest is accompanied by much confusion. This confusion over spiritual gifts is the result of ignorance of God's Word. Furthermore, many trust in their feelings rather than faith that comes from a study of God's inspired Word (2 Tim. 2:15; Rom. 10:17).

All that can be known about spiritual gifts is found in the Bible. What someone claims to be able to do or what someone claims to have seen is not evidence. Any belief that contradicts the Bible is false and, therefore, sinful. In this lesson, we will: (1) consider some of the false views of spiritual gifts, (2) discuss the purpose of spiritual gifts, and (3) discuss the duration of spiritual gifts.

## **FALSE VIEWS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

There are various false views regarding spiritual gifts. Some views may seem to be a harmless misuse of the term. However, words do have meanings, and we must strive to call Bible things by Bible names. Yet, other views seek to extend the duration of spiritual gifts beyond Biblical limits.

### **Wrong Views Held Regarding the Purpose of Spiritual Gifts**

As to the nature of these gifts, some believe that they are various talents that individuals possess that are to be used in service to God. On the Waterbury church of Christ web site in Waterbury, CT, one can find a survey that is used to take a Spiritual Gifts Inventory.

This is not a test so there are no wrong answers. The Spiritual Gifts Inventory consists of 80 statement items. Some items reflect concrete actions; other items are descriptive traits; and still others are statements of belief ("Spiritual Gifts").

This survey is to be filled out and submitted to the elders.

Another example of this is seen on the West Waynesboro church of Christ web site in Waynesboro, VA.

A Spiritual gift is, a gift or ability that God entrusts to each of His people in order to involve them in the task of advancing His purposes together. It is very possible and highly likely, that each follower of Christ, possesses more than one gift, although, one gift will probably score higher than all the rest. If you would like to know how God has wired and gifted you, in order to better serve Him and His Church, you can click on the text below for a (PDF) version of a spiritual gifts assessment test ("Spiritual Gifts Assessment").

It is obvious that these two congregations (among others) believe that spiritual gifts are various talents that everyone possess which are to be used in God's service. However, *spiritual gifts* is never used this way in the Scriptures. To introduce his discussion of the purpose and duration of miracles, Paul stated, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Cor. 12:1).

### **False Views Held Regarding the Purpose and Duration of Miracles**

Most, if not all, denominations (including Roman Catholicism) believe and teach spiritual gifts are still available today. Pentecostals and Assemblies of God (along with various others) believe miraculous spiritual gifts are to last throughout the entire Christian age. Furthermore, it is a commonly held belief among most other denominations that these gifts continue today in a limited way. They are convinced that the Holy Spirit continues to illuminate, lead, and strengthen the individual believer. It is believed that the Holy Spirit does this separate and apart from and in addition to the Word of God. It is unfortunate that both views have made inroads into the church of our Lord.

## THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Spiritual gifts were an important part of the early church. Today, if anyone desires to know God's will, he needs only pick up a Bible and study. During the infancy of the church, Christians were not afforded this luxury since the Bible was yet incomplete. Spiritual gifts were used in the first century by God to reveal His will to man. Following is a brief discussion of the purpose of spiritual gifts.

### Spiritual Gifts Were Used for the Revelation, Proclamation, and Confirmation of God's Word

There are nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 which are: wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Jeremiah stated, "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). Thus, man needed instruction from God. This required **revelation**. Furthermore, man needed to **proclaim** the right message in the correct language. This required the gifts of prophecy, discerning of spirits, and interpretation of tongues.

Since the early Christians did not have the complete New Testament, it was necessary to **confirm the message** that was being taught. The revelation they received and were proclaiming had to be proven that it was indeed the Word of God. Therefore, God gave them the gifts of faith, healing miracles, and tongues (Acts 3:11; 13:11; 1 Cor. 14:22; Acts 2:1-5 respectively). In fulfilling the Great Commission, the apostles "went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). Later, the Hebrews writer asked:

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him* (Heb. 2:3).

Furthermore, Paul stated that the New Covenant was *confirmed* (Gal. 3:15).

We conclude that the spiritual gifts spoken of in the New Testament were used for the specific purpose of revelation, proclamation, and confirmation of God's message. Any attempt to assign a different purpose to these gifts results in corrupting God's Word, which is a sin (1:6-10; Rev. 22:18-19).

## THE DURATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As we previously noted, the Bible teaches miraculous gifts were needed for a specific purpose. However, these gifts were only temporary. They were to confirm the Word until the revelation was completed in written form. Once the written revelation was complete, spiritual gifts would come to an end. Regarding this, Paul wrote:

Love never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall be done away; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:8-13—ASV).

Notice verse 8:

Love never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall be done away; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall be done away (ASV).

Paul said, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away" (13:9-10—ASV). There can be no doubt that this is a reference to the miraculous spiritual gifts and that these gifts would pass away. That which is *in part* gives way to that which is *complete*. The things that were in part, the spiritual gifts, were used to bring the revelation of God's will to man. However, when this revelation was committed to writing as it was in the first century, there remained no further purpose for these spiritual

gifts. Therefore, when the finished revelation, the Bible, was complete, the things that were in part were abolished.

Paul continues in verse 9, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.” During the infant stage of the church, the written revelation from God was not complete. Spiritual gifts were needed to guide the church. However, in verse 10, Paul, predicts: “But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away” (ASV). The point here is that the miraculous spiritual gifts would cease when “that which is perfect” came. But, to what does *perfect* refer?

Some apply “that which is perfect” to Jesus Christ. They believe that the miraculous spiritual gifts were intended to last until the Second Coming of Jesus. They conclude, since Jesus has not yet returned, the spiritual gifts must continue. However, Paul did **not** say “when He who is perfect has come.” He said, “that which is perfect.” Paul’s words do not fit the context if we apply them to Jesus. Also, we must remember that *perfect* literally means “complete” or “whole.” It does not refer to sinless perfection, but to maturity, or completion. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 13, the *perfect* refers to completion of the New Testament.

There is something else in 1 Corinthians 13:13 which clearly proves that *perfect* cannot refer to Christ’s Second Coming. Paul wrote: “But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three” (ASV). The point is that faith, hope, and love will continue after that which is perfect is come. Yet, faith and hope will end at the Second Coming of Jesus. Regarding hope, Paul said, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom. 8:24). From this we learn that at the Second Coming of Jesus, hope will end. Therefore, “that which is perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 cannot refer to Christ.

In verse 11, Paul uses the illustration of the child growing to maturity. At the time of Paul’s writing, the church was in its infancy. Paul shows that the complete revelation would be a sign that the church had reached its maturity. The Bible itself claims to be all-sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Since that is the case, why do we need miracu-

lous gifts now that the Bible is complete? We are now in the time that Paul predicted would come (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

A complete revelation from God was given in the first century or during the lifetime of the apostles. In John 16:13, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into **all truth**. That does not leave any truth to be revealed. Jesus said, “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*” (17:8). The application of this can be seen in Paul’s statement to the Ephesians:

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 (Eph. 3:3-5).

Paul said the Holy Spirit revealed the mystery unto him. He wrote it down, and we can read it and understand it. Our faith is to be based upon the written Word (John 20:30-31). It is complete and final (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This statement would take into consideration the concluding work of the then living apostles and prophets.

Jude instructed Christians to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). The Scriptures were not going to be revealed over and over again, not even twice but only “**once**.” Therefore, since we have a complete and final revelation from God, we must conclude that no one has the gift of *wisdom* and *knowledge* (miraculous) today. These gifts (along with all other spiritual gifts) served their purpose and terminated in the first century.

## CONCLUSION

There is ample evidence in the New Testament to know the meaning, purpose, and duration of spiritual gifts. The fact is, the purpose of these gifts ended with the completion of the New Testament. Therefore, we must conclude that they have ceased.

The Word of God is all-sufficient to produce obedient faith.

Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name (John 20:30-31—ASV).

The *perfect* Word provides all we need to know, and the providence of God is promised to us as we make our way toward the eternal home of the soul.

### WORKS CITED

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

“Spiritual Gifts Inventory.” Waterbury Church of Christ. 22 May 2017. <<http://waterburychurch.org/Home/SpiritualGifts.aspx>>.

“Spiritual Gifts Assessment Test.” West Waynesboro Church of Christ. 22 May 2017. <<http://www.westwaynesboro.com/about/spiritual-gifts-assessment.html>>.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of spiritual gifts as used in the Bible?
2. What was the purpose of spiritual gifts as used in the Bible?
3. To what/whom does “that which is perfect” refer?
4. What is the duration of spiritual gifts?
5. What is the product of spiritual gifts?

# THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD

*Gary W. Summers*

## BACKGROUND

Jeremiah 8:22 describes a condition among God's people that could not grow any worse. The prophet lived during the last forty years of Judah's history which culminated in the nation being taken captive. God sent them warnings through men like Jeremiah, but the people

mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till *there was no remedy* (2 Chr. 36:16).

Therefore, the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations prove to be two of the saddest in the entire Bible—yet, ironically, at the same time, proper consideration of them makes for one of the richest and most rewarding studies the Bible student will ever engage in.

Setting the tone for the plea about balm in Gilead is Jeremiah 7:27: "Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you." All of Jeremiah's preaching, therefore, would seem to be an exercise in futility. So why did God want him to preach?

- The foremost reason is that He needed to make His will known and give His people an opportunity to repent.
- A second reason might be that it afforded Him the opportunity to reveal His disposition toward the nation's continued and perverse stubbornness.
- Third, Jeremiah's numerous warnings serve to put all people of all times under notice that destruction also awaits other nations (and individuals) who turn their backs on God. To make this point of impending doom, God (through His prophet Jeremiah) uses imagery that is rich beyond measure. The reader cannot miss the incredible sadness on the part of God and His prophet. The people's re-

jection of God is described in so many inventive ways that no one could overlook what is happening—except the very people to whom it is occurring. God told Jeremiah to tell the people, for example: "This *is* a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth" (7:28).

- A fourth reason for Jeremiah's life's work might be that it serves as a means by which to measure ourselves. How close are we to truth perishing today? In some quarters of the brotherhood, it already has, and in most religious denominations it is well-known that "doctrine doesn't matter." How far are we from being overwhelmed by modern-day idolatry, including humanism, evolution, and various forms of "spiritual correctness" (such as believing in denominationalism and its various doctrines)?

Of course, Christians today dwell among those in the world; we are not an exclusive nation, as Judah was. But sadly, both society and the church are largely in rebellion against God. We have not degenerated to the level of Judah prior to the captivity by Babylon in 586 BC—yet, but we have traveled a long way down the road toward that destination. What does it look like just before the end? God provides the nation a list of complaints. The first two we have already noted but supply the entire list below from Jeremiah 7:27-34.

1. They would not obey the inspired words of Jeremiah, God's prophet (7:27).
2. They would not receive correction (7:28).
3. They either could not recognize truth when they heard it or would not accept it—or both (7:29).

4. They had done evil in God's sight by setting abominations up in the house of the Lord, which resulted in its being polluted (7:30).
5. In the Valley of the son of Hinnom they were burning their sons and daughters in the fire at the high places of Tophet (7:31).

Let us consider these five points. Disobedience to God (number 1) has always been at the core of man's problems. Adam's and Eve's rebellion resulted in them losing their home in Eden. The world uniting against God at Babel resulted in mankind's languages being changed and the people being scattered to the ends of the earth. Why did the people of Jeremiah's day think they would fare any better? If, for some reason, they did not believe the prophet to be inspired, they surely knew that Moses was. Could they not know something as fundamental as the prohibition against idols (graven images)? Had they not heard, "Thou shalt not kill"? Or had they imagined that they finagled their way around that commandment?

Regardless of any sin that someone commits, the worse offense is his attitude toward it (number 2). Refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing is fatal because one must confess a sin before it can be forgiven (1 John 1:9). Many are like the adulterous woman, who ate, then wiped her mouth, and said, "I have done no wickedness" (Pro. 30:20). David was guilty of violating two of the Ten Commandments, yet he humbled himself before God and was forgiven. Without that "broken and contrite heart" (Psa. 51:17), one remains lost in his sins.

Some may not have been able to recognize truth because they were unaccustomed to hearing it (number 3). After a few decades passed by with only a few rational voices, the people began to think Jeremiah and those like him were the ones who were screwy. In modern times, some will visit our assemblies of worship and comment how strange it is for us not to use mechanical instruments of music. "I could never worship where there are no instruments. That's just too weird." Undoubtedly, it does seem bizarre if one has been

accustomed to it all of one's life, but the question ought to be, "Is it right in God's eyes?" If God has not authorized it for our worship, then we have no right to go back to the Law of Moses to try to justify it (Gal. 5:1-4).

Others may know the truth but just do not care or do not think it matters. How many brethren today have been influenced by post-modernism which allows people to disagree and contradict each other while claiming both are right? A significant portion of brethren have undoubtedly bought into the denominational error that grace covers everything—including (evidently) false teaching. The New Testament refutes such a notion in almost every book—from Matthew 7:15 to Acts 20:28-30 to Galatians 1:6-9 to 1 Timothy 4:12 to 1 John 4:1 to Jude 3 to Revelation 22:18-19. Yet, the erudite and sophisticated among us imagine they are somehow wiser than Holy Writ. No one can be saved without a love of the truth (2 The. 2:10).

Imagine polluting God's house with idols (number 4)! What an insult to the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth! How could anyone give honor to idols who are nothing? Did they not remember Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal—how utterly ineffective those men were who worked themselves into a frenzy, to the point of cutting themselves (1 Kin. 18)? Yet, they could not get Baal to produce even a flickering spark over their sacrifice, let alone consume their offering—because idols are powerless to respond. At least the people of Elijah's day responded by proclaiming, "The LORD, He *is* God! The LORD, He *is* God!" (18:39). No such conclusion was remembered (or desired to be recalled) in Jeremiah's day. What could be worse than polluting the sacred temple of the Lord with such riffraff?

Significantly worse was the killing of their innocent children—as sacrifices to these worthless idols (number 5). How could a parent stand to do such a thing? Had compassion died? Probably, they were told something like this: "If you sacrifice your child to Molech (the deity of Moab), he will make you fruitful and prosperous so you will have many more children." Or maybe, it had

just become so commonplace in their culture that they just accepted it (as many do abortion today), as heinous as it was.

At any rate, these are the charges of God against His people. Being guilty of any one of these sins would merit destruction, but all of them together would bring about a massive punishment.

### GOD'S REACTION

Judah had defiled God's temple and God's laws. He would destroy their place of "worship," where they sacrificed their children. Jeremiah records God's pronouncement: "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room" (Jer. 7:32), which occurred when Jerusalem fell. Many would not even be buried; their corpses would become food for the birds (7:33). No more in Jerusalem would there be expressions of happiness, nor would there exist the usual joy accompanying marriages, for the land would be desolate (7:34).

This gloomy outlook is not mitigated in the slightest; it grows worse in terms of what God describes next, which leads up to the question about their being balm in Gilead. First, God totally **disrespects** this generation. Consider these chilling words.

"At that time," says the LORD, "they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves. They shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served and after which they have walked, which they have sought and which they have worshiped. They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. Then death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of those who remain of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I have driven them," says the LORD of hosts (8:1-3).

One would think that when the people of Judah heard these somber words that it would give them pause to evaluate their standing with God. Ordinarily, God did not approve of the desecra-

tion of the dead. They were to be treated with respect and honor. A previous exception occurred in connection with the fake priests of the altar of Bethel that Jeroboam had set up. God sent the man of God to cry out against it; he prophesied that a future king, Josiah, would burn the bones of the priests upon the same altar whereon they burned incense (1 Kin. 13:2).

The way God felt about the false religion Jeroboam had introduced in Israel (for which the nation was taken captive (2 Kin. 17:21) is the way He now felt about all of the Israelites who lived in Judah. The bones of the kings, the princes, the rebellious priests, and the false prophets—along with the people who willingly followed them—would be defiled to show God's contempt and disdain for them (and for all who find themselves in similar situations).

God chose to call this generation "an evil family." The Bible had previously described an evil family—that of Ahab and Jezebel, which included their daughter Athaliah who destroyed every heir of the king of Judah—almost. Yet, even Ahab had a moment of faith in Jehovah; his grandson Jehoram also had a few noble moments. However, this evil family of Judah defies imagination. Consider some of the descriptions leading up to this point in Jeremiah's writings.

The nation had **forsaken** the Lord their God, burned incense to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands (Jer. 1:16; 2:19), **played the harlot with many lovers** (3:1), **dealt treacherously** with Jehovah (3:20), were **wise to do evil** while lacking knowledge to do good (4:22), had **made their faces harder than rock** and **refused to return** (5:3), **vainly imagined** that evil (including war or famine) would never come upon them (5:12), had given themselves over to **covetousness**, and could not experience shame or even **blush** (6:13-15) (Rollo 159-61).

Jeremiah 5:31 encapsulates the character of the people:

The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their *own* power; And My people love to *have it so*. But what will you do in the end?

Is it any wonder that the Lord would take into captivity a generation this smug? The people re-

fused to listen to the inspired Word of God and follow the objective truth that had been known for a thousand years. Instead they “followed the counsels *and* the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward” (7:24).

Does not this describe the practice of the people in the time of the judges when there was no king in Israel? Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Jud. 17:6; 21:25). Unfortunately, it also describes most of society today. People refuse to adhere to the objective standard of morality given from God; instead they set **themselves** up as judges of what is right and wrong, which is the self-governing (autonomy) tenet of humanism. As in Israel, so today such thinking is a rejection of God and an exaltation of man. The result is the same, however—God’s wrath.

Nevertheless, God attempts to reason with His people. If a man falls, does he not try to get up (Jer. 8:4)? As *The Pulpit Commentary* says:

Who ever sees a fallen man stay quietly on the ground without attempting to rise? or a man who has wandered out of the path persist in going the wrong direction? (11:214).

Such would be foolhardy indeed. Yet, Jerusalem is engaged in a perpetual backsliding. They choose to dwell in deceit rather than to walk in the light of truth (Jer. 8:5). This writer once observed a semi almost climb to the top of a long, icy hill. The vehicle fell short of the goal, however, and began sliding backward. The man behind the wheel undoubtedly took measures to stop that perpetual backsliding, but nothing availed; he ended up at the bottom of the hill. The difference between the hapless truck driver and Israel was that he had no control over what happened—Jerusalem did. Any time they wanted to leave the lies they were being told and face reality squarely, they could have repented, but they chose to maintain their unprofitable course. If some religious groups were appropriately named today, they would call themselves, “The Church of Perpetual Backsliding.”

God listened for a positive response but received none (8:6). The people did not speak according to reality; perhaps they created their own, as New Age adherents propose we do. They had

the temerity of asking, “What have I done?” Really? With all the messages they had heard up to this point, they were not cognizant of any wrongdoing on their part? They must have engaged in a tremendous amount of self-deception. Everyone just ended up turning “to his own course,” which might work better if we all had permission to judge ourselves. Who would not fare well if that were the case? A horse rushing into battle acts on instinct and emotion, which can result in injury or death. People operating on natural instincts coupled with emotion often find themselves in catastrophic circumstances.

The Lord gave animals certain instincts that serve them well (when not overpowered by emotion). They migrate; they spawn; they do what God created them to do, but God’s people cannot exercise the good sense that God gave a goose. They should know that their sins will bring judgment, but they seem to tune out the message (8:7). How then can the priest, the false prophets, the rulers, or the people say, “We *are* wise, And the law of the LORD *is* with us?” (8:8)? What good is it to have God’s law if nobody is willing to listen to it or practice it? If a man had a million dollars placed in his bank account, it would do no good unless he was willing to spend it. Would we not all think it was foolish for him to have his car repossessed and his house foreclosed on, when he could use the money in his savings to cover his expenses. So is it unwise to possess God’s law but fail to benefit from it.

In the latter part of verse 8, God sets the record straight. The scribe is using a false pen to convey falsehoods. He does not merely speak wrongly although sincere. He knows he is setting forth lies (Probably the people hearing them know it, too.) When someone contradicts the Word of God, how smart are they? The devil knows how easy it is to add the word **not** to a commandment (Gen. 3:4). His followers specialize in the practice (Jer. 8:8-9).

Oh, but such atrocious behavior brings with it a penalty. Their wives and property shall be given to others. Everyone has been motivated by covetousness, and no exceptions can be cited—including the priests and the prophets. Everyone deals

falsely (8:10). They have made people feel better by proclaiming that there will be peace when war will occur instead (8:11). Even worse, their consciences are so seared that they will practice any evil (8:12). If a person commits a minor infraction of God's law, he will likely experience a twinge of conscience, but the greatest of sins can now be committed, and no accusing voice will shame them. Their time of punishment is coming. God will consume them, taking away their food and drink and other blessings (8:13).

Now there comes an exchange between God and the people. When things begin to go awry, some of the people will seek to escape, seeking fortified cities, where they can be protected. Now they will think of God—that He is bringing evil upon them for their sins, as promised (8:14). It begins to dawn on them that the prophets had lied because they looked for peace in vain. They receive trouble instead of health (8:15). Babylon destroying Jerusalem had been prophesied; judgment was upon them. One could hear in God's (formerly) holy city the snorting of Babylon's horses all the way from Dan (which was in the far north, closest to Babylon (8:16).

Ironically, as Jacob (Israel) was blessing his sons, he said of Dan: "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, A viper by the path, That bites the horse's heels So that its rider shall fall backward" (Gen. 49:17). Now horses from Babylon would be trampling through Dan, and accompanying them would be serpents and vipers which would bite the inhabitants of the nation (Jer. 8:17). As Jeremiah envisions the captivity and punishment, he tries to comfort himself in the sorrow he feels; his heart is faint within him (8:18). Now he experiences torture by what he envisions.

From a far country, the daughter of His people cry out: "*Is not the LORD in Zion?*" A parallelism echoes the thought: "*Is not her king in her?*" (8:19). In other words, "How could God let this happen? Does He, our King, no longer rule?" Sure, **now** they are willing to acknowledge Him instead of the false deities they had been serving, but it is too late. God replies, "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their carved images—With foreign idols?" (8:19). God's answer

to the mournful strains of the people's dirge is to remind them that they brought this punishment upon themselves by their continual backsliding—their never-ending obsession with their idols, who could neither protect them nor keep them from the ravages of war.

The people resume their lament: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (8:20). *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests "*fruit-gathering*" would be more appropriate than "summer," adding: "When the harvest was over and the fruit-gathering ended, the husbandman looked for a quiet time of refreshment" (Cheyne 11:216). Metaphorically, they had received their harvest of idolatry, paying a dear price for their sins; why were they not now delivered from their captors?

### JEREMIAH'S REACTION

One might think that constant rejection of the message God gave Jeremiah to preach would produce an, "I told you so," attitude. "You should have listened to me; so don't expect any sympathy now. It's not as though I didn't warn you." One would be wrong if he so thought. Jeremiah's heart is breaking as he sees what will occur: "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me" (Jer. 8:21). He could have felt vindicated, but instead he feels sorrow of the deepest kind. He knows they deserve it. They are suffering justly for their sins, having received plenty of warnings concerning what would happen—including this one. But they refused, *refused*, **refused** to pay heed to the love God expressed in providing multiple messages of the dire consequences they would endure. Today, they would be analogous to a driver not believing the signs shouting out, "**Danger Ahead! Bridge Out!**" He just blithely continues his journey to death and destruction.

The prophet cries out, "*Is there* no balm in Gilead, *Is there* no physician there?" (8:22). The balm of Gilead was prized for its medicinal value—so much so that it was exported to other nations round about. Jeremiah asks rhetorically if they have run out of the healing substance, as well as a physician to apply it? In other words, is

there nothing that can heal the hurt of the people? Of course, Gilead still possesses balm, and probably the city does not lack physicians to administer it, either. “Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?” He knows the answer but cannot refrain from asking the question. He, of all people, knows the sins of the people. He also knows that the captivity will last 50 more years (making a total of 70 from the time of the first wave of captivity when Daniel was taken (25:11-12). He knows Israel is more than worthy of all she has received, but he cannot contain his compassion.

“Oh, that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people!” (9:1). The opening of Lamentations continues this thought, mentioning the loneliness of the now-empty city of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:1), the tears she has shed (1:2), her captivity (1:3), the prospering of her enemies (1:5), and their mocking of her (1:7). Considering the great ruin of both the city and the people, Jeremiah asks:

*Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?  
Behold and see If there is any sorrow like  
my sorrow, Which has been brought on me,  
Which the LORD has inflicted In the day of  
His fierce anger (1:12).*

### APPLICATIONS

Does this text have any applications for us? The following are suggested.

God totally **disrespected** the generation that was taken captive. How Daniel and his three friends came to be so faithful is a mystery; perhaps it was their youth. Even flowers occasionally bloom in peculiar places. Would it not be ironic if, within one century of time, America went from being “the greatest generation” to “the most self-absorbed and wicked” generation! We are definitely slouching toward Gomorrah. “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin *is* a reproach to *any* people” (Pro. 14:34).

Members of the Lord’s church should not **discourage** preachers and elders. At one point, Jeremiah decided to quit preaching because of the lack of response. In fact, he did. However, he could not refrain from proclaiming God’s mes-

sage which was like a fire burning within him (Jer. 20:9). Unfortunately, many men have succeeded where Jeremiah failed. The fact that a faithful man of God even **thought** about quitting his life’s work shows that no one is immune. Probably, most preachers have questioned the worth of their efforts and at least thought about it—if only briefly. Elders likewise have resigned because of the burdens of their task. For that reason, God says plainly to Christians:

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Christians today should make it a primary goal not to **disappoint** God. God has given us the way in which to walk. He has commanded us to grow in knowledge and in faith (1 Pet. 2:2; 3:18; Heb. 5:12-14, etc.). If we fail to love God and our brethren, we have failed, period. If we fail to love the church and to put it first, we must make Jesus sorrowful. We dare not risk leaving our first love (Rev. 2:4). Growing complacent makes us nauseous to our Lord (3:14-16). We can do better than some of the bad examples seen in the early church. Israel was a continual disappointment to God. May we be a source of joy to Him.

Especially important is it to make sure that we do not **disqualify** ourselves from salvation, as the people of Jeremiah’s day did. We may imagine that we are stronger than we really are; we should take heed, lest we fall (1 Cor. 10:12). Paul said that he had to discipline himself lest, after he preached to others, he might himself be disqualified (9:27). God requires vigilance on our part. We cannot be ignorant of the devil’s devices (2 Cor. 2:11). He is subtle, introducing the Christian to sin through milder than obvious forms of temptation. His goal is to get us started down the road of compromise which will lead us to ever more serious forms of disobedience. Movies serve as an excellent example of the way this works. Three decades ago we would have been horrified to hear the language that now peppers a two-hour story. Now we comment, “Oh, there were only a dozen or so

words in it.” Likewise, what was once described as *cheesecake* has become nudity, showing most of the parts of the human anatomy. Are Christians really so starved for entertainment that they feel compelled to support this industry? Even advertisements in print and commercials on television would probably have qualified as pornography not many years ago.

This insidious creeping of worldliness spreads through the church, also, with some objecting to sermons on modesty or the drinking of alcoholic beverages. Some preachers have even been fired for setting forth the truth on these matters. In addition to the moral conditions of the world infiltrating the church, so is the influence of false teaching. The use of unfortunate translations, the lack of Bible study that transcends the superficial, and elders who will not take a firm stance when faced with error all contribute to a drifting away from the moorings of truth (Heb. 2:1-4).

Also disqualifying some Christians from God’s favor is their refusal to live evangelistically. Not

everyone can knock on doors (although most can), but God provides ways for all Christians to spread the Gospel. We all have a responsibility to be light and salt (Mat. 5:13-16). We are all debtors to those lost in sin (Rom. 1:14). Being evangelistic begins with thinking properly. If we had the vision of lost souls being tortured in flames, we might display better the compassion of Jeremiah. He saw what would happen to his people. Jesus explained the destiny of all those who live as the rich man did (Luke 16:19-31). Brothers and sisters of the kingdom must realize that there is a balm in Gilead, and we are the ones to make it available to sin-sick souls.

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### QUESTIONS

1. What are four reasons God had Jeremiah preach since He knew that no one would respond?
2. What are God’s five complaints against the people in Jeremiah 7:27-34?
3. What action on God’s part showed His disrespect for the nation?
4. What is ironic about hearing horses as far north as Dan?
5. How might Christians disqualify themselves?

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