

Truth

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The Preacher's STUDY

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, KJV).



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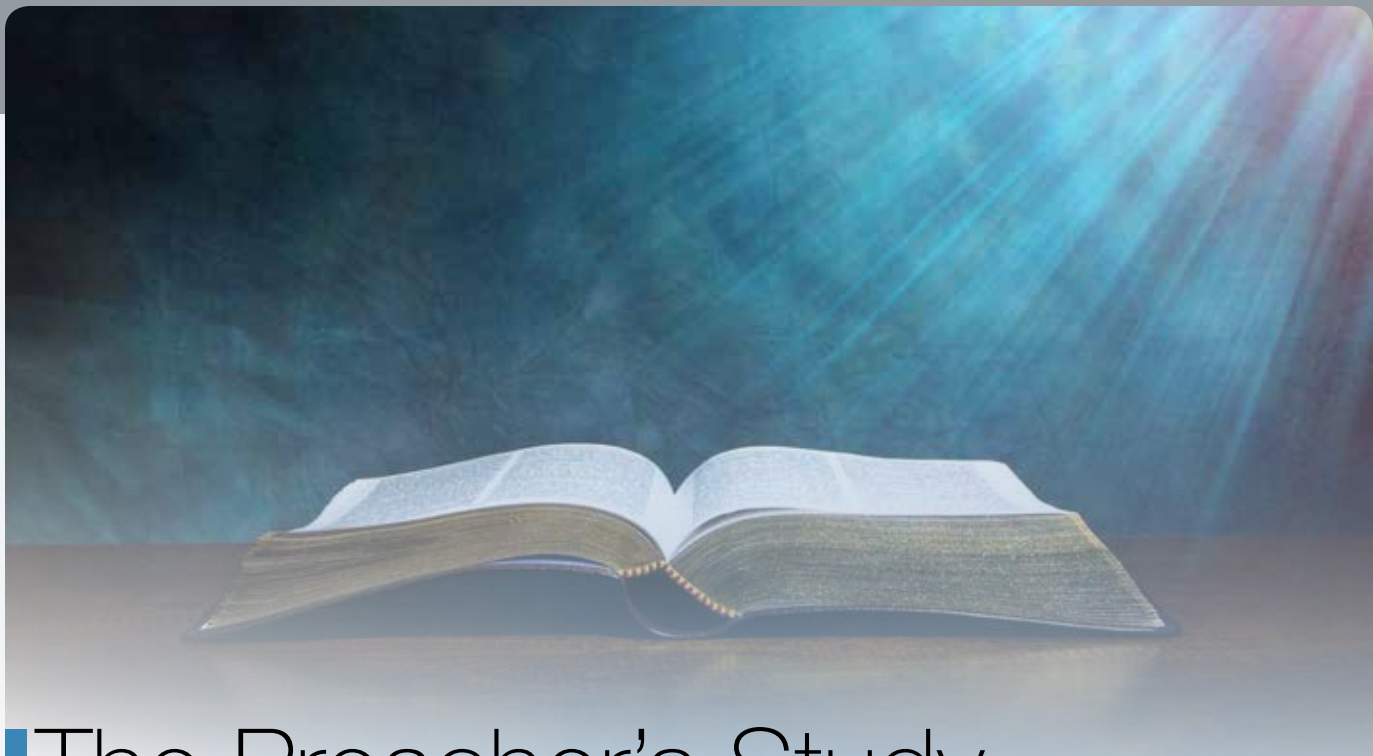
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Gospel preaching should be compelling and fresh, but we must not become obsessed with telling or hearing something new.

The School of Hard Falls

by Mark Mayberry

On January 5th, 2017, my life *literally* turned upside down. In a moment, I went from being healthy and whole to a state of serious injury and brokenness. With one false step, I went from enjoying my surroundings to being imperiled by the same.

I love running, logging over 1,600 miles during 2016. Visiting our family in Kentucky, I was off to another good start. Early on the morning of January fifth, 2017, I left the house while it was still dark, and for the next several hours, I thoroughly enjoyed myself, running at a leisurely pace, enjoying the beauty of being outdoors at the dawning of a new day.

Broad Run Park, located a few miles south of Louisville, is a place of solitude and subtle beauty. Running trails meander through 600 acres of forested hillsides and broad bottom lands, beside meandering creeks, jagged cliffs, and cascading waterfalls. The lights of Louisville glowed to the north as fog lifted from the valleys and snow drifted down from above.

Starting my run early so as to hopefully beat the snow, initially, I could see the slick places along the path and successfully avoid them. Eventually, snow began to cover the path, hiding the patches of black ice. I began running on the grass beside the track, especially on steep inclines, so as to maintain proper footing. For two-and-a-half hours, everything was fine, until I reached the 11.5 mark of a 13.1-mile run. Since the terrain was not so hilly, and the footing seemed good, I had begun running along the paved pathway. However, with one false

step, everything changed. Hitting a hidden slick spot, my feet shot out from under me, and I landed hard on my back, resulting in seven fractured ribs and a punctured lung which partially collapsed with internal bleeding.

Serenity gave way to danger, and pleasure gave way to pain. Because it was snowing, sensible people were at home. I was alone, sprawled on my back, in agonizing pain. Forcing myself to get up, I was able to walk the remaining distance back to my car. After running the heater for a while (It was twenty-eight degrees, and I was sweaty from a long run.), being unable to reach anyone on the phone, I slowly drove back to the house of John and Frani Smith, parents of our daughter-in-law, Sarah. After being assisted up the steps and into the house, I sat (wrapped in blankets) shaking uncontrollably for 20 minutes, suffering from the combined effects of shock and becoming so chilled.

My first inclination was to “tough it out.” However, after being examined by a nurse who lived across the street (whose name, incidentally, was also Mayberry, but of no kin), she ordered me to the emergency room. Nathan, our son, drove us to the hospital. When x-rays revealed the extent of my injuries, I was transferred by ambulance to the University of Louisville Hospital, a local trauma center, where I remained for eight days.

Had my injury only involved fractured ribs, it would not have been so bad. However, the punctured, collapsed lung, coupled with internal bleeding, required the insertion of a

drain tube in my chest. Unfortunately, it took much longer for the punctured lung to seal. Thus, I “enjoyed” an extended stay at “Club Med.” Days were long, and nights were longer.

Throughout the ordeal, I kept thinking to myself, “Lord, what are you trying to teach me?” Over the course of time, the following thoughts crystalized in my mind. So, beyond the obvious (“Mark, don’t be stupid, and run alone on icy pathways!”), here are a few of the lessons learned from this experience.

Life’s Fragility

Life is fragile and fleeting. The wise man said, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1).

The New Testament echoes and expands this same theme:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin (James 4:13-17).

Life’s Uncertainty

In Ecclesiastes 9:10-12, Solomon offers counsel for wise living: approach each day with diligence, but recognize

that life is filled with uncertainty—
"time and chance" overtake all men.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going. I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them" (Eccl. 9:10-12).

Determination

When I slipped on the ice, and was in great pain, I just wanted to lay there. However, since I was sweaty and the temps were below freezing, I recognized, "I must get up." Despite the intense pain, I forced myself to roll over from my back, and using my head as a pivot point, was able to push myself up from the ground, eventually stand up, and begin the long slow walk back to the safety and warmth of my vehicle (over 3.5 km away).

Sometimes grim determination is required. Nearing the end of His earthly ministry (Luke 9:51-56), and on the brink of His betrayal, and ensuing passion, Jesus exhibited this quality (Luke 22:39-46).

The KJV reads, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem..." (Luke 9:51). According to the NASB, "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem..."

Jesus manifested the same resolve in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My

will, but Yours be done." Luke adds, "Being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:39-46).

Patience

During my hospitalization, a good friend offered wise advice, saying, "Be a patient patient, Mark." Because of the severity of my injuries (with seven broken ribs and a punctured lung), I did not recover as quickly as the doctors hoped. Yet, they kept saying, "The process will work if you give it time." Sure enough, the bleeding eventually stopped and they could remove the drain tube from my chest.

Solomon said, "The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit" (Eccl. 7:8). Patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), an essential quality for spiritual growth and faithfulness (Col. 1:9-12).

Trust

Sometimes the solution to our problems lies outside ourselves. We may be able to respond in some measure, but ultimately we must depend upon others, and especially God, for assistance. I learned to trust in my doctors, nurses, and those who were dedicated to helping me recover.

Writing to the Philippians from Roman imprisonment, and speaking of his future plans, Paul said, "Therefore I hope to send him (Timothy) immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly" (Phil. 2:23-24). Note the language: "I hope... I trust..." The Psalmist said, "But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever" (Ps. 52:8).

Thankfulness

I stand amazed at the outpouring of love from friends and family. Brethren here at Adoue Street have been so supportive. Disciples from the Hebron Lane congregation in Shepherdsville, KY (where Nathan and Sarah attend) visited me repeatedly while I was in the University of Louisville Hospital. Brethren around the world sent well-wishes and offered up prayers on my behalf. Thank you, Shereilyn. Thank you, Nathan and Sarah. Thank you, Ryan and Emilee. Thank you, John and Frani, for providing a home away from home. Thank you, Alan and Julie, for providing a place of rest and recovery as we journeyed home. Thank you, dear brethren, for your many expressions of concern and acts of charity. Such demonstrations of Christian compassion, by family, by life-long friends, by brethren near and far, by those well-known and otherwise unknown, is a testament to the power of the gospel. God is good. He helps us, directly and indirectly, as we face trials and tribulations.

Conclusion

Life is fragile and uncertain. Let us, therefore, approach it with determination, patience, trust, and thankfulness. "You are my God, and I give thanks to n are my God, I extol You. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting." (Ps. 118:28-29). **T**



Mark Mayberry
Editor

Mark and Shereilyn have labored with the Adoue Street church of Christ in Alvin, TX since 1998, where he serves as the evangelist and an elder. His website is <http://markmayberry.net/> and his email is mark@truthpublications.com.

Words on Stone and Parchment

by Kyle Pope

God's written revelation of His word began at a unique point in human history when it could be read and understood by all.

Imagine teaching a class of little children to write for the very first time. You would start with the alphabet, but imagine having to teach them 15,000 characters! As difficult as that might seem, it helps us appreciate the remarkable timing of when God chose to begin the process of revealing His written word to mankind.

In the earliest stages of God's dealings with man, He spoke directly to the heads of families (Gen. 3:9; 4:6; 7:1; 13:14; 31:3; Exod. 4:4). For centuries, there was no record of any written revelation of God's will. From what we know about the earliest forms of writing, there may have been a very good reason for this.

The First Writing Systems

The earliest form of writing was *ideographic* pictures and symbols representing ideas. Many are familiar with beautiful Egyptian *hieroglyphic* inscriptions with complex pictures and symbols. In Mesopotamia, a similar system called *cuneiform* was used,

involving wedge-shaped symbols pressed into clay. This created a problem: communicating through picture writing required the writer to have artistic ability and know a large number of symbols. Some years ago, Chinese, a modern ideographic script, was reduced from 15,000 characters to 5,000. Such systems made it hard for common people to learn to read and write. Often the only ones who were literate were professional scribes who kept records for kings and the wealthy.

The ancient world knew nothing of the modern conveniences we take for granted. There were no smart phones, laptops, or computers. All writing was carved into stone, pressed into clay, or marked on surfaces that could absorb pigment. While the Bible refers to tablets of clay (Ezek. 4:1), the first written revelation of God's word (so far as we know) was on stone tablets. God told Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and

commandments which I have written, that you may teach them" (Exod. 24:12).

The First Alphabet

Critics of the Bible once argued that the claim that God gave the law to Moses was impossible, because it was believed that alphabetic writing did not exist at that time. However, in the winter of 1904-1905, this argument was disproved. In the Sinai Peninsula, near the area where the Bible says God gave the Law to Moses, archaeologist, Flinders Petrie, discovered inscriptions in a script now believed to be the first alphabetic writing ever known. This script, known as *Proto-Sinaitic*, used a simple system of symbols that corresponds to the Hebrew alphabet which was used to write the Old Testament. Such an alphabet made it possible for ordinary people to learn these simple symbols corresponding to spoken language. At this key moment in human history, God began the process of revealing His written word to mankind, making it accessible to all.



Hieroglyphics



Cuneiform



Proto-Sinaitic Inscription

God did not preserve His word through the centuries on stone. Most of His revealed word was written on dried animal skins that were stitched together and rolled into scrolls. The Law of Moses was preserved in this form. Jeremiah was told, “Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day” (Jer. 36:2).

The First Books

“Books,” as we now know them, did not exist until the time of the New Testament and afterwards, when single pages of *parchment* (dried animal skins) or *papyrus* (a dried plant flattened and glued together) were bound together in what is called a *codex*. Thousands of copies of handwritten texts of biblical books, written on scrolls or pages from *codices* (the plural of *codex*), have survived through the centuries. It was with these tools that God revealed and

preserved the Bible as we have it today. In our next study, we will look at three steps involved in the revelation of God’s word in the Old Testament. **11**



Kyle Pope

Kyle Pope preaches for the Olsen Park church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas. He has written several books published by Truth Publications including *How We Got the Bible*. He can be reached at kmpope@att.net.



Children's Lessons from the Treasure Chest

by Deborah Towles

Recognizing the truth of Jesus' statement, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," what do you keep in your personal treasure chest?

Compiling a treasure hoard is a favorite and exciting game for most children. Yet, it is more than just a game; they learn to classify the value of objects in their world, a process that continues beyond childhood. Their collection of "treasures" is as meaningful to them as our own. This common childhood activity provides an opportunity to teach about the challenges of recognizing and valuing true riches (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Figurative or literal, everyone has a treasure chest containing that which is valued above all else. Tangible objects may fill our treasure chest – possessions such as gold, silver, jewels, or heirloom keepsakes. It may contain intangible items such as relationships, ideas, physical knowledge or spiritual wisdom. Our treasure is that which consumes our thoughts and time, energy and resources, driving our existence and defining our character (Matt. 6:21, 24-32; Luke 12:16-34).

Objects considered valuable in this world often communicate rich spiritual lessons. As gold and silver must be refined to be purified and reach their highest value, so God's people must face the refining fires that test and purify their faith (1 Pet. 1:6-9). The pearl is formed because an irritating grain of sand, while it must be endured, is perfected into a thing of great beauty (James 1:2-4). A diamond is a chunk of carbon that has withstood tremendous pressure to become a precious

possession, as Christ, who endured the trial of the cross (Heb. 1:3-12, 5:8-9). Yet, earthly treasures will not endure time (Matt. 6:19) or be taken beyond the grave (1 Tim. 6:7).



Teaching our children the true standard by which the worth of all things is evaluated, they acquire knowledge to avoid the pitfalls of mistaken judgments and store up treasure of a good foundation for the future (1 Tim. 6:9-11; 17-19). What better riches could we give them?



We should treasure certain things far more than anything the world offers: our relationship with God and His word (Ps. 19: 7-10; 119:10-11; Matt. 13:52), the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:44-46), the wisdom and knowledge of Christ (Col. 2:2-3), a father's wisdom (Prov. 2:1-5), lips of knowledge (Prov. 20: 15), a worthy woman (Prov. 31:10), true wisdom (Job 28:18; Prov. 8), good works of godly women (1 Tim. 2:9-10), heavenly treasure (Matt. 19:21; Luke 12:31-34), a good name (Prov. 22:1),

and also an approved faith resulting in salvation (1 Pet. 1:7-9).

Does God have treasure? He entrusts the treasure of the gospel to men who share it with the lost for whom He patiently waits (2 Cor. 4:1-7; 2 Pet. 3:9). The gentle and quiet spirit of a godly woman is far more precious in His sight than outward beauty (1 Pet. 3:1-4). Those who fear the LORD and esteem His name are His special treasure, preserved and protected among men (Mal. 3:16-17). Of all the riches God created, His saints are preserved as His inheritance (Eph. 1:18), even when all other riches are destroyed (2 Pet. 3:11-12). The true value of our souls, which we sometimes sell so cheaply, is understood only in the light of the cross, for therein we see what God gave in exchange (Matt. 16:26; Rom. 5:6-9).

When we learn to value what God values, we will optimize teachable moments during our child's play. By showing them the true standard, they will gain the knowledge to avoid the pitfalls of mistaken judgments and store up treasure of a good foundation for the future (1 Tim. 6:9-11, 17-19). What better riches could we give them?

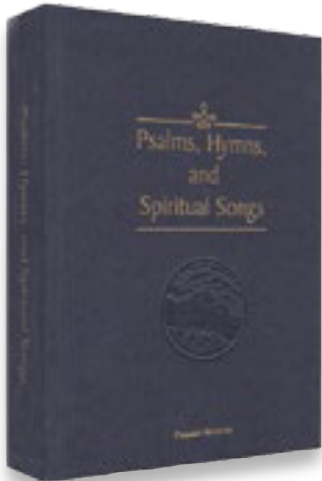


Deborah Towles

Deborah Towles is the wife of Gale Towles who preaches for the State Line church of Christ in Charlotte, NC. They have four children and nineteen grandchildren. She can be reached at deborah@carolina.rr.com.

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Past Controversies Involving Faith vs. Works

by Daniel H. King, Sr.

We achieve a historical understanding of the relationship between faith and works by looking at past controversies.

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The importance of having faith in God and Christ must not be minimized, even though it has been frequently overstated and even misstated by zealous advocates of the notion of “salvation by grace through faith, and that alone.” Many in the modern religious world advocate this view, despite various denominational affiliations.

We take seriously these statements of Scripture. Jesus meant what He said in John 8:24 and elsewhere. Paul also meant what he said in Ephesians 2:8 and elsewhere. Both of these texts, and many others like them, lead to the inevitable conclusion that, without believing in Jesus, a person will be lost. Thus, faith in Jesus as God’s Son, the resurrected and enthroned Lord, is absolutely essential to salvation; without it, no person who has lived since his enfleshment shall be able to stand before the judgment bar of God and hear the words, “Well done, good and *faithful* servant...” (Matt. 25:21, 23). To be faithful, we must be full of faith, by very definition, and faithfulness unto death is also emphasized (Rev. 2:10). Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Faith as Assent to the Apostolic Testimony

Early Christians saw faith as having to do with an assent to the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus and those elemental doctrines which were taught by Him and His representatives, the apostles and prophets. Thus, during the patristic period, both sides in the Gnostic controversies attempted to show that the tenets of their belief system were genuinely apostolic in derivation.

Both sides could not be correct in their assertion, of course, but they understood the necessity of this principle. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy were defined in terms of whether or not a teaching was consistent with the ancient faith of the fathers. However, concentration on this element of truth, without consideration of other biblical principles and teachings, led to an altogether unbiblical narrowing of the idea of faith, so that it came to be seen only in the light of assent to the apostolic precepts and doctrines. Focusing exclusively on the notion of what is believed, it became divorced from a personal and intimate relationship with God and Christ. One could be considered a faithful Christian without having any relationship with God other than a willingness to comply

with certain aspects of the Christian regimen.

Although the essential core of this belief was to some extent true, it did not represent a full understanding of the concept, especially as pertaining to what men must do in order to please God. Without doubt, believing apostolic doctrine is good and right. However, more is necessary than merely giving mental assent to a thing, even if that which is believed and accepted is altogether true. In this instance, faith was conceived of as having to do with orthodoxy, embracing those particular tenets and truths found in apostolic teaching. Although orthodoxy is in fact important, by itself, it represents a cold and dead system of assenting to all the proper historical facts and doctrinal statements. The faith found in the New Testament is far more than this.

Moreover, as the decades passed, since the concept of justification was not much studied or well understood, and it had not been understood in terms of its connection with Jesus as Savior and Lord of one’s own life, faith came to be regarded “simply as the passport to baptism (remitting all past sins) and to a lifelong probation in the church (giving the baptized the opportunity to make themselves worthy of glory by their good works)” (Packer, 401).

One sees in this the wellspring of Roman Catholic theology, as it developed over time. Also, it explains the tendency of many in the “high church” environment—who live daily in a manner quite at odds with the teachings and principles for which they claim to stand—and yet, they continue in full fellowship with their church, and are often held up as iconic figures exemplifying the faith to which they have given filial allegiance.



Augustine

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430)

Augustine was one of the greatest and most prolific writers of ancient times. Western culture has been profoundly influenced by him. Many modern scholars count him as one of the three major figures of the ancient world. Some see him as the most influential of all. While we believe this to be an overstatement, it is clear from such remarks that Augustine was, indeed, remarkably tangential in steering the course of Western thinking.

Beginning as a confused young man who came from a chaotic background, he moved through several different perspectives on life and even various religious and anti-religious groups. In the end, he was challenged by the preaching of the remarkable orator

Ambrose at Milan, Italy. Baptized by Ambrose in 387, Augustine’s brilliance was immediately recognized by his fellow churchmen. Eventually he served as bishop of Hippo, where at the age of 75, he died during the terrible siege of the city by the Vandals (AD 430).

It would be difficult for one to read all of the works of this amazing writer. Without doubt, Augustine was the most studious man and prolific writer of his age. Embracing the notion of original sin, he became convinced that the whole human race was, in essence, responsible for the original sin of Adam and Eve. The fall itself, loss of freedom of choice, the obstruction of knowledge, loss of God’s grace, the loss of paradise, the presence of concupiscence, physical death, and hereditary guilt all descended upon the human race in the wake of Adam’s sin. Therefore, he taught that men were born sinners. Even infants share in this sinful nature, and are counted as sinners even before committing any sin on their own. Thus, he argued that infants should be baptized as a remedy for their inborn sins.

Pelagius (c. 360–418), a British born monk, who later moved to Rome, opposed the idea of predestination. He converted Celestius, who further developed the Pelagian perspective. Soon he was declared a heretic and was excommunicated at the Council of Carthage in 416. However, when Zosimus became bishop of Rome, the teachings of Pelagius were pronounced orthodox. At the time, no fixed conviction on the issue of human nature was broadly held. Subsequently, his views were again condemned at the Council of Carthage in 418. So Pelagianism came to be considered to be heretical in the Roman Catholic Church.

Pelagius’ main contention was that man possesses a free will in the absolute sense of the word. Sin

consists only in the separate acts of the will. There is no such thing as a sinful nature. Sin is a deliberate choice by one who is perfectly free to choose otherwise. Inasmuch as sin consists only in separate acts of the will, the idea of its propagation by procreation is absurd. Thus, children are not born in sin or born with sin, although they may imitate the practice of sin which they learn from their parents and their contemporaries; rather, they are born morally neutral and choose to do as they may by their own act of will (Berkhof, 234).

Learning that Pelagius was attacking some of his views, Augustine quickly responded, and a fierce controversy ensued. Out of this controversy, Augustine fully formulated his theories, further elucidating his views of the Fall, Original Sin, and Predestination. He argued that man suffers from an hereditary moral disease, and is subject to the inherited legal liability for Adam’s sin. We can be saved from these evils solely by the grace of God. The whole human family is one mass of sin, out of which God has elected some souls to receive His unmerited mercy, while babies who die unbaptized go into everlasting perdition. In his mind, there was no other explanation than the inscrutable wisdom of God. These views later found great favor with John Calvin and other reformers during the Reformation period (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 108, 109).

Augustine believed that election to salvation was God’s choice, not man’s. Faith is strictly a gift from God, while good works are a natural outgrowth of God’s choices on behalf of the righteous man or woman. In contrast, Pelagius believed that each act of good or evil on man’s part is a free choice, committed by an individual who freely chooses his own way, and, who, ultimately, will choose his own final destination.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), author of the *Summa Theologica* along with other influential writings, was responsible for the further refinement of the views that were first set forth and enumerated in great detail by Augustine. In fact, the two were so much in harmony that it could be argued that they were practically the same. In the Catholic Church, their views have been held as orthodoxy and any inclination to move away from them has been considered heresy. Some of Aquinas' views were, at first, rejected and banned in some of the Catholic orders; yet, he was eventually canonized by John XXII, and is now considered one of the great doctors of the Roman Church.



Martin Luther

The Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation by nailing his *95 Theses* to the church house door at Wittenberg, Germany, in the year 1517. Obviously, he was dissatisfied with many of the beliefs and practices of contemporary Catholicism. These debate propositions challenged any willing opponent to engage with him in discussing the issues before the church at the time. In addition, Luther's willingness to explore new ground in his study of the Biblical doctrine of atonement and salvation led him to conclude that God pardons guilty

sinner through faith alone, excluding all "works" that men perform. This became the most distinctive and memorable aspect of his teachings.

According to Luther, "All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Rom. 3:23-25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us..." (Luther, 289).

Though he had many followers, Luther also was opposed by numerous scholars and religious leaders. John Calvin, while agreeing with Luther on his major points, argued that the language of his position was incorrect, and described "good works" on the part of believers as a necessary consequence or fruit of their faith. Most churches in the Reformation tradition, even to this day, hold that *sola fide*, the Latin words used by Luther to define this doctrine, is true to Sacred Scripture and must be maintained as an essential element of Evangelicalism.

Careful study of Luther's many writings show that he was not nearly so wed to the notion that good deeds are not essential for the Christian as many may have thought. Sometimes his language lends itself to a defense of this idea, but at other times his comments do not seem to do so.

For example, he wrote: "God has also pictured this will and good pleasure of His in the affection of parents for their children. For in domestic relations we see that the father and mother are affected and delighted more when their little son or daughter brings a little flower or some other trifle than when a servant or a maid carries a big bag or beam to them. Such trifling acts are lovely and gratifying to parents when they are done by their children. When

servants and maids do them, they pay no attention to them..." (Plass, 1513).

Of the necessity of baptism for salvation, he was also very plain: "It is decreed by God that whatever is not faith avails nothing and receives nothing. But if they say, as they will do: After all, Baptism itself is a work, and you say works avail nothing for salvation. What, then, becomes of faith? I answer: It is true *our* works certainly contribute nothing toward our salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work but God's... God's works are beneficial and necessary for salvation... we insist on it as so necessary for the apprehension of the benefits of Baptism that without it nothing can be received or enjoyed" (*Ibid.*, 56).

The larger panorama of denominationalism that grew out of the reformatory religious schisms of that era were influenced primarily by two principal ideologies. One resulted from the religious writings and influence of John Calvin (1509-1564), especially his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) and his many Biblical commentaries. Most of his work was done at Basel in Switzerland, but his influence has been felt around the world. His theology included such important themes as predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of the lost. Calvinism, in large measure, was taken from the teachings and writings of Augustine. His views were opposed by a Dutch Reformed theologian named Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), much as Augustine had been opposed by Pelagius. Opposition to Calvinism has been classed as "Arminianism" to this very day.

Conclusion

From the beginning, the movement to restore New Testament Christianity rejected the complicated theories and unbiblical notions of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Unfortunately, these

ideologies rob man of his right of personal self-government and of his ability to choose right and wrong. In the end, it lays upon the shoulders of a loving and righteous God the ultimate responsibility for revolt and rebellion on the part of mutinous human beings. After all, if God made us this way, and it is His sovereign will that we should become disobedient children, then how can He justly condemn us when we err from His ways? Such theories ultimately lead to infidelity and skepticism on the part of people given to logical and independent thought.

Also, this distortion lends sympathy to the notion that a dead faith is vibrant enough to save us, despite what James said on the matter: “Faith without works is dead, being alone” (James 2:17). Indeed, if mere mental and cognitive affirmation of a principle of truth is all that is required for a believer to enter a state of grace with God, then dead faith does indeed save. Yet, this simply cannot be the case.

Finally, if we do not have an absolute right to choose between good and evil, then God must be seen as somehow responsible for whatever outcome there may be from our actions. It is impossible to square this notion with biblical teaching, which frequently offers an invitation to faith and obedience to wayward souls, providing them a way out and a way forward, if they will show themselves faithful and obedient, willing to move in the direction that God has so graciously provided for them, i.e., “save yourselves from this crooked generation...” (Acts 2:40; cf. also Matt. 11:28; 19:21; Mark 1:17; 8:34; etc.).

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Daniel H. King, Sr.

Daniel H. King, Sr. preaches for the Locust St. church of Christ in Mt. Pleasant, TN. Their website is <http://www.lscoc.com/>. His website is <http://danielhking.com/>. He can be reached at danielhking@hotmail.com.

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Husbands, Love Your Wives

by Robert Harkrider

Husbands sometimes abuse their leadership position in the family, acting selfishly rather than sacrificially; our wives deserve better.

It has been said that if you see a man opening the car door for his wife, it means that either he has a new car or a new wife! We may giggle at that analysis, but, sadly, it reminds us of the husband who tells his wife on their silver anniversary, “Twenty-five years ago, I told you that I loved you, and if I ever change my mind, I will let you know.”

In reality, these illustrations are not funny, but imply the underlying reason why so many marriages are failing. The true love of a husband must be like the love that Christ has for the church: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). Obviously, we cannot match God’s love in quantity, or in quality, but we can love in *kind*... evidencing indestructible, sacrificial, and unselfish love!

Marital death is rampant in our nation. No one needs a poll to recognize this. Look next door, across the street, or around the corner, to see the lifeless remains of shattered unions that once breathed the breath of married life. Observe relatives (grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts) and fellow Christians who have gone back on their vow—“until death do us part.”

The breakdown of any relationship, be it business, political, or marital, can usually be traced to its leadership. The husband is the *head of the wife* (Eph. 5:23); as the ruler of the relationship, he must bear chief responsibility for its failure. Ephesians 5 does not say that

wives are slaves to their husbands, but it does say wives are to be submitting to husbands who love. The day he becomes indifferent toward his wife is the day when the soundness of the relationship begins to suffer. Having the love that Christ had for the church is the basis of the husband’s rule of his wife and is the spirit that will breathe life into any marriage.

Just as Christ Loved the Church

How can we love like Christ loved the church? Consider a few characteristics. First, Christ’s love for the church was indestructible. He loved even those who slapped, mocked, spit on, and crucified Him. He died for us when we were undeserving (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). The love Christ had for the church drew no line that said He would not die for us if we crossed that line. An inferior love is given only to those who earn the right to receive it, but God’s love is extended to those who don’t deserve it, and have not earned it. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Christ’s love served the needs of others. Many explain that they divorced because they “fell out of love.” Sadly, this illustrates a misunderstanding of “love.” The kind of love Christ had for the church is *agape* love, that is, the attitude of “active good will” whether or not the person loved is deserving.

We may not have that euphoric, “ooey-goey” feeling that the world terms “love.” Yet, a husband who imitates Christ will set aside his own interests and do what is good for his wife. Nothing she says or does will interfere with or defeat the unselfish spirit that promotes her well-being.

What we fall “out of” we can fall “back into.” Do you remember when you were first trying to win her love? Ask yourself, “When is the last time I made a sacrifice for my wife? When is the last time we wanted to do different things, and I set aside my own carefully laid out plans to do what she wanted to do? The world says: “Be the macho man, big shot! Build up your own identity; grab all the gusto; live for the moment.” God says the opposite: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Just As You Love Your Own Body

“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies: he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church” (Eph. 5:28-29). When husbands see the needs of their wives as with the clarity they see their own needs, they have learned the secret of successful marriages.

A good rule to help troubled marriages is to apply the “Golden Rule” (Matt. 7:12). Ask yourself, if roles were reversed and you were the wife, would you want to be married to someone who treats you the way you are treating her? As a good neighbor puts himself in his neighbor’s shoes before speaking or acting, so a good husband will slip on his wife’s sandals to see what love demands. This is called “understanding.” The inspired apostle warned, “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

The word “nourish” (*ektrepho*), meaning to “feed or to nurture,” is used primarily in reference to raising

children in a way that promotes health and strength. The word “cherish” (*thalpo*), literally meaning “to soften or warm with body heat,” is used to describe a mother bird sitting on her nest. Husbands are to provide their wives with a nest, a security of warmth, and a place of nourishment.

Give relief to your wife when she needs an hour or two from the burden of children at the end of a grueling day. Offer a few words of praise and a back rub when struggling with an emotional downer at a certain time in her cycle. Push a vacuum cleaner or minister at a sink full of dirty dishes. Wimpy? NO! This is the love all marriages need. This is the stuff of husbanding.

Compare the love of a husband to a warm blanket on a cold winter night;

as long as the wife feels encircled, wrapped up in this blanket, she is able to surrender herself completely and unconditionally to her husband, both body and mind. In order to give her this feeling of being sheltered, love her just as Christ loved the church, and nourish her as you do your own body. Also learn that it is not unmanly to express your feelings. If your words and caresses go together with this attitude of heart, they will convey to her the message, “You are loved.” 📌



Robert Harkrider

Robert F. Harkrider has served with the South Bumby church in Orlando, FL for the last thirty years. He can be reached at rharkrider@earthlink.net





Bobby L. Graham

Bobby L. Graham preaches and is an elder for the Old Moulton Rd. church of Christ. He is married to Karen (Hodge) Graham and they have three children: Richard, Mary Katherine Winland (Darren), and Laura Paschall (Jeremy). He can be reached at bobbylgraham@pclnet.net.

QUESTION: Did each of the apostles possess all the gifts of the Spirit? Yes? or No? Scripture? I understand, that in the first century, each brother in the local church did not possess every spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12,14). However, what about the apostles?

The apostles of Jesus Christ, having been called and trained by the Lord, were endowed for their work with power from on high (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8). The word *dunamis*, meaning power or strength, is what the Lord gave them through the working of the Holy Spirit. When the twelve were “filled with the Holy Spirit” not many days after the Lord’s promise, they received such power as was needed to perform their role in (1) teaching people what the Lord had done and said, (2) completing the message of truth which Jesus had not taught them, (3) working whatever miracles were needed in verification of the messengers and confirmation of their message, and (4) distributing to others in the church the miraculous gifts needed for the growth of the infant church (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14; Mark 16:17-18; Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:12; Acts 8:17-19; 19:6).

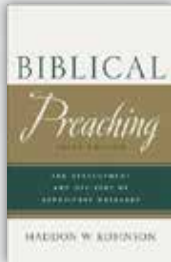
In their performance of these works the miraculous element was present in assuring their accuracy and power: (1) speaking in foreign languages (Acts 2:4), (2) speaking by divine inspiration (John 14:26; 16:12-13; Gal. 1:12), (3) imparting miraculous gifts by the laying on of their hands (Acts 19:6), and (4) working of various kinds of miracles (Acts 3; 9:37-42; 28:3-6). There is nothing to indicate they lacked any miraculous powers or gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 or Mark 16:17-18. It is my judgment that they were empowered to work all kinds of miracles which their hands equipped others to work; they were lacking in no respect.

In addition to their miraculous power, their work also demonstrated the authority given them for good (2 Cor. 10:8). They served with the

power to bind and loose what heaven had already appointed (Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18), as judges on thrones over spiritual Israel (Matt. 19:28), as ambassadors of Christ (John 13:20; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Cor. 14:37), as men setting forth the condition of forgiveness of sins (John 20:22-23), and as witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:48-49; John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8, 21-26).

While no one passage states that the apostles possessed all of the gifts about which our querist inquired, it seems pretty clear they were able to exercise them, because they dispensed them. **T**

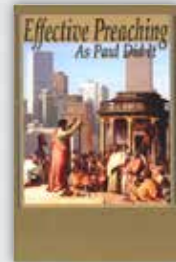
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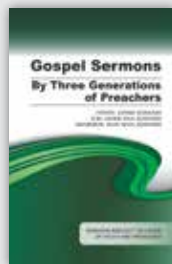
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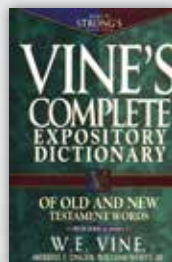
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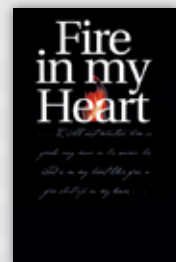
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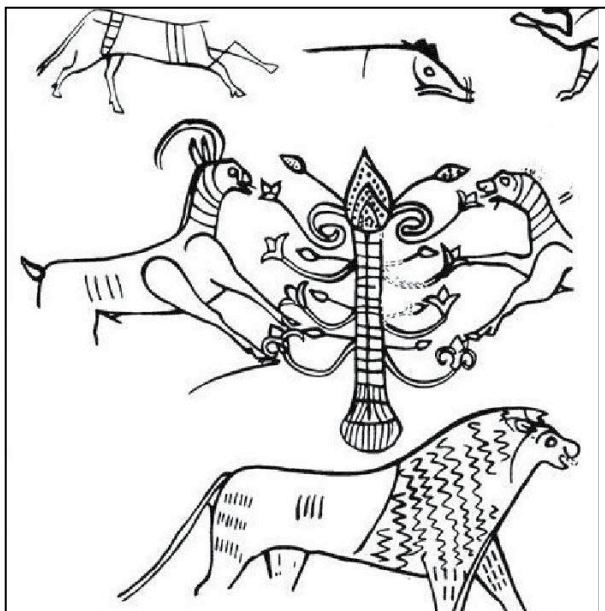
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Who Was the Wife of Yahweh?

by Trent Dutton

In contrast with the sexualized Canaanite fertility cults, the “I AM” who revealed Himself at Horeb is a High and Holy God.

Images of goddesses were common in the final years of Judah’s existence, and many scholars believe the most popular of these female deities to be Asherah. Yet, in her duty, Asherah often acted in tandem with her consort El, or with Ba’al, the god of fertility. It was these two that brought fertility to both land and animals in the form of Ba’al’s rains and Asherah’s reproductive agency. This was logical, because is that not how fertility worked to the human mind? In order to achieve all the divine activities and bring blessings on the land, male and female—master and consort—must work together, just as a man and woman must operate together to bring about human fertility.



Pithos A line depictions from Kuntillet Ajrud site report showing Asherah imagery.

Indeed, the ancient world expected that the divine must have a consort, as nearly all gods did. To erring Israelites of Judah, archaeological evidence at the sites of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm indicate that this need for a wife extended to even Yahweh Himself. This particular evidence is in the form of dedicatory and blessing inscriptions concerning “Yahweh” and “His Asherah”—phrasing understood to indicate this goddess belonged to Yahweh.

Kuntillet ‘Ajrud

Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (pronounced *koon-til-let aj-rod*) is not currently identified with a Biblical site, but dates to the first half of the eighth century BC. It is located off of the main road leading from Judah to the Red Sea in the Negev, in the traditional territory of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The nature of the finds indicates this may have been a site controlled, or at least heavily influenced, by the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. Despite the Samaritan presence and rampant idolatry, many of the storage jars were dedicated in Jerusalem for the priests at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud.

Both pottery and walls at this site are covered in symbols of Asherah and inscriptions dedicated to Yahweh and His Asherah. Four inscriptions address the divine pair, including Pithos A, Inscription 3.1, which states “...I have [b]lessed you to YHWH of Shômôn [Samaria] and to His asherah.” Another example written on the wall, Inscription 4.1.1, reads “[...May] He lengthen their days and may they be sated [...] recount to [Y]HWH of the Têmân and His asherah...”

Khirbet el-Qôm

Less well known than Kuntillet ‘Ajrud is Khirbet el-Qôm (Biblical Makkedah), also located within the traditional territory of Judah. Here, a series of Iron Age tombs dating to around 750 BC were discovered. Inscription 3 from Tomb II mentions Yahweh’s Asherah three times, including the blessing statement: “Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh, for from his enemies by His asherah He has saved him.” This inscription is followed by a fertility symbol, the Bes hand.

Asherah and Yahweh in the Biblical Text

Despite any human efforts to marry off Yahweh, the prophetic texts indicate that Yahweh already considered Himself a husband. For, before the children of Israel had ever offered Him Asherah, such as in 2 Kings 21:7, the prophets describe a covenant made between Yahweh and the nation itself—making the children of Israel His bride



Map of Israel and Judah showing locations of Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet Ajrud.

and He her jealous husband. Even the language of Exodus 20:5 is structured, not as a God insisting merely on monotheism, but as a passionate husband insisting on fidelity from His covenant bride. He describes Himself as jealous for Israel, and refusing to countenance any competition for her affections. Thus, often the mention of idolatry in the Hebrew Bible is described, not in terms of theology or apostasy, but as adultery; and the prophets paint the acts of idolatry as the graphic infidelity of a virgin bride turned harlot (Ezek. 16:1-63; 23:2-9, cf. Hosea).

Yahweh makes clear that His is the patriarch of His people, poetically weaving in the tribal imagery that would have been familiar to the Israelites of the Divided Kingdom. Many have argued that, where there is a father, there must also be a mother. But in asserting His oneness and self-sufficiency (Exod. 3:14; Ps. 50:9-12), Yahweh also affirms His oneness—He has no need of a consort or female creator to aid in His work (Isa. 45:21-

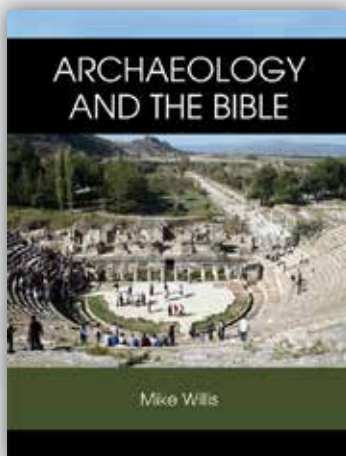
22), laying claim Himself as the one who gave birth to Israel (Deut. 32:18; Isa. 42:14).

Such archaeological finds as these inscriptions pictorialize the idolatry of the nation of Israel, which appears in the Hebrew texts, symbolized by the *leit motif* of the adulterous wife of Yahweh Himself. If the inscriptions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm truly represent Israel's adoption of a divine marriage between Yahweh and Asherah, this illustrates the depths of Israel's fall: in the course of her own adulterous relationship with the gods of the land, Israel had come to consider God Himself as turning from His covenant wife to a constructed goddess. **TL**



Trent and Rebekah Dutton

Trent and Rebekah Dutton both hold Master's degrees in Biblical Archaeology from Wheaton College, in the Chicago, IL area. They have participated in four full excavation seasons with the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, Israel, and the initial survey season of Tel Shimron in the Jezreel Valley.



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The Value and Danger of Skilled Speech

by Jesse Flowers

Faithful evangelists will hone their communication skills, but avoid using the smooth and flattering speech associated with false teachers.

Every preacher by trade is a communicator. So naturally every man that preaches desires to communicate well and effectively. Of course, not all of us who preach regularly will be like Aaron, concerning whom God said, “I know that he can speak well” (Exod. 4:14) or like Apollos, who is described as “an eloquent man” (Acts 18:24). And yet, it is only fitting that a teacher of God’s Word would want to do his absolute best in communicating the divine message of salvation to the saved and unsaved (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

However, we must guard against the temptation of focusing more time and attention on *how* we say something than upon *what* we say. It is easy to get caught up in how we package and present the message more than the actual message itself.

Certain dangers may be associated with skilled speech. In fact, a great deal is said in the Bible about such speech tactics employed by false teachers. For example, they speak “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10) and “smooth words” (Jer. 12:6). Paul said, “by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18); moreover, they seek to deceive with “persuasive words” (Col. 2:4). Peter warned, “by covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Pet. 2:3); again, they speak “great swelling words of emptiness” (2 Pet. 2:18). Jude concurs, saying, “they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jude 16).

Brethren do well to pay close attention to the way Paul described his conduct at Corinth when he preached the gospel among them. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Notice, Paul made it a point to emphasize to the church in Corinth that he did not come to them with “excellence of speech” or with “persuasive words of human wisdom.” Why not? Paul was determined that the Corinthians put their faith in the power of God, i.e., the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), and not in the wisdom of men. What is the focus of our preaching today—excellence of speech and persuasive words of human wisdom, or Jesus Christ and His gospel?

Unsurprisingly, we find Paul expressing in essence the same thing when he wrote his first epistle to the church in Thessalonica: “...we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But

as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ” (1 Thess. 2:2-6).

Let us ensure that “our exhortation” does not come from error, uncleanness or deceit either; nor should we, at *any* time, use flattering words in our teaching and preaching. Our motive in preaching must never be to “seek glory from men” or to please men (Gal. 1:10). Like the apostle Paul, may we seek only to please God, the One who tests our hearts!

Every gospel preacher must recognize and embrace his solemn duty “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:1-2, 5).

Faithful evangelists must “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13). I’m afraid too many present-day preachers have given more attention to reading from

the works of Max Lucado, Rick Warren, Chuck Swindol, N.T. Wright, or other influential figures in the religious world, rather than searching the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). A faithful evangelist must “study” to “present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). A faithful evangelist must “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2), not his personal thoughts or feelings, or those of another man. A faithful evangelist must “charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3) than the doctrine of Jesus Christ (2 John 9-11).

Not only do gospel preachers have an important responsibility when it comes to recognizing the danger of skilled speech, but so do elders. Elders have been given the charge to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet. 5:2). It is they who must watch out for our souls (Heb. 13:17) and protect us from all spiritual dangers. As Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders of old, local overseers today must “watch” and “remember” the warnings concerning the dangers of false teachers (Acts 20:31), from without and within, who will “rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). Elders must seek out preachers who will stand in the pulpit and faithfully speak the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11), and who are not merely impressive, professional, entertaining speakers.

Not only do preachers and elders have an important responsibility in guarding against the danger of skilled speech, but also saints in every congregation of God’s people. Members must be careful not to develop “itching ears” and slowly but surely “turn their ears away from the truth,” desiring a softer, more palatable message (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Sadly, some members of the church are more interested in the length of the lesson, speaking

ability and style of the minister, than the Scriptural content of the sermon. Tragically, too many brethren have reached the point where they no longer “endure sound doctrine” and prefer the skilled speech of weak, compromising, and erring preachers (cf. Isa. 30:10). Let every member of the Lord’s body desire and demand book, chapter, and verse preaching!

All who preach would always do well to remember the warning of James. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (3:1). Well should we receive a stricter judgment! We are influencing people either towards an eternity in heaven or hell based on how and what we teach. As Paul said to Timothy: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). Every gospel preacher should desire to say, along with Paul, “that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). May the Lord bless each one of us with the strength, courage, and resolve to do just that! **T**



Jesse Flowers

Jesse and his wife, April, have labored with the Pruett and Lobit church of Christ in Baytown, Texas for the past nine years. They have four children, Jesse (9), Josiah (7), Anna (4), and Clara (2). He can be reached at jafopie@hotmail.com.

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The Value and Danger of Commentaries

by Joe R. Price

Commentaries represent focused-thinking, and are often the result of years of intense study; yet, they must be measured against the Word of God.

The gospel preacher has a divine charge to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). To do so, he must know the word of God, since he cannot preach what he does not know. He has an obligation to learn and live the Scriptures, for which he will be held accountable (1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Cor. 9:16; James 3:1). Clearly, the preacher’s study of God’s word is crucial to doing his work effectively and with God’s approval (2 Tim. 2:15).

The apostle Paul taught the evangelist, Timothy, how to equip himself as a preacher, so that he could “instruct the brethren” as well as teach the lost (1 Tim. 4:6). Among other things, Timothy was urged to “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13). And, he was told to “meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim. 4:15).

A preacher studies the Bible for his own spiritual development, as well as to equip himself to preach the doctrine of Christ fully and faithfully. Many study tools are available to assist in one’s study of the Scriptures. Bible commentaries are one such resource. Every Bible commentary must be assessed against the word of God. Does it respect the verbal inspiration of the Bible? Does the author use other Scriptures to support his conclusions upon a given text? What is the basic theology of the commentator? These are just some of the questions to ask

when using such study aids. One can be led astray by the comments of Biblical and theological scholars.

The Bible is the first and most important thing to learn. This seems obvious, yet Paul’s encouragement to Timothy to “give attention to reading” undoubtedly refers to the inspired text (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). The best commentary on inspired Scripture is inspired Scripture itself. We do well to “heed the prophetic word” that has been confirmed to us, for it shines the divine light of truth in every dark place (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The hundreds of New Testament citations of Old Testament passages help unlock the “mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:4-5). Allow the Scriptures to explain themselves. Then and only then, use commentaries to assist in increasing your understanding.

Bible commentaries are tools intended to give instruction on what the Biblical text means. There are limitations and dangers associated with using them. Let us briefly consider some of both.

Value

1) *The different types of Bible commentaries add value to one’s study of the Scriptures.* We should distinguish here between lexicons, concordances, word study reference books, and Bible

commentaries. Commentaries actually expound upon the Biblical text, its background, context and meaning. Two major types of Bible commentaries are expository and exegetical. The first typically includes “teaching notes, outlines, illustrations and practical applications of the authors’ study and teaching” (Fairchild). The second is “more technical or academic in nature, concentrating on the original languages, context or grammar of the text” (Fairchild). The preacher needs to realize that his personal study preferences (for example, perhaps he loves to do in-depth word analysis) is not always equivalent to the present need of his audience. Use reference works and commentaries to help increase your understanding of God’s word so that you may perform your primary task, which is to “reprove, rebuke and exhort” (2 Tim. 4:2-5).

2) *A Bible commentary exposes the student to another person’s devoted study of God’s word.* A Bible commentary typically reflects the author’s years of dedicated study and meditation upon some portion of God’s word. As one studies a passage of Scripture, reading how someone else has thought through that passage (with its implications, instruction, etc.) can be instructive and lend insight into its meaning and application. At the same time, this reminds us to search the Scriptures to see if those comments harmonize with God’s revelation (Acts 17:11).

3) *Commentaries can give us a perspective on things that cannot be learned from the Biblical text itself.*

For example, a commentary may include historical information about the time period and geographic location. It may provide insight into the cultural background of a given text or book of the Bible. Such information from commentaries broadens our understanding of the times, places and forces at work in the Biblical narrative.

4) *Commentaries help inform and increase our knowledge of the Bible.*

Bible commentaries often provide us with additional passages of Scripture that enhance our understanding of the verse under consideration. For example, commentaries on Psalm 110 will likely direct us to New Testament passages which show its Messianic fulfillment, enhancing one's understanding of the text. Commentaries are at their best when they help us gain further knowledge and insight into how Scriptures relate to each other.

Dangers

1) *The danger of going to Bible commentaries first.* Conferring with the wisdom of men does not validate or authenticate the certainty of God's word (1 Cor. 2:1-5; Gal. 1:6-17). In other words, truth is not truth because a Bible commentator said it is so. Inspired Scripture is our source book for personal spiritual growth as well as for the preacher's sermon preparation. Using Bible commentaries and other resources is helpful, but they will never replace the Bible itself. We must not allow them to do so. As one man said, "Invest yourself in studying the Bible text itself first, and work towards using commentaries as a reference. It is a mistake to jump quickly to see what the 'expert' says and build your teaching on that" (Brooke). Commentaries are not inspired; they can be wrong; therefore, we must "test the spirits, whether they

are from God" by using the standard of apostolic revelation (1 John 4:1, 6).

2) *Beware of the commentator's biases.* The theological biases of a commentator may well distort his comments. Calvinism is likely to permeate the commentary written by a Calvinist. The presumptions of Premillennialism will find their way into commentaries by its adherents. Those inexperienced in the Scriptures can be swayed to adopt the terminology and the false definitions presented in such works. This does not mean we should not use commentaries; biases will likely be found in them all. It means we should be careful to test a commentator against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11; John 5:39). Discernment is in order as we use Bible commentaries, or we will find ourselves drinking from "broken cisterns" (Phil. 1:9-11; Jer. 2:13). A firm grasp of the Scriptures is needed to avoid being led into error by false definitions, erroneous concepts and philosophical approaches to God's word (Col. 2:8, 2-3; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). The faithful and sound words of Scripture take precedence over the "contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:20).

3) *The danger of intellectual elitism.* We glory in the Lord, not in intellectual prowess (1 Cor. 1:26-31; 2:1-5). Commentaries represent biblical scholarship. Yet, not all scholarship is good; some is poor. Academic scholarship does not equate to Scriptural soundness. Indeed, such knowledge can lead to arrogance (1 Cor. 8:1). Knowing what a commentary says does not make one fluent in the Scriptures. Some are tempted to put undue stock in men and their observations upon the Scriptures, so much so that if you disagree with commentator "so and so," then you are diminished or discounted. That degree of trust in men is misplaced, endangering souls (Jer. 17:5-7).

4) *The danger of relying on commentaries instead of a "thus saith the Lord."* Bible commentators do not establish truth; Jesus does (John 14:6). His authority is revealed in His word, which men can understand and obey (Matt. 28:18-20; Heb. 1:1-2; Eph. 3:3-5; 5:17; James 1:21-25). Bible commentators are not our binding authority for whatever we do "in word or deed" (Col. 3:17). Only the inspired Scriptures fit that bill (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Conclusion

All Bible commentaries are not created equal. Let us seek balance as we use them, giving preference to the divine word over the words of men. Diligent use of the Scriptures is paramount to handling God's word accurately and being approved workmen in His sight (2 Tim. 2:15). We may aptly apply the following inspired comments to using Bible commentaries: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:19-22). 📖

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Joe R. Price

Joe Price has preached for the Mt. Baker church of Christ in Bellingham, WA for 20 years. His websites are <http://www.bibleanswers.com/> and <https://swordtips1.wordpress.com/>. He can be reached at joerprice@mail.com.

The Value and Danger of Technology

by Tim Matheny

We live in a remarkable age, where computers and the internet provide many benefits, but also pose distinct dangers.

“The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.”

To what does this anti-technology rant refer? Google? Wikipedia? Actually, no. The quote is attributed by Plato to none other than Socrates himself, and it's about writing. No, not writing on a laptop, just... writing.

I often go back to that quote to remind myself that we have always had warnings about the misuse of new technology, and those warnings have varying degrees of accuracy. Ten minutes or so on any social media platform will tell you that Socrates wasn't completely wrong about writing instead of face-to-face interaction. On the other hand, I am very glad he was mostly wrong, because, as much as I appreciate all who are reading this, I would not have time to go to all of your houses and have this discussion!

We live in a world constructed around the acquisition and communication of data, with unprecedented ease and freedom. Yet this leads to high stakes for communicators like the gospel preacher: both bold steps forward

and frustrating missteps are visible, it seems, anywhere and everywhere on the planet. With that in mind, I would like to offer a brief assessment of strengths and dangers of today's digital world for preachers, and then, if I might, make a few suggestions, that I pray will be of help.

The Positive Side

With a huge focus on the dangers of computer technology coming from brethren today, I think it's important that we take a moment to observe the very positive effects that computers and worldwide communications technologies have brought to preachers and teachers of the Word. If we conclude that the preacher's work is

to know the Word, communicate it well, and use it to convict people of their need for salvation, it becomes readily apparent just how much God has blessed this generation of His people.

First, in terms of learning the Word, we have free access to a wealth of tools that far outpace the capabilities of any library that a preacher could have assembled in the past, libraries that cost hundreds or thousands of dollars and required dedicated rooms. Word studies that used to take days can now be conducted in seconds, and without the need to use a numbering system just to navigate to the same word in a different reference. Even digital Bible study tools that we in the past would have loaded onto our computers



are available on the web for free. My personal favorite on the web is the free Blue Letter Bible (<https://www.blueletterbible.org>) and on the iPad and iPhone, Mantis Bible Study (<http://mantisbible.com>) But there are many inexpensive options out there, and that's a good thing.

Second, we have tremendous opportunities to reach out to others. Preachers can, with nothing more than a smartphone, create a video every week to talk about the lessons for the week, or a new Bible class starting, or a "thought for the week." Those videos can be shared via social media (one of the best uses of many social media platforms) or via a church website.

Third, we have the ability to augment our spoken words with visuals that can help our brethren to better understand the Scriptures we are teaching. Want to keep people focused on the Word? Put the passage up on a projection screen with presentation software, like PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, or Google Docs, and use the tools in those platforms to point out things the reader needs to observe in the text. Want to give users a sense of place? Free maps abound on the internet, and for a low cost, there are sensational maps drawn specifically for Bible students, like those at <https://biblemaps.com>, available in many formats including apps for many mobile devices. I've even used Google Earth to produce a 3D map that allowed me to show students how Joshua could have been using the topography around Ai to set up an effective ambush and victory.

The Negative Side

Of course, there are also areas of concern about which every preacher and teacher should be vigilant. In this regard, although we are often rightly concerned about the potential for immorality, I would like to focus on concerns that are specific to

preachers in this article and leave those pertaining to all Christians to other writers. And there are plenty of those concerns that we can address.

For instance, it is very easy to "just Google it" and pick bits of "wisdom" from many others, rather than studying for oneself. The result can be preaching containing biblical error, or at the very least a very shallow understanding of God's truth.

Second, there is the danger of distraction from the work of the Gospel. Social media, for instance, if allowed to, can swallow up your time on needless pursuits or embroil you in discussions that seldom "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect" (Titus 2:10).

Third, we may actually *harm* our ability to effectively communicate God's Word with poor use of presentation tools, either through unnecessary, distracting visuals, or by hindering the listener's ability to process the visuals (poor contrast or color choices, or typefaces that are too small to be read all over the auditorium, etc.).

Suggestions

I have worked for a large technology company for many years now, and have to communicate using tools like these on almost a daily basis. More importantly, I have been using those tools to preach and teach the Word of God for many years. I would like to make a very few quick suggestions for preachers and their technology:

On the Web, look for tools, not books. There are plenty of commentaries out there. Some of them are very good, but none of them is the Word of God, and your commitment is to the Word, not to some human's thoughts about it. Open your eyes to the Word itself! At the congregation I attend, we teach detailed observation

of the Word (sometimes called "inductive" Bible study). There are so many great tools out there to help you unlock the text itself. Focus on them first.

Use social media and don't let it use you. This one is more a matter of personal discipline than anything else. We need to consciously decide just what we want to accomplish with Facebook, Twitter, and the like – and focus on that. They can be servants for our outreach instead of masters of our time, but we must approach them with deliberate intent in order to control them (and ourselves).

Learn the tools with which you communicate. PowerPoint (just like all other presentation software) is a nasty beast unless you learn to tame it. There are rules for quality visual support. Learn them! Take a class, find an expert presenter in the congregation and pick his brain, or ask your children or grandchildren! Believe it or not, they actually teach presentation software in school now. But please, please take the time. Don't distract from the Word; illuminate it! And always remember: your slides are not your presentation. Your delivery of the "Good News of God" is the presentation! The slides are just there to help the listener focus on the message. If they're not accomplishing that purpose, it's time to either learn how to use them better, or ditch them altogether.

May God richly bless your efforts to preach His Word. 🙏



Tim Matheny

Although Tim has worked for one of the largest computer and electronics manufacturers for 28 years, and is passionate about technology, his first love is for the Lord and his family. He and his wife, Margaret, are members of the Brentwood

congregation in Nashville, TN. Their family includes sons Steven, Tyler, and Matthew, two wonderful daughters-in-law, Jenny and Alyssa, and the newest love of his life, granddaughter Elizabeth (Elle). He can be reached at matheny@gmail.com.

The Value and Danger of Using Original Languages in Preaching

by Connie W. Adams

There is value in being able to accurately and effectively use original language tools; yet, misplaced emphasis may mask pride and perversity.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew except for sections in Ezra and Daniel, which were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek, a few Aramaic words and expressions are found there as well. Very few of us are familiar with these languages.

Benefits

Thankfully, in the providence of God, we have good, reliable translations in English. We are indebted to men who have devoted their lives to studying the languages of the Bible. We have ample tools to assist in determining what words mean in these languages. We have various lexicons, such as *Thayer, Arndt and Gingrich, Gesenius, Vicent's Word Studies, Vine's Expository Dictionary*, etc. One can be a good student of the word of God even if he does not know a Greek letter from a chicken track.

It is helpful in studying various texts and in preaching, teaching or writing, to be able to explain what a word means in the original language. Yet, we must be careful not to leave people with the impression that, unless they have mastered Hebrew and Greek, they cannot understand the Bible.

Dangers

"The common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37). They not only

heard him, they understood him. Paul said, "We use great plainness of speech" (2 Cor. 3:12). Paul also wrote "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor. 14:18-19). This context concerned the use of spiritual gifts in the age of miracles, yet the principle of speaking so as to be understood is clear.

I had the privilege of studying Greek for two years in college, but that did not make me a Greek scholar. I have heard some brethren try to pronounce Greek words in preaching and make a poor job of it. Would it not be far better to simply say, "The original word here means..." and to say it in a language you can pronounce?

Several years ago, a friend of mine who had begun preaching, but had not gone to college, was "trying out" at a congregation near the coal mining country. When he met with the elders to discuss the work, one of the elders (who happened to be the superintendent of county schools) asked him, "Do you know the Greek?" He sadly said, "No, I did not get to go to college and am dependent on word studies to help me." That elder placed his hand under his chin and said, "Thank the Lord for that! We are

plum up to here in the Greek." The last preacher there had a year or two of New Testament Greek in college and he would write words on the board in Greek. The audience had no choice but to take his word for it.

Years ago, Foy E. Wallace gave preachers some good advice when he said, "Put it down where the calves can reach it." For all you city slickers, this means that when you put out hay for the cows to eat, put it down where the little calves could get their part. A common complaint about some preachers is that the message is way over their heads. It is good to have a useful vocabulary, but if you have a choice between a big word not commonly used by your audience, and a smaller one which is understood, why not opt for the smaller one?

Here, I offer some unsolicited advice for writers in this and other venues. Please consider your audience. While there is a place for scholarly treatment which might help some preachers, you usually are not addressing a seminar of theologians when you present an article in this paper. If you want to help the circulation of the magazine, consider ordinary readers who spend 40-60 hours a week in a job and are not skilled in Hebrew and Greek. Sometimes articles become so technical and ponderous that they

have the effect of a sedative and put you right to sleep.

On the Other Hand

Growing Christians should be just that, growing Christians. We must advance beyond the milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). The Hebrew writer relates the priesthood of Christ to that of Melchisedec, but he said they were “dull of hearing” and had not advanced beyond first principles. In fact, they had not done too well with those. Then he said, “Everyone who useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:10-14). Some need milk for a while, but growth demands that they learn to eat meat. The Bible is a mix of both. Yet, even when we are dealing with meat, is it not the part of wisdom to break it down so that it is easy to absorb? Making the complex simple is a skill worthy of our best efforts.

I am thankful for those among us who have applied themselves to the study of the original languages of the Bible. Their efforts have contributed much to my understanding of the text of Scripture. But I am thankful as well for those who taught me the word of God, even when I was a young boy, in simple terms which were within my reach.

If we present ourselves as well informed in Hebrew or Greek, we will sooner or later be exposed. A few years ago a Jehovah’s Witness came to my study. I listened to his argument, which was sprinkled with references to the Greek. Finally I said, “You have referred to the Greek several times. Are you well versed in the Greek?” He assured me that he was. So I reached back to my Greek New Testament and handed it to him and asked him to read John 3:16 from it. He turned it over and over,

thumbed through it with a red face and admitted that he knew nothing of the Greek except what he had learned in their training sessions. So, let’s use what we know and not promise what we cannot deliver. **T**



Connie W. Adams

Brother Connie Adams has preached since he was 15 years old. He has done local work in several states, and for over forty years did full-time gospel meeting work throughout this country and in several other countries. He

still conducts meetings when invited and serves as one of the elders of the Hebron Lane church in the Louisville, KY area. He can be reached at conniewadams@twc.com

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Candid and penetrating, the author writes in the context of a historical period that many fail to grasp. While professional historians seek to capture the 20th century among churches of Christ from an academic perspective, Adams offers on-the-ground insight of one who came of age during the last half-century. His treatment of the attitudes and issues of the 1950’s and 1960’s may be one of the plainest yet.

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—Colly G. Caldwell

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The Value and Danger of Private Counselling

by Art Adams

Our Lord studied with others in public and in private; yet, one-on-one counselling requires circumspection.

Jesus is our counsellor and He is wonderful (Isa. 9:6), offering guidance through His word – the Bible. Since God's word provides "all things that pertain to life and godliness," then this is where true counselling wisdom begins (2 Pet. 1:3). Issues of counseling involve applying Biblical truths to life experiences. This is where the role of the counsellor as confidant and wise advisor come in. Counselling can be helpful, but it can be damaging when diabolical advice is given and received by vulnerable people. Such was the advice of Jonadab to Amnon, and, when followed, it resulted in the rape of his sister and his own death (2 Sam. 13:3-5). The advisor must be extremely careful of his or her words because such have the power to help, to heal, to distort and to destroy.

Those seeking counsel are usually very vulnerable and open to suggestions. Accordingly, the advisor must first be grounded and solid in his/her own thinking. Perhaps this is part of teachers receiving a heavier judgment (James 3:1). By our words we will be justified and by our words condemned (Matt. 12:37). In helping others, let the counselor remember the power of words to heal and to destroy.

Not everyone should counsel. Those who do so must stay within their own scope of knowledge, and not try to be something they are not,

or something that others expect them to be. It is okay to say, "This is beyond my scope of knowledge." There is no shame in admitting such, but there can be shame (and great damage done) when we foolishly speak in areas wherein we are ignorant (2 Pet. 2:12). A chief rule of counselling is "Do no harm." If something is beyond our ability, wisdom is seen in referring an individual to someone who can provide the needed help (John 1:39).

As a professional, licensed counsellor, each year I am required to take a full days' (8 hours) training on counselling ethics. The purpose behind this is to keep counsellors mindful and current on the dangers and dilemmas of counseling others. These same seminars are available to "clergy" and others, and I recommend attendance at these. PESI, a non-profit organization, offers a variety of these sessions nationwide (<https://www.pesi.com/>).

Discussion about counselling often focuses on how a given situation "might look," and being careful not to be alone with the opposite gender when counseling. Advisors need to be cognizant of potential dangers. However, folks who seek counsel do not come to the counselor for sex. They come for help. There are some charlatan counsellors, and some exploit counselling situations. It is our

ethical duty to expose and cull out these culprits by reporting them.

The counsellor's *Code of Ethics* requires that he/she should not participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation. This includes not being manipulative nor engage in secretive, hidden, or disguised actions. Secrets can make us sick, and also keep our counselee sick.

Unless an advisor is trained and licensed in a counselling discipline, I strongly recommend he know his limits and stay within them. So, for the preacher or shepherd or advisor, I ask, "What is the scope or boundary of your training?" As a preacher (which I am, also), I would say the boundary is the limits of the word of God, when someone comes to me about a spiritual problem. So, my role as a preacher or church leader is to give knowledge of the Scriptures as they apply to the person's situation and to help the person with options on how to apply God's word in their situation. As a licensed counselor, I can go deeper into techniques and probe the impacts of past experiences or traumas. I can help clients connect the dots to multiple layers of issues supporting the presenting problem. Yet, as a preacher, my scope of care is limited to the Scriptures. Congregations do a great disservice by expecting preachers,

elders, or leaders to operate outside their areas of expertise – becoming problem solvers, marriage counselors, mental health experts, and more. Stay in your lane!

Two root causes create ethical dilemmas in counselling: competing values and competing loyalties: (1) A person tells you something “in confidence” and you agree not to tell, but their spouse and/or the elders need to know; now you have put yourself in a box. Be aware and never do that. Set boundaries at the first of the session. Let the person know you will be sharing what is said with the other leaders in the interest of their soul. Explain the confidential relationship to them. (2) Counsellors should resist the tendency to take sides or show preferential treatment. Counselling requires a neutral party – that is you, the counselor. Do not become a double agent carrying the story to the other person. While sorting through the facts, use critical thinking skills and beware of hasty judgment. For instance, a husband is caught with pornography. It is easy to “jump on him,” but hold off, and get the rest of the story. Perhaps his wife has been withholding sexual relations for months or years. Does that change the picture? Neither is right. Both issues need attention. Instead of acting upon partial information, ask, “Is there more to the story?”

Dual roles – Counseling roles in the church meet with blurred boundaries more than any other profession. Christians often get together, visit each other’s homes, jointly attend social functions, etc. Because we know each other, counselling without bias is made difficult. Remember which hat you are wearing when you counsel.

Touching – Some question the ethical propriety of touching, believing that such behavior is a first step that will inevitably lead to full sexual relations; others reject this assumption.

However, touching and hugging do not have the same meaning to everyone. Knowing that 25% of females and 20% of males have been sexually molested by age 18, touching may have a different meaning for one who offers counsel vs. one who seeks counsel. Be careful that a hug does not become a feel or an invitation. Establish your policy about hugging or touching at the start of the sessions. In short, don’t be hugging on the sisters.

Environment of Care – Counselling manuals tell me how to arrange my office for discretion. My desk should be positioned so the client and I both have equal access to the door. No one should feel trapped in your office. Risk management companies say I need a window in my door so those passing by can see that nothing untoward is occurring. Such policies also say a therapist should not be alone in a building with a client. If a client is “provocative,” I should leave my door partially open. Preachers and others should follow similar standards. Many have fallen because they did not manifest wisdom, and thus allowed things to go too far.

Enmeshment – Counselling is usually situational and involves limited episodes. Beware of the member who always needs to meet for counselling. This should be a red flag. Some dependent personalities want us to do their thinking for them. But, if they do what we told them to do and it does not work then who is the “bad guy” and who has the liability in a law suit? It is better to help folks see what God says, consider their options, choose one or more, try it for a few days, and then perhaps return. It is unhealthy when a member cannot think without calling us – this is dependent and pathological thinking. Refer them for deeper help, is my general advice.

Gender difference – Special ethical concerns arise when the client is a

woman and the counsellor a man. There may be a danger that the husband/wife, dominant/subordinate relationship will be duplicated with disastrous results. Be aware and keep boundaries clean. Recognize that the consequences of family breakup and/or single parenthood are usually more serious for the woman than the man. These may include loss of social role, loss of status, income reduction, and additional child-rearing burdens. Many women feel a greater pressure to resolve family problems, because they do not have viable alternate roles or support networks outside the family. They have more at stake, and may, therefore, be willing to risk more to maintain the relationship, or “give in” when the issues have not really been resolved.

Transference and Countertransference – Counseling situations are one-sided. The counselor is there to hear what the member has to say. However, when a counselor communicates his/her most intimate thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or behaviors to a member in this setting, the counselor has crossed a professional boundary. This is how unhealthy relationships get started. On the counselee’s part, transference can happen. That is, the member begins viewing the counselor as oppressor, hero, father, lover, rescuer, or savior. Counter-transference is when the counselor reciprocates these feelings to the member as punisher, parent/child, lover, rescuer or hero. The relationship is now unhealthy; afterwards, neither can forget the other. Rescuing the victim and thinking, “Their life is better because I am in it,” may become an obsession. When the counselor becomes too enmeshed with the member, he/she is no longer part of the solution, but a part of the problem. Beware! Talk to your own confidant and sort out those feelings before meeting with the member again.

Reporting – State laws require mandatory reporting of certain situations. These laws are usually worded that when you “have reason to believe” you must report. These apply in suspected child abuse or neglect, threats of homicide and/or suicide, elderly abuse and perhaps more depending on the state. A case in point was in 1976 (*Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California*). In session, a client told the counsellor of his desire to kill a person. Afterwards, the client acted as he had said, and committed murder. The courts filed against the counselor under “duty to warn” and won. If the counsellor knows of an intended victim, he/she is required to notify the police and/or others likely to apprise the victim of the danger and to take whatever other steps are reasonably necessary under

the circumstances. This law applies to church counsellors as well.

Finally, those offering counsel in church settings usually deal with personal dilemmas, parent/child issues, or marital conflict. These can be intense. Outside counsellors are sometimes a better choice. When do you need to refer? To whom and where do you refer? How quickly can people get in to see a therapist or doctor? These questions need to be answered before you get into a dangerous situation. There are different levels of care; often folks need more than a few one-hour sessions. When people are a danger to themselves and/or others, or gravely disabled (psychotic), they need inpatient hospitalization. Contact the agency to which you refer and help the member get an assessment of the

severity of their issues so an intensity of services level can be established.

Brethren need our help. Let us be wise in what we say, how we offer help, and in knowing our limits. If you need my advice or assistance, please contact me at <http://www.leavingthepit.com/>.



Art Adams

Art is a gospel preacher, licensed clinical social worker, and licensed clinical addiction counselor. He has been with the Plymouth, IN congregation for 22 years and conducts weekend meetings around the country with a Biblical

perspective on addiction and mental health topics. He can be reached at artadams3049@yahoo.com.

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The Value and Danger of Distractions

by Jim Deason

Recognizing the need for relaxation, Jesus said to the disciples, “Come apart and rest awhile;” yet, we must redeem the time.

The work ethic of Jesus is nothing short of amazing. He was an indefatigable worker (Matt. 4:23-25; 9:35-38; Mark 10:1; 6:31). There is nothing miraculous about this truth, and it cannot be explained away by His Divine nature. He was a man, living and working as a man, experiencing the same muscle aches and strains as do we. He was motivated by a single driving force: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:35). Further, there was for Jesus, just as there should be for us, an added sense of urgency about the work He was placed on the earth to do: “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day, night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

I want to believe, while we would not dare put ourselves in a class with Jesus, that most preachers of the ancient faith have a similar work ethic. Most have the same motivation. Most feel the same sense of urgency, and most I know do.

The beginning of a good work ethic for any effective preacher is the time he puts into the study of the Word of God. Beyond the obvious responsibility to carry the message of the cross to the lost, it is the duty of every faithful gospel preacher to equip the saints to serve (Eph. 4:11-12). This includes bringing people to a level of spiritual

maturity through teaching (Eph. 4:14-16; Heb. 5:12-6:1). Stated succinctly, you cannot teach what you do not know. Therefore, in order to know what you want and need to teach, blocks of time must be set aside for study, meditation, and prayer.

Priorities

Teaching the gospel of Jesus is the *first* responsibility of the preacher, but it is *not his only* responsibility. A preacher has the same responsibility as any other Christian to visit the sick (Matt. 25:34-46) and to exercise his duties toward his family (1 Cor. 9:4; Eph. 5:2-31; 6:4). It is his responsibility to “admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, (and) help the weak” while learning to be “patient with everyone” (1 Thess. 5:14), and all of this means time with people. There is even the need, at times, to “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while” (Mark 6:31).

This being true, *reasonable and balanced priorities* must be established regarding your schedule. If you spend too much time in a “secluded place” (read “golf course” or “duck blind” here), your study will suffer. Recreation with your family is good, wholesome, and needed, but *too much time* devoted to the baseball or soccer field can take away from both study and work—and the people who listen to you will be

able to tell whether you’ve spent enough time in your preparation. All of this is to say that a preacher must be conscious of his time and whether or not he is using it effectively.

Forty years ago, a beloved sister in Christ who realized I was struggling with time management presented me with a “Day-Timer” calendar to track for myself how I utilized my time. In doing so, she was kind to explain that this was for no one else’s benefit but mine (even though I was under heavy criticism at the time, and I was later to see that criticism was with some justification). It was a priceless gift, because it opened my eyes to how ineffectively I was using my time. I recommend to any young preacher that you keep a written or digital record of how you spend your time. It will be eye-opening to you also, help you to use your time more effectively, and keep you from making some of the same mistakes that I made.

Distractions

Of course, the enemy of a good work ethic is distraction. Jesus talked about the “thorns” of life which choke out and hinder good seed from producing fruit (Luke 8:8, 14). Not everything that eventually becomes a “thorn” is necessarily anything wrong of itself. There is nothing wrong with some forms of pleasure, but any form of

pleasure can become a distraction if allowed to do so. A man is charged by God with making a living and providing for his family (Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 5:8), but all of us know people who have allowed their chosen field of labor to choke out righteousness and become a thorn.

Preachers face these challenges like anyone else. So, for the most part, it becomes a matter of self-discipline and learning to balance the things of life. Let me offer a few illustrations that, though not exclusive necessarily to the work of preaching, certainly have application to those of us who preach:

Computers. With the advent of the digital world, computers have automated Bible study. Resources that once took hours to comb manually can now be searched in seconds—all of them, at the same time—providing you with exactly the specifics for which you were searching. *Logos Bible Software* is incredibly helpful in my study. At the same time, this same software can be distracting if I allow myself to forget the task at hand and go “chasing rabbits.” Also, the same computer loaded with *Logos* has an internet browser with which I can check the latest on Alabama football, or browse anything of passing interest. O, how easy it is to be distracted! Self-discipline is essential.

Place of study. Though I have a study at home, my main place to study is in my office at the church building. I have vacillated betwixt the two regarding which is best. If I study at home, my lovely wife is apt to interrupt my sermon preparation by asking me to take out the garbage (I just threw you under the bus, honey!). This is further complicated with children in the home. If I study at the building my office seems to have a revolving door of people and phone calls (and, honestly, I wouldn't have it any other way). But none of this helps a lot when

I am trying to finish that sermon on Calvinism! My solution to this challenge is early morning study, in my office at the church building, and before all of the hustle-and-bustle starts. My rule of thumb is to try to get most of my study completed before 10:00 in the morning. After 10:00 AM everything that gets done is usually in “bits and snatches.”

The goal in all of this is to spend sufficient time in quality study for the purpose of effectively preaching the gospel. Distraction is the enemy of both effective study and a good work ethic.

A Final Word

Paul told Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). Though some of us are fully supported to preach the gospel, preaching is not a profession nor do I believe it should ever be so considered. It is a work that demands the best of our time, efforts, and resources. Blessed are we who have loving brethren to free us of the burden of secular labor so that we can do that which we love the most—preach the gospel. The trust these brethren have in us should never be violated by a poor work ethic, nor by allowing distractions to lessen our effectiveness. **TL**



Jim Deason

Jim Deason preaches for the South Cullman church of Christ in Cullman, AL where he has served for almost 11 years. His email address is jhdeason@gmail.com.

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The Value and Danger of Newness

by Mike Willis

Gospel preaching should be compelling and fresh, but we must not become obsessed with telling or hearing something new.

In 1967, I started full-time preaching when I was twenty years old. I wanted to preach nothing but the gospel. I thought that there was no use in me preaching subjects related to “what must I do to be saved” because we had been thoroughly schooled in those subjects. I thought our members had heard about the identifying marks of the New Testament church so frequently that I didn’t need to be preaching about that either. On one occasion, I even complained that I was having to teach a Bible class on one of the gospels because I wanted to study some of the letters of Paul. How green and naive could one be?

I was fortunate to have my brother Cecil living nearby to direct and guide my studies and to look over my sermons. He insisted that I preach on first principles and, to my surprise, I learned that I didn’t know nearly so much about those subjects as I thought I did. I preached through Roy E. Cogdill’s New Testament Church (and read other books on the same subject, such as Leroy Brownlow’s *Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ*), began reading sermons from various other restoration preachers, and read the periodicals under his guidance as well. And, to my surprise, the members told me that it had been a long time since they heard sermons on those subjects and how much help the lessons were to them. During those years, we baptized

more people than at any other time of my life and, as time passed, I became grounded in these first principles.

I doubt that I was the first or only young preacher who was tempted to preach something new to his audience.

The Value of Newness

In the Old Testament, as Solomon spoke of how the world operates and the nature of human activities, he said there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9-10). Yet, even the Scriptures speak of “new” things. Doing a quick word search, one can read of the Lord’s new covenant with the house of Israel (Isa. 43:19; Jer. 31:31-34) which brought in such a change that it could only be compared to a “new heavens and earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). The doctrine which Jesus introduced was described as new doctrine (Mark 1:27; Acts 17:29, 21); those converted became a new man (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10) and entered through a new and living way (Heb. 10:20). So there is room for some legitimate “new” things in the gospel.

The Psalmists spoke of a new song (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10). The idea of a new song, according to J.J. Stewart Perowne is “one which springs freshly from a thankful and rejoicing heart – one which seeks to put an old theme in a new light” (The Psalms, I: 266).

Jeremiah also spoke of the ever continuing mercies of the Lord: “Through the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness” (Lam.3:22-23).

We appreciate the new songs that are being written to praise God, even though we continue to enjoy so many of the old ones. Our worship is sometimes stimulated by a new song, or a new-to-me verse of an old song, or a new song newly revived.

In the Lord’s covenant, every person has to build his faith for himself. Every individual must learn to search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11) for himself. I have been impressed by men who discovered in the Scriptures some things that I had previously missed. Their studies enlightened my own understanding. Every person must prove all things and hold fast that which is good (1 Thess. 5:21). Listening to and examining things that have been taught by his seniors, the growing Christian will discover that some of the things passed down are human traditions, which upon examination, may have lost their value to a new generation.

There is a danger to ruts. Vance Havner said that a rut is just a grave with both ends kicked out. We can overreact to changes associated with

our congregational experiences. A congregation can be upset by someone painting the walls a different color, having an opening prayer immediately following the announcements instead of its traditional place (between the second and third song), moving the times of the worship service, having only one worship assembly on Lord's day, changing from a spring and fall meeting to week-end meetings, making the announcements at the end of worship instead of the beginning, etc. When one of our song leaders led three verses of the selected hymn before the Lord's Supper and then the last verse after the Lord's Supper, one member thought we were going liberal. We can get caught in ruts.

The fact of the matter is that we must constantly examine ourselves to be sure that we are using the most productive means of communicating the gospel to our own generation. This might require changing some things from the way our fathers did it to how we preach today. Jesus concluded one of His parables saying, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8).

Especially is this true with reference to changes in technology. Undoubtedly, the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg (ca. 1440) changed everything for the fifteenth century. In addition to leaving some scribes unemployed who were forced to start new occupations late in their lives, the printing press made it possible for critics of the Roman Catholic Church to disseminate their objections to the Papacy in ways previously unimagined. The use of radio, in its time, changed things and, in my generation, the use of a call-in radio program was very effective. We are stunned by how the digital revolution has changed how people communicate and are thankful for those who are becoming quite efficient in using it to spread the gospel.

And, there have also been changes in the social context of America. The kind of preaching that was acceptable in the 1940s and 1950s explicitly contrasted the false doctrines of the denominations and the New Testament. Men such as W. Curtis Porter were quite popular because of their effective debating. In the late 20th century, our culture had changed to the point that debates are not appreciated and are rarely conducted. Those who are effective debaters are not nearly so appreciated in the 21st century as they had been in the 19-20th centuries. One must be as wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove in trying to faithfully present the gospel to one's own generation (Matt. 10:16).

The Danger of Newness

The Bible also makes us aware of the danger of new things. Scripture warned those who began to worship new gods (Deut. 32:17; Judg. 5:8). The new cart that had been prepared for transporting the ark of the covenant resulted in the immediate destruction of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:3). In one of His parables, Jesus warned of the danger of using a new cloth to patch an old garment, obviously cautioning against combining the elements of the old and new covenants or combining human traditions with the new covenant (Matt. 9:16).

The appeal for the new may appeal to one's human pride. Second-century Gnostics thought that they could reach salvation through esoteric knowledge. There are some who think they have found something in the Lord's revelation that few, if any, have ever discovered. This is especially true with reference to various eschatological events. Some have discovered a "new" doctrine that teaches that the second coming and judgment occurred in A.D. 70 and that, therefore, there is no scriptural promise of the Lord's future coming, the resurrection of the body,

and heaven and hell. Others have "discovered" that there is no "going to heaven" because heaven will be here on this earth, which will be rejuvenated at the Lord's coming. The "I-know-something-you-don't-know" is a tool of Satan that appeals to the intellectual pride of life. It is a danger to Bible faith.

Conclusion

May God grant us the wisdom to avoid falling into ruts that equate human traditions with divine revelation and to avoid rejecting all of the proven judgments of our elders because of our desire to be different. 📖

Sources

Perowne, J. J. Stewart (John James Stewart). *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation with Introductions and Notes, Explanatory and Critical*. Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1891.



Mike Willis

Mike Willis served as editor of *Truth Magazine* for 40 years. He has been married to Sandy (Parson) for over 50 years and they have two children, Jennifer Mann (who is married to Robbie Mann, a deacon at the Decatur Township church in Indianapolis) and Corey who is married to Meagan (Robbins) and serves as a deacon at the Jamestown, IN church. They have four grandchildren: Corbin and Ian Mann and Raven and Tori Willis.

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