

Truth

Magazine

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LOVING THE LORD

**“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”
(Ps. 119:105, NASB).**



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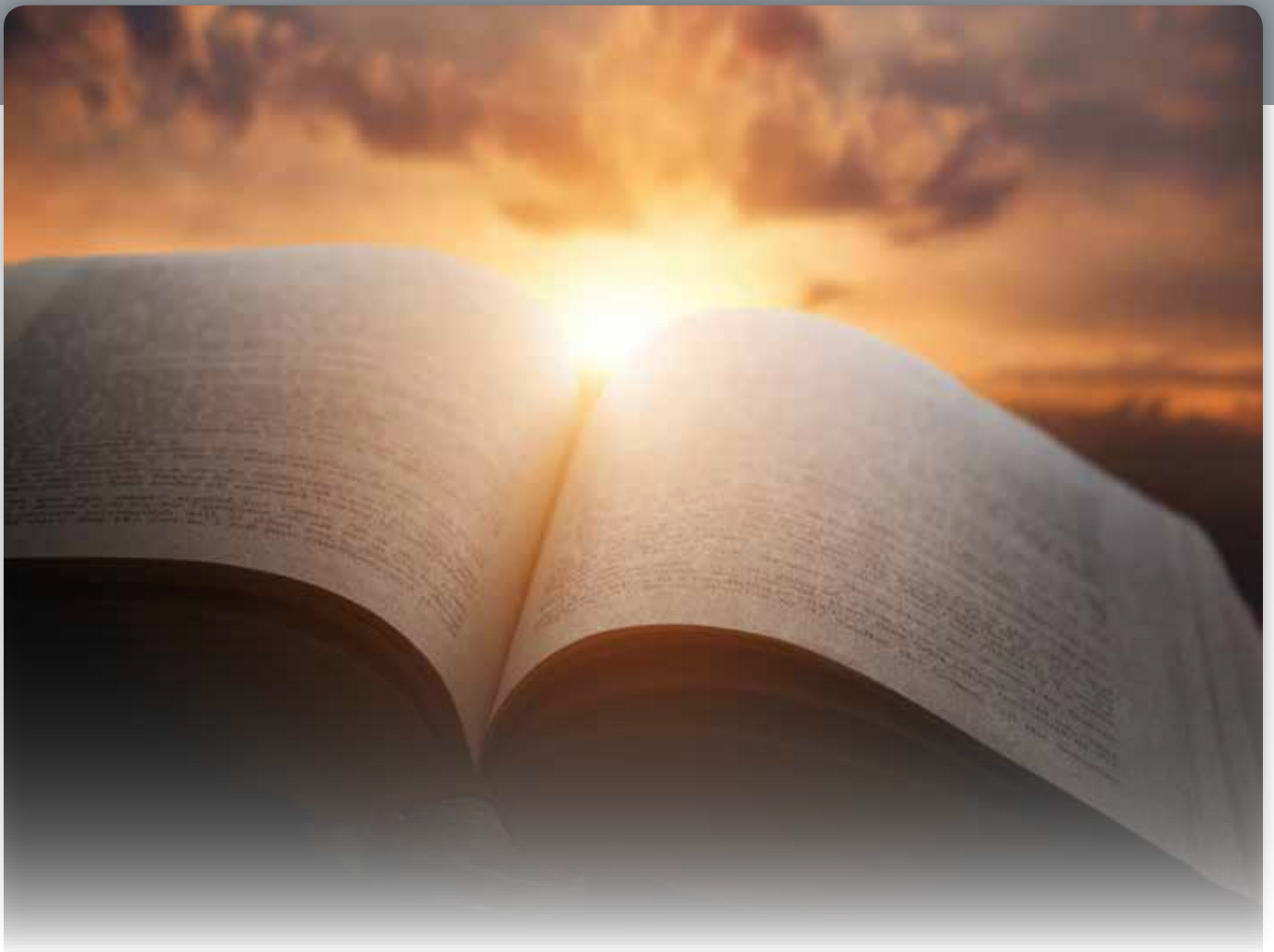
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What Is Sin?

by Mark Mayberry

Recognizing that sin is a violation of God's law, let us be mindful of its destructive influence in our lives.

From the dawn of human history, sin has involved a transgression of God's will for humanity. This is illustrated by Adam and Eve's violation of the Edenic injunction, Cain's violation of God's will concerning worship, his subsequent shedding of Abel's blood, the pervasive violence of the antediluvian world, the sexual immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah, the despicable behavior of Lot's daughters, etc.

Just as the serpent tempted Eve through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (Gen. 3:1-7; 1 John 2:15-17), Satan foments within our hearts a desire for that which is forbidden (Rom. 7:7-12). Man is enticed through his lustful desires; when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death (Jas. 1:12-15).

Sin denotes failure. As the tribes of Gad and Reuben learned when they sought permission to settle in the Transjordan, they were obligated to fulfill their duty to God and their brethren (by crossing over the Jordan and helping the other tribes conquer Canaan). To do otherwise was to commit sin and incur guilt: Moses said, "But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:20-24, esp. v. 23). In other words, we can sin through commission or omission, i.e., doing that which is prohibited (1 John 3:4), or leaving undone that which is commanded (Jas. 4:17).

It Is Perilous

Sin is a menacing threat. After his sacrificial offering had been rejected, Cain compounded his error by manifesting an evil attitude. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it (Gen. 4:6-7). Let us, therefore, heed the warning of Peter: "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

It Is Ruinous

It is damaging and destructive: "He changes rivers into a wilderness and springs of water into a thirsty ground; a fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it" (Ps. 107:33-34). It results in putrefaction: "You will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another" (Ezek. 24:23; cf. 33:10-11).

It Is Degrading

It is defiling and debasing. Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). He added, "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment (Isa. 64:6).

It Is Enslaving

Solomon said, "The wicked are captured by their own iniquities, and held with the cords of their

sin" (Prov. 5:22). Jesus added, "Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34-36).

It Is Lethal

Sin leads to death (Gen. 2:16-17). After Adam sinned, he was driven from the garden of Eden; God stationed cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 2:16-17); Adam thus began his long, inexorable march to the grave (Gen. 5:5).

Living under the curse of sin and death, we face the consequences of Adam's transgression. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Through personal disobedience, each accountable individual ratifies Adam's rebellion and falls under the same condemnation (Rom. 5:18-19). Those who pursue wanton pleasure are the walking dead: "She who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives" (1 Tim. 5:6). As James declared, "When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15). Salvation is made possible through Jesus Christ: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

It Is Corrosive

The concept, "Bad company corrupts good morals," applies to both friends and family (1 Cor. 15:33-

34). Paul repeatedly emphasized the parallel principle, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:7-9).

It Is Contagious

Sin spreads like an infectious disease. Describing the danger of empty and worldly chatter, and the insidious influence of false teachers, Paul said, “their talk will spread like gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:16-18). The Greek word *gaggraina*, occurring only here, refers to “a gangrene, an eating sore” (Thomas 1044). BDAG defines it as “a disease involving severe inflammation, which, if left unchecked, can become a destructive ulcerous condition—gangrene.” Louw and Nida say it refers to “a disease involving severe inflammation and possibly a cancerous spread of ulcers which eat away the flesh and bones” (23.165).

In this regard, consider the sad example of Eli, a high priest and judge of ancient Israel, first mentioned in 1 Samuel 1. During this time, the tabernacle was at Shiloh. Eli and his sons were priests to the Lord (vv. 3, 9). Levitical priests served at the tabernacle, offering sacrifice on behalf of the people (Lev. 17:3-7), and providing spiritual instruction to Israel (Mal. 2:5-8).

A Tragic Example

While Eli demonstrated a degree of devotion to the Lord, his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were wicked and worthless men. Instead of being content with God’s provision, they demanded more than their fair share, seizing the best of the sacrifices for themselves (1 Sam. 2:12-17; cf. Deut. 18:3-5). Moreover, the sons of Eli were immoral and depraved: “they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting” (1 Sam. 2:22).

Priests were expected to set good examples, especially those who served as high priests. However, Eli failed

as a father. Although he verbalized displeasure, his rebukes did not go far enough (1 Sam. 2:22-25). God’s word established a procedure by which society could deal with such worthless sons (Deut. 21:18-21), but Eli remained passive in the face of such provocations. Compounding his guilt, he benefited from their corrupt practices. God asked, “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?” (1 Sam. 2:29).

As a result, divine judgment was determined and decreed (1 Sam. 2:26-36). Later, a prophetic pronouncement of doom was delivered to young Samuel against the house of Eli (1 Sam. 3). Judgment came through the agency of the Philistines, who defeated the armies of Israel, slew the sons of Eli, along with 30,000 of their brethren, and captured the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 4).

The epilogue communicates a tragic implication: “When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years” (1 Sam. 4:18). As people age, and become less physically active, they often gain weight. Nevertheless, Eli’s excessive weight, which contributed to his death, also reflected moral compromise. God rebuked Eli for tolerating such sin in his house. He made himself fat by eating the choicest of the sacrificial offerings (1 Sam. 2:29). How tragic!

The Solution

While sin is characteristic of fallen humanity, apart from divine forgiveness, it is a barrier to shared fellowship with the Lord God (Isa. 6:1-7; 59:1-2). It leaves an indelible stain that only God can remove (Ps. 32:1-2; Isa. 1:18-20).

What is the solution? Before the foundation of the world, God formulated the plan of salvation (Eph. 1:3-4). Through craftiness and deception, the serpent deceived Eve; yet, the first Messianic prophecy followed man’s fall: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel” (Gen. 3:15). Note the significance of “her seed”: Jesus Christ was born of a virgin (cf. Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25). “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

Man is a free moral agent, possessing the ability to choose either obedience or rebellion. Moses challenged Israel, saying, “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live” (Deut. 30:15-20, esp. v. 19). Joshua issued a similar ultimatum: “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

Let us, therefore, choose the path of reconciliation. Recognizing our inadequacy, let us look to Christ for deliverance (1 Tim. 1:15-16). As sinners saved by grace, may we be devoted to performing the work of God, and walking in His ways (Eph. 2:8-10). **TL**



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Hezekiah and Isaiah: Real Men Serving a Real God

by Kyle Pope

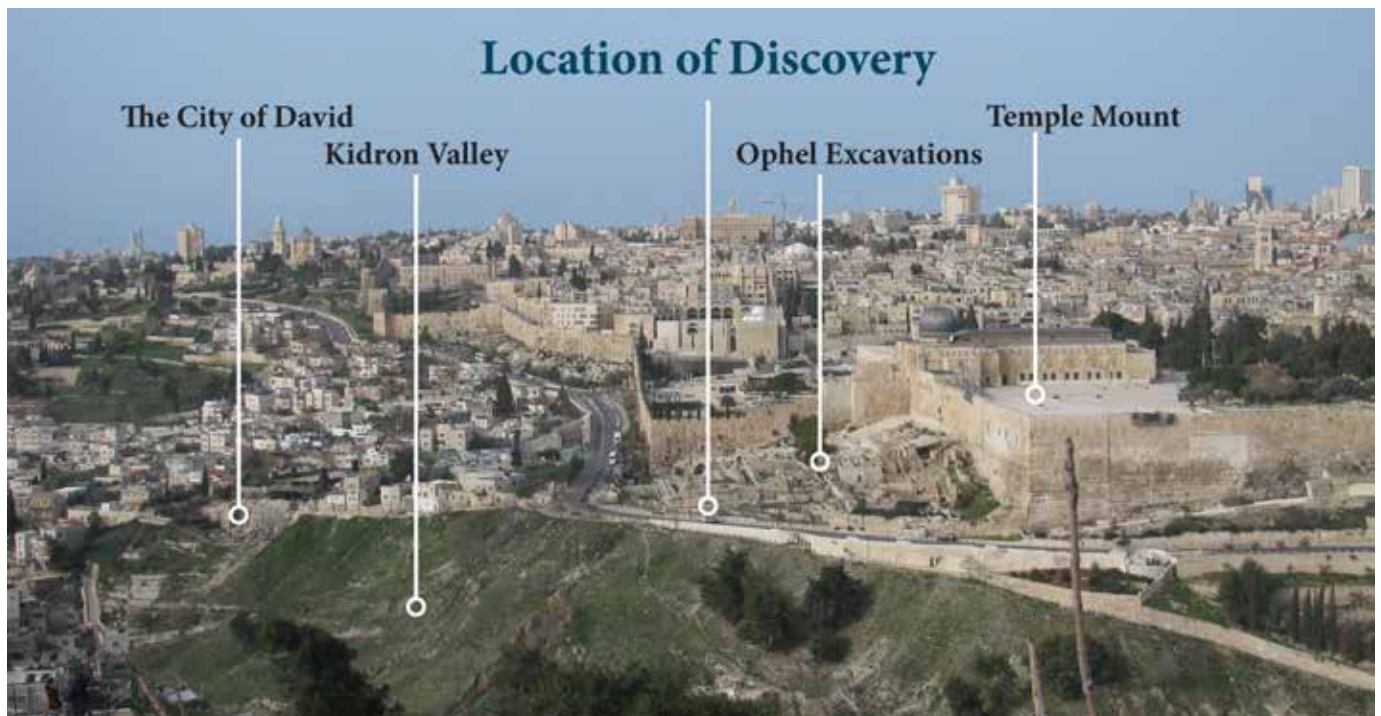
2018 witnessed significant archaeological finds that further confirm the life of two important figures in biblical history. While the Bible needs no confirmation, such discoveries reinforce our confidence in the reliability of Sacred Scripture.

Around 702 BC, Hezekiah, the faithful king of Judah, learned some disturbing news. Scripture records, “In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live””’ (2 Kings 20:1, NKJV). Imagine learning that you were about to die. How would you react? Isaiah was one who could be trusted. He had faithfully prophesied during the time of Hezekiah’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather (Isa. 1:1). During Hezekiah’s reign, Isaiah had revealed to him God’s deliverance

from the Assyrian army that threatened Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:1-7). Through Isaiah, God revealed His answer to Hezekiah’s prayer during this perilous time (2 Kings 19:15-34), and God destroyed the Assyrian army, as Isaiah had prophesied (2 Kings 20:35). Even so, his prophesy was not of deliverance, but death—the death of Hezekiah.

Scripture tells us Hezekiah’s reaction. It records, “Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, ‘Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal

heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly” (2 Kings 20:2-3). Like Hezekiah, we too are mortal. Our lives will not last forever on this earth. The Hebrew writer tells us, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb. 9:27-28). God may not tell us when our life will end, but it is an inescapable reality.



Location of discovery in the old city of Jerusalem. Photo by Kyle Pope



Replica of bullae used to seal a document. Photo by Toni Pope

Hezekiah’s reaction is not surprising to us. He wept and wept “bitterly” (or literally “a great weeping,” *Young’s Literal Translation*). Like Hezekiah, the inevitability of death can lead us to sadness, but God is not blind to this. Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). He understands the pain of death. The Hebrew writer tells us that Jesus’ death, sharing in our flesh and blood, destroyed the devil’s “power of death” (Heb. 2:14), releasing human beings who live in bondage to “the fear of death” (Heb. 2:15).

Hezekiah’s reaction is impressive: As he had done throughout his life, when confronted with danger, his first reaction was prayer. In Christ, we are to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Paul told the Philippians, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). This doesn’t mean that every anxiety will be removed. Paul prayed three times for his “thorn in the flesh” and was told “No” (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Prayer for the Christian, like prayer for Hezekiah, demonstrates a humble recognition of God’s dominion in our lives. Peter urged Christians, “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Real Men in Real Places

As we consider this remarkable encounter, it is important for us to

recognize that these men were not mythical characters from *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, or *Lord of the Rings*, but real men who lived on this earth centuries ago. In 2009, in excavations conducted by respected archaeologist Eilat Mazar just south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in the area known as the “Ophel,” two small clay artifacts were discovered. They were two bullae, the impressions made by a seal pressed into soft clay. Bullae were used to seal documents and verify the author or sender. One of the bullae was quickly identified. It read, “Belonging to Hezekiah, [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah.” For several years, other examples of Hezekiah bullae had circulated throughout the antiquities market, but this was the first to be found in a controlled, archaeological excavation.¹ It was found in a pile of debris against a wall near an area believed to have been used by the royal bakers up through the time of the Babylonian destruction of the city in 586 BC. It was decorated with a winged sun-disk, believed by some to represent God’s care over His people. Psalm 84:11 declares, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield.” Psalm 91:4 promises, “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.”

About ten feet away, they discovered another bulla whose significance would not be recognized for several years. The upper left portion of it was damaged, and the lower left was probably obscured when it was first impressed by its owner’s thumbprint—which is still visible. What remains is remarkable!

The middle section reads in Hebrew, “*leyesha’yah[u]*,” meaning “belonging to Isaiah.” Now many people probably bore the name *Isaiah*, but the lower section has the three Hebrew letters *nyv*. The portion obscured by the thumbprint has room for the Hebrew letter *aleph*. If this was the full reading, it represents the Hebrew word *nyv*, meaning “prophet.” That would make the full reading “belonging to Isaiah, [the] prophet.” Not all accept this conclusion. Some take it as a personal name of some other Isaiah, but to find the names of Hezekiah and Isaiah in the same proximity, within the same archaeological context is compelling. The Bible uses these names together sixteen times (2 Kings 19:5, 20; 20:1, 8, 12, 14, 16, 19; 2 Chron. 32:20, 32; Isa. 37:5, 21; 38:1; 39:3, 5, 8). In her article reporting on this in the spring of 2018, Mazar wrote:

...the close relationship between Isaiah and King Hezekiah, as described in the Bible, and the fact the bulla was found next to one bearing the name of Hezekiah seem to leave open the possibility that, despite the difficulties presented by the bulla’s damaged area, this may have been a seal impression of Isaiah the prophet, adviser to King Hezekiah.²

In November 2018, my wife and I had the thrill of seeing both of these artifacts in an exhibit at the Armstrong Auditorium in Edmond, Oklahoma. It was moving to consider that these small bits of clay may well bear witness to these great men of faith.

Continued on page 34

Teaching Our Children: The Principle of the Lesson (Part IV)

by Aleta Samford

The most important lesson in life is knowing who God is and what He has done. Effective teachers will emphasize this to their students.

In this article, I am asking whether we find the Law of the Lesson, which states “The truth to be taught must be learned through truth already known,” in the word of God.

We have looked at two aspects of the law: 1) a lifetime of laying a solid foundation upon what is already known, and 2) each lesson in class as we proceed from what the students know to what they don't know. This article will address the first aspect.

To visualize this principle, I've been using a stairway because it shows the step-by-step progress of learning. Regarding the salvation of our souls, we often use the phrase steps of salvation. While not a biblical expression, it effectively describes the process by which God invites us to enter through His word.

In reference to the sample scenario of November's article, God's word first asks, “What happened?” not, “What does the lesson mean?” God doesn't expect or demand that we become obedient in baptism, then embark on a faithful life, until certain truths are discovered. In other words, He starts where we are with what happened.

If we are sincere, in *hearing*, we will relate the facts of the mighty deeds of our Father and His glorious plan for our salvation through Jesus Christ to one another and come to certain conclusions. Next, we will personalize those facts, *believing* what we have read. *Belief* will lead to *repentance* as we desire to become more like our Savior, and then to *confession* of the name of the One who died to make our salvation possible. The next step, of course, finds us obeying in *baptism*. Why would we not? Understanding, obedience, and faithfulness are natural responses when a proper foundation is laid.

Scripture also shows us the uselessness, or danger, of placing the learner on the *top step* before being ready. What happens when we don't begin with who God is, what He has done, and other basic truths? The apostle

Paul faced this dilemma with the Athenians on Mar's Hill: “For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). They are reminiscent of the 5th-grade philosophy class our son faced (June 2018 issue). They did not know who God was (vv. 22-23) and most certainly did not include Him in their decisions.

The Athenians were spending their time on the top step, precariously figuring things out on their own. If Paul had begun with baptism, they would, as we say, have just gotten wet. God was not the foundation for their knowledge; He wasn't their primary active force (June and August articles). Paul might as well have been facing a classroom of infants in that regard.

Paul proclaimed to them their first step: who God was and what He had done. Only then did he proceed to give them a purpose for living; only then did he tell them to repent.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). When we recognize God's authority in all areas of life, everything falls into its proper place. Life makes sense, and the world has meaning. We'll avoid becoming our own active force, our own authority and instead be obedient... naturally. We understand what it means to be a child of the Heavenly Father. This is the life-long aspect of the Law of the Lesson.

Psalms 78 is a summary of the history of God and the Israelites and a commentary of what all people should be doing with that history. We must teach our children the source of our faith and help them begin to build their own, one step at a time. 📖



Aleta Samford

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Sermon on the Mount: Anxiety

by David Flatt

While anxiety is symptomatic of a lack of trust in God, discipleship provides a proven path to contentment and peace of mind.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:25–34)

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus considers self-constructed barriers to the

kingdom: self-righteousness, materialism, and anxiety. In certain respects, each of these barriers is connected, evidencing a basic lack of faith. Rather than believing and trusting in God, such people trust in themselves. They look inward for fulfillment rather than Godward. This is idolatry. This is why the self-righteous, materialistic, and anxious are not permitted into the kingdom.

About Anxiety

Everyone can relate to anxiety. Regardless of time and place, worry is common to the human experience. Finding safety and security are primitive concerns to us. Since Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of Eden, humans have had to cope with the burdens of providing for themselves by the sweat of their brows. Life has never been easy.

We live in an anxious society. Mainly, we are overwhelmed by an uncertain future. There are many sources of uncertainty in our lives, most of which are financial. We worry about employment, affording the cost of living, having enough money in retirement, the rising cost of health care, etc. People of Jesus' day were equally concerned about these types of issues; albeit, in different ways. The point, however, is this: every generation will always be concerned about finding daily necessities and coping with an uncertain future.

Wisdom is found in being able to recognize that we will always have to concern ourselves with the necessities of life and an uncertain future. Therefore, we should not allow these concerns to consume us. Instead, we must learn how to manage and balance these issues—but, how?

A Better Way

As long as people have had to work and cope with an uncertain future, there have been those who offer advice on how to live a balanced, peaceful life. Today is no different. People seek advice from the likes of Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, Joel Osteen, Suze Orman, and Dave Ramsey. While we may learn helpful information from these and others, Jesus' teaching is much more than simply self-help. Jesus teaches us how to deal with the burdens of life, not so that we can just have a good life or have more in this life. Jesus teaches us how to get to the kingdom.

We cannot make the burdens of this life our foremost concern. This is self-destructive. For example, the uncertain future over which we agonize quickly becomes our present worry. Before we know it, our present becomes the past—the worrisome cycle of life repeats over and over again. Solomon described this exhausting, unfulfilling cycle of life:

What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation

comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:3-9).

Being consumed by the cares of life is unfulfilling and destructive. Jesus shows us a better way to live. He instructs us to make God's kingdom and His righteousness the foremost goal of our lives. Both the kingdom and the righteousness of God are found through faith in the Teacher of this most transformative sermon. The apostle Paul would later explain how faith in the Messiah is the law of righteousness (Rom. 10:1-4).

The problem of anxiety can be easily identified in our lives. Most quickly acknowledge the pressures of life weighing heavily upon them, but what can be done to ease those pressures? What can be done to begin replacing worry with trust? Consider the following suggestions.

Develop Trust

Disciples deal with anxiety by developing greater trust in God. Belief in what God accomplished through the Messiah leads us to trust God. This is what Jesus is teaching us in this part of His sermon. Instead of relying on our abilities to provide for an uncertain tomorrow, we must trust God today.

Make a List

When discussing this section of Jesus' sermon, something is always said about priorities. Jesus did not

just teach to seek the kingdom but to seek the kingdom *first*. However, what does this mean in the daily grind of life? What do we value most in our lives? How we spend our time and money usually is an indication as to what is most important to us. Make a list of your goals. What are you working towards accomplishing? After making a list, ask yourself:

- Are these goals helping me get to the kingdom?
- Are these goals helping my family get to the kingdom?
- Are these goals hindering my family and me from getting to the kingdom?

Sacrifice

After making a list of goals, decide which ones can be eliminated. Are my current priorities a help or hindrance to getting to the kingdom? Are my current priorities a help or a hindrance in reflecting the glory of God in my life?

Getting to the kingdom and reflecting God's glory demands sacrifice—a concept that is nearly lost in our society. We are told we can have it all; yet, this lie only contributes to our anxiety. Some painful decisions may be in order. To seek the kingdom first in our lives, we must make better use of our time and resources. We are going to have to make wiser decisions regarding the impact that our values and goals will have on our pursuit of the kingdom.

Accept Help

We often struggle to find the humility to accept help from others. We should stop thinking we have to do everything ourselves. Life is long and hard. As such, God never intended for us to bear the burdens of life alone. Adam was given Eve, a helper suitable for his needs. God gives citizens of the kingdom the Messiah, the Spirit, and also each other—to provide aid and

support on the winding road of life (Matt. 11:28-30; Rom. 8:26-27; Gal. 6:2).

Pray

As previously discussed, prayer helps cultivate dependency on God. Rather than presumptuously thinking we can do things on our own, we are to look to God for help. The Bible says, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). An old familiar song says, "O what peace we often forfeit; O what needless pain we bear; All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

Remember God's Grace

In this text, Jesus reminds His audience of God's grace. God takes care of birds; certainly, He will take care of His children. When we look inwardly and rely upon ourselves, we forget that the blessings we enjoy are the result of God's grace and goodness. Yes, we have to be responsible and care for ourselves and our families; however, all we have is the result of God's grace being poured into our lives.

Remembering God's grace gives us a better perspective in our lives. A verse of the song, "Amazing Grace," reads, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come; 'Twas grace that brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home." Recalling how God's grace has been brought into our lives in the past will help temper how we cope with present concerns and face an uncertain future.

Conclusion

Those first to come to the kingdom had many reasons to be filled with anxiety: poverty, discrimination, and oppression, to name a few. Paul would remind saints of the fundamental principles of the faith. He wrote,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness ►

be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:4-7).

Let us awaken to the dangerous realities that our self-righteous, materialistic culture poses to faith. The self-righteousness and materialism

of our society are fueled by anxiety. The fear of not measuring up to the superficial standards of success drives ambition and consumption. Jesus frequently warned how the cares of this world and the deception of riches would put a stranglehold on faith (Matt. 13:22).

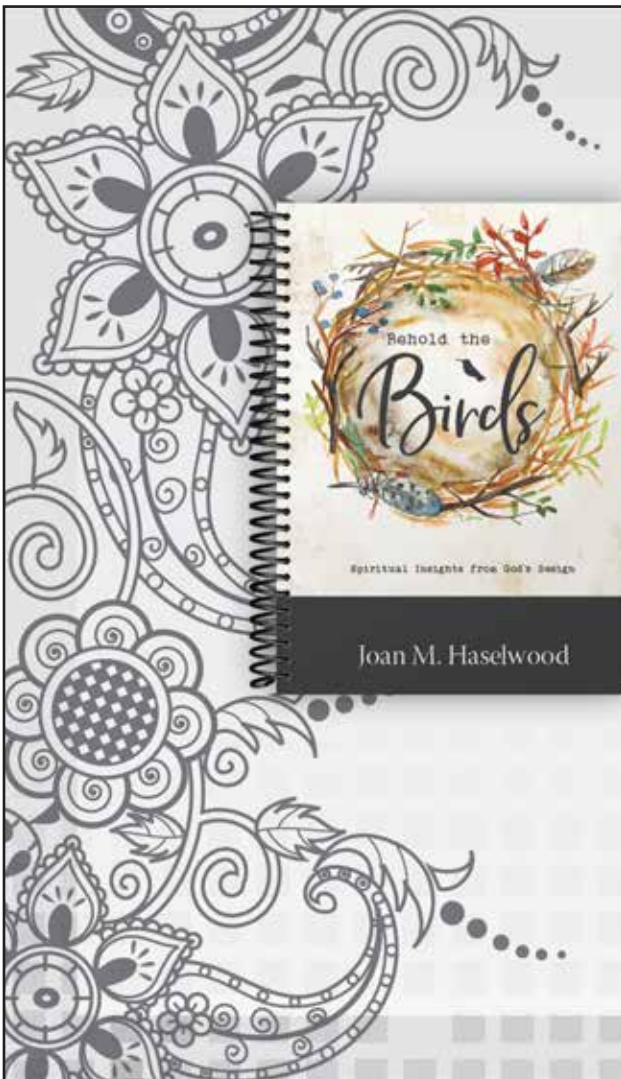
Therefore, we need to reevaluate our lives. We need to take the steps of faith explained by Jesus to guide us to the kingdom. Once arriving

at the kingdom by faith, we must continue to trust and rely on the King in how we live in this world. If we are not thoughtful and deliberate in how we live, we will be swept away from the kingdom by the world. **TL**



David Flatt

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Wayward Children: A Painful Trial (Part 1)

by Ron Halbrook

Wayward children present one of the most painful trials a Christian could ever face; yet, consistent application of biblical principles help us navigate these troubled waters.

Ezekiel 18:10-13 describes a righteous man whose child becomes a thief, a violent person, an adulterer, and an idolater. This is one of the most challenging and painful experiences a parent can ever face. No words can adequately express the anguish and disappointment of parents with wayward children. Even unrighteous parents do not escape the piercings of this sharp sword. The words of Solomon ring as true today as when they were first written: “A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him” (Prov. 17:25).

The Bible records numerous examples of the tragedy of wayward children and gives priceless guidance to saints who walk by faith, not by sight, in the face of such devastating storms.

In Old Testament History

God experienced the grief of wayward children when Adam and Eve first violated His love and trust by sinning against Him. Little could they have realized that their sinful conduct would be compounded in the sins of their children and the human family at large. All of us enter this same house of horrors when we sin: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). None of us can measure the devastating impact of our sins!

We are amazed to learn that God did not give up on His wayward children.

Satan used a woman to introduce sin into the world, but God promised to use a woman to bring our Savior into the world. God told Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The seed of woman to be wounded by Satan was the Son of God. We are astonished to learn that it cost God His only begotten Son to make a way to restore His wandering children to His fellowship!

The halls of history are littered with examples of wayward children. Who can measure the anguish of Adam and Eve when Cain killed Abel in anger over his brother’s righteous conduct? Abel’s blood cried out to God for justice, and Cain bore the punishment of his sin the rest of his days. Their parents lost two sons. God gladdened their hearts by the birth of Seth, but they carried the wounds of losing two boys to the grave. Read Genesis 4 and weep with them!

After Jacob deceived Isaac in order to receive Esau’s birthright, Esau planned to murder his brother. When the plot was reported to his mother Rebekah, she in desperation sent Jacob away to hide among their relatives in Haran “until thy brother’s fury turn away” (Gen. 27:44). This painful separation stretched across twenty years. Sibling hatred brings the bitter fruit of suspicion, emotional alienation, physical separation, and

lost opportunities to build precious ties and memories. Above all, the parents suffer broken hearts!

Jacob’s display of favoritism toward Joseph, combined with the resentment of his sons over Joseph’s prophetic dreams, resulted in such bitter hatred in the hearts of Joseph’s brothers that they sold him into slavery. They concocted a tale about finding Joseph’s coat covered in blood and let their father think that an animal mauled their son. In spite of many efforts to comfort Jacob, he drowned in grief saying, “For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him” (Gen. 37:35). Jacob’s wayward sons left this heavy burden on his heart for many years—it was lifted in the end only by God’s good providence. Changing circumstances of life sometimes contribute to children coming to their senses and making correction.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 reveals the cold reality of wayward children who become hopelessly hardened cases. The Law of Moses spoke here of cases where a young man raised by righteous parents becomes so hardened that the humiliated parents were required to bring their son before the judges. He was to be executed in order to protect the community from harm and corrupting influences. The ingratitude and rebellion of

such a son pierces his parents' hearts with a thousand swords!

While King David repented of his adultery, he lost the moral leadership of his family. His son, Amnon, raped his daughter Tamar, and what could David do but writhe in pain, knowing his own example was a disgraceful stumbling block to others? Absalom tired of waiting for his father to punish his brother, and plotted Amnon's murder and fled into hiding for three years (2 Sam. 13). Later, Absalom arrogantly courted the hearts of Israel and drove his father from Jerusalem, intending to wrest the reins of power from him (2 Sam. 15). Afterward, Joab, always watchful for David's safety and political interests, killed Absalom on the battlefield, contrary to David's wishes. The Bible records David's anguished, heart-wrenching reaction upon receiving the news: "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33).

In the Personal Teaching of Jesus

Wayward children appear in the personal teaching of Jesus. He used the examples of children who first rebel and then repent in contrast to some who profess loyalty and then rebel, in order to illustrate the condition of the Gentile people and the nation of Israel (Matt. 21:28-32). The Gentile world which had brazenly turned away from the true God was open to hear and obey the gospel of Christ, whereas the proud Jews who professed their loyalty to God rejected Christ.

The well-known Parable of the Prodigal is really the Parable of Two Prodigal Sons. One hit the bottom of the barrel in immoral, riotous conduct, but finally repented. The other son

lived a righteous life, but became self-righteous in his refusal to receive his penitent brother (Luke 15:11-32). Self-righteous Jewish leaders were not ready to receive humble sinners who repented at the preaching of Jesus.

In one of the most scorching sermons ever preached, Jesus accused Israel's religious leaders of being hypocrites, blind guides, whited sepulchers, venomous vipers, and hardhearted, wayward children. He spoke not in bitterness, but like a brokenhearted father, pled with them, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). Nothing else could be done for them in heaven or on earth. God left them desolate, alone, to be destroyed by their own folly.

In the Church

The New Testament reveals that we will face the challenge of wayward children in the church of Christ. God teaches us to admonish, rebuke, warn and plead in every way possible to bring them to godly sorrow and repentance. Then, if they reject God's Word, we must withdraw from them. God gave a procedure when one brother sins against another (Matt. 18:15-17). The offended party should first privately seek reconciliation. If that fails, he will bring witnesses to strengthen the appeal. If that fails, the matter will be brought before the church for the final step of discipline.

The apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit to direct the church in disciplining wayward members. First, there must be concentrated admonition to restore the fallen saint (1 Thess. 5:14). If all efforts fail, Christ commands the local church to withdraw its fellowship from the Christian who has fallen into sin. There

must be a public announcement to inform and unite the church in taking this painful step. It is all done in love to save the sinner, not to destroy him (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). How long we should plead with the wayward member is a matter of judgment, considering such factors as the nature of the sin and the attitude of the offender. At every step we must speak "the truth in love," and even after the final step, we manifest our Father's love for wayward children: "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (Eph. 4:15; 2 Thess. 3:15). **TL**



Ron Halbrook

Ron Halbrook and David Dann serve together as evangelists for the Hebron Lane Church of Christ in Shepherdsville, Kentucky. Ron began his work with the church in 1997. In addition to the local work, Ron makes four trips to the

Philippines each year and does meeting work here in the U.S. He can be reached at halbrook@twc.com.

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Bobby participates in fill-in preaching, Belize trips, teaching at Athens Bible School, and in gospel meetings. He and his wife, Karen, have three children: Richard, Mary Katherine Winland (Darren), and Laura Paschall (Jeremy). He can be reached at bobbylgraham@pclnet.net.

QUESTION:

Where is the command, example, or inference for offering the Lord's Supper a second time at the night service?

Answer:

Brethren sometimes ask about the correctness of eating the Lord's Supper at night or in a second worship assembly of saints. It is commendable that they want to know and do what is scriptural. Sometimes they ask about a "second serving of the supper." This expression demonstrates a false concept of insisting that the church serve the supper as if the church sanctions it or makes it official or right. The New Testament speaks of eating the supper (emphasis on the partaker), but not of serving it (emphasis on the congregation). One would just as well ask about second preaching, or second singing, as the second serving of the Lord's Supper, because the New Testament doesn't specifically speak about any of them, though it generically authorizes all of them.

The mistake made by some is to insist on specific authority for what the New Testament already generically authorizes. The same passages sometimes used to restrict the Supper to one assembly (i.e., Acts 20:7) also would restrict saints' meeting to one time, if viewed as specific authority. Where is the specific authority for them to meet twice, to sing twice, or to have preaching twice? Why then do our objecting brethren have more than one gathering to sing and pray and teach on the first day of the week, but not to eat the Lord's Supper? Let us study the matter to determine what is right.

What does the New Testament teach about eating the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34)? (1) Authorized people: saints; (2) Authorized action: eating unleavened bread and drinking fruit of the vine; (3) Authorized place (situation): where saints assemble to eat it; (4) Authorized day: the first day of the week; (5) Authorized manner: in remembrance of Christ, discerning His body and blood. These are the scriptural features of the Lord's Supper as taught in the New Testament. When we observe these essentials, we act scripturally. To require more than these is to legislate where only God can speak (1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Does this allow eating it at night (or in a second gathering of saints)? When a Christian eats what the Lord specified in the manner that He commanded in a gathering of saints on the first day of the week, he has done all that the Lord binds on him to do in this matter. Who has the right to bind more? While some may have scruples that do not permit them thus to eat the supper, they have no right to forbid others the right to observe what the Lord enjoined. One's conscience should not be held over others. For what it may be worth, both Lenski and Barclay say that it was common for first-century churches to meet twice on Sunday (early in the morning for the slaves who had to work for their masters and later in the day for others). It was an effort to accommodate the slaves. Would a second service of a congregation that has outgrown its building be scriptural? Based on their teaching on this matter, some would not allow such.

Why Do Some Object to Such a Practice?

(1) Some say there is no authority for the practice, but we have previously demonstrated that there is such authority.

(2) A few object because it takes place at night, asserting the disciples in Troas observed it on Saturday night in Acts 20:7, according to Jewish time. Yet, close study of the context of Acts 20 shows that the Christians were not observing Jewish time (counting a day from sundown to the next sundown), but Roman time, because Paul left “on the morrow,” meaning the next day. His departure would have been the same first day of the week in Jewish time, according to the objectors. Under Roman time, disciples communed at some point after Saturday midnight, and Paul later preached till the following midnight (the beginning of the second day of the week). Paul’s eating his own meal (not the Lord’s Supper) in verse 11, and his departure came “on the morrow” (at daybreak).

(3) Several object to what they call a “segmental observance” of the supper, insisting that the disciples in Acts 20:7 were all present and that 1 Corinthians 11:33 requires the whole church to partake. This position is based on an unprovable assumption—that all disciples were present and eating or that all who were present ate. There are very few Sunday mornings in some large congregations when all who attend eat. If they fail to eat, then we have a segmental observance on Sunday morning. What makes a segmental observance at one time any more acceptable than at another time? “Tarry for one another” (used to condemn a “second serving”) appears in a context of selfishness and division, where some were rushing ahead of others to consume their supper, making communion in the body and blood of Jesus impossible. Paul was seeking to restore the fellowship in eating and drinking by regulating their selfishness and stopping the division among them. To use the command to require simultaneous eating/drinking is to twist and abuse the apostolic mandate.

(4) Some say that it is wrong for one person to commune alone. This is based on the idea that the only communion is with the saints at the time of eating, but the Bible teaches otherwise. The Christian communes with Christ (Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 10:16-21) and with other saints in other places (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Paul in Ephesus was separated from the Corinthians by 275 miles (1 Cor. 16:8, 19). Neither distance nor time makes such communion among saints impossible. Five minutes (same service) or five hours (later service) do not hinder this communion. A review of the essentials earlier covered convinces us that one person can eat scripturally.

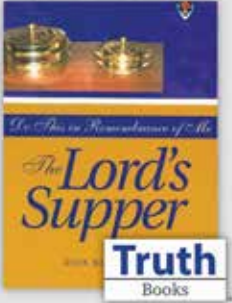
(5) Some object on the ground of the abuses that this practice has produced. It is true that some have abused the privilege of eating the Lord’s Supper at a later time, but some have also abused the local church by making

it into something God didn’t intend it to be, the office of elders by making them into something unscriptural, and the privilege of prayer by misusing it, but the abuse never proves the scriptural practice wrong. God said to let each one eat and drink, in spite of the possibility of abusing the privilege. Some brethren will not let others do what God lets them do. God in his wisdom did not allow possible abuse of the Passover in Numbers 9:10-13 to keep him from allowing it on a later occasion. Furthermore, he never called it a “second Passover.”

(6) A few have objected to being subjected to the observance of the supper by others. This is mere opinion, possibly based on selfishness. In chapter 13, Paul taught the Corinthians to love one another by being patient, kind, and long-suffering. Possibly we need more lessons along this line.

Conclusion

There is a marked difference between one sincerely holding to a position like this one and thus not personally eating at a later gathering (Romans 14 would defend his right to do so) and his forbidding others the right to do what the Lord told them to do (Romans 14 would condemn his doing so). One’s conscience cannot become the standard for others. The brother whose conscience forbids his eating under this circumstance should not participate, but he should allow others to do as their conscience dictates. No church should ever have problems or divide over such matters. Such is inevitable when one goes to the hurtful extreme of making his conscience a binding rule for others in such matters. Is it not strange that an avenue of worship designed to unite brethren and declare their oneness in Christ (1 Cor. 10:17) has become the center of disunity and divisiveness? When people make their conscience the rule for others, such tension always follows. 📖



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The Early Rains and the Promises of God

by Barry Britnell

Do you want to be reassured of the promises of God? Then look no further than the rain that falls on the Sea of Galilee.

For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables. But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, *the early rain and the later rain*, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full (Deut. 11:10-15).

I have always been interested in the weather. I remember performing weather experiments for science fairs while in high school. I loved weather so much that in the spring of 1991, I graduated from Florida State University with a degree in Meteorology. In addition, I have always been interested in the Bible. As I read the wonderful stories in the Bible, I see that it is filled with specific instances and comments about the weather.

Just before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, Moses spoke to the people and described the wonderful land that God was providing to them, saying that God will provide the land with “early rain and later rain.” What exactly does that mean? Let me try to explain.

Living in North Alabama, we see a lot of rain. On average, we will receive about 55 to 60 inches of rain per year. For the most part, that rain falls consistently throughout the year. We have some months that are wetter than other months. However, normally, the rain falls on us all year round.

Due to the upper air currents and geography of the area, the weather in Israel acts much differently. While they have the same four meteorological seasons, (spring, summer, fall, and winter) as far as rainfall is concerned, they only have two seasons. They

have the wet season and the dry season. The wet season lasts from October to May. The dry season lasts, of course, from May to October. During the dry season, the land of Israel receives very little, if any, rain. Therefore, the early rains fall in October and the later rains fall in May.

For the past several years, the land of Israel has been going through a drought. Rain falls during the rainy season, but not as much as is needed. Consequently, that has caused several ripple effects throughout the land, including the lowering of the water level of the Sea of Galilee. Every year, as the months of October and November arrive, I always try to track the weather in Israel by paying special attention to the websites of the Israeli Meteorological Service, websites that display the water levels across the land, and various live web cameras.

So far in this current rainy season, the rainfall has been very good. Every few days, the land has received fair amounts of rain and the water levels are slowly beginning to rise. Recently, I was able to capture a screenshot of a live web camera from the city of Safed (see image on next page), which sits a couple of miles north of the Sea of Galilee. In this image, you can see a beautiful rain shower over the lake.

Over 3,500 years ago, God made a promise to the children of Israel, saying that He would provide



The stream at the Tel Dan Nature Preserve, which eventually feeds into the Jordan River.



Looking south across the Sea of Galilee.

water for the land “in its season.” He did exactly that. In doing so, He taught the people valuable lessons. He taught them about the love He has for them. He taught them to appreciate things that are given to them. Also, He taught them to not be wasteful of the blessings that they have been given. God has been continually teaching those same lessons to people every year since He made that promise.

We base everything we believe on the promises that God has made to us. Do you want to be reassured of the faithfulness of those promises? Then, every fall, sit back and watch the storm clouds spread across the Sea of Galilee. In so doing, you will once again be reminded that once God makes a promise, He always keeps it. 📺



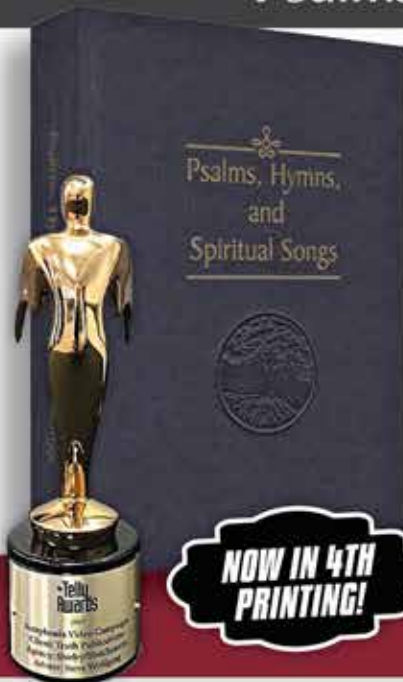
Barry Britnell

Barry Britnell is the founder of Exploring Bible Lands, LLC (www.exploringbiblelands.com) and leads Bible Study tours to the land of Israel. He also works with Appian Media (www.appianmedia.org) to produce Biblically-sound videos used in teaching others about the Bible. Barry and his wife, Tabatha, have three children, live in Athens, AL, and worship with the Capshaw church of Christ.



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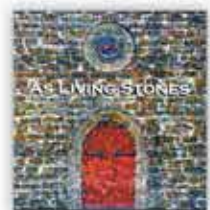
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Challenges to Tax-Exempt Housing Allowance for Ministers

by Steve Wolfgang

Steve reports upon a case that is working its way through the courts that is of interest to preachers of the gospel.

The 7th Circuit Court of Appeals sits at Chicago, occupying the 27th Floor of the Everett Dirksen Federal Building in the Federal Plaza downtown. It is one of twelve such federal Courts of Appeal, one rung below the US Supreme Court in the federal court system. On October 24, 2018, I attended the oral arguments presented before the court regarding Case #18-1277, *Gaylor v. Mnuchin*. It is a reprise of a case brought by the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) which was dismissed in 2013 for lack of “standing” by the plaintiffs. After making some adjustments in their case, FFRF is back again.

Judge Michael Brennan presided, joined by Senior Judges Daniel Manion, and William J. Bauer (nominated by Presidents Trump, Reagan, and Ford, respectively, and confirmed by the Senate).

I’m not an attorney, I don’t play one on TV, and I didn’t stay at a Holiday Inn last night—so take these “laymen’s” impressions with grains of salt. I do have a personal interest in the case, in that it challenges the right of churches and preachers to declare a significant portion of their income as a tax-exempt housing allowance. FFRF alleges that this is unconstitutional, violating the First Amendment (Article I of the Bill of Rights) which mandates, among other things, that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The argument is that such housing

allowances grant government privilege, not available to other citizens, to religious organizations and ministers. The lower court in Wisconsin ruled in favor of the FFRF, and that decision was appealed to the 7th Circuit.

FFRF has called this a “David v. Goliath” campaign, imagining Goliath as the various religious bodies whose ministers would be affected by the elimination of tax-exempt housing allowances. However, the real giant in the room and the bigger challenge for FFRF may be that they are suing the US government itself—specifically the Secretary of the Treasury.

Representing the government at the October hearing was an array of attorneys, led by Jesse Panuccio, Associate Attorney General of the US (the third highest ranking official at the Department of Justice, who oversees virtually all non-criminal matters). He was joined by four other attorneys at a table laden with documents and surrounded by document cases and still more attorneys seated near the table.

The chambers were “comfortably full”—each of the rows of spectator benches might have had room for one or two more persons, if everyone had moved to the center.

Also arguing an amicus brief was Luke Goodrich, VP and Senior Counsel of Becket Law—a firm which argues religious liberty cases on behalf of believers in many religious

communities, “Christian” and otherwise. They are representing a coalition of Chicago churches (ranging from Holy Cross Anglican Church to the Chicago Embassy Church, to the Chicago Diocese, Russian Orthodox Church), arguing specifically that the elimination of the IRC 107(2), which provides for ministerial housing allowances, would discriminate against poorer religious groups which cannot afford to provide a church-owned parsonage for their preacher, as allowed in Section 107(1) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Seated at the opposite table were two attorneys who argued that the ministerial housing allowance permitted under IRC Section 107(2) is unconstitutional. Speaking first was Adam Chodorow, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, arguing a brief filed by a coalition of tax professors. I thought he made the strongest and clearest case possible that IRC 107(2) is unconstitutional simply by singling out a special class (ministers) to receive a benefit not available to other citizens. Agree with the arguments or not, he made his case clearly and fielded the questions effectively asked him by the justices.

Richard Bolton, who I believe is a general-practice attorney in Madison, WI (where FFRF is located), spoke last, representing Annie Gaylor and Dan Barker, co-presidents of

FFRF. My impression is that FFRF was not particularly well served by his presentation, which to my ears sounded rambling, disjointed, repetitive, and unclear. Agree or not, the other attorneys presented their cases clearly and concisely, supported by relevant court decisions and logic. Bolton, who seemed flustered by questions from the justices, also sounded exasperated at times that the simple assertion of the rightness of his case was not accepted as obvious (one man's opinion). Presumably, such cases are decided on the merits of conflicting claims presented in the briefs and prior case law and court decisions, not so much on the eloquence and personality of the presenters.

Many of the issues raised in oral arguments had been discussed in an interesting seminar at the Loyola University Law School, which I also attended, the week prior to the 7th Circuit oral arguments. Some of the issues included whether the housing allowance passes the three-prong "Lemon v. Kurtzman" test, based on a 1971 Supreme Court decision. Among these issues is whether a law has "secular intent" (Judge Manion posed several questions about the secular effect, not merely the secular intent, of the law), and whether "Lemon" provisions should take precedence over historical considerations in the legislative history, adjudicating such issues on a practical basis involves government entanglement in the usage of either parsonage or house exempted under the allowance, and much more.

An interesting part of the "back-story" of this case is that the issue was brought to the FFRF by a now-retired IRS agent who is also a member of a local Church of Christ. He became disturbed upon discovering that, in 1970, some so-called "Christian Colleges" (including Abilene Christian University and Pepperdine), claiming to be "integral agencies of the church," had sought tax-exempt housing

allowances for many of their staff personnel (including athletic coaches identified as "basketball ministers"). To accomplish this, they enlisted the aid of several congressmen from Texas, including George H. W. Bush of Houston, and Omar Burleson of Abilene (an ACU alum and supporter) to pressure the IRS to allow such a ruling. The rest, as they say, is history.

So, as is often said of such matters, "We'll see." Whatever the 7th Circuit decides, the case will almost certainly be appealed to the US Supreme Court. The lower court decision in Wisconsin, declaring tax-exempt housing allowances for ministers unconstitutional, was stayed pending appeals. Should that decision be upheld by the 7th Circuit, and then by the Supreme Court, the lower court decision mandates that the statute allowing tax-exempt ministers' housing allowance will become null and void 180 days after the last appeal process is exhausted. Whether Congressional legislative action to restore it might ensue remains to be seen. Stay tuned!

A decision is expected sometime early in 2019. **TL**

Sources

Public Access to Oral Argument recordings presented before the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals is available here: <http://media.ca7.uscourts.gov/oralArguments/oar.jsp>.

An audio recording of Case #18-1277, Annie Gaylor v. Edward Peecher, is available here: http://media.ca7.uscourts.gov/sound/2018/ds.18-12771280.18-1277_10_24_2018.mp3.



Steve Wolfgang

Steve has worked with the church in Downers Grove (suburban Chicago) since 2008. He and his wife, Bette, have two adult children and three grandchildren. His blog, *eklektikos*, can be read at stevevolfgang.wordpress.com. He may be reached at stevevolfgang@aol.com or wolf@uky.edu



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What Qualifies One to Preach the Gospel?

by John Humphries

While education and intellect are important, greater emphasis should be placed upon having a sincere love for God and His word, and genuine concern for the souls of men.

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days (Acts 3:17-24).


Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed (Acts 13:26-28).

The Sanhedrin council in Jerusalem contained highly educated and very intelligent men (cf. Acts 5:34). Without

question, they were the leading experts and authorities in all of the customs and theology of the Jews at that time. No doubt, they knew the Hebrew and Aramaic languages completely and fluently. Many (if not all of them) also knew Greek and Latin as well (cf. John 19:20). They could recite vast sections of the OT from memory in the original languages. They were the go-to leaders of their day in the field of Biblical scholarship and learning (cf. Matt. 2:4). They prided themselves concerning their intelligence and their knowledge of the Old Testament and their traditions (John 7:49; 9:34; Rom. 2:17-20). They were theologians who were second to none!

These learned and intelligent men did not understand and therefore distorted some vitally important truth that the prophets taught. Namely, they did not understand the work of the Messiah or the nature of His kingdom (Acts 3:17, 24; cf. John 3:10). Even ignorant and unlearned fishermen (Acts 4:13) eventually understood more than they did concerning the Messiah and His kingdom. The Sanhedrin scholars (in spite of their great learning and high intellect) had the wrong "perspective" concerning the new covenant of Christ (1 Cor. 2:8). They rejected Christ and what He taught (John 7:48). Sadly, many intellectuals and theologians today are in the same boat with these Sanhedrin scholars. Otherwise, why are they not teaching sound doctrine instead of promulgating error concerning true worship, salvation from sin, the New Testament church, etc., etc.?

Given this, we must realize that it doesn't require being highly educated and gifted with great intellect to understand and preach the truth (1 Cor. 2:7-8). Rather, a sincere love for God and His Word, as well as a deep love for the souls of mankind, are prerequisites to know and preach the gospel of Christ. Couple this with a humble eagerness to sit at the feet of faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 3:13-17; 1 Tim. 4:16). We must also be ready to humbly correct and adjust our thinking, should we find ourselves out of step with the truth or in need of further teaching (cf. Acts 8:30-31; 18:24-28).

Please note that we are not opposed to education and high intellect! We could wish that we had more ourselves, but this is not required to teach and preach the gospel of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). We must not, therefore, overly linger at the feet of the "wise and intelligent" (Matt. 11:25) theologians, absorbing so much that simply is not sound, and becoming too "intellectual" to preach the simple and sound gospel of Christ faithfully (Col. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:13). We may need to repent of our prideful egos and get our thinking in line with what the Bible, the inspired word of God, teaches concerning the qualifications of a faithful gospel preacher (Rom. 12:3; 10:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). **Preach the word!** 



John Humphries

John is presently retired from local work and fills in here and there. He also preaches an occasional gospel meeting and continues his gospel work in India. He and Edna have four children. He can be reached at johnedna2012@gmail.com



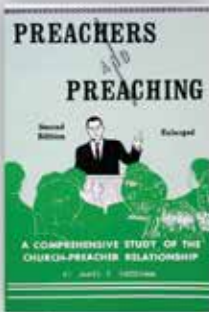
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The Heavenly Places

by Sean P. Cavender

Sean explores the meaning of this unique phrase that the apostle Paul employs in the Ephesian epistle.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a wonderful and encouraging epistle. It explains our fellowship with God through His Son (Eph. 1:3-5), the salvation we enjoy (Eph. 2:8-9), the enlightenment we have through the gospel of our faith (Eph. 1:9, 13, 18), and the riches of God's mercy (Eph. 1:7). It also reveals how we should live in accordance with the grace of God and how to maintain unity in the church, the bride of Christ.

One of the most interesting and unique phrases in Scripture is also found in the book of Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing *in the heavenly places* in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Observing how this phrase is used in the epistle, we will be able to appreciate better the blessings we have obtained through Christ, the leadership of our Savior, and the promise of victory in our spiritual warfare.

In Ephesians 4, the apostle describes the unity of the church, and our duty of preserving that unity comes from being a part of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6). Then Paul quotes the 68th Psalm, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8; Ps. 68:18). This verse refers to the victory of God and how a victor of warfare will take of the spoils of his enemy. In the context of the book of Ephesians which shows the blessings and riches we have through our Lord Jesus Christ, we may wonder,

from whence did these blessings come? Why have we received such blessings? Are we worthy of or entitled to, this kind of benevolent treatment? No. It is by *the measure of God's grace* that we receive these good gifts (Eph. 2:4).

In the context of Ephesians and Psalm 68, we see God and Christ as victorious warriors. Christ is the victor, and He has taken the spoils of the spiritual warfare in which He is engaged, and has given them to His church for its own benefit. He has given us the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers who equip the saints for edification (Eph. 4:11-13). The Lord has conquered the evil one, the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). He proved His might against the devil by defeating Satan when sinners were busy serving the devil, fulfilling the lusts and desires of the flesh (Eph. 2:3). "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:5). The divine plan of the ages was consummated, the devil was defeated, and Christ was victorious.

This victory did not result in a cruel dictatorship, but in a loving, caring, sacrificing, and benevolent king. Jesus is the head of the church "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20-23). We can read of the extent of Christ's love over His church in Ephesians 5:25-30. Those who were once dead in sin are now made alive to Christ. God has "raised us up with Him, and seated us with

Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). Just as the Lord was victorious over the devil, we have been made victorious over sin, death, and the devil. We enjoy a fruitful fellowship with Christ our Lord and King.


As children of God, we presently enjoy fellowship with Christ "in the heavenly places" through being members of His body, the church (Eph. 5:30). How is the love, mercy, and grace of God (Eph. 1:4-7) manifested and made evident? It is through the church, the bride of Christ. The manifold wisdom of God is now made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10).

The plan of salvation is wonderful and marvelous. Paul stands in awe of the wonder and amazement of this plan in Ephesians 3:17-19. The wisdom of our God is evidenced through the defeat of our adversary. Satan must have been convinced of his victory when we "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air..." (Eph. 2:2). When it appeared that we were doing Satan's bidding, the Lord extended to us the opportunity of redemption and forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7). Now, we are in fellowship with the Lord and engaged in the spiritual warfare for the One who is certain to be victorious!

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world

forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

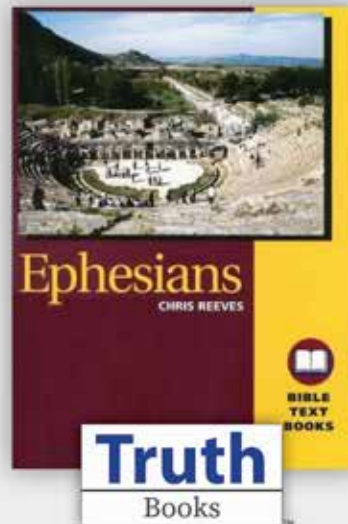
Paul exhorts us to be strong in the Lord and to put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10). We must be prepared to fight against the devil and all the agents that he will use and manipulate in a feeble attempt to gain victory. We have been raised up and seated “in the heavenly places” and now our warfare is “in the heavenly places”—we are not engaged in a carnal battle. Our struggle is against the devil and his will. God promises that we will be able to stand firm and resist the devil in this fight (Eph. 6:13).

It is interesting to look at the book of Ephesians and how it ends, showing us that, as the children of God, we are in spiritual warfare. However, it is at the beginning of the epistle that we are made fully aware of the certainty of victory and how we can obtain that victory. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). There is no question or doubt regarding who is victorious or how we can become victorious. We must choose Christ! We must seek the redemption that is found in His blood (Eph. 1:7), and we must believe the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:13)! The salvation of the Lord is given freely by His grace and through our faith (Eph. 2:8-9). We can enjoy the benefits and blessings of being “in the heavenly places” when we trust and obey. 



Sean Cavender

Sean has worked with the Bald Knob church of Christ for two and a half years in Bald Knob, Arkansas. He and his wife, Kristin, have one son. The church website is diligentlyseekhim.com. He can be reached at spcavender@gmail.com



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The Progressive Mindset: Baptism

by Chris Reeves

In his ongoing examination of the progressive mindset, Chris looks at changing views on baptism that are creeping into the brotherhood.

When discussing the “progressive mindset,” a distinction must be made between change in technology and change in New Testament doctrine.¹ If by “progressive” one means a desire to change and to progress using modern technology, then I am all for being “progressive.” For example, I’ll take a PowerPoint presentation over a chalkboard any day. However, if by “progressive” one means a desire to change and to progress beyond the doctrine of the New Testament—to teach something different; then, I am opposed to being “progressive” (2 John 9-11).²

Today, many religious individuals, in and out of the Lord’s church, are progressive with regard to New Testament doctrine. They have moved beyond what the New Testament teaches on many matters. Within some Churches of Christ, there are progressives now advocating such things as grace-alone salvation, unity-in-diversity fellowship, heaven on a restored earth, a hell that is not eternal, a common meal with the Lord’s supper, the use of women preachers, and instrumental music.³ This article will briefly examine the teaching of a few progressive brethren in the area of baptism, and it will offer a review as well of the true, New Testament teaching on baptism.

Progressive Teaching on Baptism

In 2001, Douglas A. Foster, himself a progressive associated with Abilene Christian University, wrote an article in *Restoration Quarterly* making the point that brethren in the distant past were, for the most part, united in their beliefs about baptism.⁴ Foster wrote that these brethren held views that baptism was immersion, that baptism was to be followed by faithful living, and that baptism was for the remission of sins. Foster then concluded his article by pointing out that brethren in the more recent past have been divided over baptism. Foster mentioned two points of current division: (1) must one know that baptism is for remission of sins when he is being baptized, and (2) must one believe that being born again involves baptism, or is the new birth by faith alone? Concerning this last point, Douglas wrote: “Another view [among brethren, CHR], though decidedly a minority one and often labeled heretical by the mainstream, is that one becomes a child of God at the point of belief in Christ.”⁵ Foster closed his article this way: “Our controversies have arisen over the precise nature of the human part in baptism and the possibility that innocently unimmersed persons would experience a ‘baptism of the heart’ that would save.”⁶

Foster’s article demonstrates that a progression concerning baptism

has indeed taken place among some brethren from times past to the present. Brethren today, in general, still believe that baptism is immersion in water and that it is an important command to obey. The division that exists has to do with the purpose and design of baptism. Progressives are saying that baptism is not necessary for the initial salvation of the believer. Who has caused this present division over baptism and when did they do it?

Sometime around the early 1980’s and running through the 1990’s, progressive brethren associated with some institutional Churches of Christ began to openly advocate their belief about two things: (1) the presence of “Christians” in the denominations, and (2) the understanding that baptism does not have to be for the remission of sins. These progressives began to change the face of some of the churches of Christ, which in time would make them denominational look-alike churches. Simply put, these progressives wanted open fellowship with members of denominations, and they believed they found justification for it in their progressive view of baptism. Here are a few examples.

Rubel Shelly has advocated his Christians-in-denominations belief for some time. He wrote the following in 1984 in his book, *I Just Want to Be A Christian*: “Surely there are individuals in practically all the

denominations known today who have learned of Jesus, looked to him in sincere faith, turned away from their conscious rebellions against his will, and embraced him as Savior through their immersion in his name.”⁷

Max Lucado, minister of the Oak Hills Church (formerly, “Oak Hills Church of Christ”) and a very popular religious writer, has advocated his pray-the-sinner’s-prayer belief for some time. In December of 1996, Lucado encouraged listeners of the UpWords radio program (KJAK in Lubbock, TX) to pray the sinner’s prayer to be saved. He said: “Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins. I give my tears. I give my fears. I give my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you, Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen. [Announcer’s break]... I’d like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church. I want to encourage you to be baptized. I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don’t want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.”

On July 2, 1997, Lucado made the following comment in a television interview in Nashville, TN: “I believe in baptism. Jesus was baptized. The Bible teaches baptism. I just don’t believe that baptism saves you. I believe that Jesus Christ saves us. And baptism is one of those ways we celebrate our salvation. It’s really the initial step of the faithful believer.”⁸

A more current example of the progressive mindset on baptism comes from John Mark Hicks, Professor of Theology at David Lipscomb University. He has advocated his pious-unimmersed-saved belief for some time. Hicks wrote the following in a paper presented at the second meeting of the Baptist-Churches of Christ Dialogue held at Hardin Simmons

University and Abilene Christian University, January 30-31, 2004:

Therefore, the bottom line is that God values a transformed life more than he values baptism. This does not render baptism unimportant, unnecessary or meaningless. Baptism is God’s transforming work, but God values the goal of baptism more than baptism itself. God will work toward the goal even when baptism is misunderstood and misapplied.

When God is pictured as the ‘God of technicalities’ who zaps his people simply because they violated the technicalities of a ritual, the nature of God’s holiness is seriously misunderstood. God is not searching for technical law-breakers; he is searching for hearts that seek him. He punishes those who rebelliously violate his commands but forgives those who seek him, even when they seek him in ritually imperfect ways. The heart is more important than ritual; obedience as transformation is more important than obedience as ritual.⁹

Our traditions [Baptist and Church of Christ, CHR] have equally run to extremes in the profession and practice of our baptismal theologies. Campbellites have often turned baptism into a technical line in the sand that divides the lost and the saved. We have, indeed, at times exalted baptism above transformation. That is our extreme. Baptists, on the other hand, have at times devalued the soteriological significance of baptism and separated it from the conversion narrative.

I believe we can move closer to each other if, on the one hand, we Campbellites adopt a more self-conscious Calvinian baptismal theology that recognizes the primacy of faith and the goal of transformation and, on the other hand, Baptists adopt a more Calvinian baptismal theology that

recognizes baptism as a divine act within the conversion narrative. In other words, Campbellites should cease questioning or doubting the eternal destiny of unimmersed believers and recognize them as pilgrims in the process of transformation on the same journey as themselves, and Baptists should invite believers to baptism as part of their conversion experience and invite seekers to baptism in the context of the sinner’s prayer rather than substitute baptism with the sinner’s prayer.¹⁰

Several other examples of progressive thinking on baptism could be offered here, but these will suffice to illustrate the point. So, what has happened in the past thirty-five years or so? What has happened is that some progressive brethren have taken others with them on a path away from and beyond the scriptural teaching on baptism. These progressives are change-agents who are leading their followers down the path of liberalism. Their doctrine on baptism is now basically that of the Baptists: baptism is an important act of obedience to God for the Christian who is already saved by faith, but baptism is not “for the remission of sins” and it is not necessary for salvation.

New Testament Teaching on Baptism

We must never follow progressive brethren, but always follow the truth laid down in the New Testament scriptures. What do we learn about baptism when we turn to the pages of the New Testament? Let us consider briefly four truths about baptism. In the New Testament, we learn about the types of baptism, the action of baptism, the candidate for baptism, and the purpose or design of baptism.

First, the New Testament teaches us about the types of baptism. There was the baptism of John (Matt. 3:1- ►

12; etc.) and the baptism of Jesus' disciples (John 3:22-23, 26; 4:1-2). There is the baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11; etc.). There was the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; Acts 2:1-5; 10:44-48; etc.). There was the baptism of the Jews (Mark 7:4; etc.). There was the baptism of suffering (Matt. 20:22-23; Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:49-50). There was the baptism of Israel (1 Cor. 10:2). And lastly, there is the baptism of the great commission which was first administered by the apostles to all sinners (the world) for the remission of sins (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16). This is the "one baptism" for all mankind today (Eph. 4:5).

Second, the New Testament teaches us about the action of baptism. Baptism is immersion. It requires immersion in water (Acts 8:37; 10:47). The Greek verb *baptizo* and the Greek noun *baptisma* mean "immersion." These Greek words have been transliterated (not translated) into English as baptize and baptism.¹¹ To talk of the "modes" of baptism, as some do, is like talking about the "colors" of black. There is no "baptism by immersion" because baptism *is* immersion. These Greek words are related to the verb *bapto*, meaning "to dip," "to immerse," or "to plunge." The act of baptism is immersion because of the meaning of the Greek words and because the New Testament also implies it. Baptism involves a going to water (Acts 8:36), much water (John 3:23), a going down into water and coming up out of water (Mark 1:9-10; Acts 8:38-39). It also involves a burial in water and a rising from water (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12).


Third, the New Testament teaches us about the candidate for baptism. Baptism is for the obedient believer. The emphasis is not on a particular age, but on the mental maturity of the individual. The person who is to be baptized is first the person who hears the gospel—a teachable person

(Matt. 28:19; Acts 18:8); the person who believes the gospel—a trusting person (Matt. 16:15-16; Acts 8:12-13; 18:8); the person who repents of his sin—a penitent person (Acts 2:38); the person who confesses Jesus as Lord—a committed person (Acts 8:37-38); and, the person who obeys the command—a compliant person (Acts 10:48). Both men and women are baptized (Acts 8:12). Grossly immoral persons (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 6:9-11), morally good people (Acts 10:1-2, 48), religious people (Acts 2:5, 38; 8:26-38; 9:1-19; 16:14-15; 18:8; 19:1-6), and non-religious people (Acts 8:4-13; 16:30-34) are all baptized.

Fourth, the New Testament teaches us about the design or purpose of baptism. Baptism is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38, 41).¹² Baptism is the act that places a believer into a right spiritual relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is the act in which salvation is granted (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16). Baptism places the believer into Christ, his death, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12). It also places one into his one body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27). The emphasis in these last baptism passages is on the Christian's new life separated from sin and the Christian's unity with other Christians. Baptism also provides the believer with a clean conscience (Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:21-22). Because baptism is for the remission of sins, baptism should be immediate (Acts 8:36-38; 16:33), and it should cause great rejoicing (Acts 8:39; 16:34).

The New Testament teaching about baptism is a much needed subject today. There is unnecessary confusion and controversy among religious groups about baptism. Unfortunately, there are also progressives among Churches of Christ who would lead brethren away from the simple Bible truth about baptism. Because of this,

there are brethren today, especially among the younger generation, who need to learn what the Bible teaches about baptism. As one brother said, the Bible is clear "as mountain air" on this subject. Let us all know the clear Bible teaching about baptism and never compromise with others about it.

Friend, have you been baptized? Was it the right action (immersion)? Were you the right candidate at the time (an obedient believer)? Was it for the right purpose (for remission of sins)? Let us avoid the progressive doctrine about baptism and always be content to stay within the teaching of Christ found in the New Testament. Remember, when brethren become progressive, they become digressive. 

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¹⁰ *Ibid*, 23.

¹¹ The perfectly good and long-time practice of transliteration is now being questioned by some scholars. For a recent critique of the transliteration of baptism, see Benjamin J. Snyder, "Technical Term or Technical Foul? Βαπτίζω (Baptizō) and the Problem of Transliteration as Translation," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 21 (Spring, 2018), 91-113.

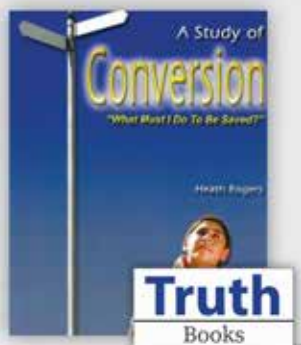
¹² The words "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 form a Greek prepositional phrase (εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν). This same phrase, without the definite

article, is found in Matthew 26:28; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; and, Luke 24:47. *After studying all of these passages, it should be clear to the honest Bible student that "for" (εἰς) in this phrase points forward (so that sins might be forgiven) and not backward (because sins have been forgiven).*



Chris Reeves

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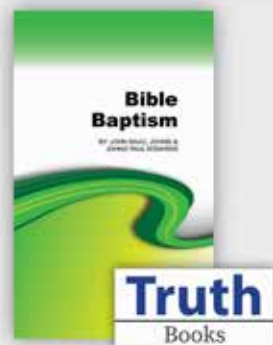
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Why Did My Savior Come to Earth?

by Howard Whittlesey

Howard reflects upon the supreme expression of God's love for lost mankind and how it should impact our priorities.

Many of us, reading the title of this article, will recall the old gospel song by this name—and perhaps even sing a bar or two of this beloved hymn. It was/still is a song that reveals to us one of the divine reasons that Jesus took on the fashion of a man to bring His Father's love into reality before the eyes of the world. The song poetically reflects upon things that Jesus did for us, gave us, told us, and showed us. We mutually stirred one another's hearts by way of "putting into remembrance" those poignant gestures issued by our Savior. Yet, we could gain so much more if we tap the Scriptures to acquire a "refresher" course on "why else" our Savior came to earth. Shall we?

Luke 2:49 might be a classic beginning as we recall one reason Jesus came to earth: "I must be about my Father's business." This spake Jesus unto His beloved mother. One could say that this very much sums up the collectivity of purpose that Jesus came to fulfill here on earth. These words He spoke as a twelve-year-old. Boldness becomes one of such an age when mission and purpose are fully realized and pursued. Right?

John's Take

John 3 is a wondrous chapter for numerous reasons. John the Baptist answered his disciples' inquiry: "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men

come to him" (v. 26). John replied, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (v. 27). Hereby one is given the origin and purpose for Jesus' coming to earth: the Father *gave* us His Son from heaven.

John 5:20-21 enlarges upon this item, showing us the coordination between the Father and the Son in the serving of Jesus' purpose. Jesus was shown all things that the Father had done. The Son then translated these blessings and gifts unto man. Why? Was it not to show His Father's love and compassion for man—His own creation? Verses 26-27 reveal that the Father gave the Son life as well as the authority to execute judgment. No disparity can be rightly perceived between Father and Son in that which is utilized to fulfill the eternal purpose of Jesus' coming to earth. Verses 36-38 show that the Father and Son harmonize perfectly in the works done by Jesus. The Father bore witness of His Son—even in multiples of prophecy—yet, the people did not hear Him or believe.

John 8:16-18 acknowledges the unity and cooperation of the Father and the Son: "And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."

John 10:10-11 and 15 gives the confirmation that life originates, is perpetuated and protected in, and by, Jesus—more reasons why Jesus came to earth. He also reveals His versatility of character portrayal in that He is a Good Shepherd. A *good* shepherd will give his life to protect/save his sheep. Sound familiar?

John 14:23-24 shows the coherence of the Father and the Son: "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." Jesus said that the word which ye hear is not mine. This is an ellipsis. Add the words "only" and "also" in order to get the point that Jesus intended (not mine "only," but "also" the Father's). Again—cooperation/coordination.

My Take

Certainly, more reasons could be gathered, but we would do well to sum up this collection with something about which few keep in mind. It is the conviction of this author that we are all tools and instruments of our Lord and Savior. Could we suffice it to say that this is why *we* are here on earth? The great commission was given by Jesus to the apostles so that they would take what Jesus gave them and pass it on to "every creature." However, the apostle Paul gave

Timothy the realization that you and I need as well. Paul said, “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Much publicity is given to the carrying and passing of the Olympic torch every four years. We could take that concept into the spiritual realm and pass on the “gospel torch.” The Olympic torch carriers jog to the location at which it is passed. The Christian has far more latitude concerning travel and contact with others to whom to pass it on.

Parents

Dad and Mom can pass this torch to their children in such a way as to make them proud to carry it for the Lord unto the “common salvation” (Jude 3). The idea is to *do* what one must *do*, which

is just as important as saying what one can say. Doing is the essence of biblical believing. So, our kids can be made a part of something that is truly their heavenly Father’s business. Start it off with *doing* the right thing. This puts the recipients of the good deeds into a greater readiness for *hearing* the right thing. *That* is when the “gospel torch” gets put into good hands. What if every family was led to see, and respond to, the value and blessedness of this spirit?

Jesus’ Thrust

You see, this is what Jesus did. He came to heal, empower, strengthen, embolden, and inspire others to carry—and to pass on—His Father’s torch. The five things in the last sentence are *verbs*. They are issued by way of *doing* with and for others what they should *turn* and *do*—namely, passing on the gospel torch. Speaking of Jesus, the apostle Peter said, “According as

his divine power hath given unto *us* all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called *us* to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto *us* exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

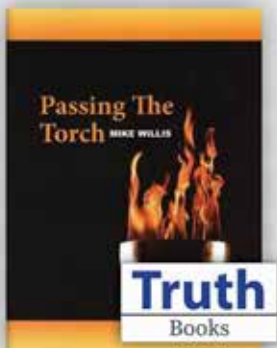
Conclusion

The Author and Finisher of our faith has seen to it that we lack nothing that is needed to accomplish this and more unto the salvation of men’s souls. *Now, why is it—that my Savior came to earth?* **II**



Howard Whittlesey

Howard lives in Denver, IN. He served as a choir director in grades 7-12 for thirty-nine years. He and his wife, Colleen, have four children. He can be reached at howcolwhit@aol.com.



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by Kyle Pope (continued from page 7)



Hezekiah Bulla (left) and Isaiah Bulla (right). Courtesy of Watch Jerusalem

Hezekiah's Life Extended

As Hezekiah prayed, it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David"' (2 Kings 20:4-6). God may not extend our lives here on earth, but like Hezekiah, by His mercy, He extends life in the age to come to those who serve Him faithfully. Jesus declared, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b). The apostle John ended his gospel explaining that his account was "written that you may believe

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). The extension of Hezekiah's life was merely a foretaste of the Power that would ultimately conquer death and offer to all souls the way to eternal life.

What a comfort it must have been to Hezekiah to hear God's promise "I will deliver you" and "I will defend this city." We too face many dangers, obstacles, and threats. Like Hezekiah, in Christ, we have the promise that God will deliver us from all our foes, whether persecution, temptation, enemies, or death. Paul wrote that in temptation God, "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Though we will face hardship, illness, and suffering (John 16:33), in Christ we have the promise that God hears us and will answer in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14). Even in those

things that we must suffer, Christians are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Our victory is found in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ, by which God delivers us from all dangers (Rom. 8:38-39). Like this ancient prophet and king, we too serve a real God of real promises and real deliverance. **TL**

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Kyle Pope

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

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(281) 367-2099
www.woodlandschurchofchrist.org

VIRGINIA

CHESAPEAKE

Tidewater church of Christ
217 Taxus Street
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 7 P.M.
Evangelist: Steve Schlosser (757) 436-6900

CHESTER

Chester church of Christ
12100 Winfree St., (Central to Richmond,
Hopewell, Petersburg, & Colonial Heights)
Bible Study 9:30 A.M., Worship 10:30 A.M.
Evening 5:30 P.M., Wednesday 7:30 P.M.
church Building: (804) 796-2374, (804) 385-2725
or (804) 271-0877

NEWPORT NEWS

Harpersville Rd. church of Christ
315 Harpersville Road
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Wednesday 7:00 P.M.

RICHMOND (METRO)

Courthouse church of Christ
Courthouse Rd. at Double Creek Ct.
(2.2 miles S of Rt. 288)
Bible Study 9:30 A.M., Worship 10:30 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 7 P.M.
Evangelist: Gene Tope (804) 790-1629
www.courthousechurchofchrist.com

RICHMOND

Forest Hill church of Christ
1208 W. 41st Street
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Evening 6:00 P.M., Wednesday 7:00 P.M.
Evangelist: Jack Bise, Jr. (804) 233-5959

RIDGEWAY

church of Christ
2970 Old Leaksville Road
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Evening 5:30 P.M., Wednesday 7 P.M.
(276) 956-6049
www.churchofchristatridgeway.com

ROANOKE

Blue Ridge church of Christ
929 Indiana Avenue N.E. (5 min. from Roanoke
Convention Center)
1st Lesson 9:15 A.M., Bible Study 10 A.M.
Worship 11 A.M., Wednesday 7:30 P.M.
(540) 344-2755

VIRGINIA BEACH

Southside church of Christ
5652 Haden Road
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Robert Mallard (757) 464-4574

WASHINGTON

BELLINGHAM

Mt. Baker church of Christ
1860 Mt. Baker Hwy.
Bible Study 9:30 A.M., Worship 10:30 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 7 P.M.
Evangelist: Joe Price (360) 752-2692 or 380-2960
www.bibleanswer.com/mtbaker

SEQUIM

Sequim church of Christ
American Legion Hall
7 W. Prairie St. at Sequim Ave.
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Wednesday night Bible study 7 P.M.
Evangelist: Jerry MacDonald
(360) 808-1021 or biblepage@att.net
www.churchofchristinsequim.com

TACOMA

Manitou Park church of Christ
(meets at Gray Middle School)
6229 S Tyler Street
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Wednesday 7 P.M.
(253) 242-3098
tacomachurch@gmail.com
www.tacomachurch.com

WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON

Oakwood Road church of Christ
873 Oakwood Road
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 10:50 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 7:30 P.M.
oakwoodrdcoc@suddenlinkmail.com
www.orcoc.org • (304) 342-5637

CLARKSBURG

Westside church of Christ
Davisson Run Road
Sunday Morning 9:30 A.M.
(304) 622-5433
www.westsidechurchofchristwv.net

FAIRMONT

Eastside church of Christ
1929 Morgantown Avenue
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 10:45 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 7 P.M.
(304) 363-8696 or (304)844-2437

GLADESVILLE

Gladesville church of Christ
2906 Gladesville Rd., Independence, WV 26374
Sunday Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 10:45 A.M.
Sunday 7 P.M., Wednesday 7 P.M.
(304) 864-3078

MOUNDSVILLE

Moundsville church of Christ
210 Cedar Street
Bible Study 9:30 A.M., Worship 10:30 A.M.
Evening 6:30 P.M., Mid-week 7:30 P.M.
Evangelist: Tony Huntsman (304) 845-4940

PARKERSBURG

Marrtown church of Christ
825 Marrtown Road
Bible Study 9:30 A.M., Worship 10 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 7:30 P.M.
(304) 422-7458 or 893-5227

WYOMING

RANCHESTER

Ranchester church of Christ
Hwy. 14 West, Ranch Mart Mall
Bible Study 9 A.M., Worship 10 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday 6:30 P.M.
Contact: Bob Reich (307) 655-2563

CANADA

CALGARY, AB

Northside church of Christ
803 20A Avenue NE
Bible Study 10 A.M., Worship 11 A.M.
Evening 6 P.M., Wednesday Bible Study 7 P.M.
+1 (403) 452-5116
www.churchofchristcalgary.com

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Website redesign project

To better serve you, we're in the process of creating a new design for our CEI Bookstore/Truth Publications website.

Our goal is to bring an easy-to-use, mobile-friendly, intuitive framework, with excellent content.

The redesign will take a few months to complete, but we are very excited about revealing the new site in early 2019!

