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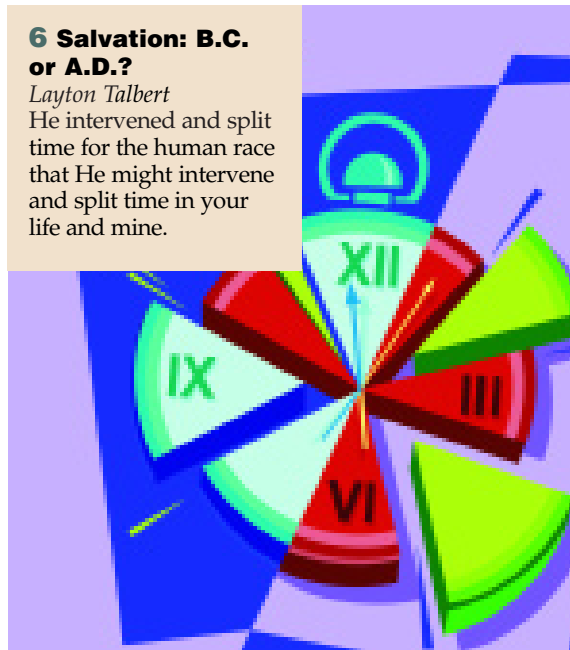
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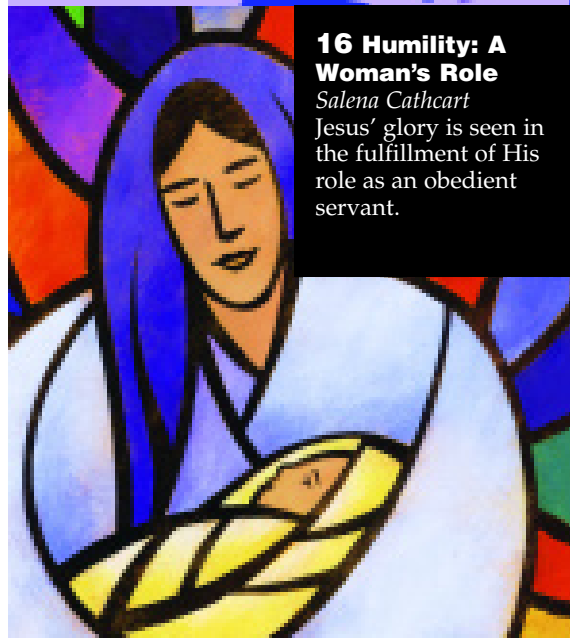
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**T**hank you for your March/April 2002 issue, it is being a great blessing for me, because I learning, something more of "Islam," and how I can explain to others that these people are wrong. . . . May God continue helping and giving His wisdom to all of you brothers.

*Pastor Elio S. Mateo Gil  
Dominican Republic*

**D**ear sirs, we are not preachers, but we enjoy your magazine very much . . . We are a couple in our seventies and have two grandchildren at Bob Jones. . . . We are praying for all of you.

*The Browns  
Florida*

**Y**es, of course we want a *FrontLine* Subscription Sunday. I want one every year as a matter of fact! Please enter us every year about this time when you send out the annual letter and just send us the stuff. I promise that we will use it! Thanks for the best magazine in the world.

*Dr. Dave Stertzbach  
Williston, VT*

**I**groaned . . . when I learned that "Ehud" had passed away from the pages of your publication. It is unfortunate that we fundamentalists take ourselves so seriously that we cannot suffer a little humor lest we be offended. . . . May

## We want to hear from you!

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You may request that your letter not be published or that your name be withheld, but anonymous letters will not be accepted.

Ehud be resurrected to your pages.

*Pastor Steven G.  
Smallwood  
Monroe, GA*

**I** have enjoyed reading your magazine. I found your exegesis of Proverbs 18:24 (Jan/Feb 2000) to be right on the money. . . . Another article was a concern to me. . . . page 8 in Sound Words (Sept/Oct 2000) the author mentions that 50 percent of people in fundamental churches tithed. Wasn't tithing God's way of taxing Israel . . . [isn't] the New Testament believer under grace and not law? No amount is set as to the minimum a person is to give. I give faithfully to the Lord and encourage others to do likewise. Even though I do not tithe the Lord has blessed us in that all our bills are paid, we have food on the table and extra for special needs.

*Darrel Clark  
Indianapolis, IN*

**I** appreciate the fresh voice that is brought to my desk every two months. The articles in the past two issues have really been true sources of encouragement, challenge, and blessing. Keep up the good work please.

*Pastor Matt Austi  
Conewango Valley, NY*

**T**hank you for printing Bruce Oyen's article, "Ahaz: A Wicked King and Religious Pragmatism." However, why are the obvious accommodations and concessions of evangelicalism thoroughly critiqued while the subtle inconsistencies of fundamentalists are often overlooked? The difference between doctrinal clarity and convenience is a subtle form of pragmatism that is destroying our movement. Doctrinal ambiguity produces heterodoxy.

*Nathan Young  
Buford, GA*

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## Charting the Course: Leadership

If this issue of *FrontLine* is your first, or if you have missed the last few issues for some reason, let me invite you to contact the home office to ask for a copy of *Charting the Course*, the full text of a message I brought to the Board of Directors of the FBFI at the last Winter Board Meeting. This series of articles is adapted from that message because I want everyone who is a member of the FBFI or a subscriber to *FrontLine* to know where we are headed and how we plan to get there, if the Lord tarries.

The Fellowship principle is the key to the longevity and strength of the FBFI. Just as the Fundamentals and the Baptist distinctives are not for sale, the Fellowship principle is not for sale. It must be maintained if we are to remain strong, and that will be done through leadership. As we look to the future, we must prepare for a new generation of leadership. Ministries tend to produce after their kind, and the FBFI must produce the leadership for its future.

We need men who are committed to this Fellowship—men who have earned the leadership, who have been in the trenches and in the battle, who have the smell of smoke and blood on them, men who've gotten in with both feet. A man who is looking for a position doesn't deserve a position. That leads to "fellowship politics." The leadership must stay on course. Getting off on rabbits' trails and using the Fellowship as a forum is a violation of the Fellowship principle. We must not allow the Fellowship to become a public debate on Arminianism or Calvinism, the text issue or methods of preservation, accreditation, or theological hairsplitting. We need strong leadership in

these areas—men who realize that our Fellowship is broader than these peripheral issues.

In state Satellite Meetings, Regional Meetings, and the National Meeting, and in *FrontLine* magazine, we must have men who are leaders on the Fellowship principle. The themes and speakers will be approved by the President. Resolutions will be approved by the President. *FrontLine* articles will be approved by the President. If a speaker or a writer wants to use the Fellowship's meetings or magazine to grind his own ax or to attack someone else's school or personal convictions, we'll not use him. If he wants to make his personal views on things other than the fundamentals a test of fellowship, he violates the Fellowship principle.

Speakers and writers will not use the Fellowship this way. Take the text issue, for example. No speaker should get up and take potshots at others within the Fellowship. Good men hold different views on this matter, and even though he holds them sincerely, he has no right to insist that his view is the only Biblical position unless it is stated in the Bible. If a man has kindly explained his personal convictions without attack, it is foolish for his critics to demand "equal time" for rebuttal. Everyone has an opinion but no one should demand that everyone else submit to it.

Leadership must help the weaker brethren in these areas. A leader is a man who will rise above the petty issues and attitudes and hold others to the Fellowship principle on nonessentials. I had a

young evangelist call me recently to say that a nationally known evangelist had said, "We had better be concerned about the direction of the Fellowship. It's going into hyper-Calvinism." This young evangelist said, "We're really concerned about the Fellowship, that it's going into hyper-Calvinism. What do you think about that?" I said, "I'm always concerned about extremes, but I'm more concerned about gossiping evangelists in our Fellowship than I am about hyper-Calvinists." The gossiping tongue will do more to damage or destroy the Fellowship than anything else.

This Fellowship is broader than our local churches, our schools, our evangelistic associations, our personal opinions and our preferences. This Fellowship has been attacked many times over the years because it will not line up with some well-known leader, some school, or some ministry on nonessentials. Fundamentalists must take their stand on the fundamentals and separate from those who deny them in precept and practice, but those who demand that others get in line behind their pet issues are disobeying the Bible they claim to defend.

The future leadership of this Fellowship will have one thing settled: a commitment to the Fellowship principle. The current leadership needs every one of you praying as new leadership is developed. Everyone needs to step up to the plate and protect this Fellowship principle and realize the unique blessing God has given us. It is unique; it is a Fellowship that is precious. Brethren, pray for your leadership.



DR. ROD BELL

# Salvation

## B.C. OR A.D.?

Layton Talbert

Who split time?" A billboard along the highway daily poses that rhetorical question. The sign juxtaposes images of a lightning bolt on the left and a multi-colored explosion of fireworks on the right, divided only by the unmistakable outline of a cross. The statement it makes, and the reflection it invites, is as eloquent as it is simple.

Two years ago we witnessed the worldwide celebration of a new year and, as popularly counted, a new century and millennium. Television audiences could tune in literally all day long and watch one international celebration after another as the tide of the New Year swept through each successive time zone, and the sunrise of a new millennium dawned on the shores and borders of country after country on this spinning globe. Even nations that do not officially tabulate their years in terms of B.C. and A.D. paused to recognize the event and participate in its celebration.

The division of all of time between B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (*Anno Domini*, "the year of our Lord") is an ongoing witness to the inescapable centrality of Christianity for all of humanity. Its testimony is silent but potent, ignored but always there, like the silver-tongued stars declaring in every dialect the glory of God to anyone and everyone who will pause long enough to ponder and

hear (Ps. 19:1–4). But like the stars, this division of time has become mundanely familiar to most people. Familiarity does not always breed contempt. Sometimes it breeds mere indifference. Which is worse? At least contempt shows some awareness of the object. Indifference simply ceases to take any notice of familiar realities surrounding us.

Presbyterian pastor Henry Van Dyke (better known as a poet and writer of short stories) reflected that when one considers the international impact of the coming of Christ, "we do not wonder that mankind has learned to reckon history from the birthday of Jesus, and to date all events by the years before and after the Nativity of Christ." Even the attempt to remove the Christo-centric time designations cannot escape Him entirely. In their dating system, the substitution of B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) instead of B.C. and C.E. (Common Era) instead of A.D. still marks time from the same event.

The tacit admission of the centrality of Christ in human chronology remains. God in His providence has willed it to be so. Whether we ignore its message or not, its witness will one day raise its voice—along with the stars (Ps. 19), and the stones (Luke 19:37–40), and the Queen of Sheba (Matt. 12:42)—either to condemn us for our unbelief in the face of their testimony, or to bless us for hearing their witness to the centrality of the Son of Man and His rightful claims upon

us and on all of human history.

But the division of all of time between B.C. and A.D. is more than a witness of a distant reality. It is a providential parable, a reminder of our personal need of a present spiritual experience. We sinners desperately need change—cleansing from the guilt of our sinful past and freedom from its bondage. We need more than a new year, more than a 'new leaf.' We need a new life. Merely turning over a new leaf is the empty and short-lived effort of someone who ignores the fact that all the old leaves that he has turned before are scrawled with the graffiti of failure. Changing bandages is futile if, "from the sole of the foot even to the head," we are "full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (Isa. 1:5-6). If that is God's view of me as a sinner, I need something radical. I need someone who can "split time" for me—someone who can alter me so thoroughly and internally and permanently that I am able to divide my life into two distinct segments—B.C. and A.D.

What Jesus Christ did to all of time collectively, Jesus Christ does to everyone individually who comes to Him. That is precisely why He came and split time in the first place! He intervened and split time for the human race that He might intervene and split time in your life and mine. In the familiar lines of the Christmas story, we read that the angel directed Joseph to call His name Jesus (which means "Savior") "because he it is that shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). And any person who comes to Christ in faith is "in Christ" and becomes a "new creature"; old things pass away, and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:12).

Any man or woman who is not "in Christ" is still living in the dark, B.C. age of sin, under the glowering cloud of the wrath of a holy God (John 3:36). How can it be otherwise if we have willfully rejected the one remedy for our condition, which He Himself sacrificially provided through the suffering of His own Son? How can it be otherwise when by our denial of our need and our disbelief of God's own testimony, we are calling Him a liar (1 John 5:10-13)?

[JESUS]  
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But anyone who will turn "in repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21), and will embrace Him as Savior can have deliverance from sin. That's why His name is Jesus, remember? Because He alone can save—that is, rescue and deliver—from sin's dominion and practice and consequences. And for anyone who does that, Christ splits time. Your life will be as distinctly divided between B.C. and A.D. as the centuries of human history. All the "old things are passed away"; that's B.C. Everything becomes new and you yourself become a "new creation"; that's A.D. It is as new and radical as being born all over again. That is why, in John 3, Jesus Himself described the change He works in people in exactly those terms, as a "new birth."

Becoming a Christian is not getting a new lease on life; it is getting an altogether new life! It is *not* like turning the page and writing a fresh new chapter in a book. When you become a Christian, God pens "The End" and closes the cover of the book of your old life, and begins writing a whole new volume. The first, the old "B.C." volume, is over. The second, the new "A.D." volume, is a sequel, but everything is different. You will have the same name, but you are not the same person. That's what God does in conversion; that's what Christ does when He splits time.

When Christ came, He permanently split time. All human history is defined by its relation to that event. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, yet the world knew Him not (John 1:10). When He came, He came to His own things—the world He Himself had fashioned and created and peopled and sustained (John 1:1-4)—but His own people received Him not (John 1:11). But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12). When Christ saves, He splits time. Every human life is defined by its relation to that event. Are you living in B.C. or A.D.?

Dr. Layton Talbert is a *FrontLine* Contributing Editor who lives in Travelers Rest, South Carolina.

# Peace

## THE BLESSING OF ASSURANCE

By John Aloisi

In the seventeenth-century classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Hopeful become sidetracked and are nearly engulfed as they wrestle with Giant Despair. When they finally make it back to the main road, they decide to post a sign warning other travelers about the dangers which lie at the end of an innocent looking path. The sign says: "Over this stile is the way to Doubting Castle, which is kept by Giant Despair, who despiseth the King of Celestial Country, and seeks to destroy his holy pilgrims."<sup>1</sup> Although he often wrote in allegories, the challenges that Bunyan envisioned Christian facing were not mere hypothetical possibilities but rather the issues with which he and many others had struggled.

Today many Christians wrestle with the question of assurance. They long to have their doubts settled. Unfortunately, many are looking for it in the wrong places, and so their troubles persist. Scripture is the only infallible source of assurance about one's salvation. This article is a brief study of what God's Word says about assurance.

### What Is Assurance?

Bruce Demarest defines assurance as "the confidence of the believer in Christ that notwithstanding his mortal sinful condition he is irrevocably a child of God and an heir of salvation."<sup>2</sup> It involves both a knowledge that one is at peace with God and a confidence that one will someday "be present with the Lord"

(2 Cor. 5:8) when he leaves this sinful world. Assurance is related to one's awareness of his present spiritual standing. However, even genuine believers sometimes lack assurance of their salvation.

### Why Do True Believers Doubt Their Salvation?

Lack of assurance among believers can be traced to three main sources: ignorance of Biblical truth, acceptance of false teaching, and toleration of known sin. Any one or a combination of these three can plant doubts in the believer's heart.

Many believers do not have a firm grasp on what Scripture says about the nature of their salvation. Without a basic understanding of Christian doctrine, it is not surprising that some believers do not feel as though they are Christians. Spurgeon writes:

Let no Christian among us neglect the means provided for obtaining a fuller knowledge of the gospel of Christ. . . . Many of the fears of Christians would be driven away if they knew more. Ignorance is not bliss in Christianity, but misery; and knowledge sanctified, and attended by the presence of the Holy Spirit, is as wings by which we may rise out of the mists of darkness into the light of full assurance. The knowledge of Christ is the most excellent of the



sciences, seek to be masters of it, and you are on the road to full assurance.<sup>3</sup>

Quite often lack of biblical knowledge is accompanied by openness to unbiblical teachings. Adherence to unbiblical ideas about the nature of salvation can cause one to lack assurance. Again Spurgeon notes:

Certain forms of Arminianism are deleterious to the faith of the Christian; those forms, for instance, which deny the election of God, the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit, and the final perseverance, because of the sure preservation, of the saints. These denials seem to me to cut from under a man's feet everything he has to stand upon, and I do not wonder that the man who believes them has no assurance.<sup>4</sup>

A believer may possess a great deal of Biblical knowledge and a proper view of salvation but still lack assurance if he is living in willful disobedience to God's Word. When a Christian persists in known sin, prayer will seem useless and the Word of God meaningless until he comes to repentance. The writer of Hebrews seems to connect full assurance of salvation with a sincere heart and a clean conscience, saying, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). Believers who harbor sin will often lack assurance of their salvation.

### **The Primary Means of Assurance**

God's Word is the foundational means of Christian assurance. Feelings change from day to day, but God's Word remains the sole infallible source of information about salvation. The Scriptures must have a primary role in plotting one's journey back to the place of full assurance.

Believers who struggle with assurance can find great comfort in John's Gospel. The third chapter of John contains a number of clear promises for those who place their trust in Christ. In verse sixteen of this chapter, John states that "whosoever believeth in [the Son] should not perish." In this context, perishing refers to final ruin in hell apart from God. Those who place their trust in Christ have God's promise that they will not suffer endless punishment in hell.

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John also writes, "He that believeth on [the Son of God] is not condemned" (John 3:18). Because of the finished work of Christ, a believer will never have to face the condemnation which his sin has earned. In contrast John says that the unsaved are "condemned already." While believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), they can trust God's promise that they will never be condemned (Rom. 8:1).

John also declares that the believer has been made a recipient of eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). John does not refer to eternal life as a mere possibility for the believer but as a glorious reality. God has promised eternal life to every sinner who repents and places his faith in the person and work of His Son.

The Word of God contains many clear statements about the nature of salvation. It teaches that salvation is a work of God, not the result of human effort or merit. While most believers would readily acknowledge that salvation is provided by the grace and power of God, some claim that the believer's security is in some way dependent upon the will of man. This idea runs contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Paul says, "being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). God initiated salvation and he will complete it.

In John 10:27-29 he recounts the words of Christ to a group of unbelieving Jews, saying,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus promises to defend His sheep from anyone who would seek their spiritual harm. The safety of the sheep depends upon the faithfulness and ability of the Shepherd; therefore, they are eternally secure.

### **The Secondary Means of Assurance**

The secondary means of assurance can be divided into two broad categories: the

witness of the Holy Spirit and the believer's perseverance. These are more subjective than the clear statements of God's Word about salvation and cannot be viewed as the foundation of Christian assurance. Nevertheless, the individual who is lacking in either of these categories has significant cause to reexamine his salvation.

In Romans 8:16, Paul states, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." This verse has been misinterpreted by some Christians as referring to direct, extrabiblical revelation. The witness of the Holy Spirit does not involve new special revelation but rather Spirit-given confidence concerning one's relationship to God based on Biblical revelation. All true believers are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit who bears witness to the reality of their adoption.

The believer's perseverance involves two aspects: perseverance in doctrine and perseverance in practice. While all true believers will persevere, not all who profess salvation are truly saved. Mere professors will often be known by their eventual departure from the faith. As John writes, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

True Christians will continue to hold the basic doctrines of the faith. In First John 4:6, the apostle declares, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us." Those who do not heed the Word of God demonstrate that they are not God's children. The unsaved have little genuine interest in God's Word, but true believers seek to understand and follow it.

In his second epistle John brings this truth into sharper focus. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). Individuals who make a profession of faith in Christ but later depart from what the Scriptures teach about Christ have no ground to believe they were saved.

One of the great hallmarks of a true believer is a desire to obey God's commands. James states that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 20, 26). True, saving faith will always affect one's actions. As John writes, "Hereby we do know that we

know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Christians can transgress the commandments of God, but their lives will be characterized by a desire to obey God's will. Spurgeon writes:

Obedience is the grand test of love. If you are living after your own will, and pay no homage to God, you are none of his. If you think of the Lord Jesus as your Master, and never recognize the claims of God, and never wish to be obedient to his will, you are not in possession of eternal life. If you desire to be obedient, and prove that desire by your actions, then you have the divine life within you. Judge yourselves. Is the tenor of your life obedience or disobedience? By the fruit you can test the root and the sap.<sup>5</sup>

Another evidence of salvation is genuine love for the children of God. True Christians will love their brothers and sisters in Christ. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10). Those who do not love the sheep do not love the Shepherd (1 John 4:20). Those who love God's children possess Biblical grounds for assurance.

Scripture indicates that assurance is possible and, in fact, is part of God's will for every believer (1 John 5:13). Believers who continually doubt their salvation are unable to enjoy the new life God has given them and are seriously hindered in their ability to serve Christ. In contrast, those who have assurance of their salvation have all the more reason to love and serve the God who saved them.

John Aloisi is a Th.M. student at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Lincoln Park, MI.

ONE OF THE  
GREAT  
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TO OBEY  
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<sup>1</sup>John Bunyan, *The Complete Works of John Bunyan*, 4 vols. in 2 (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 2:57-58.

<sup>2</sup>*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Assurance," by Bruce A. Demarest, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. (Reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:289.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:324.

<sup>5</sup>Spurgeon, *Expository Encyclopedia*, 1:296.

# Worship

## KNOWING THE UNIQUE GOD

By Layton Talbert

**E**lohim (*el-o-HEEM*). It is the third word in the Hebrew Bible, the first name by which God identifies Himself. It appears 31 times in the 31 verses of Bible's first chapter. It (or its equivalent in whatever language was spoken in Eden) was the first name for God known to be uttered in human history by man or woman—in this case a woman, Eve (Gen. 3:3). And it is a name for the true God that appears some 2300 times in the Old Testament. It is always translated "God" when used of the true God. But the same word sometimes refers to false deities, where it is routinely translated "gods." How can the same form of the same word be translated as both a singular *and* plural, God and gods?

### The Name's Unique Form

The most immediately striking feature of this name for God is that, even though it is translated "God," it is a *plural* form. The "*im*" in *Elohim* indicates a plural in Hebrew. (For instance, "each one" of the angelic creatures described in Isaiah 6:2 would be called a seraph, but all of them together are collectively called seraphim. Likewise, it is one cherub or several cherubim, not cherubims.) *Elohim* is the plural form of the singular, *Eloah*, which is closely related to another singular form, *El*. (These two singular names, also translated "God," appear much less frequently in the Old Testament; both of them together occur only about 260 times, mostly in

poetical sections). The root words from which these names are derived seem to combine both the idea of power (emphasizing God's might and strength) and the impression created by that power (indicating this is One to be feared for His great power).

### The Name's Unique Use

If this very common name for God, *Elohim*, is a plural, then why is it translated as a singular? Does our theological prejudice cause us to ignore the grammar of the Bible? Doesn't the plural undermine our belief in one God? In Hebrew, as in other languages, the plural form can have several grammatical uses. In other words, a plural form does not always mean there is more than one. In this case, *Elohim* is not a numerical plural, indicating polytheism (many gods). But how do we know that?

If this plural form, *Elohim*, meant Gods, the verbs and pronouns used with it would also be plural. But you will notice that the pronouns and verbs used with this name are *singular*, not plural (e.g., Isa. 45:3, 15, 18). Throughout the Old Testament, with very few exceptions which are easily explained by the context, this *plural* name for God takes *singular* pronouns and verbs—indicating that, though the form of the word is plural, *Elohim* is one God, not many. But if it is meant as a singular, *why* does it appear in the plural form?

Some have argued that this plural name for God anticipates the later-revealed doctrine of

the Trinity. But it is probably unwise to read New Testament revelation of the Trinity back into the Old Testament use of this name. After all, the doctrine of the Trinity does not imply three Gods, but one.

Rather, this plural form represents what has been variously called an “intensive plural,” a “plural of greatness” or a “plural of majesty.” That simply means that the noun is made plural in order to intensify or magnify its qualities. Though we are not directly familiar with the customs of royalty, we are accustomed (in Shakespeare’s plays, for instance) to hearing kings refer to themselves in the plural. Henry V charges one of his counselors to “take heed how you impawn our person . . . we charge you, in the name of God, take heed.” He was not bipolar nor a megalomaniac. He was employing a customary use of the plural.

In other words, the plural form is a way of magnifying the office and amplifying the greatness of the person so described. In this case, the plural title *Elohim* represents God as the sole Deity in whom alone resides all strength and might. It magnifies God as unrivaled in His power and unique in His person.

What makes this name all the more unique is that this use of a plural title for a singular God was not found in any other Mideastern culture or language. All the heathen had *elohim*, gods, who were false deities. But only Israel had *Elohim*, the one true God besides whom there is no other.

### A Unique Name for the Unique God

Amazing, isn’t it, how thirty seconds can reverse your entire perspective, your whole scope of reality? That is what struck me on a recent jet flight. One moment I was on the ground, sitting comfortably in a large jet taking off alongside a seemingly endless airport terminal towering over the surrounding landscape and flanked by massive man-made structures whose very size seems to strut man’s impressive importance. Thirty seconds later I was silently soaring over the earth.

As we climbed, rapidly broadening my horizons and heightening my perspective, all of man’s works—which seconds earlier had dominated the landscape so imposingly, gradually shrank into petty impotence and obscurity. From 30,000 feet, buildings filled with people shuffling papers looked like toys, homes like tiny Monopoly houses dotting the endless God-made panorama of creation.

Such an experience gives you a glimpse into an Isaiah 40 kind of perspective on

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man in relation to God. And I was seeing only an infinitesimal fraction of the planet. You suddenly realize that the earth is far larger and that man is far smaller than you ever imagined—and that if God is truly aware and genuinely concerned about every one of these miniscule organisms fashioned in His image (grasshopper, Isaiah 40:22 calls them) crawling the wide earth below, He must be immeasurably greater than you ever dreamed.

There is no one else like Him, it is true; He is unique, incomparable. But beyond that, *there is no one else*. Period. He is singular, solitary. Have you noticed that repeated emphasis on the solitary uniqueness and sole existence of your God that echoes through the latter portion of Isaiah? If you have not yet marked these statements in your Bible, take some time to do so. Then work your way through them and meditate on them.

- To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? (40:18)
- To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. (40:25)
- Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. (43:10)
- I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no savior. (43:11)
- I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. (44:6)
- Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any. (44:8)
- I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me. (45:5)
- That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. (45:6)
- Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no other God. (45:14)
- I am the LORD; and there is none else. (45:18)
- And there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (45:21–22)

- To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? (46:5)
- For I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me. (46:9)

God insists repeatedly that He alone is the only God and Savior, besides whom no other exists, and to whom He has sworn that every knee will bow in submission.

Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear (Isa. 45:20–23).

Does that sound familiar? It should. It is quoted in the New Testament, and applied in a strikingly significant direction.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11).

Did you see the significance? Exactly who is this one, true, unique *Elohim* in Isaiah 45 to whom every knee will bow? Elohim is Jesus, the Savior, highly exalted by the Father, to whose unrivaled authority every knee will bow in submission and whose absolute Lordship every tongue will confess. You may do it voluntarily now, and receive His forgiveness and favor; or you can wait until it is too late, when you will be compelled to concede in eternity what you refused to acknowledge in life, to your eternal shame and loss.

This sole and solitary Savior for all the ends of the earth has, by grace, made Himself your Savior. This singular, unique, unrivaled, unparalleled, one-and-only true God has made Himself your God! Embrace His for that! Glory in that! Magnify Him for that! Worship Him for what He is and for what He has made Himself to you.

Dr. Layton Talbert is a *FrontLine* Contributing Editor who lives in Travelers Rest, South Carolina.

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# Thankfulness

by Steve Skaggs

## BEHEMOTH REVISITED

I saw The Behemoth again today. I hadn't seen it for many months. There it was, in a vacant lot in a bad section of town, crammed full of clothing and I don't know what else. Seeing it made me consider anew God's continued undeserved blessings to me and my family.

The Behemoth was the van I discussed in an article called "Young, Cool, and In Love." I told of its many quirks and then summed up by expressing my gratitude for having old clothes and an old vehicle but a marriage and family that are, thanks to the Lord, intact.

After the article was written I put The Behemoth out in the front yard with a "for sale" sign in it. One day Cindy said, "There's that car again. Those people have been by several times, but they never stop."

I hurried out to flag down the car as it drove slowly past. "Can I help you?"

Four people got out of the car—a thin woman who had difficulty walking and two others, apparently her grown daughter and a teenage son. There was also a cute little girl, perhaps two years old, who started playing with our kids' toys in the front yard.

"How much you askin'?" the lady wanted to know. I told her. "Could we take it for a drive?" I handed her the keys.

They didn't drive it far—just once around the block. The woman struggled to get in and out of it. I started to list some of The Behemoth's problems. "The air doesn't work.

But it'll be a good vehicle to get you around town and stuff. I wouldn't take it on any long trips."

The woman shrugged. "That don't matter to us. We're homeless. We want it to live in."

I couldn't think of an appropriate response. I just said, "Oh!"

"We been livin' in this car. We need somethin' bigger."

I looked at the little girl playing in my kids' playhouse. How would her opinion of our modest home and patchy lawn differ from mine?

"I give you three hundred now to hold it fer me. I have to find the rest of my family—they're in another car. We'll go to the bank and draw out all our money and bring it by in a hour. I'll sign somethin' if you want me to."

I scribbled a note, giving the date and stating that she had given me money to hold the van for her. "This is really to protect you," I said. "To prove that you gave me the money, so I don't sell it to someone else while you're at the bank." I wrote two copies and we signed them both.

Cindy and the kids and I put a bag of groceries and a gospel tract in the van. I waited more than an hour, but the family didn't return. I had to get to work, so I told Cindy to call me when they came back. It wasn't until late in the afternoon when they did. I wanted to see them when they returned—I wanted to

say, "In spite of what you might think in your circumstances, the Lord loves you and wants to save you." But I didn't have the opportunity. They came by and made the transaction before I could get home. So when I got there, The Behemoth was gone.

The Behemoth—this was the van I had complained about because it didn't have air conditioning and because not all the doors worked right. This was the van that had made me feel noble because I was willing to sacrifice luxury to drive it. This was the van that I had felt was really just a little beneath me—but I was glad for it, I was glad for it.

Now it was to be someone's home—a step up for them, four people who had been living—what kind of a life?—in a compact car.

So today I saw it again. It was undoubtedly The Behemoth—same color, same distinguishing marks. We were driving our "new" van (only fifteen years old!), much nicer than The Behemoth.

But seeing The Behemoth and remembering what had become of it was a rebuke to me—a rebuke because I have beyond what I need and yet always want just a little more. Just a little more—not much, I'm not greedy, Lord—just a little more, Lord, and then I'll be happy. Then I'll have what I need to serve You as I should.

## ... JUST A LITTLE MORE, LORD, AND THEN I'LL BE HAPPY.

See, as long as I maintain that attitude, then I can deceive myself into thinking that it's the Lord's fault when I don't completely obey Him, not mine.

If I only had a better vehicle, Lord! Or if my house were just a little bit bigger—we really need another bathroom, Lord. It's not a "want"—I'm not spoiled. Forget the fact that when my dad was a kid, his family didn't even have indoor plumbing. That doesn't matter. Our family *needs* a second bathroom—and an extra bedroom—and just a little more money each month—then I'll be happy—then I'll serve whole-

heartedly!

"And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of . . . [saints who] had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) . . ." (Heb. 11:32, 36–38a).

That was fine for them, Lord—but as for me and my house, well—we . . . need . . . just . . . a little . . . more.

Steve Skaggs is Product Development Manager at BJU Press in Greenville, South Carolina.

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# Humility

## A WOMAN'S ROLE

By Salena Cathcart

A popular talk show recently had a segment regarding the role of homemaker. The primary focus of the “specialist” was to show that the only way a woman can succeed in her home is to make *herself* the priority. She has the responsibility to make sure that *she* is still accomplishing something worthy of notice and glory rather than just spending her day looking to serve her family.

This is not the pattern we find in Scripture. How is a woman to find honor or glory in her role? John has a lot to say about *glory*. In John’s gospel we find the noun *glory* 18 times and the verb *to glorify* 23 times. Certainly there is something John wants us to see about true glory. When John states “we have seen his glory” in 1:14, we may tend to think in terms of the transfiguration, but the verse directs us differently. John tells of the “Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us” and proceeds to speak of an all-too-common life, lived in a less-than-extraordinary context. We don’t see Jesus living among royalty or even the rich. We don’t see Jesus looking for a role that is self-promoting. Instead we find Him preaching in remote locations to insignificant people, people who would come to despise him and eventually crucify Him. Even when we might expect the true extent of His glory to be seen in His miracles, we find instead that they go largely unrecognized and unappreciated by the people.

In fact, in spite of John’s emphasis on glory,

John’s gospel is the only Gospel in which we find no account of the transfiguration. We might expect to be led to such a climax when we speak of glory, but the concept John develops is far removed from our human understanding of glory. Leon Morris in his commentary on John points out,

It seems to me that John has no intention of referring to the glorious transformation of Jesus before his disciples at any point in his Gospel. It simply would not fit into what he is saying. His idea of glory cannot be concentrated into any one incident. He has the distinctive idea of seeing glory everywhere in Jesus’ life.

Where is the glory in Christ living an ignoble life in a forgotten part of the world among people of no consequence? *Jesus’ glory is seen in the fulfillment of His role as an obedient servant.* Notice that in John 12:23 Jesus declares, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.” The disciples expected Him to usher in His kingdom and reign as supreme monarch, but Jesus was referring to His death on the cross. It was through Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion that we see the glory of the Godhead. This was His role on earth, and it was through fulfilling His role that we get a glimpse of the magnificent glory of God.

Even as Christ’s glory was seen in His fulfilling his role, so may a woman find glory in fulfilling her role, whether that be as a single person, a



wife, or a mother. The glory the world seeks for women—glory found in praiseworthy accomplishments and important titles—is not the glory the Lord emphasizes.

Consider Miriam, who had great abilities and connections as Moses' sister. She was savvy and smart. Her quick thinking had allowed her family to stay united when Moses' mother hid him in the bulrushes. Miriam was a great leader and motivator. After the Lord delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, it was Miriam who led the women in triumph and praise to the Lord. But God does not put forth Miriam as an example for us to imitate. In fact, God took away her glory before the Israelites by smiting her with leprosy when she spoke out against Moses. Her accomplishments did not matter once she chose to stray from her proper role.

On the other hand, consider the woman of Proverbs 31. She had all the strengths Miriam had, but she used those abilities to fulfill her role in an appropriate manner. She did not seek out a glamorous position or strive for the notice of others. She saw her role as God designed it to be, identified the tasks that met the responsibilities of that role, and sought to do those tasks to the best of her ability. God draws attention to and brings glory to this woman because she knew her role and she fulfilled it in an excellent fashion. Nancy Leigh DeMoss writes in *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*:

Women today don't always get a lot of strokes for being wives and moms, for faithfully loving and

cares for their husbands and children. There is enormous pressure to "do something worthwhile," to have our own identity. Even apart from the pressure of the culture, our own hearts long for recognition and appreciation for the sacrifices we make. The woman God uses is a humble woman; she follows in the steps of the Lord Jesus who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7).

That passage in Philippians tells us that Christ did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but saw instead that His role was to take on human flesh, suffer, and die. It was in this way, this lowly way of service that culminated in a humiliating crucifixion, that men would come to acknowledge the glory of God.

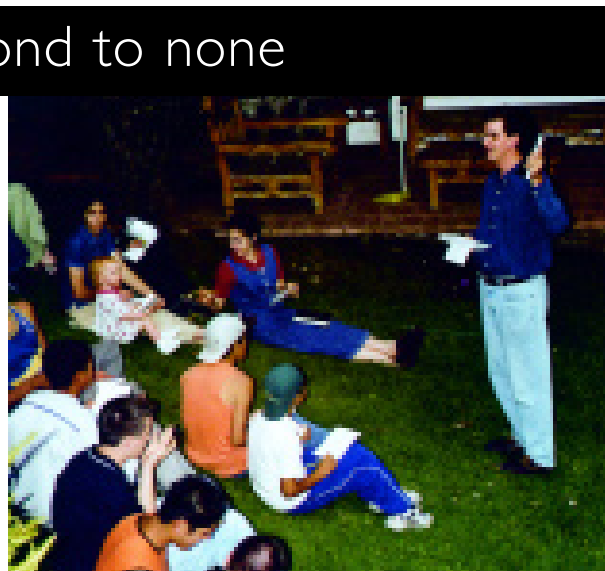
Where is your glory, Christian woman? It is not found in the recognition or acclaim of the world. It is found as you fulfill the role the Lord has given you. Do not long for another! Are you a mother? Fulfill your role! Are you a widow? Fulfill your role! Are you single? You too have a role to fulfill! Do not let the glamour and glory of the world draw you away from your God-designed role. True glory is found as you fulfill your role, even as Christ did His.

Salena Cathcart is a BJU graduate and a mother of three toddlers living in Columbus, Ohio.



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# Spiritual Sight

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

By Patricia Mondore

The magnificent edifice towered far above every other structure in the city nearby as it proudly overlooked the harbor. Standing around 400 feet tall, the lighthouse was an extraordinary feat of engineering by anyone's estimation. Even beyond its staggering height, it was also a scientific wonder with its light system that could be seen from up to 35 miles out at sea. Its builders had, no doubt, believed they had arrived at the pinnacle of architectural achievement and had made a triumphant statement of man's limitless capabilities.

The lighthouse was without question the preeminent work of its day or of any before it. This project was not, however, a product of modern times. The Pharos Lighthouse was completed in 280 B.C. on a small Egyptian island just offshore in the Mediterranean Sea. The construction of such a massive structure would be an impressive accomplishment even today, so it is not surprising that this lighthouse went down in history as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Although the Pharos Lighthouse is no longer standing, its influence remains in several respects. From an architectural standpoint, it has been used as a model for many prototypes along the Mediterranean, as far away as Spain. In addition, linguistically, it gave its name to lighthouses all over the world. The French word for lighthouse is *phare*, while in Italian and Spanish it is *faro*.

The Pharos, which was considered history's first great lighthouse, was located on an island

in the bustling harbor of Alexandria. Historians have estimated the Pharos to have reached anywhere from 384 to 450 feet (equivalent to a modern 40-story building), and it was built to that height for good reason. Alexandria stood on the flat Nile Delta, and without the Pharos light there were no natural features to help guide navigators into the city. Of the seven wonders of the ancient world, only the Pharos had a practical use in addition to its architectural elegance. For sailors, it ensured a safe return to the Great Harbor. For architects, it was the tallest building on earth at the time it was built. For scientists, it was the mysterious mirror that fascinated them most. The mirror reflected the sunlight during the day; a fire blazed on its roof at night. The internal core of the tower was used as a shaft to lift the fuel needed for the fire.

Alexandria, the city in which Pharos was located, was founded in 332 B.C. by Alexander the Great, king of Macedonia. Alexander planned this namesake city to become one of the finest ports of the ancient world. Shortly after Alexander's death, his commander Ptolemy Soter assumed power and established his capital there. Ptolemy noted the small island, Pharos (its name is believed to be a variation of "Pharaoh's Island"), off the city's coast. He had a breakwater (made of large stones or masonry) of nearly one mile in length called the Heptastadium (meaning "seven furlongs") built to the island. This gave the city a spacious double harbor where the lighthouse was eventually built. The project was initiated by Ptolemy Soter around

290 B.C., but it was completed after his death in 280 B.C. For centuries to follow, day and night, mariners could depend on the Pharos Lighthouse to guide them to safe harbor.

Alexander had become a busy and thriving seaport. It was also a center of Greek culture as evidenced by the numerous statues of mythological gods found throughout the city. The 12 chief gods of Greek mythology, usually called the Olympians, were Zeus, Hera, Hephaestus, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Hestia, Hermes, Demeter, and Poseidon, who was the god of the sea. Hence, it made perfect sense that a statue of Poseidon adorned the summit of the Pharos Lighthouse. Sostratus did not, however, decide to dedicate the completed monument to this volatile god of the sea. Instead, the dedicatory inscription Sostratus placed on the lighthouse was "to all of the savior gods on behalf of those who sail the seas."

While the majority of the citizens of Alexandria, along with Sostratus, worshiped the multiple gods of Greek mythology, the northeastern quarter of the city at that time was occupied predominantly by Jews who continued to believe in the one true God of the Bible. In fact, it was there that the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, was made some time around 100 B.C. It was also there in Alexandria, during that same period, where a certain Jewish baby boy was born who would one day carry the message of one particular Savior God to the world. Despite his Greek name, it is likely young Apollos was not raised to believe in the mythological gods of Alexandria but in the Hebrew God of the Bible. We know that at some point Apollos chose to follow God the Son by placing his faith in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures record by saying,

a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue . . . shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:24–28).

The Scriptures also teach that Apollos was a peer and contemporary of the apostle Paul and that he eventually joined Paul in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul wrote, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:5, 6). Paul and Apollos were working toward the same goal of sharing their Savior God with the world. Being from Alexandria, Apollos had grown up under the shadow of the mighty Pharos lighthouse and was, no doubt, well aware of its dedication to the gods. But Apollos now knew the One who declared, "I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me" (Hos. 13:4). Like Paul, he too was "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Apollos knew the one and only Savior of the world was Jesus.

Apollos might have referred to the savior gods of the Pharos to point the people to the true Light of the world. He was no doubt familiar with the words of the Psalmist who wrote, "O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea: Which by his strength . . . stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people" (Ps. 65:5–7). What an opportunity it would have been for Apollos to assure the people of Alexandria that the God who stilled the raging waters could surely be depended on by "those who sail the seas." In fact, this very Savior, just a short time earlier, had come to earth. While Apollos was growing up in Alexandria and Pharos was shining its light across the harbor, the One the Scriptures refer to as "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9) walked along the shores of this same sea.

For centuries to follow, the light of the Pharos guided sailors safely to shore. This bright beacon of light was a symbol of hope to weary travelers as it shined the way to their destination, to safe harbor, to home. Yet, despite the fact that it was the most impressive lighthouse in the world, the Pharos was not indestructible. In 1303 and again in 1323 earthquakes took their toll on the structure, and in 1480 the Egyptian Mamelouk Sultan Qaitbay built a medieval fort on the same spot where the lighthouse once stood, using the fallen stone and marble. The magnificent Pharos was gone.

The light of the ancient world no longer shines the way to safe harbor. But the true Light of the World still does. Though Jesus walked upon this earth for only a short time, the light He brought to the world shines eternal. He declared, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). He came to shine His guiding light to all those who are lost in the darkness, tossed and turned on the rough seas of life. The savior gods to whom Pharos was dedicated could no more protect those lost at sea than they could the lighthouse itself from its ultimate fate. God, the Savior, however, not only hears the cries of every lost soul but has reached out and shined the light of His saving love, the Light of Jesus. All who follow the Light will find themselves in safe harbor for eternity.

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Patricia Mondore is a freelance writer living in Jamesville, New York.

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## FBF NEWS AND EVENTS

Tim Locke, Managing Editor

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#### February 10-11, 2003

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Embassy Suites at Atlanta Airport  
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#### April 14-16, 2003

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Oakwood Baptist Church  
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# SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

## First Partaker

### Approaching the Preaching of Romans

On yellowed 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 paper are faded outlines of my earliest attempt to preach through Romans. The sermons were handwritten. The content, revisited now twenty-five years later, is *embarrassingly* thin. I was a second-year seminary student, married less than a year, and pastoring a little country church in North Carolina. Linda and I had joined it just one week after our wedding. With what grace those patient people must have borne with us.

The series on Romans lasted all of 5 weeks. I'll never forget the relief on one dear old saint's face the Sunday morning I announced I was discontinuing it. She nodded knowingly. No one seemed disappointed. Not even my wife! In fact, after the service no one offered even the lamest semblance of at least a halfhearted condolence. The Romans series just disappeared from people's thoughts as happily as if hit by a delete button. Poof. Gone.

Fifteen years later and in a second church I attempted Romans again. My approach was different and so was the result. Some of the difference between the two approaches was, I trust, increased spiritual maturity. But some of it was simpler and less personal than that.

The turn of a year lends itself naturally to beginning things, including sermon series. Were I beginning Romans (or any other Pauline epistle) again this January, I'd put to use the following approach.

#### Remember That It's a Letter

There are four literature types in the New Testament: Gospels, a history, a prophecy, and letters.

The letter genre is unique to the New Testament. That is, although there are letters included in Old Testament documents, no Old Testament book is itself a letter. Letters read much differently from books of law or the preaching of prophets and should be approached accordingly. Here's the difference put with intriguing insight.

*"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6)*

*The prophets delivered oracles to the people, but the apostles wrote letters to the brethren, letters characterized by all that fullness of unreserved explanation and that play of various feeling which are proper to that form of intercourse. It is in its nature a more familiar communication, as between those who are, or should be, equals.*

*The writer does not announce a succession of revelations, or arrest the inquiries which he encounters in men's hearts by the unanswerable formula, "Thus saith the Lord." He arouses, he animates, he goes along with the working of men's minds, by showing them the workings of his own. He utters his own convictions, he pours forth his own experience, he appeals to others to "judge what he says," and commends his words "to their conscience in the sight of God." He confutes by argument rather than by authority, deduces his conclusions by processes of reasoning and establishes his points by interpretations and applications of the former Scriptures.*

*Why all this labor in proving what might have been decided by a simple announcement from one entrusted with the word of God? Would not the apostolic declaration that such a statement was error, and that such another was truth, have sufficed for the settlement of that particular question. Doubtless! But it would not have sufficed to train men's minds to that thoughtfulness whereby truth becomes their own, or to educate them to the living use of the Scriptures as the constituted guide of inquiry (T. D. Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*).*

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Adjusting the pulpit to this one fact—that God chose to transmit the doctrines in Romans through a letter, through *correspondence* (the word refers to “mutual response”)—revolutionizes preaching style. Here’s an example. In chapter 2 alone there are nine question marks. Nine. In one chapter. Then I count nine more in the next eight verses (3:1–8)! More than one question per verse.

Clearly there’s a wise method here. So it would also be wise to adjust one’s style. In this case, using what Socrates perfected four hundred years before Paul—the running questioning that either engages conscience (as Paul does in chapter 2) or anticipates objections (as he’s doing in chapter 3). You’ll find, as Paul did, that questioning keeps people thinking—in this case, through material to which they might otherwise have immediately protested emotionally without giving Divine reasoning a fair hearing.

Then, don’t overlook the fact that Paul’s letters conform to the standard letter writing etiquette of their day. That means they include (1) a recognizable opening that identifies both author and recipients, (2) a section of formal thanksgiving, (3) a lengthy body, and finally (4) a characteristic closing filled with greetings.

Simply following this helps with outlining. But beyond that, the formal “opening” and “thanksgiving” sections are dynamite when recognized for what they are and what they’re doing. Don’t yield to the temptation to mutate them homiletically in the interest of relevant sermon application. Compare them with their counterparts in Paul’s other letters and you’ll see that we’re dealing with something special here.

For one thing, this opening (vv. 1–7) is the lengthiest in the Pauline corpus by far. It’s also the most theologically wealthy. But most significant of all, it introduces, right out of the gate, the general subject of the epistle—*the gospel of God* (v. 1). And look at the material it yields on that subject. Paul expands on (1) *the gospel’s* relation to the Old Testament (v. 2), (2) *the gospel’s* Christocentric content (vv. 3–4), and (3) his own commission in relation to *the gospel* (vv. 5–6).

The formal thanksgiving section (vv. 8–15) reinforces for the readers the primary issue on Paul’s mind—*the gospel* (vv. 9, 15), especially his ministry in connection with it. Clearly, then, Paul has opened his letter by serving up its key on a silver platter. But the first time I attempted preaching through Romans I missed this entirely.

My old outlines say that I entitled my first sermon, “Assuming a Biblical Perspective About the Christian Life.” What a titanic struggle I must have had bending Romans 1:1–7 to that theme! Nevertheless, I seem to have won because the next week’s sermon returned to the pulpit confidently with verses 8–13.

This new section I entitled, “Accepting Our Responsibility for Other Christians.” That probably sounded promising. But what did I do with verse 10, “making request, if by any means now at length I might

have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you?” Maybe I labored mightily to convince the good folks that they ought to take a trip. And what did I coerce out of verse 13, “Now, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto)?” I’ll never know because it looks as though I conveniently passed right over verses 10 and 13. There’s no reference to them whatsoever in my outline. The Spirit breathed them out. I left them out. They evidently didn’t fit what I wanted to say.

## Ask the Right Question

Now I recognize the misstep in my approach. I had prepared with the wrong question in mind. I was asking myself, “What can I say about this?” “What can I say about this . . . that will be interesting?” “What can I say about this . . . that will be applicable to my people?” “What can I say . . . that I haven’t said before?” Result? Preaching themes that weren’t the passage’s themes. So in the pulpit I had a battle on my hands trying to twist those passages into saying what they didn’t. The people witnessed the war. Hence the relief when I called it quits.

How naturally those same passages would have unfolded if I had started with a different question. I should have been asking of each passage, “What does *this* say,” rather than “What can *I* say?” That’s no subtle difference. The results are a million miles apart.

Let me illustrate. What does Romans 1:1–6 (introducing Paul as the writer) actually say when I let *it* talk? What does it say if I restrain myself homiletically and simply question it hermeneutically?

You might have to study this display for a moment. You’ll begin to see that there are four subthemes woven together into an exquisite tapestry, but whenever things are woven together it’s difficult to trace the individual threads. So we’ll attempt to highlight them by using different fonts. We’ll see statements about (1) **PAUL’S QUALIFICATIONS**, (2) **the Gospel**, (3) **Jesus Christ**, and (4) **the Romans**.

Paul identifies himself by **HIS QUALIFICATIONS** for writing about **the Gospel of Jesus Christ** to **the Romans** (1:1–6).

**1<sup>st</sup> QUALIFICATION:**  
**HE IS RELATED AS A BOND-SLAVE TO Jesus Christ**  
(Who has so commissioned him that . . .)

**2<sup>nd</sup> QUALIFICATION: HE IS** (related to the Church as) **AN APOSTLE**  
(and in this role . . .)

**3<sup>rd</sup> QUALIFICATION: HE IS SEPARATED UNTO the Gospel . . .**

- 1. which is (not new but . . .) promised in the OT.**
- 2. which has as its subject God’s Son, Jesus Christ. . .**

- a. who was . . .
  - i. made of the seed of David (fully human) according . . .
  - ii. declared to be the Son/God (fully Divine) with power . . .
- b. who has given PAUL GRACE AND APOSTLESHIP
  - i. (purpose?) **FOR OBEDIENCE TO THE FAITH** (ultimate purpose?)
  - ii. (where?) **AMONG ALL NATIONS FOR HIS NAME among whom the Romans are also (included) the called of Jesus Christ.**

Look at the display until you can trace the four sub-themes. You'll begin to see that the formal opening is uniquely crafted to serve several purposes. Mainly it establishes Paul's credentials for expounding truth authoritatively to a church he had never visited. That truth is the Gospel. It has Jesus Christ as its central content. That same Jesus is the One who has called the Romans to Himself. He is therefore the initiator of the relationship that brings His apostle—Paul—and His called ones—the Romans—together in a certain kind of relationship to one another. All this He does for the sake of His name.

Now how do we approach preaching such material? I encourage preaching it *just like it stands*. Title the first sermon, "Paul's Qualifications for Expounding the Gospel." Someone says, "That doesn't sound relevant." Relevant?! The world's pulpits have been captured by men (and now women) who dismiss Paul in a heartbeat!

Paul. . . seems obsessed by the idea of sin. . . . the epistles commonly attributed to Paul, and especially the letter to the Romans, have, in their references to sin, unduly over-burdened the whole Western world for centuries, as well as misleading it to believe that before God can forgive his of children someone must be made to pay a mythical "price of sin."

That is a direct quote from Leslie Weatherhead, British Methodist minister included in *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching* as one of the twentieth century's outstanding preachers.

Weatherhead's mindset prevails in nearly every modern Protestant church. When I was pastoring that little country church in North Carolina, we were joined nearly every Lord's Day by one or two visitors who were members of such churches. Even if they hadn't been present, my own people needed some stout insistence from time to time that Paul is *our* Apostle—the Apostle to *all* nations, authorized and credentialed by the One who has called us out of the United States of America into His own Kingdom for the sake of His name.

Now develop that theme of Paul's qualifications to

expound the gospel to the Romans (and us!) with three main points, just as the Holy Spirit did: Paul was (I) Related to Jesus Christ as a Bondslave, (II) Related to the Church as an Apostle, and (III) Separated unto the Gospel He Expounds.

Make your subpoints precisely what they are in the passage. For instance, Paul says little about the first major point. So after defining "bond-slave" briefly, move on.

There's more that needs saying about the second major point, especially in view of the current Charismatic confusion about spiritual gifts. "Apostle" probably needs careful treatment by cross-referencing, especially to the passages explaining the apostles' first-century role (Eph. 4:11) and uniqueness (Eph. 2:20; II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4).

But mostly we need to expound on Paul's Christ-given authority to be an apostle to all nations (v. 5). Paul is Divinely credentialed to be expounding the gospel to every successive generation of the Church,

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***How naturally those same passages would have unfolded if I had started with a different question. I should have been asking of each passage, "What does this say," rather than "What can I say?"***

among every people group, and without regard for cultural, moral, political, racial, or socio-economical differences. Are people "the called of Jesus Christ"? Then they are His chosen apostle's addressees! They must hear Paul if they're to hear Him. And they must understand and yield to the impressive phrase, "obedience of faith." (What's that mean?)

Finally, there's the third major point, "Separated unto the Gospel," with its two subdivisions: (1) its relationship to the Old Testament, and (2) its Christological content. Here's where the bulk of the content lies. So here's what should make up the bulk of the sermon as well.

Of course, all of this has to be illustrated, applied, and argued, and then exhortation completes the hermeneutic package. So after exegeting the first two points carefully and then adding the rhetorical processes you may find that you need a second sermon just to expound this unparalleled introduction.

### **Get The Theme Exactly**

Here's what some of the better commentators say about 1:16–17. "These one and a half verses are . . . the statement of the theological theme which is going to be

worked out in the main body of the epistle” (C. E. B. Cranfield). “The apostle has reached that point toward which he has been moving in this rather lengthy introduction. The transition is now completed and he can state the central point of the letter” (Herman Hoyt). “These two verses have an importance out of all proportion to their length. The weighty matter they contain tells us much of what this epistle is about. . . . these verses may be held to give us the thesis of the epistle” (Leon Morris). “In these two wonderful verses . . . he gives us, as it were, stated in a summary manner in the most succinct form conceivable, what is undoubtedly the great theme of apostolic preaching—the great theme, in particular, of this epistle to the Romans” (David Martyn Lloyd-Jones). “Virtually all scholars acknowledge that these verses are decisive for the interpretation of Romans” (Thomas R. Schreiner). “They serve as the transition into the body by stating Paul’s theme” (Douglas Moo).

We’d need some weighty reasons for disagreeing with the unanimity of these careful students. However, Moo goes on to point out that “most scholars agree with this

***Luther was liberated by discovering that the gospel is not only that God is righteous but that He provides righteousness. That is, “the righteousness of God” is not only a righteousness He possesses, but a righteousness He imparts. So far so good. But Paul has more in mind than even this.***

conclusion, but they would not agree about just where within vv. 16-17 this theme is to be found.” Options are as follows:

- (1) *the gospel of Christ* (v. 16a)
- (2) *the righteousness of God* (v. 17a)
- (3) *the just shall live by faith* (v. 17b).

Since Paul has taken pains to introduce the subject of *the gospel* in his opening (and in his thanksgiving—v. 9) it would be a serious oversight to omit it from our statement of theme. But what is it the “good news” about? That’s what he’s introducing in verse 17—“therein is the righteousness of God revealed.” Dare we leave that out? Especially since the word “righteousness” and its cognates occur 65 times in Romans (all in chapters 1–10 except one occurrence in 14:17)? It’s a major emphasis to which he keeps returning.

So my attempt to combine these first two emphases is

“The Good News of the Saving Righteousness of God.” Elongating a bit more I might add, “. . . by Faith Alone.”

That brings up the question of what Paul means by “the righteousness of God.” There’s a tremendous amount of discussion about this in the literature. Nearly all agree that it refers to much more than one of God’s attributes—i.e., that He is righteous.

You may be aware that Luther was tortured by this mistaken notion that the expression referred only to a Divine attribute. “I greatly longed to understand Paul’s epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but one expression—‘the righteousness of God.’” The reason this stood in his way was because he thought that Romans was teaching that the gospel is that God is righteous. “I had no love for that holy and righteous God who punishes sinners. I was filled with secret anger against him. I hated him, because not content with frightening by the law and the miseries of life . . . he still further increased our tortures by the gospel.”

Luther was liberated by discovering that the gospel is not only that God is righteous but that He *provides* righteousness. That is, “the righteousness of God” is not only a righteousness He possesses, but a righteousness He imparts. So far so good. But Paul has more in mind than even this.


Romans 3:26 finally and triumphantly unpacks the concept when it proclaims that God did what He did at the Cross for the express purpose of declaring “his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier. . . .”

There it is. God’s righteousness in Romans is that by which He both retains His own justice and yet, incredibly, can still declare guilty sinners entirely and incontestably *just*. The good news is that He can be at one and the same time both *just* and *Justifier*. This is “his righteousness” as it is revealed in the gospel and expounded in Romans.

John Stott captures this strikingly when he says that Romans is the good news of “God’s righteous way of righteousing the unrighteous.” God has devised a means of being righteous while still giving sinners a righteous standing. Romans is that good news—The Good News of the Saving Righteousness of God.

## **Christmas Is Coming**

There’s more that needs to be suggested about approaching the ascent of this tallest, grandest, most breathtaking epistle in the New Testament. Space requires that we wait. But since Christmas is coming, how about a wish list for Romans? Best expository commentary: Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. Best work on the Greek text: C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (2 vols.). Best set of printed sermons: James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (4 vols.). Best brief overview by a dispensationalist: Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*. Best supplementary reading in Pauline theology: Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*.

May our Christmas be Christ and our New Year the best preaching we’ve ever yet done. 



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# Bring . . . the Books

*Altogether Lovely: Jonathan Edwards on the Glory and Excellency of Christ.*

In last issue's column on Iain Murray's biography of Jonathan Edwards, I encouraged you to consider mining the spiritual wealth in Edwards' own published writings. I proceeded to follow my own advice and set out to read some of his printed sermons. Quite honestly, the thought of wading through the small print of the two-volume work of his writings in my library was sufficiently intimidating to dissuade me from starting. My first task therefore was to find a small, readable volume of sermons by Edwards. Fortunately, *Soli Deo Gloria* has just the thing—a compilation of Edwards' sermons on Christ in a small treasure of a volume titled *Altogether Lovely*.

The nine sermons by Edwards that comprise this volume all have as their chief theme some aspect of the glory or excellency of Christ. Over two-and-one-half centuries later, they are as powerful and fresh today as they were when Edwards preached them. Even a casual reading of these messages reveals the passion and spiritual fervency Edwards brought to the pulpit as he preached these messages. He desired Christ above all else, and he wanted to fan this same desire in the hearts of his hearers.

In the first sermon, "God the Best Portion of the Christian," Edwards took as his text the familiar refrain "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Ps. 73:25). The godly, though they may have no other portion, have in Christ a much better portion than the wicked. A truly godly person, Edwards asserted from the text, prefers God before anything else in heaven. Our hearts long for heaven not because of any of the delights that Scripture assures us are there, but because God is present there.

If God were not to be enjoyed in heaven, but only vast wealth, immense treasures of silver and gold, great honor of such kind as men obtain in this world, and a fullness of the great sensual delights and pleasures, all these things would not make up for the want of God and Christ. If heaven were empty of God, it would indeed be an empty, melancholy place.

But a truly godly person also prefers God before all other things on earth. Not content to wait until heaven, a truly godly believer desires more of His presence now, and more than anything he might obtain in this world. He treasures his present relationship with God above any earthly friendship, earthly achievement, earthly position or honor, earthly treasure or pleasure.

He not only prefers Him to anything which he now possesses, but he sees nothing possessed by

any of his fellow creatures as so estimable. Could he have as much worldly prosperity as he would, could he have earthly things just to his mind, and agreeable to his inclination, he values the portion which he has in God incomparably more. He prefers Christ to earthly kingdoms.

*" . . . when  
thou comest,  
bring with thee  
. . . the books"  
(2 Tim. 4:13)*

Edwards concludes the sermon with two searching applications. First, the man who prefers God above all other things either in earth or in heaven has found great happiness because he has chosen the one portion that will never change or pass away and of which he can never be denied no matter what other changes may come his way.

Second, if we desire any other portion either in heaven or on earth, we have good cause to examine ourselves to see if we be in fact a truly godly person. What is the main reason you want to go to heaven? If it is not God, then examine your life. If you could avoid death and have your choice, would you choose to live always in this world without being in the presence of God or would you choose to leave this world in God's time and way in order to be with Him? Do you prefer Christ to all others as the way to heaven, or would you choose some other way if you could? Perhaps the most penetrating question of all: If perchance your lot were to spend eternity in this world, would you choose to spend life in holy living and in mean and lowly circumstances with Christ or would you chose to live in eternal wealth, pleasure, and honor without God?

As I read this first sermon, I found myself transported to the very pews in Edwards' church, hearing along with that congregation the penetrating truths as they must have been delivered by Edwards. I admit to coming under great conviction upon hearing (reading) these penetrating statements and coming to grips with the evidence of how far short my own life falls from preferring God as the best portion.

In the succeeding weeks, each sermon I have read has had as powerful an effect as this first one, if not more so. I have shared the first of these treasures with you to leave you with the challenge to seek out and mine the rich treasure contained in the remaining eight messages—as well as in the other sermons of Jonathan Edwards. ☞

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Christian men are assaulted by temptations to betray their vows to their wives and their covenant of holiness with God. Images daily assail our eyes and minds. We live in a society which is not only increasingly tolerant of immorality, but approving of it and even insistent upon it. As the influence of Christianity on our society decreases, the sway of an immoral paganism increases, pressuring Christian men to capitulate. More than ever, then, we need to heed the Bible's teaching on this theme. Nowhere is that teaching more poignant than in Proverbs' presentation of the "strange woman."

The passages in Proverbs that discuss the "strange woman" include 2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:23–35; 7:1–27; 20:16 (cf. 27:13); 22:14; 23:27, 33. In fact, D. A. Hubbard asserts that the first four of these passages constitute the "main subject" of Proverbs 1–9. These verses answer four questions: (1) Who is the strange woman? (2) What is her appeal? (3) Why is she dangerous? (4) What can protect a man from her? This column will focus primarily on the first of these questions.

Commentators often represent the "strange woman" as a prostitute. Perhaps this is because Proverbs calls her an "evil woman" (6:24) and a "whorish woman" (6:26, translated "harlot" in 7:10 and "whore" in 23:27). But our modern conception of this ancient trade does not fit the Scriptural presentation. The strange woman is not immoral for money, but for pleasure. Neither is her activity confined to a "stroll."

The strange woman is out in society (7:12) and constitutes a real threat to those who would be wise. She is married (2:17), unlike most modern prostitutes. The sin is adultery (6:29–35), rather than the more general fornication.

A proper identity of the "strange woman" begins with the two terms Solomon uses to describe her. The first (*zur*) refers primarily to a person who is estranged, where "the basic thought is non-acquaintance, non-relatedness" (TWOT). This is a woman, therefore, who is strange to me in that she is not mine. The second term (*nakriy*) is an adjective describing a foreigner, a person who is an alien. The strange woman is not necessarily from another country but from another *culture*, outside the culture of godliness. She is an alien to a godly lifestyle, a foreigner to wisdom, a prostitute not in the sense that she makes her living by it, but in the sense that she lives in this foreignness. Her lifestyle is marked by a tacit or open approval of immorality.

Proverbs 2:17 says that this kind of woman "forsaketh the guide of her youth [i.e., her husband], and forgetteth the covenant of her God [i.e., her marriage

vows]." She is not devoted to her husband. She is "subtil of heart" (7:10)—meaning that she conceals her real intentions. She is insidious. "She is loud and stubborn" instead of meek and quiet (1 Peter 3:4) and "her feet abide not in her house" (7:11).

Proverbs 6:26 warns, "For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life." There is a reason why such a person is described as "dressed to kill." This kind of woman is trolling for a relationship with a man. According to Proverbs 5:6, "She does not ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable; she does not know it." She is completely absorbed with her present existence, blind to eternity. This is why 1 Peter 2:11 says: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." This is not someone with whom men need tolerance or patience, but from whom men need deliverance.

In his commentary on Proverbs, Steveson says,

The woman is . . . "strange" because her seductive words tempt foolish men to follow ways that go contrary to the ways of God. . . . The word refers to someone outside a normal group (and so) describes any adulterous woman who has abandoned the godly ways of wisdom. She occupies a position that is outside the normal circle of women in Israel. . . . Solomon refers to one who practices the standards of the heathen.

To whom does this apply today? First, it applies to women who are open and aggressive in their pursuit of men, who dress or act immodestly, whose morals are not directed by Scripture, who are overly familiar in their conduct toward men, who openly express dissatisfaction with and/or disdain for their husbands. Secondly, it applies to those who unwittingly imbibe this spirit from the world, who wear "the attire of an harlot," are loud and stubborn in spirit, whose behavior toward men is shaped by the popular media rather than by Scripture. She may be acting like the strange woman without even being very aware of it. Some professing Christian women are guilty of this. Consider, for instance, that Amy Grant is described on a recent album cover as having "a 'come hither' look." This is precisely the strange woman of Proverbs. Finally, it applies to the largest purveyor of this behavior today, contemporary television. The Christian man must shun its portrayal of wives as independent, seductive, and aggressive, and its depiction of marriage as outdated, confining, and dull. "Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths" (7:25). ☞

**"Rightly  
dividing  
the Word  
of Truth"  
(2 Tim. 2:15)**

The Windows column of *FrontLine* is dedicated to helping the preacher draw back the curtains and shed more light on his sermon. Illustrations have a wonderful capacity to do just that. You need look no further than the preaching of Jesus Christ to see the power of illustrations. The Master used wind, water, bread, sheep, wheat, wood, coins, dogs, pigs, and other common objects to turn the light on profound spiritual truth. Christ also used contemporary stories of devastation and destruction to enlighten His hearers. The first such illustrations that come to mind are found in Luke 13. There, the news of the mass murder of worshipful Galileans became a powerful reminder of the need for repentance. The story of the fall of the tower of Siloam “threw open the window” to show the condition of all mankind. Jesus even used the burning garbage in the Valley of Hinnom to illustrate the terrors of hell. Because the Lord used stories of historical and impending destruction, this Windows article is devoted to giving you modern illustrations for your messages. These can serve as potent reminders of the importance of evangelism. Use these tragic events of human history to turn the light on the desperate plight of lost humanity.

## Earthquakes

The five worst earthquakes on record each killed more than 200,000 human beings.

830,000 died in the Shansi, China, quake of January 23, 1556. More recently 600,000 died as a result of the Tangshan, China, earthquake of July 27, 1976 (measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale).

On July 20, 1999, a magnitude 7.7 quake struck Iran killing 50,000 people. The most powerful earthquake on record occurred on May 22, 1960 off the coast of Chile. Massive landslides and volcanic eruptions accompanied the quake and killed more than 2,000. The giant tsunami generated by the temblor caused 138 deaths and \$50 million in damage in far-away Japan.

## Volcanoes

One of the most well known volcanoes in the world is at Vesuvius, Italy. Pliny the Younger described its eruption in A.D. 79. Scientists estimate that Vesuvius spewed up into the atmosphere for more than 15 miles and covered up to 20 square miles in that blast. The city of Herculaneum alone was covered with 75 feet of

ash. More than 3,000 people died in that eruption. In the year 1631, another 3,500 people died in a volcanic eruption. More than one million people now live close to Vesuvius.

Miraculously, only 57 people died in the May 18, 1980, eruption of Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington. At 8:32 A.M., the volcano blasted outward at more than 300 m.p.h. and destroyed 4 billion board feet of timber. It spewed ash over 20 square miles.

In 1994, at Popocatepetl, Mexico, a similar volcano erupted after 60 years of dormancy. It has erupted repeatedly since then. This enormous volcano has blasted ash all the way to Mexico City, more than 45 miles away. More than 200,000 people live in the danger zone around Popocatepetl.

## Hurricanes

A category four hurricane struck Galveston, Texas, in the year 1900. It killed more than 8,000 people. Another category four storm took the lives of 1,836 people in 1928 in the region around Lake Okeechobee, Florida. In 1893, two powerful hurricanes each took the lives of nearly 2,000 people in the southern United States.<sup>1</sup>

## Floods

In 1887, more than one million lives were lost in the Henan province of China when the Huang He River overflowed. Another 100,000 people lost their lives in 1911 when the Yangtze River flooded, creating a lake 80 miles long and 35 miles wide. In the year 1228, 100,000 people drowned in a sea flood in Friesland, Netherlands.<sup>2</sup>

A small but very destructive flood devastated Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on May 31, 1889. The Old South Fork dam, 450 feet higher than Johnstown, had been poorly maintained and broke open in heavy rains. The residents reported hearing a low rumble that “roared like thunder.” Suddenly, 20 million tons of water came rushing down the small valley formed by the Little Conemaugh River. Picking up debris for three miles down the mountain, the water reached 60 feet high and rushed ahead at 40 miles per hour. Carrying logs like

*“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”*

*Charles Spurgeon*

battering rams, the flood picked up miles of barbed wire from a factory upstream. Trains were swept away, and bridges fell before the torrent. Hundreds of people were trapped in their own attics as their homes floated downstream. Some 2,209 people died in the maelstrom, of whom 300 were killed in a freak fire at the Stone Bridge, where a 30-foot-high pile of oily debris formed by logs, homes and barbed wire caught fire. It was impossible for the rescuers to reach those who were trapped in the deadly blaze.

The real tragedy of Johnstown is that people had talked about the weakened dam for years. Three hours before it broke, the owners of the dam sent a telegram telling the residents of Johnstown to flee. That message was largely ignored.

## Tornadoes

Between 1950 and 1997, there were 37,757 tornadoes recorded in the United States. These killed an estimated 4,225 people. The system of twisters that struck Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana on March 18, 1925, took the lives of 695 people. In a June 8, 1953, tornado in Flint, Michigan, 115 souls perished.<sup>3</sup>

According to FEMA, the top ranking states (in terms of total numbers of tornadoes) are Texas, Oklahoma, and Florida.

## Plagues and Disease

Outbreaks of influenza have taken the lives of millions of people around the world. One of the worst outbreaks on record occurred in 1918. In that year alone, more than 20 million people died from “the flu” (type A).

There have been three major epidemics of bubonic plague in history. This horrible disease was spread by the fleas carried by rats. A total of 137 million human victims died during these epidemics. A similar plague in the 6th century decimated Rome and thwarted Emperor Justinian’s attempt to rebuild the Roman Empire. Historians believe that as many as 100 million people fell victim to this plague.

In July 2002, the World Health Organization issued its findings on the AIDS epidemic. “More than 60 million people have been infected with HIV since the epidemic began two decades ago. In 2001, it claimed an estimated three million lives. In the 45 most affected countries, it is projected that, between 2000 and 2020, 68 million people will die prematurely as a result of AIDS. The projected toll is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa where 55 million deaths can be expected.”<sup>4</sup>

## Man-made Disasters

### The Bhopal Incident

About midnight on December 2, 1984, 40 tons of methyl isocyanate was released from a manufacturing plant near Bhopal, India. 3,000 people passed away and many thousands more will die early deaths.

### The Titanic

On April 14, 1912, 815 passengers and 688 crew members lost their lives in the icy Atlantic Ocean at 2:15 A.M. On her maiden voyage to New York, the ocean liner *Titanic* struck an iceberg and sank. Legal inquiries into the incident were conducted on both sides of the Atlantic. The depositions and court records from these hearings are now available at <http://www.titanicinquiry.org>. These provide a fascinating window through which to view humanity.

One deposition, recorded in Wisconsin by Daisy Minahan, includes a powerful reminder for Christians. Miss Minahan made it safely into lifeboat number 14 as the *Titanic* was sinking. The half-filled lifeboats were one of the great tragedies of this entire incident. Many more people could have been rescued from the icy waters. After the ship went down, multitudes were floating on the waters. From them, a low moaning wail went out across the waters. Those in the lifeboats began to remember their loved ones, who were probably floating nearby. To take their minds off of the moans, Officer Lowe in lifeboat number 14 suggested that they ought to sing. He suggested that they sing a well-known hymn like “Throw Out the Lifeline.” After the women implored Officer Lowe for some time, he finally divided his passengers among three other lifeboats and went back to try to rescue more of the dying. May God grant that the believers of today would do more than merely sing “Throw Out the Lifeline.”

These tragic events of human history turn the light on the desperate plight of lost humanity. After you read these morbid statistics, you can understand the truth of Ecclesiastes 7:4, “The heart of the wise is in the house of the mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” The world tries to forget troubles such as these with mirth. The believer must remember the mourning of humanity and share the good news of the gospel. Physical death is not the end. There is a fate worse than death—the second death in the Lake of Fire for eternity. Let’s “Throw Out the Lifeline” because, most assuredly, humanity is drifting away. ☞

<sup>1</sup> NOAA

<sup>2</sup> <http://sedul.hypermart.net/stats.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.disastercenter.com/tornado/tornad2.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unaids.org/barcelona/presskit/factsheets.html>

# Stewardship

## YOUR LIFE A YEAR

By Gordon A. Dickson

# W

hat if one lifetime were like one year?

Moses said in Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Here's an idea: *plan your life like you plan your year.* All of us prepare for the seasons of the year. (If you don't believe me, check the mall parking lots.) All of us know how to plan for New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. We understand the "rhythms of the seasons." Now let's see if we can look at our passing years the way we look at the passing seasons. If my math is right, every five days would represent one year (using Moses' "average life span" in Psalm 90:10).

So, what if your lifetime were like one year?

The day you were born—Happy New Year! It's the start of a brand new life and a brand new year. What a wonderful season! Your whole life and your whole year are before you!

At nine years old, you would find yourself at Valentine's Day. It's still too early for spring, but things are beginning to change. Valentine's Day introduces you to love and not just the mom-and-dad kind. When you discover "this" kind of love, everything begins to change!

You would be "sweet 16" on St. Patrick's Day

. . . and not a moment too soon either! This "green" day reminds you of the greening of spring. In this season of "spring cleaning," you must sort out the treasure from the trash. At 16, you are choosing between good and garbage—constantly. Your choices in "spring cleaning," stay with you all year long, and that's just like life. You need the Lord's help to know trash from treasure.

At 18, you're late in March and ready to march. Congratulations! High school is behind you, the world lies at your feet. Spring is in full swing! It's a time to plan your planting. So much of the rest of your "life year" will be formed by the choices you make here. It's time to ask the Lord for wisdom.

Age 22? You're in the Easter season and already making some very adult decisions. As the flowers bloom and the weather warms, you see bright new horizons ahead of you. Already you have seen the results of those trash/treasure decisions and those "sowing and reaping" choices. As you plan out vacations and holidays, you begin to realize that the course of your "life year" is pretty well set. How you "applied your heart to wisdom" has made all the difference.

When you're 27, you would be celebrating Mother's Day, and by Memorial Day you would be "over the hill" at 30! The weather is warm and the plans are many. Now you are

making decisions, not only for yourself, but for others. You have more responsibilities and more opportunities. Sometimes wisdom comes knocking—with some very hard knocks! It becomes more and more obvious what kind of life and what kind of year you've made for yourself.

If you are in your mid-thirties, it's time to celebrate July 4th. Isn't independence great? But how did time pass so quickly? Valentine's Day was just yesterday . . . right? These are warm days, sweltering "years," hot with the activity of many well-laid plans. The real fruit of your choices is starting to show and grow. It's time to "number your days" and "apply your heart to wisdom"!

By the time you're 50, it's Labor Day, and the summer is over. It's harvest time! So many choices you made earlier in the year and earlier in life are now ready for harvest. You begin to understand the phrase "too soon old, too late smart." Fall is on the way. Is that snow on the roof?

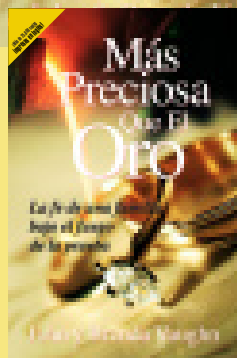
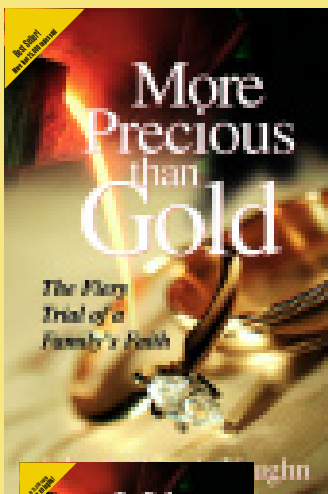
It seems a stretch, but if you're 65 you would be at Thanksgiving. (Whew! Let's stop and catch our breath!) In this season of the year, you want to gather all your loved ones together. The word "family" is very important during this part of your "life year." It's time to gather together to enjoy the fruit of your labors. It's time to bless and be blessed.

At 70, it's Christmas . . . who would have believed it? Reminiscing in this season brings back the memories of a lifetime. The treasure of those beautiful memories must push aside the trash of the bad memories. It's time to bless others with the fruit of your year and the fruit of your life.

Which season of the "life year" are you now living in? Wisdom teaches us to use each season of life the right way. It's never too late. As we anticipate the dawn of the year 2003, I hope that all of us will "number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."

Dr. Gordon A. Dickson is pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio. He also serves as Research Secretary of the FBFI.

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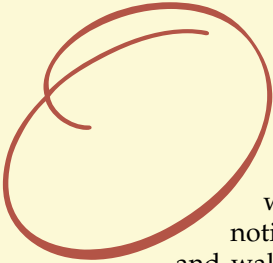
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# Sustaining Grace

## MY THORN IN THE FLESH

By Warren Stuber



One morning several years ago I noticed that my right foot was slapping the pavement as I walked. As time went on I noticed that I was tripping myself and walking with a limp. These symptoms gradually got worse. After medication, tests, and visits to several doctors, the condition had a name but not a cause. I besought the Lord, and the problem is stabilized. No pain is present, but the leg and foot remain the same. I wear a brace, different shoes, and walk with a limp, but I do walk. It takes me a bit longer to get dressed in the morning, and my physical activity is somewhat limited. The doctors are at a standstill, and unless the Lord chooses to work, my condition will remain the same. Some may question, "Why would God allow this?" My question is, "How should I react to this?"

The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 about a continuing experience he had in his life. He called it "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan"—something that God allowed to be permanent in his life. As far as we know it was some kind of physical problem for which Paul pleaded with the Lord three times for its removal. Three times the Lord refused to grant his desire. Instead, something more wonderful and beneficial happened. Something more wonderful and beneficial than physical healing? Yes!

The Lord may work in mysterious ways to us,

but He always works according to His will. As a boy I was most impressed by the first sermon of our new pastor when he preached on Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The verse was committed to memory that day. Like Paul, I have recently experienced how the Lord works and what our response should be.

### **The Reason (V. 7)**

In verse seven Paul mentions being "exalted above measure." This seems like a reference to potential pride in his life. Pride is a problem in everyone's life that must be dealt with if we are to be effective in our Christian service. "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Prov. 29:23). Saul was a proud Jew, and at this point in his life, now Paul, he is concerned about being exalted or puffed up. In the face of physical affliction, we should examine ourselves to see if God is keeping us humble through the experience. ". . . And be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5).

### **The Recognition (V. 8, 9)**

Paul had an affliction, a thorn in the flesh, that would not go away. Maybe he wondered whether the Lord had responded favorably to his importunate prayer, offered three times.

Remember, that Jesus prayed three times that the cup of sin and death would pass from Him. The will of God was otherwise, and Jesus was willing to accept it. It is a wonderful thing that the Lord completely knows and understands our situation. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

With my apparent thorn in the flesh I discovered, like Paul, the sufficiency of God. His grace is more than enough; it is the grace of God that enables us to effectively perform a task or live with a physical affliction. "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). And "he giveth more grace" (James 4:6), whatever is required.

His strength is best demonstrated in the presence of my weakness, so that He gets the glory and not I. The condition on our part, as it was with the heroes of Hebrews 11, is one of weakness; however, these same people were made strong and waxed valiant in their struggles. Through these experiences we learn that we have a God who is sovereign, sufficient, and sympathetic.

### **The Rejoicing (V. 9, 10)**

Can we rejoice in the face of physical affliction? Paul did. His letter to the Philippians certainly testifies to the fact that he was a joyful Christian (Phil. 4:4). It was not a resignation under suffering with the idea that "Since the Lord didn't remove it, I will put up with it the best I can." There was no whining, complaining, or questioning.

Paul gloried in and took pleasure in his infirmities rather than seeking deliverance. Through his attitude Christ was glorified, and Paul experienced God's grace and power. Paul continued his preaching in spite of his infirmity (Gal. 4:13).

### **The Reception (V. 9)**

In exchange for his thorn in the flesh the Apostle Paul received the power of Christ resting upon him. What an exchange! Here is the power of Christ "pitching its tent over him," i.e., dwelling in him as in a tent where He reveals His glory. This same power enables us to do all the will of God—including witnessing (Acts 1:8), preaching (Micah 3:8), or whatever God has in mind (II Sam. 22:33). I have discovered that exchanging a thorn in the flesh for the power of Christ is not only fair but glorious.

As He did with the apostle Paul, God has a special office to perform in the work of sanctification in us. Paul became well content with weakness, insults, distress, and persecutions. He learned this and rejoiced (Phil. 4:11). Only when we are emptied of ourselves can we be filled with the power and glory of God.

In the light of Paul's experience as well as my own experience, I thought of some practical applications for my thorn in the flesh. This particular affliction provided a necessary restriction on me which may have reduced the affect of a heart attack which followed it. This restriction could also be preventing overexertion after the heart attack. My affliction provides an opportunity to live a positive testimony in spite of limitations. I am reduced to operating in His strength and acknowledging that fact. Like the apostle Paul, my thorn in the flesh may have been brought about to produce humility and bring glory to God.

My doctors are confounded, but God is not. If there is to be healing, God must do it, and if He does, everyone will recognize that fact. If God continues not to heal, then I will "glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Warren Stuber is a retired minister serving at Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, SC.

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How many observe Christ's birthday! How few, his precepts! O! 'tis easier to keep Holidays than Commandments. —Benjamin Franklin

A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues. —Cicero

Adore God. . . . Be just. Be true. Murmur not at the ways of Providence. —Thomas Jefferson

O Lord, that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness. —William Shakespeare

The opposite of talking isn't listening. The opposite of talking is waiting. —Fred Lebowitz

Fortune does not change men; it un.masks them. —Suzanne Necker

Adversity introduces a man to himself. —Anonymous

If you harbor terrorists, you are a terrorist; if you finance terrorists, you are a terrorist. —President Bush

In Iraq they don't have hanging chads, they just have hangings. —Colin Powell

Leadership in the right direction finds followers and supporters. —Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld

A little matter will move a party, but it must be something great that moves a nation. —Thomas Paine

The future is purchased by the present. —Samuel Johnson

Fortune favors the bold but abandons the timid. —Latin proverb

Learn to say no. It will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin. —Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The unexamined life is not worth living. —Socrates

Our most important thoughts are those which contradict our emotions. —Paul Valery

Election years are tough on vegetarians—all the turkeys talk baloney about pork. —Bob Thaves in the comic strip "Frank & Ernest"

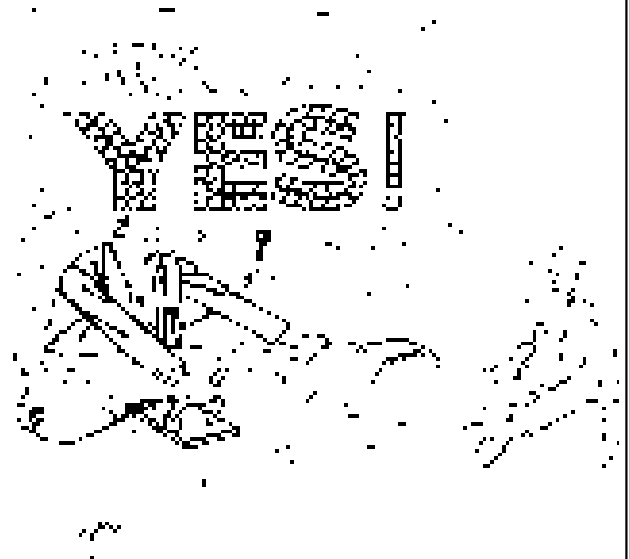
The ultimate result of shielding men from the effects of folly is to fill the world with fools. —Herbert Spencer

One sword keeps another in the sheath. —George Herbert

The marvelous thing about a joke with a double meaning is that it can only mean one thing. —Ronnie Barker

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are. —Theodore Roosevelt

Nothing fails like success because we don't learn from it. We learn only from failure. —Kenneth Ewart Boulding



“... Frank, ... you're an accountant, ... we're desperately in need of a church treasurer ...”

Wit and Wisdom is taken from *The Federalist*, [www.Federalist.com](http://www.Federalist.com)

# Hospitality for the Holidays

Laura MacPherson

It was Monday morning. Glancing at my day planner over a granola bar breakfast, I saw that my schedule was packed from 8:30 to 6:00 and that I had fourteen things on my to-do list. I sighed, already wanting to go back to bed.

I quickly turned to Romans, where I was reading in my devotions. As I read through the list of commands in the last verses of chapter 12, the words “practice hospitality” in verse 13 jumped out at me. *Hospitality?* I thought. *Who has time for that?*

During the holidays many Christians are far too busy, but are already involved in holiday activities that they can use to bless others.

## Why Hospitality?

Paul tells us in Romans 12:13 that hospitality is one of the characteristics Christians should build into their lives. In addition to this command, we find positive illustrations of hospitality throughout the Bible—Abraham to angels “unawares” (Gen. 18:1–8), Rahab to the spies (Josh. 2:1–16), and Lydia to Paul and Silas (Acts 16:14–15), for example.

We find a particularly interesting principle of hospitality in Matthew 25:34–40—when we minister to other people, we are ministering to God. The passage begins with Christ’s commending His followers for all the good things they had done for Him—providing food, drink, shelter, and clothing. The people were confused, knowing that they had not actually ministered to Christ Himself while He was on earth. But Christ responded, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). One of the ways we can serve God is by serving others.

## Rewards of Hospitality

Besides the rewards God gives to those who obey His commands, practicing hospitality offers its own rewards.

*It builds relationships.* We know the joys of friendships only when we make the effort to build them. By

spending time with others and doing helpful things for them, we build relationships that become an encouragement to us as well. One of the ladies I work with excels in this kind of hospitality. She has brought meals to me, given me small “appreciation gifts,” and has offered to help many times. We have developed a friendship that encourages us both as we share in each other’s lives.

*It adds richness to life.* Taking a moment or two out of our hectic schedules to minister to others invigorates us spiritually and enables us to appreciate more the abundant life God gives us in Him. Often, when I stopped by a nearby assisted living home to cheer up some of the residents, I would leave encouraged by their testimonies of God’s goodness. As they praised God for such small things as the sunshine outside or a daughter’s letter, I realized God’s blessings anew.

*It provides unique experiences.* Through getting involved with people, we come to know many wonderful Christians and interesting personalities. These people can encourage us in our own walk with Christ and can enrich our experiences. When I was growing up, my family often invited people to our home. Once we invited a Christian historian who

used drama to teach how God has worked throughout history. As I talked with him, I realized more of God’s hand in history and the truth that God does control all things.

## Practical Hospitality

Holiday hospitality doesn’t have to be complicated and time-consuming. There are many practical ideas for being hospitable.

*While you’re making holiday treats, make a few extra to bring over to a neighbor.* This doesn’t take much extra time and only a little extra money for the ingredients. Just double the recipe and you’ll have enough to share.

*If you have relatives or guests into your home, prepare them a refreshment tray to greet them in their room.* After a long day of traveling, people welcome a tray of fresh cookies or fruit, iced tea, or coffee. This little

HOSPITALITY?  
... WHO HAS TIME  
FOR THAT?

## Ladies Circle (Continued)

addition will go a long way in making your guests feel welcome.

*Meet a friend for coffee while you're shopping.* Spending even just an hour with a friend over a cup of coffee, tea, or soda will build your friendship. "[As] iron sharpeneth iron," Proverbs says, "so a man sharpeneth . . . his friend." Spending a little time with a good friend will bring both of you encouragement.

*While you're out, make a quick stop by a sick or shut-in person's home.* While it only takes a small effort on your part, visiting a sick or shut-in person means much to him or her. Elderly people often miss company and appreciate greatly someone visiting them, especially during the holidays.

*Send care packages to missionaries or college students.* Little things like peanut butter or chocolate chips are a treasure to many missionaries on fields where certain items can't be found. And college students love mail—especially if it contains food!

*Take a dessert or finger food to work to share with others over the lunch break.* This also takes only a little extra thought and planning, but it shows your coworkers that you care about them.

*Have "to-do" parties.* Whenever you need to get something done on your

to-do list, stop and think if it's something that other people might also need to get done. Maybe it would be a good activity for a "to-do" party, where you get together with several others and work on a project such as scrapbooking, cleaning, or letter writing.

So, as you're looking at your holiday schedule, see if you have just a few extra minutes to try one of these ideas for practicing holiday hospitality. You'll experience great rewards, and you'll find that with just a little time and energy, you can come up with some great ideas to serving Christ by ministering to others.

Laura McPherson works at BJU and is a freelance writer living in Greenville, SC.

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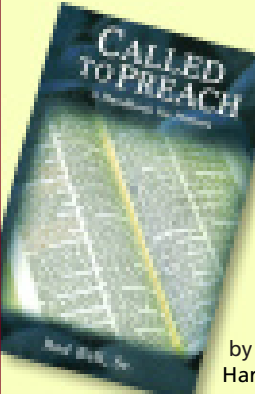
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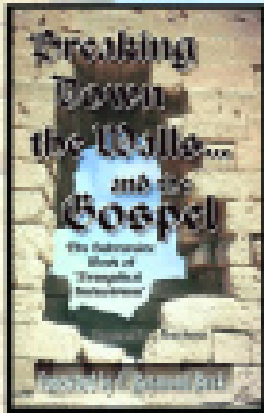
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## Servant Evangelism

**Ted McClellan**

Last fall I preached a meeting in a small rural church in an unfamiliar town. The pastor, now older, had resigned a larger more intense ministry to work in this slower-paced setting. Four years in advance, while still pastoring the larger church, he had asked me to come for a week of meetings. A couple years went by, and the pastor called to mention that he was now at this rural work and asked whether I would still like to come. I assured him that my purpose was to help him—wherever he was. Little did I know that this was a divinely scheduled turn of events. I thought I was going to this church to have a meeting, but the Lord had some lessons about servant-hood and His faithfulness that I needed to learn.

The two-day drive with my wife and four children was an enjoyable time of singing Patch the Pirate songs and anticipating the week in my mind. After arriving late Saturday evening, the pastor led us to the church and helped us set up the trailer. Tired, we went to bed not knowing what to expect but anticipating a great week of evangelism and revival.

Sunday morning the church van drove in, packed with children. I could tell that this was going to be an unusual week. The children, whose parents were missing, filled up the front of the church auditorium and greatly outnumbered the adults. After we finished the opening song I called all the children to the front and announced that they would help us sing the opening song on Wednesday night. As I turned to the congregation, I mentioned that Wednesday, family night, would feature the children singing to the parents. I encouraged the children to invite their parents.

Then while talking to the pastor after the service, I mentioned the new addition and asked what it was for. Overwhelmed, he said that they needed room for the children that attend their services. While walking out to the addition, he mentioned that due to the meetings they were going to postpone any work on the project. I guess he figured that a visiting preacher would want the extra time during the day for rest or recreation. I immediately thought of my pastor teaching us to use buildings to build people. I turned to the pastor and said, "Pastor, I am your assistant this week; if you have work that needs to get done, I am here to help you." The pastor smiled and said, "OK. Tomorrow after our prayer time, let's work on the building together."

Monday morning, my son Teddy and I met the pastor for prayer and then turned to the building project. God used that time to show me the loving heart this seasoned pastor had for this handful of people. I had the time of my life, my son by my side, helping this pastor. Teddy asked me, "Daddy, why are we doing this?" I said, "Teddy, soon this room will be filled with children hearing about Jesus." He just smiled and went on working as if to say that was good enough for him. You see, my pastor was right. You do build people through your buildings. What a building time it was for us. Together we finished closing up the exterior wall, finished the wiring, and put in most of the insulation. What a joy to hear the pastor say, "You know we got a lot done this week." But the greatest blessing was still to come.

Wednesday night arrived. Parent night was finally here. We both believed that many of the bus children's parents would attend. I can still see the pastor looking out the front door of the church and the disappointment that grew on his brow—no new parents. The church van pulled up, and as on Sunday, a large group of children filed out. The pastor turned with disappointment and said, "Let's start the service." The service started, and as I called the young people up to sing, I walked one of the children with his mother. He joined the other kids on the platform and sang the opening song. What a spark of anticipation that added to the evening's service. I preached on the home, and afterward the mother said, "You know, that's what I need in my life." I asked her how she heard of the service. She said, "We were at the park and my son said, 'Mommy, what day is it?' I told him Wednesday, and he said that we had to go to church because he was singing in the children's choir. So we came just as we were." Well, Mom came again on Thursday and Friday night, and during the invitation on Friday, she came forward to be saved. Wow! What an answer to prayer. The pastor came to me after the service with a smile of joy lifting his face and said, "You know I thought what we needed was crowds of people, but tonight God showed me that sometimes He does it one soul at a time." Yes, I thought I was going for a great week of outreach ministry, but, oh, what God did in me.

Pastor Ted McClellan serves at Faith Baptist in Taylors, SC, as the Youth and Outreach Pastor.

This is the last in a series on the four Gospels. Contrary to popular misconception, as this series has attempted to demonstrate, the Gospels are hardly repetitious. Each one confronts the reader with a distinct style, a dissimilar vantage point, a diverse selection (and sometimes arrangement) of material, and a unique thematic emphasis. If there were such a category as “most unique” (an oxymoron, I know), the Gospel of John would be the “most unique” of the four Gospels. After all, there is a reason it stands outside the traditional grouping of the “synoptic” Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

With a hefty Gospel, three epistles, and a lengthy revelation, John is the third most prolific writer of the NT (after Luke and Paul). The scarlet thematic thread that runs unambiguously through all his writings is Christ. “Johannine theology is, in essence, Christology.”<sup>1</sup> Herein lies the great irony of John’s Christology:

- There is no greater exponent of the *deity* of Christ than the one man who laid his head on Jesus’ breast. This is the particular burden of John’s Gospel.
- There is no clearer proponent of the real flesh-and-blood *humanity* of Christ than the one man who saw Him glorified. This is the particular burden of John’s Epistles.
- There is no more profound presentation of the *glorified deity and sacrificial humanity* combined than the Reigning Lamb of John’s Revelation.

This is not to say that the Christological viewpoint of each segment of John’s writings is exclusive. As Warfield observed, “the true God” (I John 5:20) was “made flesh” (John 1:14), and the “only God” (John 1:18) has come “in . . . flesh” (I John 4:2).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless there is as decided a Christological *emphasis* on the *deity* of Christ in the Gospel as there is a decided Christological *emphasis* on the *humanity* of Christ in the Epistles.

A column of 1500 words (with only 1280 now remaining!) can do no more than trace some of this Gospel’s leading characteristics.

### Theological Uniqueness of John

John’s Gospel contains a total of 879 verses. Nearly one-quarter of these verses unveil the relationship between the three members of the Godhead. For example, John 17 comprises the longest record of one member of the Godhead speaking to another member of the Godhead.

### Function & Theme

The **function** is *explicitly persuasive and evangelistic*: “I have written . . . that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God . . .” (John 20:30–31). The **theme** is expressed in the function, content, and structure of the material: *Jesus is God the Son—the incarnate manifestation of God’s Word to man—and personal faith in Him is non-negotiable.*

### Structure

The content of the synoptic narratives focuses on the threefold ministry of Christ. John’s structure is best seen in distinction to the Synoptics.

#### Discourse—teaching by explanation

- *Synoptics*—5 Major Discourses
  1. Sermon on the Mount (Mt, Lk)
  2. Kingdom of God (Parabolic) Discourse (Mt, Lk)
  3. Missionary Discourse (Mt)
  4. Ecclesiological Discourse (Mt)
  5. Olivet Discourse (Mt, Mk, Lk)

- *John*—7 Major Discourses (only in John)

1. Interview with Nicodemus (Jn. 3)
2. Interview with Samaritan Woman (Jn. 4)
3. Sonship Discourse (Jn. 5)
4. Bread of Life Discourse (Jn. 6)
5. Light of the World Discourse (Jn. 8)
6. True Shepherd Discourse (Jn. 10)
7. Upper Room Discourse (Jn. 13–17)

#### Parable—teaching by illustration

- *Synoptics*—47 Parables (Pentecost, *Words and Works*, 587–88)

- *John*—0 Parables<sup>3</sup>

Instead, John alone records Jesus’ 7 metaphors<sup>4</sup>

1. Bread of life (Jn. 6)
2. Light of the world (Jn. 8)
3. Door of the sheepfold (Jn. 10)
4. Good Shepherd (Jn. 10)
5. Resurrection and the Life (Jn. 11)
6. Way, the Truth, the Life (Jn. 14)
7. True Vine (Jn. 15)

#### Miracle—teaching by demonstration

- *Synoptics*—29 Miracles

- *John*—7 Miracles [*Signs*] (\* = 5 only in John)

1. Water to wine (Jn. 2)\*

# GOD'S WORD TO THE WORLD

- 2. Nobleman's son (Jn. 4)\*
- 3. Paralytic at Bethesda (Jn. 5)\*
- 4. Feeding of 5000 (Jn. 6)
- 5. Walking on water (Jn. 6)
- 6. Man born blind (Jn. 9)\*
- 7. Resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11)\*

**Seven Witnesses to Christ**

- 1. The Forerunner—John Baptist (5:33–35)
- 2. The Works (5:36; cf. 3:2; 10:25)
- 3. The Father (5:37–38; cf. 8:18)
- 4. The Scripture (5:39)
- 5. The Holy Spirit (15:26)
- 6. The Apostles (15:27)
- 7. The Author—John (21:24)

**Basic Outline**

- Presentation—Incarnation, not Infancy (1)
- Public Ministry (2–12)
  - Reception (2–4)
    - Cana, Galilee (2)
      - 1<sup>st</sup> Sign (water to wine)
      - Disciples' reception
    - Judea (2–3)
      - Nicodemus' openness
    - Samaria (4)
      - Samaritans' reception
    - Cana, Galilee (4)
      - Galileans' reception (4:45)
      - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sign (nobleman's son)
  - Rejection (5–12)
    - Confrontation at a Feast [unspecified] (5)
      - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sign (paralytic healed on Sabbath)
    - Confrontation at Feast of Passover (6)
      - 4<sup>th</sup> Sign (feeding 5000)
      - 5<sup>th</sup> Sign (walking on water)
    - Confrontation at Feast of Tabernacles (7–10)
      - 6<sup>th</sup> Sign (healing man born blind on Sabbath)
    - Confrontation at Feast of Dedication (10)
    - Confrontation at Passover:
    - Final Appeals/Rejection Sealed (11–12)
      - 7<sup>th</sup> Sign (raising of Lazarus)
      - Pharisees plot murder (rejection)
      - Mary anoints Jesus (reception)
    - Triumphal entry (reception/rejection)

- Private Ministry—to the Disciples (13–17)
- Passion Ministry—for the World (18–19)
- Resurrection & Appearances (20–21)

**Theological Focus**

**The Prologue**

John's prologue is unique among the Gospels and performs an astounding theological function in a remarkable way. The conceptual and vocabulary similarities between John 1 and Genesis 1 (in the Greek OT) are neither accidental nor insignificant, but central to his theological aim and Christological focus. The One whom he is presenting is none other than the incarnate appearance of the Creator who appears in the opening pages of the Old Testament. Compare:

- In the beginning (1:1, 2) = Gen. 1:1
- Word (1:1, 14) = Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, etc.
- God (*theos* 12x) = Gen. 1 (*theos*, 33x)
- was (1:3, 10, 14, 17) = Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, etc.
- life (1:4) = Gen. 1:30; 2:7
- light (1:4, 5, 7, 8, 9) = Gen. 1:3, 4, 5, 18
- shineth (1:5) = Gen. 1:15, 17
- darkness (1:5) = Gen. 1:2, 4, 5, 18
- man/men (1:4, 9) = Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:5, 7, 8, 15, 18, 24
- world (1:9, 10) = Gen. 2:1
- flesh (1:14) = Gen. 2:21, 23, 24

**Remainder of John**

John's presentation of Jesus as the Word—the incarnate revelation of God's very being and message to man—is central not only to John's prologue but to John's entire Gospel. As we have seen, John devotes nearly half of his Gospel to Jesus' extensive discourses. Beyond that, however, Robert Gundry<sup>5</sup> has recently catalogued John's reliance—in marked distinction from the Synoptics—upon key terms for Jesus' words throughout his Gospel (*rema, logos, entole, martureo, marturia, phoneo, phone, krazo, kraugazo, laleo, lalia*), as well as John's unique record of Jesus' frequent use of "Amen, Amen" in order to highlight the authority and solemnity of the words spoken. Finally, he traces nearly fifty specific passages that demonstrate the centrality of Jesus' words as the Word—the self-revelation of God the Father through the Son. "In John," Gundry remarks, "Jesus is what *is* spoken even as he *does* the speaking."

Continued on next page

## Titles/Descriptions of Christ

No other section of Scripture is so densely packed with the number or variety of designations for Jesus as John 1. In his introductory chapter John clusters together some 15 distinctive, descriptive titles: Word (1:1, 14); God (1:1); (True) Light (1:7–9); Only-begotten [better, “only, unique, one-of-a-kind”] of the Father (1:14); Jesus Christ (1:17); Only-begotten [or “only, unique, one-of-a-kind”] Son/God (1:18); Lamb of God (1:29, 36); He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:33); Chosen One of God (1:34); Rabbi (1:38, 49); Messiah (1:41); Him of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote (1:45); Son of God (1:49); King of Israel (1:49); Son of Man (1:51).

## Keywords

### Verbs

- Believe (*pisteuo*)—98x (Acts next, 39x)  
The noun faith never occurs
- Know  
*oida*—83x (most in NT)  
*ginosko*—57x (most in NT)
- Love (*agapao*)—37x (1 Jn next with 28x)  
Note: Love (*agape*) only 7x (1 Jn 18x)
- Abide (*meno*)—40x (1 Jn next with 24x, Acts with 14x)
- Witness (*martureo*)—33x (most in NT; Acts next with 12x)

### Nouns

- Father (*pater*)—122x (Mt—43x; Mk—5x; Lk—17x)
- World (*kosmos*)—77x (1 Jn next with 23x)
- Life (*zoe*)—34x (Rev next with 17x, Acts 14x)
- Truth (*alethia*)—25x (John’s epistles, 20x; all other books <9x)
- Light (*phos*)—23x (70x in NT; Acts next with 10x)
- Witness (*marturia*)—14x (most in NT; Rev next with 9x)

## Other Motifs

### Misunderstanding the Word

On a number of occasions Jesus spoke on a spiritual plane, but the audience misunderstood Him on a physical plane: 2:19–22; 3:3–8; 4:10–15; 4:31–34; 6:30–35; 6:47–63; 7:33–36; 8:18, 19; 8:21, 22; 8:31–36; 8:38–44; 8:51–59.

### Polarities

John saw no shades of gray, no middle ground. His theology is drenched in polar expressions.<sup>6</sup> With him it is either light or darkness (1:5; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:4–5; 12:35–36, 46), Spirit or flesh (3:6; 6:63),

belief or unbelief (3:18, 36; 5:46–47; 6:29, 35–36; 12:37–48), life or death (3:16, 36; 5:24–25; 6:50–51; 11:26; 12:24–25).

These and others underscore the non-negotiability of faith in Christ as God’s Son and submission to Christ as God’s Word.

<sup>1</sup> Harris in *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 167.

<sup>2</sup> *The Person and Work of Christ*, 52.

<sup>3</sup> John contains *no* parables in the normal, synoptic sense of a fictional story related in the aorist tense. John 10:6 uses the word *paroimia* (“proverb, image”; cf. 16:25, 29). John never uses *parabole* (which occurs 46x in the Synoptics).

<sup>4</sup> These are known as the 7 predicated statements. John also records 7 absolute statements (8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19; 18:5–8; 4:26; 6:20).

<sup>5</sup> In chapter 1 of *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* (Eerdmans, 2002). See forthcoming review in *Biblical Viewpoint*, April 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, 203–212

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## House Bill Protects Pro-Life Providers

In late September the House of Representatives passed the Abortion Non-discrimination Act, which is intended to protect any health care institution or physician from discrimination for refusing to provide abortion services to women. The bill ensures that health care facilities may provide the services they deem appropriate. Examples of the types of discrimination being addressed: The Alaska Supreme Court ruled some community hospitals must do second-trimester abortions against their will; the St. Petersburg, Fla., city council required a private hospital to depart from a nonprofit consortium because the association had a pro-life policy; NARAL's Maryland affiliate is conducting a "Hospital Provider Project" designed to result in hospitals being required to provide abortion services. Under the new provision these hospitals and health service providers would be able to challenge discrimination legally. (*Baptist Press*, 9/26/02)

## Immigration for Homosexual Partners

One hundred of the House of Representatives have rallied around Rep. Jerrold Nadler to endorse "Permanent Partners Immigration Act," H.R. 690, which provides homosexual partners of U.S. citizens the same immigration

privileges as married couples. Current U.S. immigration law limits preference for admission to the non-citizen spouses and other immediate family members of U.S. citizens. Support for the bill appears to be political posturing and a way to court the homosexual lobby rather than a real attempt at new legislation. (*Baptist Press*, 9/25/02)

## Vice President Cheney One; Former President Clinton, Zero

Former President Clinton is reported to have chastened U.S. policy on Iraq by saying, "Saddam Hussein didn't kill 3,100 people on September 11; Osama bin Laden did. As far as we know, he's still alive. We might do more good for America's security in the short run, and at a far less cost, by beefing up our efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere, to flush out the entire network and to find him. We know they still have a terrorist network around the world. And we're already kind of changing the subject here, looking at Saddam Hussein. He's not going anywhere." After being shown the clip from Mr. Clinton, Vice President Cheney read a statement he pulled from his pocket, saying, "What if Saddam Hussein fails to comply, we fail to act if we take some ambiguous third route which gives him yet more opportunities to develop

his program of weapons of mass destruction and continue to press for the release of sanctions and ignore the commitments he's made? Well, he will conclude that the international community has lost its will. He will then conclude that he can go right on doing more to build an arsenal of devastating destruction. If we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow. The stakes could not be higher. Some day, some way, I guarantee you he'll use that arsenal." After reading these words, Mr. Cheney revealed the author as Bill Clinton in 1998. (*The Federalist*, 9/13/02)

## Statistics from Southern Baptist Survey

Seventy-one percent of Southern Baptists said the Bible is the Word of God, to be taken literally word for word, with 11 percent agreeing that the Bible is the Word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the church's teachings. Fifty-two percent of Southern Baptists give ten percent or more of their annual income, compared to 19 percent nationally. Thirty-one percent participate in evangelism or outreach, compared to a national average of 13 percent. Twenty-one percent believe that "all the different religions are equally

good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth." What would a survey like this reveal from Fundamentalists? (*Baptist Press*, 9/23/02)

## Canada Considering Hate Speech Legislation

The Canadian House of Commons recently gave approval-in-principle to bill C-415, a private bill introduced by New Democrat MP Svend Robinson. If passed, it would amend the criminal code to include inciting genocide or hatred against any identifiable group on the basis of sexual orientation. This would mean that anyone speaking out or disparaging homosexual behavior could be arrested and sentenced to prison time. This bill would affect pastors preaching in their pulpits and would also affect the ministry of some preachers via the television and radio. (K-House News, 9/17/02)

## We Supply the World's Oxygen

At the World Summit meeting on Sustainable Development in South Africa, issues of the world's poorest nations were addressed. The 60,000 delegates considered how to solve the problem of world hunger, while the chef of the five-star hotel where the VIP's were staying fixed 1,000 pounds of lobster, 5,000 oysters, 450 pounds of salmon, and more than

two tons of steak. In addition to the food, the hotel provided thousands of bottles of vintage wines and champagnes flown in from the best vineyards, and served with beluga caviar. During the summit French President Chirac encouraged a global tax to raise funds that could eliminate world hunger. The South American diplomat, recognizing the importance of the rain forest, asked the world to reimburse his government for supplying the world's oxygen. Even while America prepares to send hundreds of thousands of tons of corn, Zimbabwe refuses to accept the genetically altered food. Mr. Manawasa, Zimbabwe's president, said, "We would rather starve than get something toxic." This is the same corn Americans eat every day. (*World Magazine*, 9/21/02)

**Boston University  
Chancellor: John Silber**

Mr. Silber returned to the chair of chancellor after a six-year hiatus and immediately stirred the liberal pot by shutting down the homosexual support group at a prep school run by the university. Mr. Silber said, "We're not running a program in sex education. If they want that kind of program, they can go to Newton High School." He objects to the politicization of sexuality, saying, "It's none of my business, so don't make it my business by insisting on rubbing my nose in whatever your preference is, because I don't want to know." Kevin Jennings, executive director of the New York-based Gay, Lesbian and

**NOTABLE QUOTES**

It is therefore recommended . . . to set apart Thursday the eighteenth day of December next, for solemn Thanksgiving and praise, that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor.—SAMUEL ADAMS, November 1, 1777 (adopted by the 13 states as the first official Thanksgiving Proclamation) (*The Federalist*, 9/2002)

The Pilgrims came to America not to accumulate riches but to worship God, and the greatest wealth they left unborn generations was their heroic example of sacrifice that their souls might be free. —Harry Moyle Tippet (*The Federalist*, 9/2002)

Hold on, my friends, to the Constitution and to the Republic for which it stands. Miracles do not cluster, and what has happened once in 6000 years may not happen again. Hold on to the Constitution, for if the American Constitution should fail, there will be anarchy throughout the world. —Daniel Webster (*The Federalist*, 9/2002)

Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves. —Henry Ward Beecher (*The Federalist*, 9/2002)

Measured by the standards of men of their time, [the Pilgrims] were the humble of the earth. Measured by later accomplishments, they were the mighty. In appearance weak and persecuted they came—rejected, despised—an insignificant band; in reality strong and independent, a mighty host of whom the world was not worthy, destined to free mankind. —Calvin Coolidge (*The Federalist*, 9/2002)

That all the people may with united hearts on that day express a just sense of His unmerited favors: —Particularly in that it hath pleased Him, by His own over ruling providence to support us in a just and necessary war for the defense of our rights and liberties; . . . by defeating the councils and evil designs of our enemies, and giving us victory of their troops—and by the continuance of that union among these States, which by His blessing, will be their future strength and glory. —Samuel Adams on behalf of the Continental Congress, November 3, 1778, calling for a day of Thanksgiving during our Revolutionary War (*The Federalist*, 11/2001)

Straight Education Network, complained about Mr. Silber's apparent violation of federal equal access laws. (*World Magazine*, 9/21/02)

**Millard Erickson and the Open View of God**

Millard Erickson, renowned professor of theology at Truett Seminary, spent three lectures at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary discussing the controversial subject of God's foreknowledge. He argued for six governing principles when considering this subject: Universal liability (can you take this view when you consider all of Scripture?), literalism (we must ask ourselves what the criteria is for taking this literally and what not literally), comparing Scripture with Scripture, examine narrative and didactic passages that relate (open Theists favor narrative passages over didactic passages), examine controlling metaphors, and progressive revelation (God has progressively revealed more and more of Himself throughout history). He confronted the open theists argument that the traditional approach is held hostage by Greek philosophy by donning a pair of green-tinted glasses and saying, "We all have colored lenses; they're just different colors. We all have to tease out our presuppositions and deal with those first. But I would not simply accept that the traditional view is philosophically based and the open theist view is biblically based." He agreed that while there is some historical record in favor of the open theist view, it is rarely from men we would consider

orthodox. (*Baptist Press*, 10/09/02)

### **“Under God” to Remain in the Pledge**

The House of Representatives goes on record as approving the phrase “in God we trust” as our national motto and affirming the statement of one nation “under God” in the pledge of allegiance. The measure is a response to the June 26 opinion by a federal appeals court which voted 2–1 that the pledge violates the Constitution, overturning the 1954 act of Congress that inserted the phrase “under God” into the pledge. The five members who voted against the measure were Barney Frank of Massachusetts; Michael Honda and Pete Stark, both of California; Jim McDermott of Washington; and Bobby Scott of Virginia, all Democrats. (*Baptist Press*, 10/11/02)

### **Miss America Preaching Abstinence**

Erika Harold was crowned Miss America 2003 and admonished not to promote sexual abstinence. Miss Harold, a spokesperson for Project Reality, an abstinence-focused education program, made chastity her platform as a contestant for Miss Illinois and has delivered the abstinence message to 14,000 students in Illinois. After appealing the order, Miss America chief executive George

Bauer said there would be no restrictions on her discussion of chastity as a part of her youth violence prevention platform. With 3 million new cases of teenagers contracting sexually transmitted diseases each year, this is a message America needs to hear. (*Baptist Press*, 10/11/02)

### **Falwell Facing a Fight**

Reverend Jerry Falwell, known for his opposition to the homosexual movement, is under attack. Mel White and his homosexual partner Gary Nixon moved into a small house across the street from Mr. Falwell’s Thomas Road Baptist Church. White leads Soulforce, a protest group that pushes the homosexual agenda among churches and denominations, and ghost-wrote Rev. Falwell’s autobiography before he “came-out”. He and his partner told reporters that they came to town to correct the misinformation of homosexuals given by Rev. Falwell. Though Rev. Falwell views this as a publicity stunt, he says they are welcome in his church, adding, “I can’t think of anyone who needs it more.” (*World Magazine*, 9/28/02)

### **American Academy of Pediatrics Affirms Homosexual Unions**

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American

Academy of Family Physicians issued a statement endorsing adoption and parenting rights for same-sex parents. The AAFP, a 93,500-member organization, issued a statement similar to that of the AAP, which promotes adoption by nurturing parents regardless of sexual orientation. The AAP maintains that “children who are born to, or adopted by, one member of a gay or lesbian couple deserve the security of two legally recognized parents.” They recommend that all the benefits of marriage partners, including Social Security payouts and visitation rights, should be granted to partners of same-sex unions. (*Baptist Press*, 10/29/02)

### **Archbishop of Canterbury: Pro-Homosexual**

The conservative wing of the Church of England is mounting a protest against the installation of Rowan Williams as the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Over 500 church clergy were surveyed with 54 percent saying that they disapproved of Williams’s position. Williams has admitted to knowingly ordaining homosexual ministers and is sympathetic to homosexuals who are in committed, loving relationships. He takes office in November and is coronated in February. (*World Magazine*, 10/19/02)

### **Ten Commandments to Remain**

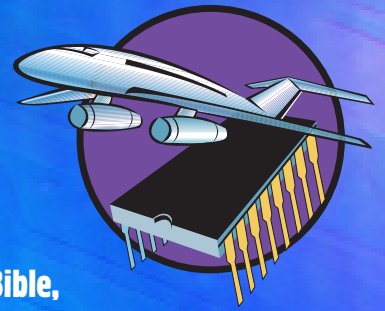
Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore is being challenged in court for orchestrating the placement of a 5,300-pound granite monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments outside of the judicial building. Moore testified that he believes the Commandments to be the foundation of all moral law, or “those things that are from God.” Moore was elected chief justice in 2000, while pledging to restore the moral foundation of law by insisting that people return to the knowledge of God. (*Baptist Press*, 10/22/02)

### **Newspapers Announce Homosexual Unions**

For years newspapers have announced marriages, usually with a picture of the happy couple, in their social pages. The practice recognizes a legal aspect of common-law marriages, which rests in the public affirmation of the relationship. Now over 139 newspapers across the country are publishing the union of homosexual couples. The *New York Times* took the lead, and papers both small and great have followed suit. This marks another step toward the legalization of homosexual marriages and will deeply impact American culture. (*World Magazine*, 10/12/02)

This news is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International.

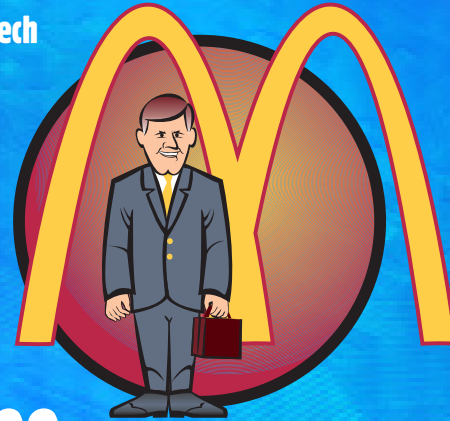
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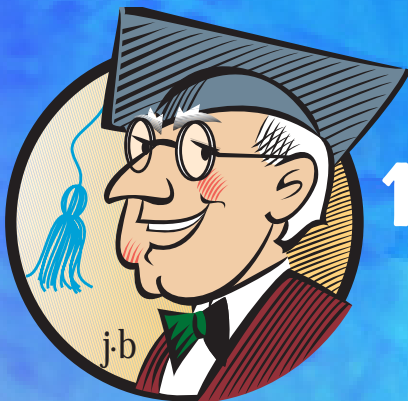


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*The Tradition  
Continues...*



*Jesus Christ, the ultimate Servant, made Himself of no reputation.  
Kneeling as a slave before house guests,  
He "poureth water into a bason,  
and began to wash the disciples' feet,  
and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded" (John 13:5).*

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## Gifts Beyond Measure

**A** criticism I've heard a number of times is that some churches only "preach John 3:16, and sing about heaven." There are many things that take place between salvation and heaven, and Christians need to be built up and taught to serve during those years of growth. Salvation is about more than going to heaven. We were created for God's glory; we are saved for God's glory; we should live for God's glory.

That great passage on the sufficiency of Scripture in 2 Peter 1:3-4 tells us that we have been given "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." "Life" refers to eternal life—salvation. "Godliness" refers to the life we live after salvation—sanctification. We need to take the advice of the old song, "Count Your Blessings." Remembering what happened to us when we got saved is

a key to understanding what comes next. Remembering what has happened since salvation is a key to appreciating whatever comes next.

The life-changing event we call salvation occurs when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of Who Jesus Christ is. The blessings that come for "life and godliness," according to 2 Pet 1:3-4, come through "the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Peter goes on to tell us exactly where to obtain this knowledge, "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."

We identify ourselves as bible believers for a number of reasons, but this is the main one: God has revealed Himself in His inspired Word and everything we need for salvation and Christian living is given to us in these precious promises. Saved people, those who have "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust," will, through them, become "partakers of the divine nature." That

is a settled part of salvation. Paul assured the Philippians, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

To the Romans he said, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he

called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." If you have salvation, you have the assurance of glorification.

But God's sovereignty in salvation and sanctification does not deny human responsibility. The Sovereign God holds men responsible. Obedience and discipline are essential to spiritual growth. Christians must realize the great blessings of salvation that come through our God given opportunities to glorify Him through our obedience.

In spite of the commer-

cialized and corrupted celebration that Christmas has become in American culture, it is still a time for Christians to remember the great gift of God in sending His Son to die for our sins. He gave Himself! Christians need to remember all year long that although His work on the cross is finished, the blessings of that finished work continue. He gave Himself once and for all, but his mercies and compassions "are new every morning." Salvation is once and for all, but the blessings of salvation are a daily experience.

Those who recognize that God's Word is a wonderful gift will approach it each day without a fearful sense of obligation that they will have a bad day if they don't read their Bible. They will open it as they would a valuable gift from a loved one. Those who know that the Lord will meet with them in prayer offer their praise and petition with joyful hearts. Giving, witnessing, serving in hundreds of ways become an "exchange of gifts" that brings satisfaction to the soul. Knowing that God keeps giving should provoke us to a spirit of giving in all we do.

The more we grow, the more we should realize that Christianity is not about Christians, it is about Christ. He is such a great giver, that it is easy for us to be content to be receivers.

But as we become like Him we must learn to be givers too. His gifts are truly "gifts beyond measure," and the greatest gift of all is the gift of Himself. The Bible tells us about Him. Our lives and all we are given to sustain them are given for Him. He doesn't need us; we need Him.

... the greatest gift of all is the gift of Himself.



DR. JOHN C. VAUGHN

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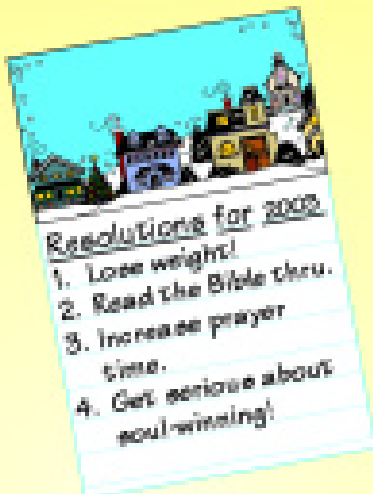
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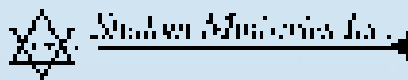
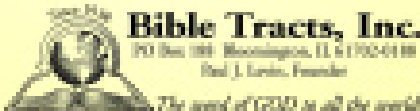
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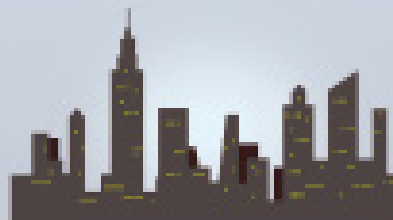
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