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## The Birth of Christ Brings a Decision

John C. Vaughn

**E**ach Gospel writer presents a slightly different perspective. Matthew addresses the Jews to prove that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. The first three verses of chapter two illustrate the implications of that fact.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew's first chapter presents the genealogy of "Jesus the King," the natural son of Mary, the adopted son of Joseph, who, under other circumstances, would have been "Joseph the King." In 2:1-3, Matthew arrests our attention with a contrast: those far away were drawn near, while those nearby were still far off. In spite of the secularization of modern culture, men cannot escape this contrast. Men are drawn to the underlying truth of Christmas by their deep longing for the joy that it promises. And yet men are driven away from that truth by their deep jealousy for control of their own lives. So it was when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Wise men, even though they were far off, were drawn to the Savior, but wicked men, though they were nearby, were driven away.

Daniel had called Him "Messiah the Prince," and Prince He was indeed. When Matthew closed his Gospel he

had made the point that Jesus Christ was not only the King of the Jews but the King of the Universe. We look at the story from hindsight, but consider it from the ancient perspective. "When Jesus was born . . ." is an amazing statement. G. Campbell Morgan described this child as "the Eternal God, contracted to a span." His unique conception, followed by a normal human birth, brought Him to us as a baby—an infant! Not a single word yet preached, not a single work performed; the power was not in what men realized, but in what God was revealing. Matthew said it in 1:23, reminding us of Isaiah's promise, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

Paul taught the Corinthians that this witness is "to the one . . . the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." Some "seekers" still ask for help from selfish men. They expect direction to the "King of the Jews" from Herod—himself interested but unmoved. First Corinthians 1:26 tells us that not many wise men come to Christ. The shepherds found their way immediately, but the wise men, even with a star to guide them, went instead to Herod. Herod went to the scribes, not for understanding but to stay in control. Of course, we acknowledge the wise men for having the wisdom to come at all. They were so moved by the birth of the incarnate King that they were not afraid, at first, to call him King in the presence of Herod the king. (There is a sermon in this story on the precision of the capital "K.")

Our persistence in the Great Commission is helped by remembering that wise men today, though far off, are drawn near by the birth of Christ. He promised that when He was lifted up, He would draw all men to Himself. He was lifted up on the cross. When we preach Christ crucified, we make the point of the incarnation: He was born to die. Wise men take refuge not in the sentimentality of the Nativity but in the shocking reality of Calvary.

Therein is the offense that causes wicked men, though near, to be driven away by the Incarnate Christ. Though some would say that Christians, Jews, and Muslims all worship the same God, the Son of God said otherwise. To the unbelieving Jews, He said, "Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." And though Islam tips its turban to the teachings of Jesus, its doctrine is clear: "Allah has no son." When Herod heard the question about the "King of the Jews" and understood that the wise men had "come to worship him . . . he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

Truth is often not good for business, for family ties, or friends. It brings contention and conflict. It causes men to lose control. They feel the wind that would drive their sails, but they will not pull up the anchor of sin. To them, the Good News is not good at all. Again this year, wicked men celebrate the birth of Christ so long as it is not a threat to their own sovereignty. The gospel is a question of life or death: the birth of Christ brings a decision. Wise men, even though they are far off, are drawn to Him, but wicked men, though they are near, are driven away.





# Seeing Him Who Is Invisible

**T**heophany and Christophany appearances, as recorded in the Old Testament, were certainly met in a much different manner than the way Christians now approach the incarnation. “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!” is a far cry from “Woe is me . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”<sup>1</sup>

Accounts of Old Testament theophanies generally take little space describing what was seen, for the message was more important than what was seen. No theophany, including Isaiah’s vision in chapter 6, gave a complete visual of all that God is. When Moses desired to see the LORD, God’s response was “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”<sup>2</sup>

Most theophanies inspired fear and dread. Take, for example, the patriarch Jacob as he expresses surprise for having seen God and lived (Gen. 32:30). Or consider Manoah’s expressed fear of impending doom (Judg. 13:20–22). God’s revelation of Himself through thundering earthquakes and fire convinced the people that they should be content with the mediating ministry of Moses (Exod. 20:19, 20). Even the *shekinah* that filled the temple

on its dedication caused the people to prostrate themselves in worship. All of these manifestations revealed a simple aspect of God’s nature that was important for the people to understand.

In the fullness of time God revealed Himself more fully by the incarnation of His Son. John writes, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. . . . No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”<sup>3</sup> These passages present two essential truths regarding the incarnation of Jesus Christ: the full deity of Jesus Christ and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.

## The Full Deity

The “Word” presented in verse 14 is the same “Word” presented in verse 1. This Word is God—specifically, God the Son.

John, who like most Jewish people, was committed to monotheism, had no problem seeing the distinction

between God the Son and God the Father. John presented them as distinct Persons, yet he did not yield his position regarding “just one God.” It was important for John to communicate the deity of the Word because most people could not look past the flesh that the *Logos* became. The word translated “became” in this text means to “to be made, to be born, to come about, to happen.”<sup>4</sup> In this event, the eternally pre-existing Son of God, while not denying His divinity, embraced what it means to be a part of humanity. But important to John for the sake of his readers is that the One who became flesh was and continued to be fully divine. This word does not mean to be “‘changed into’ in the sense that Jesus, by becoming human, ceased to be God. Nor does it mean ‘appeared’ human or even ‘took on’ humanity. The main point is that God has chosen to be with his people in a more personal way than ever before.”<sup>5</sup>

His deity is further affirmed by words that have deep significance when they are properly understood. John calls the Word the “only begotten of the Father” in verse 14. In verse 18, the AV identifies the Word as the “only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.”

Regarding verse 18 there is a significant discussion regarding a textual variant that is important to John’s purpose in this text. The greater textual evidence supports the “only begotten God” or “the only begotten, God.” The word translated “only begotten” (*monogenes*) can mean “the only one to be born.” But the author of Hebrews uses this same word to describe Isaac (Heb. 11:17). Isaac was not the only son to be born to Abraham, nor was he the first. He was a unique son, though, for he came to Abraham by the promise of God and was the son to receive God’s promised blessing. In this sense, Isaac is the “unique” or “one-of-a-kind” son. With this lexical understanding, one should avoid the error that Jesus somehow emanated out of the Father, becoming a lesser “god.” Rather, one should remove the birth or emanation in verse 18 and instead think on the unique status of the Word.

The Word is the uniquely exalted one from the Father in verse 14. This helped those who saw the humanity of Christ but had a hard time accepting His unique status. In verse 18, in unmistakable terms, the Word is the unique and only God. Simple humans need this help, because if they were to judge by visual senses alone, the Word would appear like every other. But John challenges his readers to observe with eyes of faith. Those eyes see more than simple humanity. They see God revealed to humanity. For the Word did not simply *represent* God. He *was* God.

### The Full and Exegetical Humanity

The Word, having become flesh, pitched His tent with us. This descriptive term has often been translated

“dwelt.” But this rare word is not the commonly used word to convey the idea of living. John was either making an allusion to the temporary nature of Christ’s sojourn, or, more preferably, he was making reference to the tabernacle.

John will use the word *doxa* or glory for the first time in his Gospel. The glory of God was said to be known first in the tabernacle and then later in the temple. God led His people with the *shekinah* glory that appeared as a cloud by day and fire by night. It hovered over the tabernacle.

This same glory appears several times in the Scriptures as a unique manifestation of God. In Exodus God first appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Later, Moses would converse with God “face to face” as described in Exodus 24:17, 18: “And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.” Note the use of the term “glory” and “cloud.” After spending forty days in God’s glorious presence Moses’ face literally glowed (Exod. 34:29–35). When Moses would later request of the Lord to see His face (as previously referenced), God permitted him to see only “my back.”<sup>6</sup> When presented this opportunity, Moses fell to the ground in worship.

In the tabernacle and later in the temple, the glory of God was manifested in the awesome splendor of overpowering light. While this was a visible manifestation of God, it did not invite human gaze. This manifestation demonstrated the holiness and magnificence of God, but God desired to reveal more. This He did in Jesus Christ. John, by using the word “glory,” reminds his readers of the manifestation of God that was known in the Old

Testament and states that he has seen it. While he may be referring to his presence at Christ’s transfiguration, it is more likely that he is referring to the fact that their eyes saw Christ and their hands handled Him.<sup>7</sup>

Verse 18 teaches that the Word revealed the Father. Again, John could have used a much more familiar and common term to indicate the concept of revelation. Rather, he used *exogeomai*, a term that means “to give a full account” or “to tell the whole story.”<sup>8</sup> This is why Carson identifies Christ as the “narration of God.”<sup>9</sup>

If you had gathered the spiritual elites of Israel around the time of Jesus to work out a statement on the nature and character of God, you probably would have had universal agreement on His great and grand attributes. But if you had exegeted those principles for the daily lives of your fellow Israelites, you would find all the debate that is typical of rabbis today. This is exactly what Jesus did in the days of His sojourn: He exegeted God perfectly for the everyday needs of mankind. The religious elites generally could not

*In this event, the eternally pre-existing Son of God, while not denying His divinity, embraced what it means to be a part of humanity.*



tolerate it. But Jesus' words carry the same weight for us as they did for His contemporaries: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also."<sup>10</sup>

Jesus, the fullness of God, the fullness of man, pitched His tent among us. He exegeted in words and life all that He came to reveal of the Father. He gave the whole story while sojourning among us. No one will understand the Father if they cannot understand the Son. No one will get to the Father except through the Son.<sup>11</sup> Today the God-man is at the right hand of the Father, but there is another "tabernacling" that is taking place. The indwelling is of a different nature from the incarnation, but the effect is to be the same. The Holy Spirit indwells believers so that the fullness of Christ can be seen through His witnesses. We, with Paul "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Robert Conduct is an FBFI Board Member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church in Baldwin, Maryland.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6:5.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 33:20.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:14, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by William

F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 158.

<sup>5</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 33:18-23.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 1:1.

<sup>8</sup> Kostenberger, 50.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991), 135.

<sup>10</sup> John 8:19.


<sup>11</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>12</sup> Colossians 1:24.



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# Christmas in Bethlehem

## When the Shepherd Became My Lamb



**Wilbur Schoneweis**

**T**he Christmas season is filled with many marvelous and encouraging themes in which the Christian can rejoice, be comforted, and glorify God. However, the Christian will have to look beyond the usual trappings of the season to find these themes.

No season of the year is accompanied by such

uplifting and soul-stirring music as the Christmas season. But one has to listen past the usual din of worldly noise to hear the wonderful strains of "Silent Night," "Who Is He in Yonder Stall," or Handel's "All We Like Sheep." While the world starves for want of bread, the Christian has meat to eat that the world knows not of.

A review of Christmas songs in your church hymnal will reveal themes of a Babe in a manger and shepherds and wise men coming to worship. "Our heav'nly Lord, That hath made heav'n and earth of naught, And with His blood mankind hath bought" is a theme running from creation to the cross.<sup>1</sup> "A voice, a chime, a chant sublime, Of peace on earth, good-will to men" is a theme that runs from the cross to the millennial kingdom of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, Revelation 12 is a wonder-filled Christmas text: "And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne" (Rev. 12:4b, 5).

The woman, Israel, gave birth to a Man-Child whom the serpent tried to devour at birth. But the serpent was kept from his vicious insanity when Christ ascended back to His throne. That is a theme God's people need to hear. It is solid food to fortify the Christian after the luster of the season is past.

After all, Christmas goes back to Genesis 3 and is never out of season redemptively or theologically.

Daniel observed related Christmas wonders recorded in chapter 7, verses 9–14. He saw, "till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit. . . . As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away. . . . [Then,] one like the Son of man came . . . to the Ancient of days. . . . And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom."

Daniel continued to observe, "Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (v. 22). He again saw "the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (v. 27b).

The Christmas theme of my meditation is found in John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." According to the theology of the Old Testament this meant that the shepherd would have to become a lamb.

In John 8 the context of Jesus' statement is given. The scribes and Pharisees asked Him, "Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning" (v. 25).

The conversation of the scribes and Pharisees became heated and hateful. They bragged of having Abraham as their father. In chapter 9, Jesus, on the Sabbath, healed the man who was born blind. This further infuriated the religious shepherds of Israel. Jesus rebuked them for their own blindness, and then presented Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep (John 10), who enters the sheepfold by the door

and leads the sheep by His own voice.

Jesus took them further by parable saying that He Himself is the Door of the sheep (John 10:7).

Jesus further distinguished Himself from the "blind," "hireling," vicious shepherds of Israel by saying, "the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

While we were touring Israel in 1999, our guide stopped the bus outside Bethlehem (the "house of bread") and explained that on the night of Jesus' birth, the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Messiah to the shepherds keeping their flocks on the hills of Bethlehem.

As I understand, those shepherds were Levitical priests keeping the temple flocks. Those flocks provided the lambs for the temple sacrifices. Jesus, the Lamb of sacrifice, died upon the cross, rose from the grave, ascended back to His throne and Father, and is now my Shepherd-King who Himself is the bread for my daily walk with Him.

Jesus, revealed as "a man child"; "the Son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days"; "the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" that first Christmas, in Bethlehem, became my Lamb.

This Good Shepherd, by this truth (John 8:32) brought freedom from the old wolf and the hireling shepherds who sneak into the fold, "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."

In summary, under Satan a world system exists which, if possible, would destroy God and all of His creation. Satan himself is so

deceived by his own rebellion that he does not realize that if he could destroy God, he himself would be destroyed (Col. 1:16, 17). However, the almighty, sovereign God of the Bible controls all world affairs—social, political, and religious—and will guide them for His own glory and praise. In addition, Jesus, the Bread of my life, has taken care of my smallest needs. And finally, Jesus, when providing bread for the 5000, teaches me that even I can help divide the loaves for the multitudes, by His simple words to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat."

This theme and anthem are worthy to be sung by the heavenly hosts to all who will listen!

Have you heard the anthem of the Christmas Lamb, and is He your daily bread?

Wilbur Schoneweis pastors the Emmanuel Independent Baptist Church in Clay Center, Kansas.

<sup>1</sup> "The First Noel," *Worship and Service Hymnal*, Hope Publishing Company, 1957, 34.

<sup>2</sup> "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," *ibid.*, 40.

*The Christmas theme of my meditation is found in John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." According to the theology of the Old Testament this meant that the shepherd would have to become a lamb.*





# The Deity of Christ

## A Look at John 1:1

Scott Williquette

When C. H. Spurgeon mounted the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for the first time, his very first words were:

I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshipers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, "It is Jesus Christ." My venerated predecessor, Dr. Gill, has left a [theological heritage] admirable and excellent in its way. But the [legacy] to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me . . . is Jesus Christ, who is the arm and substance of the gospel, who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth.

According to John 20:30, 31, John wrote his Gospel so that his readers would believe that Jesus is God's one and only Messiah and that He is God and Master. John holds out those two facts and all the implications of those facts and says, "Believe this! Believe that Jesus is God's Sent One who can forgive your sin. Believe that Jesus is God in the flesh and therefore is the master of your life. Bank on these facts. Take Jesus as your Messiah and as your God and master."

Spurgeon was correct in making Jesus Christ the primary subject of his ministry because he was also correct when he said "Jesus Christ . . . [is] the arm and substance of the gospel" and He "is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth." John begins his evangelistic Gospel by focusing on the deity of Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

### **Jesus Existed Eternally with God the Father (1:1a).**

Two things about this first phrase show us that Jesus is an eternal being. *First, Jesus is described as existing before creation.* Matthew's and Luke's Gospels begin by providing the human genealogies of Jesus. Matthew 1:1–16 provides Jesus' human genealogy on Joseph's side.

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; . . . And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Luke 3:23–38 provides Jesus' human genealogy on Mary's side. It begins,

And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi. . . .



Unlike Matthew and Luke, John bypasses the question of Jesus' human origin and addresses His eternal existence as God. Jesus has a genealogical history when we speak of His human side or His human existence. God the Son, the second Person of the eternal Godhead, the Word, always existed. There was never a time when He was not. That being true, He existed in the beginning.

The phrase "in the beginning" is an allusion to Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"). Why does John want us to think back to Genesis 1:1? He wants to stress the fact that the Word existed in the beginning of all things; that before anything was created, the Word existed; in eternity past when only God existed, the Word existed. In the very beginning, before the galaxies were created and the planets and stars were hung in their places, before the angelic beings were given life and assigned their places of worship, before the history of the human race began, the Word existed. Jesus existed not only at the inception of time but before time as well. He existed throughout eternity past.

Not only is Jesus described as existing before creation, but *Jesus is described as one who always continually existed*. The little word "was," found three times in verse 1, is very significant. There are two Greek words translated "is" or "was" in the NT. The first is the Greek word *ginomai*, which means "to be" or "to come to be." John often uses this word when speaking of something coming into existence or being created by God. It's used this way in John 1:3, 6, and 14. The second word often translated "is" or "was" is the Greek word *eimi*. Whereas *ginomai* means "to come to be" or "to be created," *eimi* has no reference to time. It simply means that something exists. In this passage, the verb *eimi* is in its imperfect tense form, which stresses the idea of continuance. So John could have written "in the beginning the Word was created" if he had wanted to. But instead he wrote, "In the beginning the Word was already continually existing." So you could paraphrase the first phrase of verse 1 as, "In the very beginning, before anything was created, when only God existed, the Word continually existed."

The fact that Jesus is an eternal being who had no beginning moves us toward one conclusion—Jesus Christ is God. God is the only eternal being. Everything else and everyone else was created by God.

### **Jesus Is Personally Distinct from God the Father (1:1b).**

*Jesus and the Father are two distinct individuals.* God the Son and God the Father are not the same person. As we will see, both are equally God, but they are two distinct persons. John sets the two persons side by side in this verse to make that fact clear.

*Jesus is an  
eternal being  
who throughout  
eternity past has  
enjoyed perfect  
fellowship with  
the Father,  
and He is, in  
His nature and  
essence, God.*

We need to understand something about the designation "God." In the New Testament whenever the word *theos* ("God") is found in a context where another Person of the Trinity is also discussed, the designation "God" refers to God the Father. A perfect example of this is 2 Corinthians 13:14, which reads, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."<sup>1</sup> So when John says "the Word was with God," his point is that God the Son and God the Father were with one another as separate individuals.

God is three distinct Persons in one. Throughout eternity past, before anything else existed, there existed three distinct Persons in one perfect and eternal fellowship. *Jesus and the Father share intimate fellowship with each other.* The Greek word translated "with" is important. It means "near" or "in the company of someone." It refers to a personal relationship between two individuals.<sup>2</sup> The point is that God the Father and God the Son did not spend eternity past in loneliness and boredom. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoyed a close personal relationship with each other.

The phrase "the Word was with God" also speaks to the character of Jesus' eternal relationship with the Father. The word "with" communicates the idea that Jesus and the Father had a close and intimate relationship. "Not only did the Word exist 'in the beginning,' but He existed in the closest possible connection with the Father."<sup>3</sup>

I had a teacher in college who often said that God created angels and humans because He was lonely. According to him, God needed fellowship and relationships. That teacher was wrong. God has never been lonely, and He has never needed fellowship or any encouragement or enhancement. He is absolutely self-existent. For God to need anything would deny the teachings of Scripture and would deny His very "godness." Throughout eternity past the three infinite and holy Persons of the triune Godhead shared perfect fellowship.

### **Jesus Is Identical in Essence with God the Father (1:1c).**

The last phrase in verse 1 could have been constructed a number of ways, each with a different meaning. Had John wanted to communicate that the Word and the Father are identical, he would have written, "The Word was the God." Such a construction would indicate that Jesus and the Father were nothing more than different names for one God and that there are not individual Persons in the godhead (Modalistic Monarchianism or Sabellianism). On the other hand, if John had wanted to teach that the Word is not truly God in the same sense that the Father is God and that the Word is a lesser or subservient god, he would have written, "The Word was a god" (Arianism, Jehovah's Witnessism).



However the apostle John wanted to stress the fact that the Word, as to His nature and essence is God,<sup>4</sup> so he wrote, “The Word was God.” When John states “the Word was God,” he is not merely saying that there is something divine or godlike about Jesus. He is saying that Jesus, as to His essence and nature, is God. In other words, Jesus is as much God as the Father is God. All that can be said about God the Father regarding His “godness” can be said about Jesus. Though the Father and Jesus are different Persons, they are both equally God.<sup>5</sup>

The very first thing John establishes about Jesus Christ is that He is God. Why? Why must people understand that? There are at least two reasons. First, the fact that Jesus Christ is God establishes His authority over us. As a person reads this Gospel he may decide that he does not need to listen to its contents. He may decide that he can do as he pleases—that he can seek God his own way. Well, that is not the case. Jesus is God, so He makes the rules. Second, the fact that Jesus Christ is God demonstrates the depth of God’s love for us. God’s love for the sinful and hopeless human race is so great that He Himself came to earth to provide a way of forgiveness.

### **Jesus Should Be Presented to the Unsaved World in a Wise and Intriguing Way (1:1).**

One of the first questions one may ask as he reads verse 1 is, “Why did John call Jesus ‘the Word?’” From 1:14, it is clear that the Word does indeed refer to Christ. But why did John choose to use this term to refer to Christ? The answer lies in the history of the Greek word translated “Word” (*logos*) and how it was used during the New Testament period. John used the designation “the Word” to intrigue and draw in Jewish and Gentile readers.

*Unsaved Gentiles would have been intrigued by John’s description of “the Word.”* To the Gentile, the word *Logos* referred to the creative force responsible for holding all things together. Within the realm of Greek philosophy, the word *Logos* referred to an all-pervading creative energy from which all things originated. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (6th century B.C.) stated that the *Logos* “is always existent” and that “all things happen through this *Logos*.” To Heraclitus the *Logos* was the omnipresent Wisdom by which all things were steered, the stabilizing, directing force of the universe. Later, the Stoics, an influential group of philosophers, picked up on the thoughts of Heraclitus and began to teach that the *Logos* was the force that originated, permeated, and directed all things. The *Logos* was not a personal being in their estimation; it was simply a force that originated and controlled.

*Unsaved Jews would have been intrigued by John’s description of “the Word.”* To the Jew of the New Testament period the term “Word” was a designation that spoke of God. First, there are a number of times in the Old Testament when God’s word equaled His power and His activity (e.g., Gen. 1:3; Pss. 33:6; 107:20; 147:15). So for the Old Testament Jew God’s word became linked with His activity.

A second reason Jews would have been intrigued by John’s use of “the Word”: During the New Testament period, Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the common language of the Jews. There therefore arose Aramaic

translations of the Old Testament called the Targums. Because of the great respect the Jews had for the name of God, in the Targums they would often substitute the name “God” with the term “word.” For instance, Exodus 19:17 states, “And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God,” but the Targum reads, “Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with the Word of God.” Genesis 28:21 states “then shall the LORD be my God,” but the Targum Onkelos renders it, “Then the Word of the Lord will be my God.” In the Targum of Jonathan, this kind substitution was made 320 times.

Why, then, did John use the Greek word *Logos* as a designation for Christ? Because he wanted to draw both Jews and Gentiles into his book. If a Gentile picked up his book and saw that the topic was the Messiah of Israel, he may not have continued reading. If he realized, however, that the book’s topic was the *Logos* that created all things, he may very well have continued. If a Jew had picked up John’s Gospel and had seen any god other than his own mentioned, he certainly would have stopped reading. However, when he saw the word *Logos* he may have thought of his God and continued reading.

This illustrates something for us regarding our evangelistic endeavors. We need to communicate the gospel to people in our culture in a way that they will understand. John used terminology his readers could grasp, and we need to as well.

### **Conclusion**

John 1:1 clearly and powerfully teaches the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is an eternal being who throughout eternity past has enjoyed perfect fellowship with the Father, and He is, in His nature and essence, God. The fact that Jesus is God should affect both our life and our message. Knowing Jesus is God should increase our love for and commitment to Him. As God, Jesus has the right to demand submission over every aspect of our lives. Knowing that Jesus is God should also affect how we share the gospel with others. The deity and authority of Christ is part of the saving gospel.

The Christ we present to others must be Savior and Sovereign God, the Sin-Bearer and Creator/Master.

Scott Williquette is pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois.

<sup>1</sup> See also John 3:33–36.

<sup>2</sup> See Mark 6:3; 14:49; 2 Corinthians 5:8.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> The Jehovah’s Witnesses translate this part of John 1:1 as “the Word was a god,” which fits their teaching that Jesus was not God but a created being. That translation is impossible for three reasons. First, of the fifty-three times John has this kind of Greek phrase (a precopulative anarthrous predicate nominative) in his Gospel, it is never used indefinitely. Second, if John had wanted to say that Jesus was “a god,” he could easily have written just that. Third, the first phrase in this verse, “In the beginning was [existed] the Word,” contradicts the idea that the Son is a created being.

<sup>5</sup> See also John 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20.

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# The Calm of Christmas

Diane Heeney

This is a busy, busy time of year. It seems we can become so inundated with “things to do, places to go, and people to see” that our spirits become disheveled and our nerves frayed. Make time in the coming weeks for the *calm* of Christmas. Turn off Bing Crosby and the Grinch for a while and ponder what the stillness was like on the hillside that incredible “Silent Night.”

A slight breeze brushes each face. Only the crunch of sandals can be heard as the shepherds meander among the brush, surveying the land. The quiet is almost tangible, and the night sky is alive and shimmering with stars. Their spirits sigh, lost in thought, luxuriating in the tranquility. “All is calm, all is bright. . . .”

Then, in an instant, there is an almost unbearable brightness! The fleecy creatures stand transfixed in fright. A staff clatters to the ground as arms flail in fear, and the men shield themselves with their rugged hands. While they are still trying to focus their eyes, a voice speaks out of the radiance:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Weather-beaten faces are blanched but childlike; watering eyes are wide with wonder. They try to catch their breath, when . . .

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

This was a sensational night! The entire glorious canopy of Heaven is filled with rapturous music such as had never before been heard. There is unspeakable beauty in the throng of angelic messengers as well as in their momentous message!

The sheep have scattered in every direction in the tumult. As the men feel their pulses returning to normal, possibly no words are even exchanged—just a trading of knowing looks as they are compelled to set off, running over the hills in the direction of a beckoning star.

In the wake of such a remarkable spectacle, are the shepherds disappointed upon their arrival at the stable? Their astonishing hillside invitation was indeed electrifying; but, by contrast, the poignancy of the peaceful scene they are about to observe is peculiarly moving in its simplicity. As the crude wooden doors creak open, they see a man, a young woman, and a newborn baby, surrounded by dusty livestock. The sweet fragrance of hay fills the earthy air. No distractions in this tranquil setting; yet the shepherds are sensible of a disquieting incongruity that leaves them pondering: Although announced with magnificent royal and celestial splendor, Christ the Lord lies in a hand-hewn feed trough. Their eyes grow moist once more, this time in contemplation. . . . “God is *with us*.”

What can we take away from this? Perhaps it is that we ought to be sure that the excitement of our holiday activity is purposeful—a means to an even more meaningful end. Maybe we are to be reminded to make time for serenity this Christmas, so the real message of the season will be allowed to gloriously outshine all of the glitzy holiday trappings of this world’s revelry. Or it could be that we simply need to look beyond the wrappings of our gifts—because we might never, in our wildest dreams, imagine the love that might be inside.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Diane Heeney enjoys writing as well as speaking for ladies’ seminars and retreats. She and her husband are helping a small, growing church in Lander, Wyoming. They have three children: Erin, Michael, and Kate.

# Peeling Away the Layers

**Doug Finkbeiner**



Few things are as enjoyable (especially for parents) as watching a children's Christmas play. Perhaps you have seen one that looks something like this:

On the evening of December 25th, A.D. 1, Joseph arrives in Bethlehem, leading a donkey that is carrying his pregnant wife. Since there is no room for them in the local economy inn, the innkeeper (and his wife) allow the couple to stay the night in their humble stable. Shortly thereafter, Mary gives

birth. During the evening, shepherds who had been informed of the birth by angels come to see the Christ child and then leave to share the news with others. The next day, three Magi arrive to worship Christ, and each of them offers the family a gift—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Although we enjoy these performances, the problem with such plays is that they reinforce traditions that have little or no historical precedent.



## The Birth, the Inn, the Stable

For instance, Christ was actually born around 5 B.C. The monk who was commissioned to develop the “B.C.” and “A.D.” calendar based upon the birth of Christ made some significant miscalculations. Scholars also debate the time of year for Christ’s birth. Many believe that Christ was actually born in the spring. In addition, we don’t know how far along Mary was in her pregnancy when the couple arrived in Bethlehem. The reason we often assume that she must have been at the end of her final trimester is based upon the assumption that the family was relegated to a stable with a wooden feeding trough as the setting for the birth. Such an assumption, though, is problematic. Luke 2:6 indicates that the birth occurred after they had been in Bethlehem for a period of time.

Although the tradition regarding the inn started quite early, the term translated “inn” in Luke 2:7 probably does not refer to an ancient “inn.” While the term is often translated as “lodging” in the Greek Old Testament, its other usage in Luke’s Gospel refers to a guest chamber (Luke 22:11; cf. Mark 14:14). Since Joseph probably had relatives in Bethlehem, it would be considered inhospitable for a Jewish family to allow their extended family to stay in an ancient inn rather than with them. Since some Jewish homes had guest rooms, it seems better to suggest that Mary and Joseph were relegated to the main room in the home of Jewish relatives because other relatives were already occupying the guest room. Homes would often attach a simple split-level stable adjacent to the main room for the protection of their animals during the evening. Due to the crowded nature of the house, Mary would have placed the baby Jesus in the stone trough connecting the main room and animal dwelling because someone else was already staying in the guest room. In this reconstruction, there is no innkeeper (or his wife), and the stable at best would be adjacent to the place of Jesus’ birth.

## The Magi

The situation surrounding Matthew’s Magi is also often layered with traditions. In Scripture the Magi, who were probably Parthian astrologers with significant political influence, are never limited to three in number. That tradition is probably based upon the fact that there are three gifts given to Jesus. In actuality, the Magi probably arrived in Jerusalem accompanied by a significant number of soldiers. Herod, who was known for assassinating anybody who would threaten his throne, would not have thought twice about eliminating three insignificant astrologers. Rather, he chooses to handle the Magi and their entourage with cunning and deceit. In addition, Jesus was probably a toddler when the Magi visited Him.

Since Herod eventually has his soldiers kill children from Bethlehem who are two years of age and younger (Matt. 2:16–18), it stands to reason that the Magi did not visit a newborn but a toddler who was at least one year old.

## What’s Most Important

After peeling away some of these traditional layers, what do we have left? We have left what is most important—reliable complementary portraits from Matthew and Luke of the coming of Jesus, the Son of God into the world. Matthew informs us that Jesus Christ, the son of David, came into the world through the virgin birth to save us from our sins, in fulfillment of the Old Testament (Matt. 1–2). He also tells us that Christ’s person has always elicited polarized responses—some accept Him (e.g., the Magi) and some reject Him (e.g., Herod). Luke tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, was born of a virgin into a humble godly home as Israel’s true king in fulfillment of the Old Testament (Luke 1–2). It is He who offered deliverance and forgiveness to Jews and Gentiles alike, even though many would reject Him (Luke 2:29–35). Luke reminds us through the lowly birth of Jesus and through God’s revelation of the birth to simple shepherds that the message of Jesus Christ is for all humanity (Luke 2:1–20).

We will certainly continue to speculate about some of the details surrounding Christ’s birth. It is important, though, that we differentiate between what is central and certain and what is peripheral and subject to debate. Enjoy the Christmas plays this year, but don’t confuse what is central with what is peripheral.

Doug Finkbeiner is Professor of New Testament and Pastoral Theology at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.



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# SOUND WORDS

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

## First Partaker

### Taking Time to Be Holy: Allowing the Scriptural Counsel of Wise Men to Condition My Ministry Priorities (Part 1)

*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise*  
(Proverbs 13:20).

Self-evaluation. Personal assessment. Do those words make you uneasy? My interest in examining my own life and ministry often would not measure on the smallest of scales. In those rare moments when I am willing, I find objectivity difficult. Even more difficult is developing the right spirit I need when my life and ministry are legitimately critiqued by someone else. While regular self-evaluation does not insulate me from others' assessments, a regular practice of honest personal and ministry evaluation can produce in me a readiness to hear and accept needed words from others.

Some of the easiest counsel to receive can come from ministerial and missions biographical literature. Consider the wise observation included in this transparent letter from the English pastor John Newton to a friend: *If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that when it turns aside from God, it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near Him, but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to the light already received* (Letters of John Newton, Letter 32, "How to Keep Close to the Lord" [Banner of Truth], 170).

Consider also the following sobering comment from a conscientious young German Lutheran pastor in the seventeenth century: *How many a Christian minister, when by God's grace he first enters upon his office, has the experience that many of the things to which he devotes hard work and great pains prove to be useless, that he must begin all over again to reflect on what is more necessary, and that he wishes he had known this before and had been wisely and carefully directed to it* (Philip Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 54).

Practical, transparent observations like these mentor me in the process of taking my own spiritual inventory. I'm encouraged by them to know that I'm not the only one who has experienced personal or ministry struggles, and that the nature of the pastoral ministry remains substantively the same as it always has been. These realities quicken my desire to fellowship with men now with the Lord and to sit at their feet to glean from their applications and encouragements in Biblical wisdom. When the same personal admonitions are repeatedly verbalized by numerous men whose lives span different eras, the counsel becomes even more compelling.

If all of the brotherly counsel of wise pastors of the past could be assembled together, it seems to me that their emphasis on the necessity of a minister's personal holiness would stand at the pinnacle. Perhaps the nineteenth-century Scottish pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne summarizes the priority best in counsel he gave to a young pastor: *Do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument—I trust, a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.*

Personal ministerial holiness must involve more

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

#### Inside

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than our being set apart to a unique calling. It consists of our being set apart to God and our diligent quest to internalize and display the character of Christ (Eph. 5:8–10) in our personal lives and ministerial priorities.

## 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Germany

In seventeenth-century Germany, Lutheran and Reformed preachers remembered the Protestant Reformation of the preceding century gratefully. Memories of the constancy of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, the unleashed power of the freshly translated Word of God, and the thrill of newly founded seminaries preparing generations of new preachers to sustain the preaching of justification by faith alone were enough to make preachers glory in the privilege of their calling. However, in spite of the “success” of the Reformation, later generations found it difficult to preserve and maintain the spiritual momentum from the Reformation era. Proclaiming and

*Practical, transparent observations like these mentor me in the process of taking my own spiritual inventory. I’m encouraged by them to know that I’m not the only one who has experienced personal or ministry struggles, and that the nature of the pastoral ministry remains substantively the same as it always has been. These realities quicken my desire to fellowship with men now with the Lord and to sit at their feet to glean from their applications and encouragements in Biblical wisdom.*

enjoying the glory of the rediscovered gospel gradually became secondary to theological quibbling with Christian brothers. The legitimate and healthy desire for Scriptural precision gave way to an era when the spiritual temperature of those groups most closely identified with the Reformation grew cold and lifeless. Overemphasis on theological and philosophical argument in the seminaries produced skilled theologians, but their preaching proved insufficiently warm to heat their own hearts, much less those of their congregations.

Into those difficult days came another “reformer”—one who objectively assessed his own age and provided Scriptural remedies for its ills. His name was Philip Spener (1635–1705). He is known as the father of Lutheran Pietism, a movement that itself would eventually deviate from its initial emphases. However, in Spener’s day, his diagnosis of what lay at the root of his movement’s struggles repays revisiting. In *Pia Desideria* (“Pious Longings”), Spener traces the malaise prevalent

in Germany’s churches to the leadership. *When you see a tree whose leaves are faded and withering, . . . there is something wrong with the roots, so, when you see that the people are undisciplined, you must realize that no doubt their priests are not holy.* He continued, *We preachers . . . need reformation as much as any . . . can ever need it. How common it was for God, whenever he planned a reformation, to begin it with the [pastors].*

To paraphrase an excerpt from Spener,

We must confess not only that pastors are to be found here and there in the church who are guilty of open scandals but also that there are fewer than may at first appear who understand and practice true Christianity (which consists of more than avoiding manifest vices and living an outwardly moral life). Although, our pastors may appear blameless, yet their lives reflect a worldly spirit, marked by carnal pleasure, lust of the eye, and arrogant behavior. It is evident that they have never taken even the first practical principle of Christianity seriously, namely, denial of self. Behold how they seek promotions, shift from parish to parish, and engage in all sorts of machinations. Where it is recognized, such conduct causes great scandal. But greater scandal is caused when it is not recognized for what it is, when people get the notion that what they see in their preachers must be real Christianity . . . Most distressing of all, however, is the fact that the lives of many such preachers and the absence in them of the fruits to faith indicate that they are themselves wanting faith. . . . I have no doubt that we would soon have an altogether different church if most of us as ministers were of such a sort that we could unblushingly say to our congregations with Paul, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Sadly, Spener noted, the state of the church illustrated the reality that *men’s tastes become accustomed to the more charming things . . . and after a while the simplicity of Christ and His teaching appears to be tasteless.* The spiritual vitality of the church as a whole as well as individual congregations, Spener tendered, depended on the preachers’ willingness to attend to the spiritual needs in their own souls and to give the primacy of nurturing their own personal relationships with God. Pastors cannot simply lament the state of their flocks. They must first examine their own souls. Have they become professional ministers whose hearts have cooled? Spener argued forcefully that long before a man entered the ministry, his formal preparation for the ministry should reinforce in him the conviction that *study without piety is worthless* and that *whoever grows in learning and declines in morals is on the decrease rather than the increase.*

## 17<sup>th</sup>-Century England

Seventeenth-century England resembled Germany. Though the Reformation never enjoyed sustained official embrace by the Crown, the hall of martyrs populated by Queen Mary’s anti-Reformation agenda, the Puritan



effort to influence the Church of England, and the great history of separatist dissent from the Church of England (from which the streams of our own Baptist heritage spring) all make for most inspiring reading. But by the end of the seventeenth century, all of the promise of the preceding one hundred years seemed to have evaporated nearly entirely. From 1660 to 1688, with varying degrees of intensity, all pastors who would not publicly identify with the Church of England faced extreme penalties of ejection from pulpits and forfeitures of salaries, prohibition from preaching, deprivation, imprisonment, and other physical punishments. (These are the years when John Bunyan, one of our most well-known Baptist pioneers, suffered the imprisonments that ultimately yielded the priceless pearl of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.) The prospect of increased religious liberty emerged during the summer following the ascension of William and Mary to the English throne in 1688. An understandable stir surfaced among the many preachers whose voices had long been either silenced or restricted. Some pastors thought primarily of the benefits of being accepted and supported by the government, and some relished the thought of the opportunity to assert the newfound political ascendancy of the Puritans.

Then in February 1689 a sixty-two-year-old minister named John Flavel, two years before his death, mailed to his Puritan ministerial colleagues a letter and a sermon: "A humble supplication to the *more aged*, and as an Exhortation to *younger Ministers and Candidates*." He queried how this army of preachers would handle their newly gained freedom in their pulpits. What would their priorities be? How would those priorities be reflected? He urged them to consider their own role in the sufferings they had endured.

Let us not lay the fault [of our 28 years of deprivation] upon others. We ourselves have been the authors and instruments of our ruin; and this must be the inscription upon our tombstone, *O England, thou hast destroyed thyself* (*Works of John Flavel*, 6 vols., 4:4).

In a word, we have seen Christ's church (alas!) pierced with arrows winged with her own feathers. . . . Long and sore have we been tossed in the sea of trouble; in our youth we were plunged into it, we are come out of it in old age (*ibid.*, 4:7).

Such times, Flavel pleads, are not times for unnecessary strife among the pastors, but times for penitential prayer and personal spiritual reformation. It will not do for preachers to return to their pulpits "cold and dead" and to deliver the words of life "so coldly and unconcernedly" that the Word seems to "die in their lips." Flavel's counsel, pent up for nearly three decades, now rushes out in pithy statements:

He will make the best divine that studies on his knees.

Take care you put not that last, which should be

first; and that, again, first, which should be last.

A head well instructed is much to be desired; but a sanctified heart is absolutely necessary.

It is one thing to be learned in the truths of Christ, another to be taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.

In a later sermon titled "The Character of a True Evangelical Pastor," Flavel continued his exhortations:

My brethren, this is the day I have often wished for, when in the sad and silent years that are past, I have been searching my own heart, and enquiring into the causes of God's indignation (as I doubt not you also have done). I have bewailed the . . . defects before the Lord, and engaged my soul by solemn promise to Him, that if He would once more open the door of liberty, I would (through His grace) labor to reform, and do my utmost to persuade all my brethren to exercise more ministerial faithfulness and prudence. . . . Though we have too many defects and weaknesses still to lament, yet I am persuaded we have not spent so many years among trials, fears, and sufferings in vain. These things, I am persuaded, have greatly improved our acquaintance with God, and our own hearts. It will be as sad as strange, if they have not. God hath been training us up in faith, humility, patience, and self-denial in this school of affliction. When we could not preach the doctrine of faith, we were reduced, by a blessed necessity, to live the life of faith. The rules of patience, humility, and satisfaction in the will of God, we were wont to prescribe from our pulpits to the people, we were necessitated to practice and apply to ourselves in our sad solitudes, and various distresses, through which the Lord has led us. So that now we come better furnished to the work, than ever before (*ibid.*, 6:583).

## 20<sup>th</sup>-Century India

The entrance of the gospel into the massive population of India happened gradually. It began slowly under Pietist missionaries in 1706, advanced through Moravian efforts during the 1700s, and then received fresh impetus from William Carey's role in birthing the modern missionary movement in the late 1700s. By the end of Carey's ministry in 1834, portions of the Bible had been translated into at least forty Indian languages. The advance of Christ's kingdom in this once forsaken land seemed assured. However, nearly sixty years later, one of the missionary leaders of the church in southern India, Tom Walker (1859–1912), offered instead a rather bleak assessment. He lamented that European believers increasingly viewed India as a successfully Christianized nation; however, his experience taught him that much of what passed for Christianity in India was really only "skin deep."

Walker could have attributed the spiritual need in India to a lack of workers, but his observations told him

otherwise. He was himself an active missionary, and he observed other missionaries and Indian Christians busy at their work; no "charge of idleness can be truly laid against us, as a whole," he said.

*But how is it that so much of our busy energy appears to be extended all in vain? Holy Scripture, personal experience, the voice of conscience, all these alike suggest one answer—we have neglected largely the means which God Himself has ordained for true anointing from on High. We have not given prayer its proper place in the plan of our campaign. Fellow missionaries, we have toiled much, but we have prayed little. The energy of the flesh, of our intellect, of our position, of our very enthusiasm, this has been allowed to usurp to a lamentable extent, the place of the one power which can rouse immortal souls from the slumber of eternal death—the might of the living God, the energy of the Holy Ghost. How many a day passes by in hundreds of missionary bungalows in one ceaseless, busy stream of work, without any time for quiet intercourse with God, except the few brief minutes snatched in the early morning before the rush begins, or the short space allowed in the late evening by exhausted nature. . . . We all know the importance of prayer and can preach discourses on its efficacy; but do we practice what we preach ourselves? . . . Fellow workers, we may run about our work in one long rush of busy labor, we may take our wand of missionary office and place it in every [house] and wave it at every street corner; but if that is all we do, Satan will rejoice and we shall be ashamed before him. Lift up your eyes and look on the fields. Is it not true to-day that India is not awakened? Let us go in, therefore, and shut the door and pray unto the Lord. . . . Do not many of us need first of all a personal awakening? We have got into a routine of work, and can show an honorable record at the close of every day, of business accomplished, visits paid, classes taught, addresses given. But in the light of eternity are we satisfied with that? Have souls really been sought, yearned over, loved, and won? Is ours fruit that will remain? . . . Better, far better, do less, if need be, that we may pray more; because work done by a rushing torrent of human energy will not save a single soul; whereas work done in vital and unbroken contact with the living God will tell for all eternity (Tom Walker in Amy Carmichael, *This One Thing: Story of Walker of Tinnevely*, 80–83, original emphasis).*

Such words from a veteran missionary probably should be framed and placed before us on our desks to confront us daily in our duties.

Let it be remembered, in all this, that the subject to be promoted is daily fellowship with God for workers and for people. . . . It is often the practical details in which help and counsel are required. It is practical


godliness in every detail which needs enforcing in our teaching in India today. It is possible to sit down and read holiness books, and to enjoy high spiritual doctrines, and yet to be culpably negligent in the details of everyday Christian life. . . . The good Lord, in His mercy, begin with us. Let Him search us, and cleanse us, and fill us with His power. Are we humble enough? Are we willing enough? Are we unworldly enough? Are we loving enough? Are we holy enough? Are we in earnest enough? Are we obedient enough? (ibid., 145–47).

## Conclusion

We have read sobering counsel from a German preacher who labored approximately one hundred years after the Reformation, an English Puritan whose ministry fell just over one hundred years after the Reformation in England, and a leading missionary in India almost one hundred years after William Carey's ministry began there. In every case, the spiritual condition of the movement in which they find themselves is similar, and their diagnosis and prescription are the same. The need is not greatest in the field—the need is greatest in us. Those who bear the message of the gospel must first be made holy by it.

It sobers me to think that Fundamentalism as we know it is approaching its own one hundredth anniversary. The four volumes of *The Fundamentals* were first published by R. A. Torrey in 1909. Though the early growth of Fundamentalism had already begun, and the movement would not formally solidify for another ten-to-fifteen years, the publication of these volumes stands as one of the defining landmarks of our movement's growth.

To outsiders, Fundamentalists have often appeared interested in assessing all other movements besides themselves. Within the last twenty years, evaluations of the current state of our movement have reached a crescendo. Many are voicing the observation that collectively we stand at a moment of decision. Probably all of us have heard or participated in some form of analysis of the contemporary condition of our movement. Most of us can list legitimate concerns and identify areas of specific need. Such times are not without Biblical and historical precedent. If any spiritual movement endures, it does so in part because far-seeing men have provided Scriptural and honest assessments to realign a movement according to the Word.

However, within the context of that broad assessment, it is even more critical that we evaluate ourselves as pastors and preachers. If the three preceding illustrations tell us anything, they tell us that there is a direct connection between the state of Fundamental churches and the spiritual condition of their leaders, and between the remedy for our churches' needs and the spiritual revival in its leaders. Now is the time for those embracing Fundamentalism to be holy—and it is time for God's men to lead the way. 



# Bring . . . the Books

## Finding Christ in the Old Testament

For years I have had the privilege of teaching the Pentateuch to incoming college students each fall. A wonderful resource that I have used throughout the years as one of my primary textbooks for that course is Michael P. V. Barrett's *Beginning at Moses: A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament* (Ambassador-Emerald International, 1999).

Luke's Gospel records a conversation between two disciples and the Lord on the road to Emmaus shortly after His resurrection in which they attempted to explain to this stranger their version of what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth (24:13–27). Their words revealed more than just an inability to explain the empty tomb. Not only had they lost their Leader's body, it was He whom they had hoped would be Messiah. At this point in the narrative, Jesus did something unexpected. Rather than opening their eyes to His true identity by revealing Himself to them openly, He opened their eyes by revealing Himself through the Scriptures beginning at Moses.

Barrett's book is one of the more concise, readable, accurate, and devotional guides to finding Christ in the Old Testament. He argues that Christ is the central theme and primary purpose of the entire Scripture. This theme gives occasion and motivation for his book.

So if Christ is the central theme of Scripture, it is imperative to find Him when reading and studying the Bible. Realistically, I have to admit that it is easier to find Christ in the New Testament than in the Old. That fact is more than obvious, seeing that the New Testament was written after the Lord Jesus had come to earth to accomplish His saving work and that the Old Testament could only look forward to His coming. Although not as apparent on the surface, Christ is the message of the Old Testament. My objective has been to show how and where the Old Testament reveals Christ, the Messiah. Finding Christ in the Old Testament is finding the life of the Old Testament; it is what gives life to what otherwise seems to be dry and outdated.

In the first three chapters Barrett demonstrates how the Old Testament writers described His person as well as His work. This section creates a "messianic profile" for the reader to use in his search for Christ in the pages of the Old Testament. Barrett then directs the reader to where the Old Testament writers revealed Christ in their writings, devoting individual chapters to investigating the covenants, the pre-incarnate appearances of Christ, the titles of Christ, types of Christ, prophecies about Christ, and patterns

of worship that direct attention to Christ.

Though Dr. Barrett (a premillennialist) does not adopt certain aspects of a dispensational hermeneutic, his commitment to accurate exegesis has produced a work that will be of value to all, including those of us who are more dispensational. And he does so with a charity and grace often missing in certain quarters when this topic surfaces. His introduction to the section where he explains how Christ is found in the covenants is a great example of the value of this book to those who are more dispensational than he.

I am well aware that the simple mention of the word "covenant" is a "red flag" word associated with the theological debate and controversy. It is not my purpose to enter into that controversy, except to say that what I am going to discuss with you is not a distinguishing element of any particular system of theology. Seeing Christ in the covenants is an issue that should be nonoffensive to all Christians. Seeing Christ and elevating Him to a central and pre-eminent position ought to be desires embraced by every orthodox Christian. As we will see, the word "covenant" occurs about three hundred times in the Old Testament. It is an important biblical word. My plan is to define the word "covenant" biblically and develop simply its messianic message. My desire is that the light will come on as we study this portion of the Old Testament with a view to Christ.

My well-marked copy continues to be a source of spiritual refreshment each fall. The book has special significance for me because the author was one of my Bible professors. His teaching made a profound impact on me, and I tried to get every class he taught. Even though I chose to focus on the New Testament during my graduate training, the love he inspired in me for the Old Testament has endured (perhaps explaining why a New Testament student ended up with a passion to teach the Pentateuch). I will never forget the class period when he taught us the prayer in the opening paragraph of the third chapter in Habakkuk. When he was done, most of us were moved to tears. This same devotion and passion is woven throughout *Beginning at Moses*. ☞

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

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*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit* (Prov. 26:4, 5).

At first glance, these verses appear to express a logical contradiction. Verse 4 instructs the reader not to answer a fool; verse 5 commands him to answer a fool. Upon closer observation, however, we realize that the writer of Proverbs is guiding his readers in responding to a fool.

Matthew Henry writes, "Wise men have need to be directed how to deal with fools . . . to know when to keep silence and when to speak." J. Vernon McGee believes, "These two proverbs simply set before us two possible lines of conduct in response to a fool." Charles Bridges writes, "Both together are a wise directory for the treatment of *the fool*." *Pulpit Commentary* labels the two responses as follows: (1) "The careful avoidance of repeating it" and (2) "the wise condemnation of it."

Let's examine closely these two verses. *Biblical Illustrator* provides some helpful insight:

The ambiguity in these verses lies in the connecting words "according to," which are here used in two different senses. "Answer not a fool according to," i.e., not in a manner agreeing with his folly, lest thou become as foolish and perverse as he. "Answer him according to," i.e., according to the nature and desert of his folly.

Proverbs 26:4 commands the reader to avoid becoming like a fool by answering him "according to his folly." In such situations, the one responding to a fool lowers himself to the level of the fool by how he responds. H. A. Ironside writes, "To answer him in the same scoffing and egotistical spirit that he manifests, would be to sink to his level." Such lowering may occur through responding in like style. *Biblical Illustrator* states,

If he speaks unreasonable, profane, peevish, or passionate words, you must not answer him in his own style. You are angry at him for his folly, and reprove him for the extravagance of his behavior, and therefore you cannot but confess that yourselves are worthy of a very sharp reproof, if you behave like him at the very time that you are testifying your displeasure at his conduct. It becomes not the followers of Jesus to return railing for railing, or one angry reflection for another, but in whatever manner others talk our tongues ought still to be governed by the law of meekness and charity.


Scripture provides some examples of godly individuals responding to foolish people in a foolish manner. Moses demonstrated his disgust with the foolish Israelites through striking the rock (Num. 20:2-11), and David became enraged over Nabal's ingratitude (1 Sam. 25:21, 22).

At times, a proper response to a fool may be silence. For example, Hezekiah's men were silent to Rabshakeh's blasphemies (2 Kings 18:36). In responding to foolish people, we must always follow Christ's example (1 Pet. 2:23) and seek to fulfill Paul's admonition (Rom. 12:21). Clearly, verse 4 directs the reader to avoid allowing the foolishness of a fool to shape his response.

Proverbs 26:5 commands the reader to answer a fool's folly as it deserves. Charles Bridges writes, "What may be at one time our duty to restrain, at another time, and under different circumstances, it may be no less our duty to do. Silence may sometimes be mistaken for defeat. Unanswered words may be deemed unanswerable, and *the fool* become arrogant, more and more *wise in his own conceit*." Ironside writes, "To expose his shallowness, and reply convincingly to his folly may at least humble him and give him to feel the need of fuller investigation." Peter Steveson believes verse 5 "warns us to deal with the fool's folly, to rebut it so that you can overcome his false sense of self-worth. The phrase 'wise in his own conceit' is literally 'wise in his own eyes.' The fool has a wrong view of himself. By dealing with his foolishness, you can cut this short." Albert Barnes writes, "it is to say the right word at the right time, to expose his unwisdom [*sic*] and untruth to others and to himself."

Clearly, according to verse 4, one cannot respond with contempt or a demeaning spirit and please the Lord. We must be motivated from genuine Biblical love, praying and trusting that our response will awaken him to his foolishness. However, a Biblical rebuke is often the right response to foolishness. Job appears to provide such a rebuke to his wife's plea to "curse God" (Job 2:9, 10).

Quite often the temptation in responding to foolish people is to allow their foolishness to drive your response. These verses imply that careful consideration should be given before responding. A quick, thoughtless response will not likely be the right response. These verses urge the reader to take the necessary time and effort to discern the proper response to a foolish person.

The next time you find yourself addressing a foolish person, allow Proverbs 26:4, 5 to guide how, when, and if you should respond. 

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



# Windows

## Principles of Christian Service from the Unprofitable Servant Luke 17:7–10

Serving God is wonderful and satisfying . . . sometimes. It is fantastic if we do it for God and not man, and if we accomplish it in God's power and not our own. When we lose focus on God, then service can be burdensome; and when done in the power of self, it is frustrating. But serving God in the Spirit is nourishment. It gives wings to fly, not chains to enslave. We are "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). God has planned our service for us. His daily planner for our life is more important than ours. He goes ahead of us, preparing the places we are going and the people we will be meeting. He works out all things for His glory so that the work we do may be a part of His great and eternal work.

Warren Wiersbe gives an excellent definition of ministry to Christ: "Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels for the glory of God."<sup>1</sup> In Luke 17:7–10 Jesus gives a story of a worker often called "the unprofitable servant" as part of an answer to the disciples' cry to increase their faith. We learn that service toward Christ, accomplished with a willing spirit, will result in an increase of faith. Faith increases not in large steps but gradually through the daily drudgery of duty. When we think of increasing our faith, we may think that we have to set some great goal or have a great vision to do the impossible. The Lord teaches a simple truth that faith increases as we live consistently and do our daily duty.

Christian service is a high and undeserved honor. The servant in this story first worked outside and then inside. We must not be offended at anything commanded of us by Jesus Christ. Any service commanded by Him will strengthen our faith. In speaking to someone who recently told me why they came to our church and eventually joined, she said, "Because in our Sunday school we have teachers who open up the Bible with the students and have them read out of the Bible!" That Sunday school teacher who opens her Bible to her students has a high honor to teach young hearts and see people drawn into the fellowship of God's church.

Service to Christ must be accomplished without expectation of human honor or reward. Serve the Lord with gladness and wait for the reward until the end of the day. The servant in this parable serves and gets no words of thanks. Why should he? He has done only what is expected and commanded of him. David Livingstone, the great missionary statesman to Africa, served without any thought of his own greatness, yet when he died, he was considered a great man. He is the only pauper to be buried in Westminster Abbey with full state honors. "Shame upon us, if we are to be outdone by slave traders. If we serve God at all, it ought to be done in a manly way. I will place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Do you think my mortgage company sends me a letter every month thanking me while extolling my virtues because I pay my mortgage on time? I don't think so! But if I am late one time, you had better believe that I will hear from them! The fact is this: when I pay on time, I am merely keeping my word and paying what I owe them. They do not owe me any thanks, and the reality is this: I am still in debt to them. They have done me a huge favor in loaning me money so I could purchase my home. I should ever be grateful toward them, for they owe me nothing!

Similarly, the master in this story does not hold up his hands in wonder and cry, "How well my servant can plough, how cleverly he feeds the oxen!" and he does not go to him and say, "My dear, invaluable servant, I am sure I do not know what I could do without you; therefore come and sit down, and I will wait upon you." Oh, no, the servant does only what has been commanded him to do, and so the master does not think of lavishing praise upon him. So says Christ: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

*"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"*

*Charles Spurgeon*

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***We must not be offended at anything commanded of us by Jesus Christ. Any service commanded by Him will strengthen our faith.***

Do you remember the laborers in the vineyard who worked all day and then the ones who came at the end of the day received the same reward? When they received what they had agreed upon, they murmured because they merely got what they asked for. They served with expectation, and when they got what they expected, they complained because others who worked less time received the same wage. But the ones who came at the end of the day worked without any expectation, and that is the way to work. They served without a contract yet got more than they could have bargained for. When you serve the Lord because of the joy and privilege of service, the pay is great. It is far more than you could ask for! When you strike a bargain with God, you limit Him, and you may be disappointed.

Realize there will be strenuous days of grueling service. I imagine that plowing and feeding cattle in Bible days before all the powerful farm equipment was very hard work. Farming still is! And yet when the farmer came out of the field, his day was still not done. The Christian servant must keep his chin up and his knees down. Sometimes we will feel like quitting, but it is always too soon to quit. If you are looking to be a celebrity, then do not be a Christian servant. The church is full of pastors and evangelists who want to be celebrities but not servants. There is some agonizing labor in Christian ministry, but don't worry—our bodies were made to work.

Serve without looking at the time clock. Serving Christ is way of life. When we are saved, we punch in. When we die, we punch out. Life is war, and it is also work. We are to work for the night is coming when we will work no more! This man served all day in the field and came in during the night and served in the home. His day was our life. We serve in the day at our job, and we come home and continue working. We should see our home as a place and opportunity for ministry.

We serve Christ in an awesome variety of ways. This servant worked in the field, hot and sweaty. Then he came into the house, where he washed up and then labored in an entirely different set of skills. To serve the Lord, one must be a jack of all trades. As a pastor, many skills can be used. A pastor is a manager and a motivator, a teacher and a theologian, a custodian and a counselor. Whatever your gift or ability, it can be used in Christ's service. Can you cook? Use computers? Write? Publish? Sing? Talk? Type? File? Counsel? Build walls? Can you do electric or plumbing or carpentry? Work with finances?


As I review nearly twenty-five years of serving the Lord, I can tell you that there are hundreds of ways to serve Christ. I have torn down walls and built them. I have ripped out trees and planted flowers. I have filled dumpsters, mopped, swept, and vacuumed. I have counseled people who wanted to get married and who wanted a divorce. I have counseled people to eternal life and kept others from committing suicide. I have written sermons, e-mails, letters, articles, tracts, and books. I have worked with finances, made phone calls, taught children, adults, and senior citizens. And I am sure your list is much longer than this. And serving the Lord is great fun.

The Christian minister remembers that no servant is indispensable. An attitude that will cripple us spiritually is this: an overestimation of our own worth in either our work or our person. We are all replaceable; none of us is indispensable. God can take us anytime He wills, and His work will go on just fine with or without us! One of our common problems is that we take ourselves

too seriously and we don't take God seriously enough. This world got along fine before we were here. And since I got here, it seems that things are actually getting worse!

A servant for Christ realizes that no matter how much we do for Christ, it is no more than our duty and far less than what He has commanded. Have we done everything that the Lord has commanded us in a perfect way? I think not! So this should keep us humble. If we are unprofitable servants as we do all our daily duty, what are we if we do less than our daily duty? "Unprofitable" does not mean that we are less than nothing but that we are servants to whom our Master owes nothing. If we have done what He has commanded us to do, He still does not owe us anything. God will never owe us anything, but He does good things for us beyond what we deserve because He is good and a stronghold to us. God rewards us and gives to us more than we are worthy of, not because we have earned anything but because He is gracious.<sup>3</sup>

Duty means we have done what we owed. When we do our duty, we are merely paying our debt. Dr. Charles Dunn says that "duty is the desire to be useful that transforms you." A true servant avoids extremes and maintains balance. In life, the right way usually runs between two extremes. Balance is a great word. One extreme is self-congratulation and the other is despondency. One extreme is thinking "I have done more than others, and I am deserving of reward and honor." The other extreme is a sense of such unworthiness and bemoaning our ability to do anything good. Wisdom avoids high thoughts of ourselves and hard thoughts of God. It is easy to overestimate our importance. When we think too much of ourselves, we will quickly think that we are overworked and underpaid, under-recognized and way too overburdened.

A Christian servant knows at day's end there will be grace for all eternity! At the end of the day the servant was able to eat and drink. What a meal is waiting for us at the end of our day! It is called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This will be the most awesome meal and spread of food you will ever taste. Let's look at Luke 12:37 as we close. Jesus will gird Himself as a servant and serve those who are watching and working for Him until He comes. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). 

Matt Recker has established urban churches in New York City and has authored two books, *Behold the City* (2002) and *Living on the Edge of Eternity* (2007). Matt and his wife, Debbie, have three children and reside in Rosedale, Queens.

<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Mackenzie, *David Livingstone: The Truth behind the Legend* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), pp. 140, 146, 133.

<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, sermon on *Our Service for Christ Never Finished* (Ages Digital Library, 1999), Number 2334, p. 731.



That we might be fellow helpers to the truth. ~ 3 John 8



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Since Clement of Rome made the artificial distinction between the clergy and laity in A.D. 95, the idea that ministry is set apart solely for “the pastor” has gradually infiltrated many churches and individual believers. Ephesians 4:11, 12 says, “And he gave some [as] . . . pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry.” Deleting the comma between “saints” and “for” clarifies the Biblical objective of a pastor/teacher. Their goal is to equip or train the members of their congregation “for the work of the ministry [or service].” That objective means that right now you (the “layman”) should be in training to do follow-up visits, hospital visits, counseling, teaching, and a host of other ministries. Ideally, a pastor should almost work himself out of a “job.” It is a blessing to go into a church where the pastor has men and ladies who share in the work of the ministry. That pastor is able to dedicate more time to prayer and the ministry of the Word. However the blessing is not unilateral. Those who “equip” themselves for the work of service are often joyous and blessed beyond measure as they get personally involved in the lives of people through their church ministry. Remember, the Scripture assumes that the “work of the ministry” will be done by those we often term “laymen.”

## Laymen in Action!

*Biblical Examples of Laymen Serving the Lord*

Aquila and Priscilla: A Church Planter's “Dream Team”

The original “Dream Team” was the 1992 USA Summer Olympic Basketball team that won the gold medal in Barcelona, Spain. (A 1989 rule change had allowed USA basketball to field teams with professional players.) The 1992 team is often regarded as the greatest collection of talent on one team in basketball history. Aquila and Priscilla are a “Dream Team” of a different kind—a church planter's “Dream Team.” In this issue we will see their impact on one church-planting work in Corinth, but in the next issue you will hear “the rest of the story.”

The apostle Paul first met this husband and wife team in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–3). Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, along with the Jewish population, had been expelled from Rome by Claudius in A.D. 49 or 50. They were tentmakers by trade and soon associated with Paul both in their business and ministry. These two are never recorded to have preached a sermon, but they were vital to Paul's ministry in several cities.

Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth before departing to keep a vow (Acts 18:18). Aquila and Priscilla departed Corinth with Paul. As the team passed through Ephesus, Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue, and they entreated him to stay longer. Paul would not consent to stay longer but promised to return if it was the Lord's will. Priscilla and Aquila, however, stayed in Ephesus. We are not privy to the details of their stay while Paul continued his journey, but they seem to be laying the groundwork for “the preacher's” return. The next time we see Priscilla and Aquila they are explaining the way of God more accurately to the eloquent orator Apollos (Acts 18:26). Apollos subsequently returned to Corinth where he greatly helped the believers and powerfully refuted the Jews.

Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19) and spent three years there. God worked so mightily during those three years that both Jews and Greeks in all Asia heard the Word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). How much were the “laymen” Aquila and Priscilla involved in planting this “megachurch”? The Scripture does not tell us some of those details, but their subsequent involvement in other ministries leads us to speculate that

they were a vital part of this work. The simple fact is that the preacher does not do “the work of the ministry” alone. Aquila and Priscilla were critical to the ministry of the great apostle Paul. Had Aquila and Priscilla not been faithful *laymen*, Paul's work could very well have been hindered. This is the point that we wish to make. You may be teaching a class, singing in the choir, cleaning the kitchen, or greeting visitors, but it is all part of the ministry. You can honor and serve God by using your talents in your local church. Your pastor will *appreciate* your service.

## Parenting Tips

Pastor John Mincy

Heritage Baptist Church, Antioch, California

Attention Deficit Syndrome is primarily a result of poor training and parental expectation. Children should be required to stop, look, and listen when they are spoken to by an authority. This begins at home at a very early age. Children should not be allowed to go on about their business while you are trying to talk to them. Through consistent love and discipline, parents can help their children overcome attention problems.

## Churchhouse Manners

*The offering is still part of the worship service.*

For some strange reason some people seem to think that the offering is akin to the intermission in a play. They whisper, talk, or just outright find something else to do. Do you realize that the offering is a part of our worship to God? The offering is an opportunity to demonstrate our obedience to God by being good stewards of what has been entrusted to us. Good manners require that you not distract others during the offering. Listen! Someone has probably put a lot of work into the offertory.

Doug Wright is an FBFI board member and pastors Keystone Baptist Church in Berryville, Virginia.



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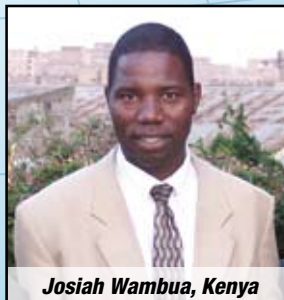
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## Cogitations Regarding Prayer

### Closing Our Eyes during Prayer

Have you ever peeked while someone was praying aloud? I assume we all have. And I think we were surprised that so many others were peeking too. Or, not just peeking—not even closing their eyes during public prayer! We who have been taught both to close our eyes and to bow our heads tend to assume that everyone else is doing so too. We are not surprised that a few little ones are glancing around. What we had not expected is that so many adults are not even making a public gesture of prayer; they probably aren't even praying. A public prayer is not an enactment, entertainment, or clerical blessing; it is a time when one leads the group in praying jointly, joining in the prayer that is being expressed publicly.

I don't—for no special reason—customarily join in when someone on TV leads in prayer. I might add my audible or inaudible "Amen" occasionally, but it just doesn't strike me as group prayer. What has surprised me is that almost all those I have seen recently have prayed with their eyes open. Some, no doubt, are reading a script. So, I ask myself; if prayer is a heart-cry, does it really matter if my eyes are open or closed? When I read a prayer on the page or on the screen, it's hard for me to actually participate in prayer. What really stops at the ceiling and what actually gets to the ears of God Himself?

Prayer is personal, intimate conversation with the Creator. Many prayer conversations throughout the day do not have an opening "Father," nor a closing "Amen." Every single prayer cry is heard and appropriately answered. God does not overlook any request, no matter how slight; He does not ignore any desire, no matter how trite. His answer may not always be what I had hoped it would be, but I know without doubt it is the correct, the best, the perfect answer. Still, I wonder, do people who gaze about during a group prayer ever see answers? Why haven't they prayed when they had opportunity? I'm not their judge, but I can pray for them.

### Questions about Prayer

I was once asked the following thought-provoking question about prayer.

Dr. Vanhetloo, I trust you are familiar with "unspoken prayer requests." I was wondering what you thought of them. On the one hand, I understand that people are naturally sensitive or embarrassed about certain things which they would rather not expose the details of to others, and of course God knows their need, whether other people do or not. But it always seems awkward when someone asks you to pray about something they won't confide in you about. One would wonder why anyone would ever divulge the details when they ask someone else to pray, and all prayer requests would be unspoken. Any thoughts?

The label "unspoken" is certainly a misnomer. Most of my praying is inaudible, nonverbalized. There could be several more proper labels for such requests, but none will likely

become accepted—such as "unspecified," "nonidentified," "specific-need," "disturbing," "personal," "embarrassing," etc. Finding a suitable label is tough. I would guess "special prayer request" would fit most situations.

I should be happy to join another in a special prayer need without knowing any of the details of the need or even of the third party, if one is involved. Usually when one shares any prayer request with me, I endeavor to pray (silently) immediately lest I forget later. I am convinced that God hears each single prayer, and the number of times I repeat the same request thereafter is not going to change the likelihood that He will respond. God knows all the details of the need. My request for provision of "daily bread" need not specify the meat I would prefer.

Later, concerning the reply I gave above, someone asked,

In your answer regarding unspoken prayers, you said, "and the number of times I repeat the same request thereafter is not going to change the likelihood that He will respond." How does that statement *not* run contrary to Christ's teaching in the parable of the widow and the unrighteous judge in Luke 18:1–8? That is, unless, of course, the immediate context relegates this persistent type of praying to prayers for the *parousia* only.

My experience includes observing Tibetan prayer flags and prayer wheels. I had in mind some who think that praying a prayer often enough will somehow change God's mind. Endless repetition of Hail Mary is wasted breath.

I am persuaded not only that God hears a single request but even that He knows what I need or what He wants to do even before I ask (Matt. 6:8). He just wants me to ask so He can answer and be honored through that answer. The older I get, the more frequently my forgetter functions. If I immediately plead in prayer, even though I might fail to pray again several times for that special request, I can feel that I did what was requested. But I don't consider that God will be any more likely to answer if I ask twenty times than if I had asked only fifteen times. I don't count the number of times. As God brings it to my mind, I repeat the request.

Persisting in prayers twenty or thirty years for the salvation of a loved one is an example of what I think is the lesson for us from Luke 18:1. Jesus points out that humans can finally break down and grant a request (Luke 18:4, 5). In contrast, God wants to answer (Luke 18:7). For some reason which He may not make known to us, He wants us to persevere. So long as that special one is yet alive, we ought not to cease praying for him. We don't break down God's reluctance; we await His timing, confident that His will is best. Our attitude as we continue year after year in prayer should not be that of blaming God or doubting His goodness, but a faith-confidence that He is able and that His purposes are best.

Warren Vanhetloo, A.B., B.D., Th.M., Th.D., D.D., is Adjunct Instructor in and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at Calvary Baptist Seminary in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. He now resides in Michigan.



God alone is man's true good, and since man abandoned Him it is a strange fact that nothing in nature has been found to take His place. —Blaise Pascal

And let us give thanks for Someone to thank. —Gerhard E. Frost

Thanksgiving . . . invites God to bestow a second benefit. —Robert Herrick

Thankfulness, like forgiveness, is not an emotion. Thankfulness is an intelligent response of gratitude to God. —Erwin W. Lutzer

Some people aren't happy unless they are complaining. —Unknown

It never occurs to teenagers that someday they will know as little as their parents. —*Bits & Pieces*

From David learn to give thanks for everything. Every furrow in the book of Psalms is sown with the seeds of thanksgiving. —Jeremy Taylor

The only way in which sensitive Americans can possibly keep Thanksgiving is with an almost overwhelming sense of responsibility. . . . Our plenitude is not something we are entitled to use for ourselves, but as a trust which, unless we share it, will be our undoing. —*Reformed Church Messenger*

Thanksgiving is the time of year when everybody begins to plan fowl murder. —*Philnews*

Christ clothed Himself with our lowliness in order to invest us with His grandeur. —Richardson Wright

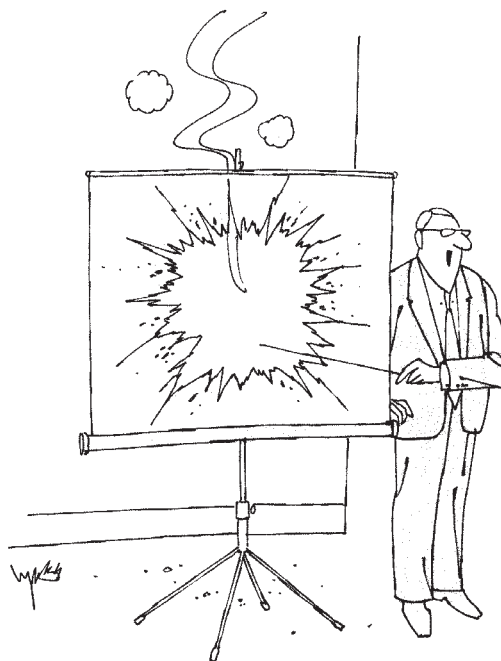
We know how God would act if He were in our place—He has been in our place. —A. W. Tozer

In the humanity of Jesus, God was truly speaking our language. —John Powell

If we could only grasp the significance of the Incarnation, the word "sacrifice" would disappear from our vocabulary. —Nate Saint

The Virgin Birth is so revolutionary a thought that it probably could only come from a God who is beyond logic and beyond theology. —Harry Reasoner

Only God could have thought of Christmas. When man invents a super being, he comes up with a Superman, or a Captain Marvel. God gives the world a baby. And in that baby is tied up the whole destiny of mankind. —Richard C. Halverson



*"... To heighten the impact of my lesson  
I am using our new powerful projector. . ."*

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

# What's on Your Thanksgiving List?

**Trisha White Priebe**

To me, presents are to Christmas what pumpkin pie and President Lincoln are to Thanksgiving. For most, those aren't exactly the words that come to mind on Thanksgiving Day. But for me, they are synonymous with the holiday.

See, every Thanksgiving of my childhood—and even a few years thereafter—my brother and I, or any child caught in our home as the case might be, would race to see who could create the longest list of things to be thankful for. We wracked our brains—careful to conceal our writing—and listed everything we could imagine. We went through piles of paper and numerous writing instruments. Usually the contest was timed, and usually our hands were sore for hours afterward. We didn't just put "the president." We put every president we could remember—and even vice presidents where possible. And we never wrote "mashed potatoes and gravy." No. Those could count for two food choices if we wrote them on separate lines.

This game was serious business in our house. And it wasn't all bad. We spent days leading up to the festivities thinking about these lists, which meant we were thinking about things to be thankful for and not just how much pie we would eat.

As I think back over the fun of that annual game, I realize now that there was one item we never included on our lists. I'm sure we never even came close to including it because—from all outward appearances—it isn't something to be celebrated. We wrote names of family members and days of the week—

But we never wrote "trials."

As I think about it now, "trials" would have opened a whole new category that could have easily given me the edge in our game. After all, trials include everything from bad days and ruined friendships to deep valleys that cause us to come face to face with what we really believe about God—and, of course, everything in between. The types of difficulties within a category like "trials" are endless.

So are our attitudes in response to these trials, I've learned.

Though I never considered it as a child, I've spent considerable time thinking about it as an adult. As I've come to learn firsthand, the pruning process of trials is painful and most generally leaves us feeling vulnerable and weak. Or, if not weak, perhaps we face anger or disappointment or denial instead.

But are we often thankful for trials? Or is that an archaic, unnatural response that sounds good in a Sunday school lesson and ends there?

As women devoted to living out God's Word in our lives, must we really be thankful for the hard things or simply "willing to endure" them with whatever grim optimism we can muster?

God wants us to be thankful.

James 1:2, 3 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

What clearer command could there be on Thanksgiving Day than the command to count something all joy? "Count it all joy" is, in essence, what Thanksgiving is about—isn't it?—rejoicing in what God has given us—making James 1:2, 3 a true "Thanksgiving verse." We thank the Lord for family, protection, nourishment, and friends, but what about the specific thing we are commanded in James to be thankful for?

James very deliberately tells us to "count it all joy" because being thankful for trials isn't our natural response. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to count "the easy things" all joy because that is expected. It isn't the natural response to be thankful for the difficult things or for the things that don't go our way.

This is Christian maturity and something I never could have understood during our little game, but this Thanksgiving, as I look back over the previous year and the various lessons God has brought into my life in the form of disappointments and pain, I choose to be thankful for trials. Why? Trials are the clearest reminder that God is still interested in pruning me and making me more like His Son. What could be better than that?

Later James tells us that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (1:17). Is it any coincidence that a verse about "perfect gifts" is included in a passage about trials? I don't think so. I may need to revisit the idea of writing down the things God has given me on this Thanksgiving Day.

I have a new category to examine and a lot to be thankful for.

Trisha Priebe is a freelance writer who serves alongside her husband, Luke, a seminary student at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan.





# The Glorious Incarnation

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).*

## John's Prologue: An Unfathomable Treasure to Be Mined

Perhaps no text of Scripture is richer in meaning than that of the apostle John's opening words in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>1</sup> As noted by NT scholar Don Carson,

The Prologue is a foyer to the rest of the Fourth Gospel, simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes. . . . But supremely, the Prologue summarizes how the "Word" which was with God in the very beginning came into the sphere of time, history, tangibility—in other words, how the Son of God was sent into the world to become the Jesus of history, so that the glory and grace of God might be uniquely and perfectly disclosed. The rest of the book is nothing other than an expansion of this theme.<sup>2</sup>

Here in the opening section of John we discover that the deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words not of some supernatural being but of the unique, one-of-a-kind ("only begotten") Son, who is, in fact, Himself God. In a mere fourteen verses of Scripture, John uniquely and powerfully portrays the relationship of Jesus, the *Logos* or Word, to God (vv. 1, 2); to creation (vv. 3–5, 10); to humanity (vv. 6–14); and to the OT system (vv. 14–18). Here we find no fewer than six profound theological truths regarding the Word, including His eternal pre-existence, His deity, His intimate relationship with the Father, His role in creation, that light and life are found in Him, and the incredible fact of the incarnation. While an in-depth treatment of each of these oft-noted and well-established truths is beyond the scope of this article, they provide a starting point for our reflections. Our focus herein will be on unpacking the significance of the Christological title of *Word* as John ascribes it to Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

## What's in a Name?

Just as the name "Jesus" is rich in its meaning of "Savior" or "God Saves," so too the term *Logos* or "Word" is charged with significance. It is striking that this term is used as a technical title for Christ in just three NT passages, with all three penned by the apostle John (John 1:1, 14; 1

John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). Although the origin and meaning of the term has been much debated, the best conceptual parallel appears to be with the OT "Word of God." While the significance of God's act of speaking (or His word) is clearly evident throughout the OT, beginning with its role in creation (note the repeated "and God said" in Genesis 1), especially striking are the parallels to the personified Word of God from Isaiah 55:9–11. The conceptual and even verbal parallels include: (1) the sending of the Word by God in order to accomplish a particular divine purpose; (2) the Word's certain success in accomplishing this purpose; and (3) the Word's return to God after accomplishing its mission.<sup>4</sup> As with the personified Word of Isaiah 55, the incarnate Word of John 1 is portrayed as "effective speech"—speech that not only disclosed the will of God but which inexorably accomplished it. As such, the *Logos* or Word of John's Prologue signifies *the ultimate self-disclosure of all that God is and does—the divine self-expression*.

Finally, that Jesus fully disclosed the character and conduct of God is echoed in John's declaration (1:18) that the Word "hath declared" (explained or made fully known) the Father. Interestingly, the word John selected to explain this process is the word from which we get "exegesis"—the term that describes the process of extensively and accurately unpacking the meaning of Scripture. As noted by Keener, "the term suggests that Jesus fully interprets God." Keener adds that "Jesus unveils God's character absolutely."<sup>5</sup> If one is in search of the high point or locus of divine revelation, one need look no further than at God's Son, the Word.<sup>6</sup>

## The Word that Permeates John's Gospel

While John's Gospel limits the use of the term *Logos* as a technical title for Christ to the Prologue, Word Christology permeates the entire Gospel. In fact, for John the term *Logos* appears to serve as a sort of Christological umbrella that encapsulates the array of significant titles to follow. The One who discloses all that God is does so through both His works and words.

For example, following the Prologue we have a sheer avalanche of Jesus' words—far more than in any other Gospel. A striking four-fifths of chapters 1–17 and three-fourths of the entire Gospel consist of Jesus' sayings, dialogues, and monologues. Moreover, the strategic juxtaposition of Jesus' signs and discourses is unique to John. For John, the signs done by the eternal *Logos* are symbol-laden, pointing

beyond themselves to greater eternal realities. These signs find their explanation in Jesus' Words. As rightly noted by Gundry, "a Christology of the Word dominates the whole of John's Gospel more than has been recognized before; . . . this domination makes the gospel a totalizing narrative"; he adds that "the Word in the Prologue 'gives expression to the idea of revelation which dominates the whole Gospel.' Thus, the portrayal of Jesus as the Word in John's Prologue works itself out in an emphasis on Jesus' word, or words, in the rest of the Gospel."<sup>7</sup>

## Jesus, the Divine Word

From the opening phrase "in the beginning *was the Word*," we are reminded of the Genesis 1 parallel ("in the beginning, *God*") and of the Word's eternal preexistence. In other words, "in the beginning, the Word already continually was." As convincingly noted by McCready, Christ's preexistence is vital in telling us what God is like, "because denial of Christ's preexistence entails denial of the Trinitarian nature of God. At a minimum the doctrine of Christ's preexistence speaks to who Jesus Christ is and what he has accomplished, and to the nature of God himself."<sup>8</sup> In next declaring that the Word was at that time *with* the Father (c.f., 1:18, "in the bosom of the Father"), John is affirming that the Word is both distinct in person from God the Father and that He is in an intimate relationship with the Father.<sup>9</sup> Finally, John concludes the opening verse with the remarkable assertion that "the Word was God."<sup>10</sup> Here John declares that the Word is one in essence with the Father while still being distinct in person. As noted by NT scholar Dan Wallace, "The construction the evangelist chose to express this idea was the most concise way he could have stated that the Word was God and yet was distinct from the Father."<sup>11</sup> Thus in the span of one short verse John has taken us "from eternal preexistence to personal intercommunion to intrinsic deity."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the whole of John's Gospel must be read in light of this very verse.

## Jesus, Revealer of God's Glory and Ultimate Bearer of "Grace and Truth"

The glory that Moses earnestly sought to see (Exod. 33:18) was ultimately revealed by God in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17). The One whom Moses could not see without dying and who therefore passed before him in a veiled fashion (Exod. 33:20, 23) has now been fully disclosed, made known, in the incarnate Word (John 1:18). The One who dwelt in a tent outside the camp (Exod. 33:7) has now come and dwelt (literally, "tabernacled") among men (John 1:14). The same Lord, who when passing before Moses proclaimed His abundant lovingkindness and truth (Exod. 34:6) has now come in the fullness of His "grace and truth" in the person of Christ (John 1:14, 17). And while Moses and Israel certainly found grace in God's sight (Exod. 33:12–14), the disciples and all believers since have received of His fullness an even greater grace or "grace for grace" (John 1:16)—one that surpasses or supersedes that which was provided through the OT Law (John 1:17).

## The Word Demands a Response

While a number of views regarding the Person and work of Christ have been proposed throughout church

history, John's prologue makes it clear that there can really be no middle ground. The incarnate Word who came to disclose God in all His fullness also demands a response. To those who receive Him by faith He grants new life in being born of God into the family of God (1:12, 13). Prerequisite for such a response is a correct understanding of the unique *Logos* of God. Is He the eternally preexistent Son become incarnate in space and time for salvation, or was Jesus simply a good man? Everything hangs on our answer to this question. The Prologue of John's Gospel clearly declares the former! Thus, as we enter the Christmas season with its appropriate focus on Christ's birth, let us drink from John's Prologue and celebrate the rich truths regarding the Word, God's unique Son. As we do, let us shout with the saints of all the ages "Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

Albin Huss is Chair and Professor of New Testament at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent treatment of John's prologue, see the six-part series by David J. MacLeod in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 160 (2003): 48–64; 187–201; 305–20; 398–413; and Vol. 161 (2004): 72–88; 179–93.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 111.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most extensive treatments of the title *Logos* and its significance throughout John's Gospel is Robert H. Gundry's *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> See discussion by Andreas Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume I* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2003), 424.

<sup>6</sup> The thematic parallels to the prologue of Hebrews (1:1–3) are striking, albeit not surprising.

<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas McCready, *He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>9</sup> The Greek preposition *pros* here expresses the notion of active relationship or communication; see, Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the oft-debated grammatical and theological analysis as to whether *theos* (God) is here to be understood as indefinite (*a god*, per the Watchtower's *New World Translation*) or definite (*God*, as noted in many grammars and commentaries), the preferred option is actually to understand it as qualitative, thereby expressing the notion that Jesus, the Word, has the same nature as God the Father while being distinct from Him. See Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 266–69.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 269.

<sup>12</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 71.



## Prayer: Our Petition

**Jerry Sivnksty**

In Jeremiah 33:3 the Lord says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." All of the resources of Heaven are at the disposal of the believer who seeks the Lord in prayer. Has it ever dawned upon you that the unfathomable riches of Heaven lie at the doorstep of your prayer life? Our mouths are not wide enough to hold all that the Lord wants to give us! He said to the children of Israel in Psalm 81:10, "I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." We could not drain the stores of God any more than we could drain the seas of the world with a straw! The Lord tells us in Psalm 50:10, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." The apostle Paul said in Romans 11:33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" I once read a statement from Matthew Henry in his book entitled *The Secret of Communion with God*. This statement greatly stirred me, and I want to share it with you: "What a shame is this to us, that God is more willing to be prayed to, and more ready to hear prayer, than we are to pray."

I want to relate a recent event that occurred in my life concerning this matter of prayer. Last year I took my son Brent elk hunting with me in Bozeman, Montana. We were staying with our good friend Paul Wetzel from Concord, New Hampshire. One day Brent and I drove up to Livingston Mountain to hunt. We stopped briefly on a dirt road to observe some mule deer and to don our hunting gear; then we got back into the truck and went up to the mountain. We had been hunting for about an hour when all of a sudden I discovered that my wallet was missing—which held my driver's license, hunting permit, cash, and several credit cards! It must have dropped out on that dirt road we'd stopped on earlier. I had told Brent to hunt until 12:30 and then meet me back at the truck; I returned to the truck at 9:30 and diligently searched for my wallet for over half an hour, but to no avail. It was definitely lost.

I had just memorized Psalm 77:1, "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he

gave ear unto me." I quoted that verse and began to pray; I asked the Lord to cause some honest person and not a thief to find my wallet and return it to me. By the time I finished praying it was 10:30; I prayed again and asked the Lord to bring my son back to the truck earlier than 12:30 because that would mean two more hours of waiting. At 11:00 Brent came back and said, "Dad, I felt led of the Lord to come back sooner." As we began to go down the mountain, I wanted to go back to our cabin, but Brent wisely suggested that we go to the town of Livingston, call the airport, and find out what we needed to do in order to fly back since I had lost my driver's license. After we'd taken care of that, we ran a few errands in town and then decided to go back to the cabin. As we were heading down the road my cell phone rang; I answered it, and someone said, "Are you Jerry Sivnksty?" I told him yes. He said, "I just found your wallet on a dirt road." He said he had seen a phone number in my wallet for a Monty Kauffman in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He had called Monty and asked him if he knew me and if he had my cell phone number because he'd just found my wallet. Monty gave it to this man, who then called me.

Isn't it incredible that this young man called Monty to get my number so he could return my wallet? He then asked me where I was; I told him we were on Swangly Road, and he said he too was on Swangly Road—just two minutes away! We met on the road, and the man gave me my wallet. I gave him a gospel tract along with a monetary reward for returning it to me.

What a wonderful Heavenly Father we have! I have been deeply moved to see the Lord's definite answer to my prayer, and I give Him all the praise. All believers—those in full-time ministry and those who are not—should be challenged to pray. Why should we worry, fret, and be full of anxiety when we have this great privilege of prayer? Philippians 4:6 says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

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## ESTHER, PART 2:

**T**he Book of Esther is a classic of dramatic narrative laced with practical and theological implications, all the more subtle and insightful due to the book's most outstanding idiosyncrasy: it never directly mentions God. The previous column surveyed the book's background, structure, and thematic elements. This column will explore Esther's theological message, function, and difficulties.

### Theology in Esther

How can a book that never mentions God communicate any theology? Quite easily, really. The theme of Esther revolves around God's providential protection of Esther's people because they are, despite all their flaws and failures, His people. He has sworn to do certain things in and with and for and through them. In reality, Esther chronicles a threat not only to the Jewish people but to all mankind: destroy the Jews and you destroy God's promised Messiah. The eradication of the Jew has not merely international but universal, cosmic consequences; repeated historical efforts to do so should, therefore, be unsurprising. Esther exhibits the mutual gravitational pull of divine sovereignty and human responsibility orbiting tightly around each other.

### Human Responsibility

"Surely the LORD is in this place," said Jacob, "and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16). Esther's trademark is not the absence of God but the nonmention of God. The two are not the same. And that is the whole point. This literary feature plays out as a two-edged paradox.

*The nonmention of God highlights human responsibility.* Human activity is exclusively in view because humans are the only ones whose actions the narrator shows us. As far as we can see, everything seems to depend on the actions and reactions of women and men.

*The nonmention of God underscores divine activity.* When a narrative identifies surprising and unlikely events—such as the parting of the Red Sea or the fall of Jericho—as direct divine intervention, the reader is impressed. But when the narrator, in relating surprising or unlikely events, keeps God hidden from view, the reader is compelled to conclude, "That *had* to be God!" What is not obvious on the surface is nevertheless undeniable. As J. Sidlow Baxter observes, "This mysterious reality which we call providence, this sovereign manipulation of all the ordi-

nary, non-miraculous doings which make up the ordinary ongoing of human affairs, so as to bring about, by natural processes, those results which are divinely predetermined, is the mightiest of all miracles."

### Divine Providence

Just because the narrator doesn't name God, however, does not mean that he does not make reference (however veiled) to God. Such references are as clear yet easy to miss as the nose beneath your eyes.

*Implicit references.* The narrator cites several comments from the mouths of the actors that subtly imply a consciousness of divine presence and activity.

4:13, 14—Mordecai's statement of the consequences if Esther refuses to intervene are theologically pregnant: (a) deliverance will come "from another place," (b) retribution would be certain ("thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed"), and (c) Esther would be missing the duty commensurate with her coincidental opportunity ("thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this").

4:15–17—The three-day communal fast is a veiled implication of appeal to God. Prayer is not mentioned; but fasting alone would be an absurd preparation for this incident. The narrator does not say that they did not pray; he merely does not say that they did. But the implication is irresistible.

6:13—Haman's wife and friends sense that since Mordecai is "of the seed of the Jews," Haman's initial humiliation before Mordecai could only foreshadow his ultimate overthrow—a tacit recognition of the reality of the God of the Jews.

8:17; 9:2, 3—Some see a "hidden theology" (Meinhold) in the phrases "the fear of the Jews" and "the fear of Mordecai" (cf. Gen. 31:42). These veiled statements are "indirect references to Yahweh's intervention in history on behalf of His people" (Sandra Beth Berg). The "fear" on the part of the heathen who witnessed this plot reversal resulted in many of them converting to Judaism.

*"Chance" references.* Esther is replete with unexpected, but perfectly timed, interconnected events that are inexplicable apart from divine orchestration. The plot is punctuated with defining incidents that steer the course and affect the outcome of the story. Here are a few examples (see Talbert, *Not by Chance*, chapter 8 for more detail): the *unexplained* disobedience of Vashti and her deposal; the *unexpected* accession of a Jewess to the Persian throne; the *chance* discovery by Mordecai of an assassination plot



# THEOLOGY, PURPOSE, AND PROBLEMS

against the king, coupled with the fact that his deed is recorded but not immediately rewarded; the baffling promotion of an arrogant prince; the propitious determination of a lot-casting; the tenuous confrontation between Mordecai and Esther; the uncertain decision of the king to receive Esther; the unpredictable insomnia of the king; the fortuitous selection by the court reader; the opportune arrival of Haman; the timely reversal of Haman's plot; and the curious naming of a memorial holiday. The ultimate symbol of "chance" in the book is the lot (*purim*) cast by Haman. Is it not odd that the Jewish feast originating from these events is named after that insignificant detail? Why the Feast of *Purim* of all things? Why not the Feast of Deliverance or the Feast of Esther? The inconsequential symbol of apparent randomness (*purim*) is transmogrified into the ultimate "antichance" symbol. The story of Esther illustrates what the naming of the Feast of Purim commemorates—that the heathen's *chance* is the believer's *providence*. Proverbs 16:9 and 33 could not find their way into a more apropos context.

## Purpose of Esther

The *historical purpose* of Esther is to recount the events that led to the Feast of Purim (9:20–32). But what would be the purpose of a book in the Bible that records the deliverance of God's people from destruction through a series of "chance" events, yet never mentions God? That suggests the *theological purpose*—to highlight God's providence in ruling and overruling in human affairs, and to demonstrate His protective care for His people and His purposes. This is accomplished by two paradoxical but complementary implications of the nonmention of God: the necessity of responsible human activity coupled with the reality of interventional divine activity.

## Problems in Esther

Most Christians have wrestled with the apparent implications of some of the situations that surface in the story of Esther. All we can do is examine the data in the story. The story has its own agenda, which does not include answering all our curiosities. In some cases where the data we possess simply do not yield a definitive answer, wisdom stifles speculation and modesty forbids dogmatism.

*Was Vashti justified in refusing Xerxes? Should she be viewed as insubordinate or morally principled?*

The story is not interested in answering that question. Beyond 1:11, the narrative offers no comment on the nature of Xerxes' request or of Vashti's refusal. In the unfolding of the story, it does not matter whether Xerxes or Vashti was in the right. In narrative terms, Vashti is merely an agent whose actions, right or wrong, facilitate the outworking of God's purposes. The narrator's extended attention to the "fallout" (1:13–22) *may seem* to suggest that Vashti's refusal was unwarranted (rather than that Xerxes' request was unseemly). But it was not important enough to the narrator's purpose to clarify, for whom it is just one more human incident that God orchestrates into His larger purposes.

*Was Esther immoral?* The text is discreet and avoids any direct or unambiguous statement. For example, when Esther "[went] in unto the king" (2:13, 15) the phrase used is the same construction for Abraham going in to Hagar (Gen. 16:4), but it is also the identical construction for Moses and Aaron going in to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:10). Again, each virgin went in at evening and returned the next morning (2:14); yet apparently the same women continue to be referred to as "virgins" even afterwards (2:19). Assuming the worst, one might liken it to the royal harems of Judah (including David's). The cultural milieu may not justify the harems in Judah or Persia, but it does at least help explain the phenomenon. Nevertheless, it seems unnecessary and unwise to go dogmatically where the text does not go unambiguously. One might read "between the lines" that she "slept" with the king, but between the lines is the only place one can find it. One may wish to argue that it's obvious to anyone who is not naïve. Others are inclined, in the absence of unequivocal data, to grant the benefit of any doubt ("to the pure all things are pure" and "love thinketh no evil"). The language of 2:16–18 conveys an air of innocence and even admiration; that a sexual encounter may have ensued with other women does not, in any case, demand that it did with Esther.

*Should Mordecai and Esther have been in Persia in the first place?* Some have argued that they were living in disobedience to be in Persia at all. Some even suggest that is why God is not mentioned in the book. Such blame, however, is unjustified. Esther was in Persia because she was born there long after the original return; one could not pick up and make the arduous and dangerous four-to-six-month trek whenever he pleased. Moreover, Ezra

Continued on next page

## At a Glance Continued

1:4, 5 indicates that the Lord did not "stir" everyone to return; many remained behind without blame, though they were expected to help finance the venture. God preserved the lives of those who had returned to Jerusalem through the presence and providential placement of principled people who had remained behind. (The Lord later similarly used two other Jews living in Persia: Ezra did not return to Judah until he was old enough to have acquired the reputation of an expert scribe and to be commissioned and sent by King Artaxerxes; Nehemiah was also commissioned by Artaxerxes to be governor of Judah, but not before he lived in Persia long enough to rise to the highly trusted position of the king's personal butler.) In addition, Haman's genocidal plot threatened all Jews who lived throughout all the king's provinces (3:13; 8:5), including Judah. The narrative of Esther and Mordecai is a positive one; they are the human heroes of the story.



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## Three-Year Prison Sentence

Chinese Pastor Cai Zhuohua returned to his Beijing home September of this year after serving a three-year prison sentence for passing out Bibles. Cai had been arrested for "illegal business practices" when a raid on his establishment found over 200,000 pieces of Christian literature. Among the literature seized were gospel literature and Bibles. Because he had been giving the literature out for free he insisted that he was not guilty of illegal business practices, but in November 2005 he was convicted and sentenced to what would be a total of three years' incarceration.

In China only government-sanctioned churches have the authority to distribute Bibles. One cannot purchase Bibles on the street or even in a Beijing Christian bookstore. They can be secured only at government-approved agencies.

Find this article at <http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/headline/world/5139816.html>.

## Resurgence of Confession

Confession appears to be a growing trend in the United States. In Colorado Springs three Catholic priests have set up a booth in a local mall where the opportunity for confession is made available six days a week. The priests say they

hear approximately 8000 confessions a year from that location.

While confession has always been a part of Catholic theology, it is also increasing among American Protestants.

Even though Martin Luther opposed private confession to a priest, the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran church voted this summer to revive the ritual as a part of its liturgy. So-called Protestant groups are now using the Web to aid members in confession. For example, the XXX Church has produced a video of members' confessing their use of pornography. This video has been placed on YouTube and has over 15,000 hits. Another group has produced the site [ivescrewedup.com](http://ivescrewedup.com) so people can make their confessions over the Web. Somehow people have come to believe that making their confession to other people removes the load of guilt, but the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one Mediator between God and man who can truly and eternally remove guilt.

Find this article at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/09/22/wconfess122.xml>.

## New German Homeschool Problems

The German government has been fighting homeschooling in the last

few years, but now it is moving beyond the citizens to address homeschooling practices of missionaries in its country as well. For example, when Clint and Susan Robinson, independent Baptist missionaries who came to Germany in March 2007, applied for residency status, local authorities indicated they would never grant that status to these missionaries since they refused to give their children over to the public school system. By mid-August they were given 45 days to leave the country or they would be "forcibly deported."

The German government has instituted this policy under the title of *Parallelgesellschaften*, a word that means "parallel societies." If children are homeschooled, they will not learn the state mindset. This is intolerable, but this is the mentality of those who think "it takes a village."

Find this article at <http://www.hslda.org/hs/international/Germany/200709191.asp>.

## Wrongful Birth?

In Australia, where sodomite couples are given the right to adopt children, new ethical issues are rising to the surface. One "couple" went through a fertility treatment in order to conceive a child; to their dismay, they conceived twins. Now that the children are three years old, they are suing for a

court award of more than \$330,000 for raising the second child to the age of twenty-one with an additional \$12,000 to compensate for medical expenses and loss of earnings resulting from an extended maternity leave. The "couple" claims they have suffered from "the stress of unexpectedly having twins, with the birth mother having lost some of her ability to love."

While this kind of attitude has sparked outrage among many in Australia, this is only the natural response of this selfish type of living. This type of behavior engenders the illogical thinking of "wrongful birth."

Find this article at <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=/Culture/archive/200709/CUL20070920b.html>.

## Lawsuit against God

In early September, Nebraska state Senator Ernie Chambers presented a lawsuit against God for "terroristic threats against him and his constituents, wide-spread theft, destruction, terrorization, millions upon millions of the earth's inhabitants." Chambers, a self-proclaimed agnostic, claimed this lawsuit had nothing to do with God but was over state legislators' opposing frivolous lawsuits. Chambers won't be "out-frivoloused." Since the lawsuit has been filed, a Texas attorney has

responded on God's behalf, and another anonymous response has come in. While Chambers does not expect the appearance of God, he does expect the court to grant either a summary judgment or at least a hearing.

Find this article at [http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070922/29412\\_Attorney\\_Defends\\_God\\_Against\\_Lawsuit.htm](http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070922/29412_Attorney_Defends_God_Against_Lawsuit.htm).

### No Episcopalian Response

Anglican leaders met earlier this year in Tanzania and asked the Episcopal Church to send a response and put an end to ordaining homosexual bishops and blessing same-sex unions by September 30. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, indicated that no such ultimatum existed, that it was simply a request for information. Much of his response to the issue reflected a need for deep and abiding unity and an explanation how each of the church groups need each other. No response to the request was granted. It is expected that a response will be made by February, but the requested September 30 answer was ignored.

Find this article at [http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070922/29411\\_Anglican\\_Head:\\_No\\_Ultimatum\\_for\\_Episcopal\\_Church.htm](http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070922/29411_Anglican_Head:_No_Ultimatum_for_Episcopal_Church.htm).

### Funeral Guidelines

In August Marvin Olasky reported on a Texas church that found itself in quite a dilemma. The High Point Church in Arlington, Texas, initially offered to host a funeral service for their janitor. The man was not a church member; in addition, though, he was a practicing sodomite (which was not ini-

## NOTABLE QUOTES

I am what I was—God.  
I was not what I am—Man.  
I am now called both—God and Man.  
—J. Oswald Sanders

**I** have often prayed that I might be able to say at the last what George Fox could so truly say: "I am clear, I am clear!" It is my highest ambition to be clear of the blood of all men. I have preached God's truth, so far as I know it, and I have not been ashamed of the peculiarities. That I might not stultify my testimony I have cut myself clear of those who err from the faith, and even from those who associate with them.—C. H. Spurgeon

**T**wo opposite religions are being proclaimed from the pulpits. One is the great redemptive religion known as Christianity, founded upon the supernatural birth of Jesus, His death on the cross as a sin offering, and salvation by repentance and faith in His sacrificial death. The other is anti-Christian, agnostic, naturalistic modernism and is being proclaimed in every denomination.—Billy Sunday

**T**he only way one could be the rightful heir to David's throne and escape this curse was to be virgin-born as Jesus was.—Oswald Smith

**H**ow does the wise man of Proverbs [30:7–9] complete the thought, "All I want for Christmas . . ."? He responds, "Lord, all I want is for my life to be characterized by consistency and contentment."—Ben Strohbehn

**W**hen we find [Ignatius] attesting the virgin birth not as a novelty but altogether as a matter of course, as one of the accepted facts about Christ, it becomes evident that the belief of the virgin birth must have been prevalent long before the close of the first century. . . . The denials of the virgin birth which appear in that century were based upon philosophical or dogmatic prepossession, much more than upon genuine historical tradition.—J. Gresham Machen

tially known by the church). The obituary, along with the funeral service plans, intended to glorify his chosen lifestyle.

When the church became aware of all of this, the leadership offered to pay for the event to be held in a different place. The church sent food and a multimedia presentation of the janitor's life—not including, of course, all the images that the family of the deceased wanted to include. The church is now being sued by the family in a civil discrimination suit.

Find this article in *World*, August 25, 2007.

### Military for Religious Freedom

Mickey Weinstein and the Military for Religious Freedom Foundation are striking out at Fundamentalism again. Weinstein made it clear that he believes Fundamentalist Evangelicals are taking over the military, and he is doing everything he can to attack them. Under the guise of religious freedom, Weinstein is now supporting a case out of Fort Riley, Kansas, where SBEC Jeremy Hall claimed he was denied the ability to meet with atheists and other non-Christians. He claims that he was threatened with military charges that would block his re-enlistment. The lawsuit also claimed that Hall was "forced to submit to a religious test as a qualification to his post as a soldier" and that Wellborn, the commanding officer, needed to be blocked from establishing "compulsory religious practices."

Compiled by Robert Conduct, Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International Advisory Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

*Newsworthy* is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the FBFI.



## Incubating Hungarian Leaders to Build Churches

**Jim Knies and David Potter**

**L**ike many other Christians, we watched with fascination as the Berlin Wall fell and many former Communist Bloc countries opened for American church planters to enter. We naturally assumed there were little or no cultural differences between these fledgling democracies. Surely, Hungary was just as Catholic as Poland. Everyone in Eastern Europe must speak a Slavic language. Certainly, the differences between Lithuania and Latvia or Slovakia and Slovenia would be like the differences between Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Belgrade, Bucharest, and Budapest all had their typical European outdoor sidewalk cafes. Just pick any country—they were basically all the same, right?

In July of 1993 God led the Knies family to Hungary, where Jim's father had been born. However, he soon realized that his assumptions were completely wrong. Hungarian was actually a very difficult language unrelated to any other Indo-European tongue. Just twenty miles to the south, he crossed the border to see bombed-out villages in Croatia. The countries in Eastern and Central Europe were in fact dramatically distinct from each other ethnically, politically, historically, and culturally.

Initially, Hungary became the perfect balance between the materialistic and spiritually hardened Western Europe and the superficial "revivals" among poorer neighboring countries. Conditions have changed. Now most Hungarians view the pursuit of money as the purpose of life.

Hungarians can be brilliant. They invented the first telephone switchboard, the carburetor, the safety match, the ballpoint pen, holography, the hydrogen bomb, Rubik's cube, and the mathematics behind computer programming. Thirteen Hungarians have won the Nobel Prize, a remarkable feat for such a small country. The high value Hungarians place on education should not surprise us. On the other hand, according to the World Health Organization, Hungary has the fourth highest suicide rate in the world, reflecting the spiritual vacuum and hopelessness of modern Hungarian life.

In 1995 God brought the Gedeon Olah family from their home in eastern Hungary to Pécs to work with the Knies family in planting a new church. Fervent soulwinners, the Olahs have been used of God to bring many people into the church. The philosophy of the ministry in Pécs is to build the church by focusing on families and to emphasize building men for leadership in the home and in the church.

In 1999, as demographic, economic, and spiritual changes demanded a deepening of the ministry, God brought the Potter fam-

ily. Having taught on the seminary level, Dr. David Potter started a Bible institute in the context of the local church. By combining the local church ministry with a training institution, we endeavor to incubate leadership by putting classroom learning to work immediately. Students grow spiritually while growing in Scripture knowledge.

Already we are about to make our next important advances. The Olah family will soon be leaving to plant a church in a nearby city with help from members of the mother church. God has raised up a young man who we believe will become the first national pastor of the mother church. Three other young men have given testimony of a call to the ministry and are currently both serving and learning. We are praying that God will use Bible Baptist Church of Pécs as a launching pad to send out many church planters who will reproduce the mother church.

Although more than half of Hungarians identify themselves as Roman Catholic, few actively practice their religion. Non-Catholic denominations, which have been captured by religious liberalism, claim nearly a quarter of the population. The Hungarian Baptist Union churches are both small in number and ecumenical in practice. They preach a gospel without commitment. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other cults aggressively proselytize, while the Charismatics dominate religious broadcasting.

The Hungarian harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. The number of Independent Baptist missionaries planting churches in Hungary has shrunk from a high of ten in 1999 to just seven currently—to reach ten million people. We definitely need more American missionaries, but the ultimate answer and our goal for Hungary is Hungarians reaching Hungarians.

Before being called to Hungary, Jim Knies served as a church planter in Malaysia, and David Potter taught at San Francisco Baptist Seminary. Jim can be reached at [jknies@baptistworldmission.org](mailto:jknies@baptistworldmission.org), and David can be reached at [dpotter@baptistworldmission.org](mailto:dpotter@baptistworldmission.org).

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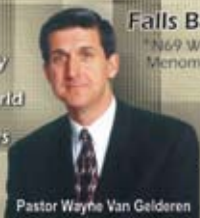
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## Police Chaplaincy

Bob Keller

Scripture teaches in Psalm 100:4 that we are to “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.” This is our attitude when it comes to serving the Lord. Jane and I are so thankful that the Lord has called us into this ministry of reaching not only those in law enforcement but also victims of crime. I recently heard that 32,000 people die in traffic accidents each year in the United States. This leaves behind countless thousands of hurting families and friends who have lost loved ones. I have said in many pulpits that some people do not turn to the Lord unless something tragic happens. As a chaplain, I have many opportunities to reach these people for our Lord Jesus Christ. It is such a privilege, and yes, a great responsibility, to tell these people that *Jesus Christ is the answer*. Christ came to heal the brokenhearted and to set the captive free.

Once a person is out of full-time ministry, as I was for many years, returning to full-time Christian service becomes a challenge. But through His grace and mercy the Lord opened a door of opportunity where I could use my gift of serving others within the area of police chaplaincy—bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the valiant men and women protecting our communities and neighborhoods.

The Lord began to speak to me about going back into full-time Christian service several years ago. But where? I had served on the foreign mission field and as a pastor and an assistant pastor in several different Fundamental Baptist churches in the United States. Our children were grown and living their own lives, and I knew that the Lord wanted us back serving Him full time. But where, I did not know.

Here I am, fifty-two years old where could I possibly serve? Who would take me seriously? I thought about going back into the pastorate or perhaps going back to the foreign mission field, but the Lord never gave me peace about pursuing any of those ministries. Then one morning while I was having my devotions the thought came to my mind: the chaplaincy ministry.

As a result I began to search for the Lord’s leading. I thought about working as a chaplain in the prison system or perhaps the hospital. I knew I couldn’t serve in the military; I was too old for that and had already served my four years in the Air Force long ago. Where could I be used at my age? No one is going to look at me; I have been out of the ministry too long, I thought.

My wife and I are members of Lighthouse Baptist Church

in LaVerne, California, where Brian Dunlop is our pastor. I learned that we had eight police officers in our church.

I asked one member who was retired from the Pomona Police Department about the chaplain program, and he recommended that we visit the department and share with them our burden for the chaplaincy ministry.

We drove to the Pomona Police Department and spoke with the Watch Commander about the possibility of a ministry working as a chaplain. The Watch Commander made a statement during the conversation that I will never forget. He stated, “*We have chaplains who serve in the military, prisons and hospital . . . but what about us? Why don’t we have chaplains that serve in the police department?*” My wife and I drove home that afternoon and made the decision. “Lord, we believe You may be directing us to work with law enforcement.” Up to that time, I had never really considered it. Believing by faith that the Lord was leading us into this work, I made arrangements to ride with a police officer.

Once arrangements were made, I was given the opportunity to ride with Officer Mark. (Up until this point, I had never ridden with a police officer, not even in the back seat!) I rode with Mark for about six hours, discussing many things concerning police work, but we also spoke about spiritual matters. Mark shared with me his burden—for some time he had been searching for someone to share with him the truth about Jesus Christ. *By the time the ride along was over Officer Mark had trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.* What are the chances of that ever happening? It was clearly a divine appointment!

After all of this, we knew that the Lord was leading us into the chaplaincy ministry. It has now been three years since that decision was made, and the Lord has opened many doors for us to minister as a chaplain for the Pomona Police Department and with other departments as well.

Luke 14:23: “And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “compel” as: “to drive or urge with force, or irresistibly; to constrain; to oblige; to necessitate, either by physical or moral force.”

Today there is a vast resource to reach out into the community that is not being utilized by the church. That resource is the chaplaincy. “Why chaplaincy?” you

*Continued on page 38*

may ask. "What could possibly be the need there?" I am so glad you asked. The statistics in law enforcement are staggering. Every fifty-nine hours an officer is killed in the line of duty, and every twenty-two hours one commits suicide. Eighty-nine percent of officers are divorced, and seventy percent of seasoned officers have been married twice. They have the highest rate of stress, heart attacks, strokes, and broken homes. Police officers hold a higher rate of suicide, addictive behavior, divorce, and stress-related diseases than any other group of professionals in our nation. "Police officers feel victimized by society; they perceive that the police department is indifferent to them, and that the public doesn't care about them."

Our ministry is called "In Pursuit Ministries" because we are in pursuit of those who are in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need pastors who are willing to work as volunteer chaplains. We are praying that the Lord would raise up many pastors of our Fundamental Baptist Churches or lay people within the churches to work as part-time chaplains with their local law enforcement agencies.

To become a law enforcement chaplain is to reach out into the community through service to police officers and common citizens who have been victimized by crime. You have the opportunity to walk your talk, to be of service, to humbly show the Word of God in your life to the officers you work with.

Through this avenue of service we have been able to come in contact with all aspects of the police department, the city council, and the mayor. We have become the official liaison between the police department and families of murder and suicide victims. This is a group of people that we did not come in contact with normally when working just with the church as a pastor. This is a group of people that would not normally come to your church. They have to be compelled to come in with love, patience, and persistently pointing them to the Savior as "the way, the truth, and the life."

Our lives should not be caught up in making money and building houses. Our lives should be caught up in serving Jesus Christ and telling people about our wonderful Savior and leading them to Him. We need to go out into our communities as servants and obey the command of our Lord to compel them to come in, that His house may be filled. Those who work as God's ministers of justice (Rom. 13:4) need to hear about Jesus Christ. Believe me, the mission field of law enforcement has been forgotten. Perhaps the Lord is calling you.

*Remember, we are never too old to serve the Lord in any work to which He calls us.* We need to be actively looking for where the Lord can use us and make ourselves available to the opportunities that He opens for us. The thought has occurred to me many times: "What if I had not answered God's call on my life?"

I am so thankful to be serving the Lord as a chaplain.

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# Christ Came to Meet Our Special Needs: A Personal Testimony of God's Gifts

Rebecca Vaughn

**W**hen I was two years old, my life was changed forever when my mother rescued me from a house fire. Although both of us were severely burned, God has given us thirty years of blessing that seemed impossible then. God has used my disabilities to reach over one million readers in my testimony tract called "Hidden Treasure." There I told the story of how God met my greatest need when He saved my soul when I was six years old. Surviving a near-death experience can bring great lessons, but living life does too. I have been learning to trust God for all my "special needs."

Philippians 4:19 says, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Recently, the Lord met a real need as He answered a specific prayer in a special way for my family and me. After two years of college, I took five years off to learn to drive. Imagine renewing a driver's permit repeatedly for seven years! Everyone at the Department of Motor Vehicles knew me and my companion dog, Charlie, by name. But, the story actually began a few years earlier.

Just a few months before my grandfather died, he helped a paralyzed friend of his obtain a van with a lift. Three years later, I reaped what he had sowed, as others helped me get my first van with a lift. It was a life-changing help to me, but the van's

size made it a challenge for me to maneuver, and in time it became difficult for me to drive because the six-way power seat became loose and wobbly due to wear and tear. After ten years, it would have cost more to replace the seat base than the value of the van.

My mother's health has slowly declined from complications related to her injuries in saving my life. My parents have worked hard to help me prepare for independent living and to serve the Lord with my life. But I had developed intense back pain and was no longer able to drive safely with my right foot. My dad took me to physical therapy twice a week all summer long. Almost two years ago, I began to

pray for a replacement vehicle. There were long hours of training and evaluations of my mobility and reaction time. I prayed for a safer and pain-free way of driving, and the Lord directed my evaluators to approve and train me to drive using only my hands.

This required new, sophisticated—and very expensive—equipment. Our State Vocational Rehabilitation Department agreed to pay for and install all of the electronic equipment, the lowered floor, and the wheelchair lift. The payment for the van itself, however, was left up to me. My family and I were praying and preparing to make large monthly payments for six years.

Six months after the van was purchased, it was fully adapted and ready

for delivery. When I began to drive it, I immediately gained confidence and relief from the pain and discomfort I had experienced with the old equipment. Dad and I had been praying not only for the money to pay for the van but also for some family members who are having spiritual struggles, and one night we asked the Lord to do something to build our faith for more fervent prayer. Two days after we prayed, we received a call from a kind businessman saying that he and his wife were going to cover the cost of the van! Two days after that, the money arrived, and two weeks after that I received the title in the mail, free and clear!

Because of my disabilities, I have special needs. Like everyone, I also have practical needs. I needed the money for my van, but I also needed more faith in God's gift of prayer for others. He truly keeps His promise that "my God shall supply all your need." He has given me a wonderful gift through the love of a very special couple to remind me that He gave me the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. I know that He will always meet my special needs, that I can trust Him, and that I need to depend on Him alone. I have Christ, and He is all I need. I give Him my love and trust, and that is all He asks.

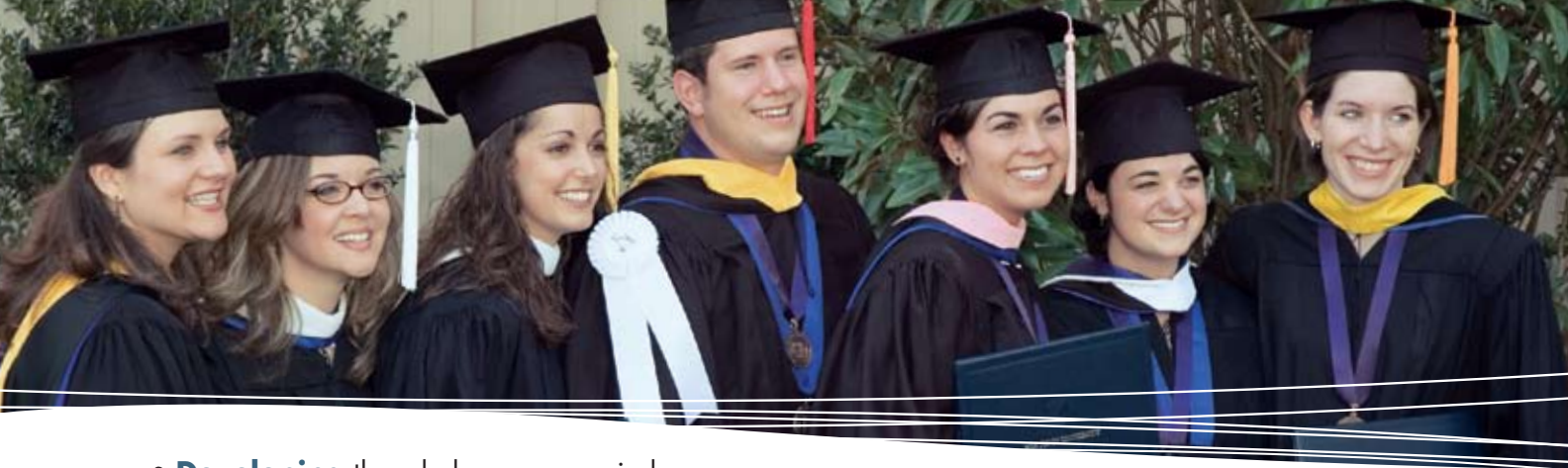
Rebecca Vaughn is a senior Counseling major at Bob Jones University. In 2004 God allowed her to participate in a six-week mission trip to Zambia. After graduation she plans to pursue a graduate degree in counseling and, as the Lord allows, to serve on other mission trips. This article is available as a tract entitled "All of Us Have Special Needs."

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disabilities, I have  
special needs.  
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I also have  
practical needs.*



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