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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

The

KING

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The Kingdom of God

Preston Mayes

Kingdom Offers

Andy Hudson

Purpose of the Temple of God in the Millennium

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The KING & His KINGDOM



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We would like to thank Larry Oats, dean of Maranatha Baptist Seminary, for coordinating this issue.

The Kingdom of God

If someone asked you to summarize the message of the Bible in one sentence, how would you answer? You could say it is about the glory of God. That is true, but the statement does not adequately express the message of Scripture. Nobody summarizing the plot of a work such as *A Christmas Carol* would feel he had adequately described it by saying, "It is about the stinginess of Ebenezer Scrooge." We want to know what happens to him in the story.

Alternatively, one could say that the Bible tells men how to be saved from sin. That is true too, but it again stops short of articulating the full message of the Bible. To use the *Christmas Carol* analogy again we could say, "The story is about the salvation of Scrooge." The problem is that that statement still does not answer all the questions—for instance, what did he do once saved? What was the point of it all?

Without minimizing the importance of the glory of God and His provision of salvation for man, a full accounting of the message of the Bible must answer the question of why man was initially created, how the Fall hindered his ability to perform that function, and how his salvation

will restore him to that original function. It is Scripture's portrayal of the kingdom of God that provides that answer.

"In God's kingdom, which he has set up by creating it, the special role he has assigned to humanity is that we should serve as his 'under-kings,' vice-regents, or stewards. We are to rule over the creation so that God's reputation is enhanced within his cosmic kingdom."¹ At the end of the creation week, God made man and indicated what His role was to be (Gen. 1:26–28). God desired that man have dominion or headship over every other type of creature (fish, fowl, every living thing) inhabiting each of the earth's environments (sea, air, and land). The first recorded act of Adam shows him performing this function as he assigned names to the various animals. He was also to "be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." In other words, man was to have offspring to help him accomplish this goal. Furthermore, man had a role to play in the care of plant life since he was placed in the Garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15).

Naturally, these goals are not ends in themselves. This work is to bring glory to the God who created everything, including man. But even in the church age, every

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This past May our daughter and son-in-law stopped at our home for Mother's Day. They had just finished a Bible translation workshop at Calvary Baptist Church in Maine and were on their way back to their ministry in central Mexico. They were so excited about what God was doing to save souls at Calvary Baptist through "The Exchange Bible Study." My husband got out our last issue of *FrontLine* and said, "I believe these articles describe the same Bible study you said is being used to lead souls to Christ in Maine!" Through our children's testimonies and through the excellent articles written in the March/April issue of *FrontLine*, we were convinced that we needed to begin reaching our lost neighbors and friends through "The Exchange." Today, my husband asked me to order two more March/April issues of . . . *FrontLine* so that we can share this treasure we found with other Christians who have a burden to reach the lost. Thank you for faithfully publishing articles to help us walk in obedience to God's commands.

Larry and Blanche Kaneshiro
San Antonio, TX

I will be praying very much for the Lord's blessings on the national FBFI meeting next week in Iowa. I'm sorry I will not be able to attend. I have had some health issues I have been dealing with. I would appreciate your prayers. . . . Thank you for your love and prayers.

Walter Kirk
Trinity Baptist Church, Salisbury, NC

Thank you for all that you do to make *FrontLine* magazine possible. I have subscribed since the very first issue and still have each one. Many of the articles are now indexed into my personal electronic files so whenever I look up a subject or passage, I am directed to any pertinent *FrontLine* articles.

May I suggest an idea that may help many preachers? In the "Bring . . . the Books" section, outstanding books are reviewed. Would it be possible for these articles to alternate between the examination of biographies and devotional books and a presentation of the many new study helps that are appearing on the market? For example, the Pillar New Testament Commentary set and the New American Commentary set are outstanding series that have been available since the nineties, but I only became aware of them in the last ten years or so. If I had not spent some time at Bob Jones University working on an additional degree or regularly made the thirty-minute drive to the Maranatha Baptist Bible College library, I might not know about these treasures. New commentaries, Bible dictionaries,

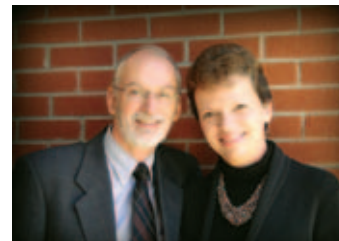
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The Victory Academy for Boys

in Wisconsin has been "challenging teens to academic excellence and Christian character since 1983." Victory's director, Mark Massey,



praises the Lord for His faithful provision for the ministry, as well as for His work in the lives of the young men and their families. Pray for the WildHeart Adventure Camp being held in the summer months.



Herb and Wanda Taylor have a ministry to the Hispanic community. The purpose of Taylor Ministries is "planting Hispanic Baptist (bilingual) churches, partnering

with established churches to reach Hispanics, and preparing Hispanic ministry leaders." They were thrilled that fifteen men at Iglesia Bautista la Fe in Arizona completed a Bible study based on the Christian film *Courageous*. As did the men in the film, these men also promised to remain faithful to the Lord and to their families.

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

The Kingdom of God

(Continued from page 3)

Christian who manages his work well brings glory to God simply by doing so. He manifests the creative genius of God, who made the universe and someone in His image to have dominion over it.

As human kingdoms have a specific location in which their jurisdiction operates, so did the kingdom as constituted by God. The location provided by God was simultaneously useful and beautiful. Humanity was lavishly provided with food from “every herb bearing seed . . . and every tree” (Gen. 1:29). The tree of life also stood in the middle of the Garden of Eden where Adam was placed (Gen. 2:9). The garden itself was a most pleasant environment. The trees were watered by a river that came out of the garden and parted into four separate rivers. The indication that the River Pison travels through the land of Havilah where there is gold, bdellium, and onyx creates the sense of a royal paradise, simultaneously boasting of precious metals, exotic wildlife, and varied plant life in a lush setting. Essentially, the kingdom of God involves “God’s people, under God’s rule, in God’s place.”² And as they lived there in His kingdom, they ruled on His behalf for His glory.

Genesis 1–2 also indicates that God’s kingdom demonstrates His goodness. He is, of course, powerful. Everything that exists was created by the mere word of God, and He did not in any sense tire from the effort. In a sinful world, power may be used or abused, but the text emphasizes that God employed His power only in beneficial ways. The creation of light, separation of water from dry land, creation of plant life, creation of the sun, moon, and stars, and creation of animal life are all followed by the notation “God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The conclusion of the creation account again draws attention to God’s goodness, noting how “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (1:31).

The theme of God’s goodness is further developed in Genesis 2. The Garden of Eden was a very good place, and Adam was told to eat freely from all that was growing there, the lone exception being the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord took a personal interest in Adam and met with him there. The Lord was not distant from him, and they had a perfect relationship. In addition, the Lord created Eve and brought her to Adam. Adam and Eve would have enjoyed a perfect marriage, untainted and unencumbered by sin. To have been given this type of relationship was certainly the exclamation mark on the statement of the goodness of God to them both. When everything is considered, Adam and Eve had every reason to believe that the Lord was benevolent and could indeed be trusted. God had given them a grand role to play in

a magnificent kingdom and everything they needed to oversee that kingdom. All that remained was to see if they would indeed embrace that role within the very good creation of their very good God.

As we know all too well, this kingdom arrangement was undone when Satan managed to create doubt regarding the good intentions of God. Eve was deceived into thinking that God was somehow unfair to them and that ultimate human fulfillment could be found only by disobeying God. Adam then chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and fell into sin. Man lost his unencumbered fellowship with God and was expelled from the Garden of Eden. His access to the tree of life was blocked. Sin had drastic repercussions for all of God’s kingdom since the harmony previously existing between mankind and the rest of the creation was fractured. The role of man as head, ably assisted by his wife as they

ruled together over creation, had been ignored. A serpent had told the woman what to do, and Adam allowed her to lead him into disobedience. From now on, the relationship between husband and wife would be far more difficult than it had been. Their roles, though essentially unchanged, would become far more challenging. For Adam to secure food for his family would become much more trying. The ground, initially meant to provide a place where man could walk and talk with God, would

reclaim the man through death and decay. Hostility would reign between man and the animal kingdom. The woman would give birth in agony.

As we know from both Old and New Testaments, God’s Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ has provided the means to save man from his sin, and we enjoy many of the benefits of that salvation now. God’s ultimate salvation, however, does not involve saving human beings only from their sin; it also involves a full restoration of man to that role he was originally created to fill. It is nothing short of the restoration of God’s kingdom.

Revelation 21–22 outlines the extent of the restoration of God’s kingdom. The Lord will once again fellowship with man in a royal garden. The New Jerusalem is prepared by God Himself and is described as a new Eden. It is constructed of “pure gold, like unto clear glass” (21:18) and adorned with “all manner of precious stones” (21:19). As in Eden, a river proceeds from the throne of the Lamb and waters the tree of life, which is also there, and whose leaves are “for the healing of the nations” (22:2). As in Genesis 1, the role of the sun and moon is noted, only this time there is no need for them. The glory of God provides the light, and there is no need to shut the city gates for there is no night. The kingdom glorifies God as “the glory and honour of the nations” come into it (21:26). The dominion of man as God’s vice-regent is restored, and “they shall reign for ever and ever” (22:5).

It is this restoration of His kingdom toward which God has been working ever since the gospel was stated in embryonic form in Genesis 3:15.

It is this restoration of His kingdom toward which God has been working ever since the gospel was stated in embryonic form in Genesis 3:15. With an understanding of this broad narrative of Scripture, we can see how Israel under the Mosaic Law was constituted to function as a microcosm of God's kingdom. The land of Israel was the place where God dwelled. He placed His presence there in the tabernacle and later the temple, structures also adorned with gold. Though this was certainly something less than the fellowship of God with man in Eden, it did represent His definite personal presence with Israel. If Israel would keep covenant with Him, He would send steady rains and provide abundant food. Deuteronomy 11:12 indicates Canaan is "a land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." The land was provided by Him and specially cared for by Him, just like Eden and ultimately just like the New Jerusalem. Israel would then function as a demonstration for the world of the blessings of submitting to the Lord God and entering into covenant with Him. Israel was, as we might term it, a missionary nation. In a pagan world that worshipped false gods in order to secure agricultural prosperity, they would see that the God of Israel was indeed the true God. Psalm 67:1, 2 speaks of this function as it states, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; . . . That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." Israel was to demonstrate what life under God's rule in His kingdom could be like.

Functionally, the church is similar to Israel in that it

is designed to call lost men to be reconciled to God, to be a part of His kingdom. Of course, it does so much differently. It is scattered throughout the world as opposed to residing in Palestine, and since the Spirit of God now indwells individual believers he is present "where two or three are gathered together in my name" (Matt. 18:20). The church will also be present in the New Jerusalem and enjoy fellowship with God and the saints forever. But the question arises as to how the church and millennial kingdom should be understood to fit into this overall scheme. In what sense is it appropriate to identify the present church with the kingdom of God? If it should be equated with some sort of manifestation of God's kingdom on earth now, to what degree should the church attempt to rule over the creation, especially in government structures controlled largely by people still in active rebellion against God? And what of the millennial kingdom? Is the idea of the worldwide prominence of Israel as outlined in the Old Testament prophets to be dismissed? It is to some of those specific questions that the following articles in this issue of *FrontLine* will now turn.

Preston Mayes is professor of Old Testament at Maranatha Baptist Seminary. He lives in Watertown, Wisconsin, with his wife and three children.



¹ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 37.

² Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002), 55.



The Kingdom in Matthew

Matthew is the only New Testament author to use the phrase “kingdom of heaven.” While the other Gospels frequently reference the kingdom of God, “kingdom of heaven” is unique to Matthew. His extensive use of this phrase (thirty-two times) invites the question, “What does Matthew mean by ‘kingdom of heaven’?”

Two main answers have been given. Early dispensationalists (Scofield, Walvoord, Darby, Larkin, Chafer, Feinberg, and early Ryrie) argued that the kingdom of Heaven could be distinguished from the kingdom of God. Nearly every nondispensationalist and almost all later dispensationalists (Saucy, Toussaint, McClain, later Ryrie) argue that Matthew used “kingdom of heaven” not to indicate a difference between the two kingdoms but to avoid using the divine name.

There are significant exegetical reasons to doubt the first answer. Space does not allow for an extended treatment,¹ but there are two key problems with this distinction. First, Matthew's use of kingdom of Heaven matches the use of kingdom of God in the other Gospels. Out of Matthew's thirty-two uses of kingdom of Heaven, twelve are in narratives which are also recorded in either Mark or Luke (and sometimes both).² In every account, Mark or Luke (or both) uses "kingdom of God" instead of "kingdom of heaven." In Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5–7, Matthew records that the poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of Heaven, while Luke records Jesus as saying that the poor will inherit the kingdom of God. An exegetical reason to doubt the distinction between the kingdom of Heaven and kingdom of God is based on the synonymous parallelism evident in Matthew 19:23, 24. Here Matthew mentions both the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of God, connecting them with "again I say unto you," signaling a repetition of the same idea.

The second possible answer, that Matthew uses kingdom of Heaven in order to avoid using the divine name, is the nearly unanimous view of modern scholarship.³ Rather than using God's name, the Jews would practice circumlocution, substituting another word or phrase for the divine name. For instance, in Mark 14:61 the high priest asks Jesus if He is the "Son of the Blessed?" Luke 15:18 comes closer to Matthew's use when the prodigal, in rehearsing his repentance speech, says, "Father, I have sinned against *heaven*."

According to the circumlocution view, Matthew avoids the use of the divine name for one of two reasons: not to accidentally break the third commandment or to avoid offending the Jews to whom he is writing.⁴ Neither is valid. The avoidance of the divine name is an example of the multiplication of human traditions Jesus argues against in the Gospel (Matt. 15:1–8), and Matthew does not appear reticent to offend the Jews elsewhere within his Gospel.⁵ Matthew's background as a tax collector incensed some Jewish sensibilities. Further, the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) is an attack against the Jewish system of thought that was at the root of the circumlocution habit. If Matthew is using circumlocution to avoid offending the Jews, it appears strange that he is not reticent to offend them in other ways. Another reason circumlocution is a poor explanation for Matthew's use of "kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's expansive use of God's name. If Matthew sought to substitute another term for the divine name, why does he use the divine name fifty-one times? Further, if Matthew is seeking to avoid the formulaic "kingdom of God," why does he fail to substitute "kingdom of heaven" for "kingdom of God" in at least four instances (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43)?⁶

Drawing a Distinction

A careful study of the first Gospel will reveal that the use of the phrase "kingdom of Heaven" is not an isolated

element of Matthew's Gospel; instead, Matthew maintains a theme of heavenly language that orients the reader to the distinction between the kingdom that will come from Heaven and the kingdoms of this world.

The distinction between Heaven and earth is a basic fact in Scripture (Gen. 1:1). The heavens are the abode of God, while the earth is the abode of man (Ps. 115:16). The kings of the earth battle against the God of Heaven (Psalm 2). Most important to Matthew, however, was Daniel 2:44, which reveals that the *God of Heaven* will one day establish a kingdom that will replace the kingdoms of this world. The idea of this kingdom from the God of Heaven quickly caught the hearts of the Hebrew people, who longed for political freedom from Babylon's rule. This longing remained from the time of Daniel all the way to the writing of Matthew's Gospel.⁷

Matthew uses "kingdom of Heaven" to directly correlate the kingdom Jesus will establish with the long-awaited hope promised in Daniel 2–7 and to make a contrast with the kingdoms of this world. Just as Daniel's original audience took hope under the oppressive regimes in the exile, so Matthew's audience could take hope under the oppressive regime of the Romans in their day. Matthew emphasizes the heavenly realm in his Gospel. A simple comparison of the use of "heaven" will show that Matthew speaks of Heaven much more (82 uses) than does Mark (18), Luke (35), or John (18). Matthew speaks of Heaven more than all the other Gospels combined! Further, Matthew connects Heaven with the Father more than twenty times, while the only other Gospel to connect these terms is Mark, and he connects them only once.⁸

It is also clear that Matthew's Gospel centers on the concept of kingdom. Matthew, of all the Gospel writers, references the kingdom the most (55 times). He shows that while Jesus' lineage runs all the way back to Abraham (stressing His Jewish heritage), it runs through David as well (stressing His kingship). The kingdom appears at the most central parts of Matthew's text: the genealogy of Jesus (1:1), the start of John the Baptist's ministry (3:2), the start of Jesus' ministry (4:17), the Sermon on the Mount (5:3, 10; 6:9–13), the kingdom parables (13:1–52; 20:1–16; 22:1–14; 25:1–46), the Passover meal (26:29), and the Great Commission (24:14; 28:18).

Two Major Themes

These two major themes in Matthew—Heaven and kingdom—come together in Matthew's unique phrase "kingdom of heaven." While Matthew connects language concerning heaven and earth in more than twenty instances, Mark does so only twice and Luke only five times. "The language of 'heaven and earth' as contrasting realities is found at the most important theological points throughout the gospel such as in the Lord's Prayer (6:9–10), the

**These two major themes
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Kingdom Offers

How many kingdom offers were made to Israel?

This may seem like a strange question. Given the varying answers, however, it is a question that needs to be considered. The concept of a kingdom offer to national Israel during Christ's earthly ministry is generally part of a traditional dispensational framework. This idea is based on the OT teaching that the coming kingdom was contingent, in part, upon the repentance of the nation of Israel. Toussaint summarizes this OT teaching: "In varying degrees nearly all the writing prophets expressed the Lord's plan of contingency for the coming kingdom. As the prophets each offered pieces of the puzzle portraying Israel's exile and restoration, it became clear that future blessing for the nation would come as a result of the three contingency factors already mentioned (the sovereign blessing by the Lord, through the Spirit of God, on a repentant people)."¹

The purpose of this article is to describe three answers to the kingdom-offer question. J. Dwight Pentecost argues for one kingdom offer.² Alva McClain argues for two kingdom offers.³ Progressive dispensationalists argue for zero kingdom offers.⁴ We'll look at each of these and then end the article with several observations.

Pentecost—One Kingdom Offer

Pentecost argues that there was one offer of the kingdom to Israel by Christ during His earthly ministry.⁵ Christ offered the kingdom to Israel via His message of repentance. Israel refused to repent, thus rejecting the offer of the kingdom. After Israel's rejection of Christ's offer, the "theocratic kingdom offer was withdrawn and postponed."⁶ God suspended the kingdom program and began a church program. The church program is God's focus during the absence of Christ from the earth. Pentecost says, "In the parables (Matt. 13:1–50) the Lord outlines the program in the development of the theocratic kingdom during the period of the King's absence, and announces the

inception of an entirely new, unheralded, and unexpected program—the church (Matt. 16:13–20)."⁷ After God is finished with the program for the church, He will "resume" his program with Israel.⁸

Pentecost affirms that Paul also taught this one offer/two program view of the future kingdom in Romans 11. "Therefore Paul is showing us that after the rejection of Israel, because of the rejection of the offered kingdom, God brought the Gentiles into the place of blessing, which program continues throughout the present age. When that program is ended, God will inaugurate the theocratic kingdom at the return of the Messiah and fulfill all the covenanted blessings."⁹

According to Pentecost, then, the present church program is separate and unrelated to the theocratic kingdom program of Israel. This view leads Pentecost to conclude that there could be no reoffer of the kingdom to the nation of Israel in the early church. In his system the church program with the Gentiles has to be completed before another offer of the kingdom can be presented to the nation of Israel. After the church program is complete, Christ will return and resume the kingdom program. At that time God will reoffer the kingdom to Israel; she will accept, and the kingdom will be instituted.¹⁰

McClain—Two Kingdom Offers

Alva McClain suggests two offers of the kingdom to the nation of Israel. The first offer was made by Christ during His earthly ministry.¹¹ Because of Israel's rejection of this first offer, Christ taught that the kingdom offer would be withdrawn, beginning a parenthesis of time between Christ's first and second comings. During this "parenthesis" Christ would build a new thing—the church.¹² This part of McClain's view is similar to Pentecost's view.

McClain, however, suggests that a second offer of the kingdom was made to the nation of Israel

during the early church.¹³ He responds to those who say a reoffer of the kingdom to Israel in the early church is not possible, saying, "Those who admit a genuine offer of the Kingdom to Israel in the period of the Gospels, could have no logical reason for objecting to a similar offer in the Acts period."¹⁴

McClain views the early church age as a second "probationary time" for national Israel. "The Book of Acts, therefore, presents another one of those probationary periods ordained by divine grace for the nation of Israel. And like a similar period in Old Testament history, when Israel wandered in the wilderness, it lasted approximately one generation. This time, however, the nation failed to enter the promised 'rest' of the Kingdom, not only at the beginning but also at the end of the probationary period."¹⁵

The kingdom was offered to Israel during the early church. Since Christ was in Heaven, this offer was communicated through church saints. Once Israel rejected this second offer, God again withdrew the offer (this time until the Second Coming). God interrupted the kingdom program and focused on the church as a unique body distinct from Israel. McClain states that the second probationary time was divinely appointed and yet implies that it was possible because of a lack of revelation from God.

Certainly, in those early days, the Church was not in possession of the truth, later revealed, that it was destined to be a unique body as distinguished from all other bodies of the saved in all ages. This observation not only fits the historical situation but also harmonizes with the progress of revelation. The shift in preaching emphasis, from the Kingdom as an imminent possibility contingent on Israel's repentance, to the Church as a unique body of believers in which all racial and national distinctions disappear, helps to explain another curious phenomenon in the history of the Acts.¹⁶

According to McClain, therefore, once the church received more revelation from God, she shifted her preaching emphasis from offering the kingdom to Israel to development of the church. Once the second probationary period ended, so did the offer of the kingdom to the nation of Israel.

Progressive Dispensationalists—Zero Kingdom Offers

Progressive dispensationalists do not teach a kingdom offer. They speak of Christ announcing the kingdom¹⁷ and inaugurating the kingdom.¹⁸ Saucy speaks of a rejection of the Messiah but not a rejection of the offered kingdom.¹⁹ "The Pauline illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11 indicates that the early church of the New Testament era viewed itself as a participant with Israel in the promises of God. Israel's rejection of Christ brought a temporary judgment of hardened hearts, but Israel would again turn to Christ and receive salvation (11:25–26)."²⁰

From a progressive dispensationalist's perspective, an offer of the kingdom would not make sense (since an offer makes the coming of the kingdom contingent upon acceptance). If Christ came announcing the kingdom and He

inaugurated it (at least the spiritual aspects of it), the only thing contingent is Israel's participation in the kingdom. Since Israel rejected her Messiah, she is hardened and does not participate in the inaugurated kingdom. God shifts His focus to the church, which is participating fully in the inaugurated spiritual kingdom. The present inaugurated kingdom guarantees that the future kingdom will come in its fullness—again with no need of an offer.²¹ The kingdom in all its fullness will be established at the Second Coming of Christ.²² According to Burns, at that time Israel's hardness will end and she will participate fully in the future kingdom. "The hardening . . . on Israel's part refers to the unknowably mysterious divine aspect of its unbelief (cf. 11:7), a condition that would continue until the inclusion of the fullness of the Gentiles. The temporal implication is that once Gentile fullness is attained, Israel's hardness will end."²³

Progressive dispensationalists do not teach an offer of the kingdom. Since they view the kingdom as "already" present, there is no need for a "re-offer" of the kingdom either.

Observations

First, there are at least two concerns with progressive dispensationalists' view that there was no kingdom offer during Christ's earthly ministry.²⁴ One is an OT concern. Toussaint concludes that "the coming of the promised kingdom was contingent on Israel's response and remains so to this day."²⁵ If Christ established the kingdom in spite of Israel's rejection (failure to repent), Jesus ran roughshod over the OT prophecies that make the coming of the kingdom contingent upon Israel's repentance.

The second is a NT concern. In Acts 1:6 the apostles asked the resurrected Christ if the kingdom would be restored to Israel again. They did not ask if Israel would be granted participant status in the already inaugurated kingdom. Why would the apostles ask whether the kingdom would be restored if it had already been established, especially after Christ just finished teaching them about the kingdom (Acts 1:3)?

Second, both Pentecost and McClain suggest that the church age is a separate program that is unrelated to Israel's kingdom program. It is problematic to completely separate the church from God's kingdom program for Israel. At least two lines of evidence show some connection between the church and the kingdom programs. The first point of evidence is that Paul teaches that salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to make Israel jealous (Rom. 11:11, 14). Part of the function of the church is related to Israel's repentance, which will bring the kingdom. In some sense, God uses the church to advance His program for national Israel.

The second evidence is that Paul continued to preach the kingdom to Israel throughout his ministry.²⁶ It was a pattern in his ministry to go to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16, 17). Paul stated that it was necessary for him to preach the kingdom to the Jews (Acts 13:46). Even toward the end of his ministry Paul preached the kingdom to the "leading men of the Jews" in Rome (Acts 28:17ff). After their rejection Paul

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Already or Not Yet?

Alva McClain and George Ladd

“Kingdom Living” is a popular phrase today. It is usually based on the idea that the church is connected to the kingdom, either because the church has replaced Israel as the people of God or because the kingdom is already here, at least in a spiritual sense.

Divergent Views

In 1959 two books came on the market with divergent views of the kingdom of God. Alva McClain (1888–1968) was the founder of Grace Theological Seminary and served as its president from 1937 to 1962. His volume, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, was a minor modification of the dispensationalism of his day. The other book was George Eldon Ladd’s *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Ladd (1911–82) developed the concept of an “already/not yet” kingdom, or what is also called “Inaugurated Eschatology.” He taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary from 1942 to 1950, when he moved to Fuller Seminary. Ladd was a covenant premillennialist and was critical of dispensational thinking. Both of these men had written concerning their respective positions earlier and were aware of the other’s position.

McClain noted that there are two “almost contradictory” discussions about the kingdom in the Bible. Some passages present the kingdom as something which has always existed, but others indicate that it has a historical beginning (compare Ps. 10:16 with Dan. 2:44). Some passages present the kingdom as universal in scope, yet others as a local rule established on earth (compare Ps. 103:19 with Isa. 24:23). Scripture presents the kingdom as the rule of God directly, without an intermediary but also as the rule of God through a Mediator who is a channel between God and man (compare Ps. 59:13 with Ps. 2:4–6). Some passages describe the kingdom as something wholly future, while other passages see the kingdom as a present reality (compare Zech. 14:9 with Ps. 29:10). Finally, the kingdom of God is viewed as an unconditional rule arising from the sovereign nature of God, yet is also seen as a kingdom based on a covenant made by God with man (compare Dan. 4:34, 35 with Ps. 89:27–29).

To solve this interpretive problem, most early dispensationalists argued for two separate kingdoms. Men such as C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles C. Ryrie, and J. Dwight Pentecost distinguished the kingdom of Heaven from the kingdom of God, the former being the Messianic, mediatorial, Davidic millennial reign of Christ and the latter being the universal reign of God over all creation or, more frequently, the spiritual reign of God in all believers. Others rejected the difference between “kingdom of Heaven” and “kingdom of God” but held to two kingdoms with the same basic concepts—an earthly temporal millennium and a heavenly eternal reign. Both Ladd and McClain modified these approaches to the kingdom. McClain argued that there is only one kingdom of God, but it is seen in two aspects or phases. He suggested that the terms “universal” and “mediatorial” are the most appropriate to distinguish between these two phases (pp. 19–21).¹ McClain viewed the “universal” aspect of the kingdom to be God’s sovereignty over all aspects of divine creation, including all of mankind. Part of the universal kingdom is the mediatorial aspect. This is first found historically in Abraham, for all mankind had to recognize Abraham as the one chosen of God, and later in the kingdom of Israel and especially in the Davidic covenant.

The Gospel of the Kingdom and The Greatness of the Kingdom

In *The Gospel of the Kingdom* Ladd argued for a single kingdom of God with four important elements. First, the kingdom is “a present spiritual reality.” Second, it is also an inheritance “which God will bestow upon his people when Christ comes in glory.” Third, the kingdom is a realm into which the followers of Jesus Christ have already entered. Fourth, the kingdom is a future realm that believers enter when Christ returns (pp. 16–17). First and foremost to Ladd, a kingdom is “the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king” (p. 19). Therefore, the kingdom of God is first a reference to God’s rule and sovereignty and *not* to the realm in which He rules or the people over whom He rules (pp. 20–21). This was the base for Ladd’s “already/not yet.” The kingdom is *already* here in a spiritual sense,

for Christ is the King and rules in the hearts of men, but the kingdom is *not yet* here, for Christ is not yet reigning physically over the world. The basis of Ladd's definition of the kingdom was a lexical study of the word rather than a thorough study of the word in its various contexts.

McClain countered this approach in *The Greatness of the Kingdom* in a lengthy (531-page) exposition of almost every use of "kingdom" in the Bible. He argued that a "kingdom" requires three elements: a ruler, a realm, and a rulership. The requirement of a ruler is primary. A ruler may withdraw from his realm or temporarily cease ruling, but when this happens the kingdom is no longer present. "We can as little have a reign with no kingdom as a kingdom without one who reigns" (p. 17). McClain criticized Ladd's interpretation of Luke 19:11–27. Ladd had argued that the nobleman went into a far country to receive only the "authority to rule," but not a domain or subjects over which to rule. McClain argued that the parable speaks not only of the ruler, but also of the king's citizens (v. 14) and his judgment on the rebels (v. 27); these were the "realm" and "rulership."

McClain, in agreement with most dispensationalists, argued that the Millennium is a single, thousand-year reign. It is either present or it is not. Ladd disagreed, arguing that the kingdom has two aspects, the spiritual, which is already, and the physical, which is not yet. How important is this? Does it make any difference if the one kingdom, the millennial kingdom, the Davidic kingdom, is already here or not? Ladd was a strong premillennialist, but he was also a post-tribulationist. For instance, he argued that in the Olivet Discourse Jesus spoke of the *already* destruction of Jerusalem and the *not yet* Antichrist. Similarly, the Beast in Revelation 13 was the *already* city of Rome and the *not yet* Antichrist (pp. 36–37). Post-tribulationism is not a necessary outcome of the already/not yet concept; one can argue for the *already* spiritual aspect of the Millennium and hold to a pretribulational rapture. The *already* concept, however, does make a post-tribulational position more tenable. If the church is already in the kingdom, then a literal seven-year tribulation period, which has neither church nor kingdom, seems to be a significant interruption. It makes more theological sense that the church, which is already in the kingdom, is also already in the tribulation, and when the Lord comes, the church moves immediately into the physical kingdom.

Difficulties

Another difficulty with the already/not yet position is its acceptance of ongoing spiritual gifts. McClain argued that the reason for the decline in the occurrences of the spiritual gifts in the later chapters of the Book of Acts was because the Jews, who had rejected Jesus' offers of the kingdom (see Andy Hudson's article, "Kingdom Offers,"

in this issue), continued to reject Jesus as their Messiah. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would come performing miracles to verify His identity. When the Jews rejected Him, the result was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which was a clear and visible end of their ability to carry on the Mosaic liturgy. If Jesus' ascent to Heaven was also His ascent to the throne of David and the inauguration of the Millennium (at least in a spiritual sense), then the spiritual gifts should continue throughout the entire spiritual kingdom.

John Wimber, director of the Vineyard Movement and advocate of the Signs and Wonders Movement, was greatly influenced by Ladd's theology.² The ultimate purpose of the kingdom of God in Ladd's view is to finally overthrow Satan. Since the kingdom is already here, however, the kingdom today must also deliver men from satanic

forces. In his *A Theology of the New Testament* Ladd stated, "Our purpose [for this book] is primarily to show that the theology of the kingdom of God is essentially one of conflict and conquest over the kingdom of Satan."³ Ladd argued that Matthew 12:28–29 is "the strongest statement" about "the Kingdom of God as a present spiritual reality. . . . In these two verses is embodied the essential theology of the kingdom of God."⁴

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house (Matt. 12:28, 29).

Because Ladd believed that the kingdom of God is primarily concerned with defeating Satan and his forces in order to redeem men from their power, he was able to conclude that the gospel is "assaulting the kingdom of Satan" (p. 137) and that the church is "the instrument of God's dynamic rule in the world to oppose evil and the powers of Satan in every form of their manifestation" (p. 121). "What is the Gospel of the Kingdom? . . . It is this: That God is now acting among men to deliver them from bondage to Satan. . . . The exorcism of demons is proof that the Kingdom of God has come among men and is at work among them. The casting out of demons is itself a work of the Kingdom of God" (p. 47). It is easy to see how Ladd's theology supports the modern Signs and Wonders Movement.

Ladd and McClain agreed that Jesus offered the kingdom to the nation of Israel. Traditional dispensationalism argued that the offer of the kingdom in the Gospels was legitimate but was withdrawn upon the rejection of their Messiah. McClain argued that the offer of the kingdom in the Gospels and *Acts* was legitimate but was withdrawn upon the rejection of their Messiah. Ladd argued that the offer of the kingdom in the Gospels was legitimate, but the offer was actually an announcement of a different,

Traditional dispensationalism argued that the offer of the kingdom in the Gospels was legitimate but was withdrawn upon the rejection of their Messiah.

new, spiritual form of the kingdom and that the Jews had no option to reject it. God instituted the kingdom, and all believers are now part of this spiritual form of the kingdom. This form of the kingdom is so “unobtrusive” that it “can work among men and never be recognized by the crowds” (p. 55). The Old Testament view of the kingdom, however, indicated that the kingdom will permeate the world and the Messiah will rule and reign with a rod of iron.

The concept of the already/not yet is tied to the priority of the New Testament. Ladd criticized McClain for his failure to prioritize the New Testament. Ladd argued that McClain could claim that the kingdom is future “not from an inductive exegesis of the New Testament but from the Old Testament.” The Old Testament prophets spoke of an earthly kingdom centered in Israel under a King from the line of David. Since McClain took a literal view of the Old Testament, he concluded that the Davidic Kingdom will be earthly, visible, and universal. Ladd complained that the New Testament statements on the kingdom were interpreted by McClain in light of the Old Testament rather than in light of the New Testament. Ladd declared, “This brings us to the fundamental dispensational hermeneutic in contrast with that of classical theology. Classical theology recognizes progressive revelation and insists that the final meaning of the Old Testament is to be discovered as it is reinterpreted by the New Testament. . . . We must conclude that dispensationalism can be no substitute for classic theology because its false hermeneutic prohibits it from recognizing the true character of the kingdom of God as set forth in the New Testament. Dispensationalism is an Old Testament theology which is unable to fit New Testament theology into its system.”⁵ This writer has great concern with an approach to Scripture that expects and defends the belief that the Old Testament must be *reinterpreted* by the New Testament. In the New Testament is seen the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies but not a new meaning. Ladd’s argument that the Old Testament cannot stand by itself and, in essence, that the Old Testament saint could not understand a promise or prophetic declaration until the New Testament added more information or clarified the prophecy puts the Old Testament saint at a great disadvantage, for he did not know that he could not know what a prophecy actually meant.

The New Testament describes the church as being “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27), not as the kingdom. It speaks of a church with Christ as the head (Eph. 1:22, 23), not as its King. While McClain modified the dispensationalism of his day, he maintained the traditional dispensational view that

the Millennium, both spiritual and physical, is future and universal. Ladd, rejecting dispensationalism but accepting the concept of a future millennial kingdom, changed the definition of “kingdom” and interjected the concept that the kingdom is already here, in a mild, invisible, spiritual sense, thus placing the church into a spiritual millennium and linking church and Israel in a way unacceptable to traditional dispensationalism.



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¹ All page references to McClain (in parentheses) are from Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH, 1959). Page references to Ladd are from George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

² “George Eldon Ladd’s theological writings on the kingdom of God convinced John intellectually that all the Biblical gifts of the Holy Spirit should be active in the church.” <http://www.vineyardusa.org/site/about/vineyard-history>

³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 48.

⁴ Ladd, *A Theology*, 63.

⁵ Roy Beacham, “Progressive Dispensationalism: An Overview and Personal Analysis,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 15–16.

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Purpose of the Temple of God in the Millennium

“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). Since Paul penned these words, Christians immediately recognize the significance of the proposition that God now dwells with men individually and internally, rather than restricting Himself to a fixed location—the temple—corporately and externally. In taking 1 Corinthians 6:19 to heart, modern-day Christians would do well to learn how the temple fits into our broader theology. In this article, we will look at how the temple fits into our eschatology, and particularly what purpose the temple will serve in the millennial kingdom.

Ezekiel 40–48 gives us the clearest overall picture of the future temple's form and function. It also raises several questions. If the Mosaic sacrificial system has been fulfilled in Christ, why would a temple with sacrifices be required in the age to come (Ezek. 46:4, 5)? This vision is specifically directed to Israel (Ezek. 40:4), so does the Church fit into the temple, its worship, and its service structures (Ezek. 44:10, 11; Rev. 20:4)? If Christ referred to His own body as the temple (John 2:19) and He will be present as the reigning Prince (Rev. 20:4), why would a physical structure even be necessary?

These questions all directly revolve around the work and person of Christ. He is the one new element that was not directly present in the Mosaic tradition. With Christ being the central focus in the millennial temple, there are three predominant but overlapping themes which arise: (1) Atonement for an unholy condition, (2) the presence of God Himself, and (3) the levels of separation God requires in light of atonement and the presence of God. These three areas will need to be addressed in order to understand the purpose of the millennial temple.

Atonement

Christ's ultimate and perfect sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 9:26) is a fundamental issue that makes understanding the purpose of the millennial temple a challenge, particularly in light of the continuing sacrifices (Ezek. 40:38–43; 43:18–27). The sacrifices mentioned in Ezekiel overlap with those instituted in the Mosaic system. Sacrifices found in both systems include the burnt offering (Lev. 1:3; Ezek. 40:39), sin offering (Lev. 4:2, 3; Ezek. 40:39), trespass offering (Lev. 5:6; Ezek. 40:39), freewill offering (Num. 29:39; Ezek. 42:13), peace offering (Lev. 3:1; Ezek. 43:27), and the drink offering (Exod. 29:40; Ezek. 45:17). All of the major sacrifices are present, as well as some secondary aspects such as the feasts for Passover (Lev. 23:4–8; Ezek. 45:21) and the New Moon, offering requirements for the fat and blood from the sacrifices (Lev. 3:16, 17; Ezek. 44:7, 15), a portion of the offering set aside for tithes to the priests (Exod. 29:27; Ezek. 44:29, 30), as well as a portion of the land set aside for the priests (Num. 18:8; Ezek. 45:1). While there are some variations (such as in the Passover sacrifices when Exod. 12:21–28 and Num. 28:16–25 are compared with Ezek. 45:21–24), many of the same elements exist to give both temple sacrificial systems the same feel and appearance.

All physical sacrifices, past or future, serve their purpose by directing attention toward the object to which they point (Heb. 9:9; 10:1). In this case it is the perfect fulfillment in Christ's work on the cross. This, however, still does not completely explain why those sacrifices are performed, even symbolically, while the genuine Sacrifice is present. This article will examine the purpose of the temple in light of how God displays His presence through the physical edifice of the temple and subsequently how the temple creates and implies elements of separation from God.

Presence

One of the primary aspects of the tabernacle in Israel—and later the temple—was that God would have a physical

location to “dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). If Christ is “Emmanuel” (Matt. 1:23), the logical question to ask is, why would there need to be a temple in the millennium since the Son of God would be present and dwelling with them? During Christ's life, He visited the temple as a child (Luke 2:46), so there is no apparent contradiction with Christ being present as a member of the Trinity and also having a specific place of worship dedicated to God as well. Interestingly, Christ makes reference to the fact that He is higher than the temple (Matt. 12:6) but does not go so far as to say that the temple is for Him. In the millennium, God does not appear to be directly present Himself (Ezek. 43:7) but continues to utilize the temple as a focal connection point with His people as He did in the Mosaic system. There is another change that comes after the millennial reign of Christ and after the removal of sin from the earth. At that time the temple has been removed and God dwells fully and completely with no need for a building to contain and separate His presence in any way (Rev. 21:22).

God the Father and Christ the Son have different roles in the millennial temple. Some of this might relate to Christ's functional service as priest (Heb. 2:17; 5:1; Ezek. 44:2; 45:17) and supreme administrator (Isa. 2:4; Ezek. 45:9–12). In Ezekiel's vision God will continue to use the temple as a representation of His presence among the human race during the millennium (Ezek. 48:35). Christ, as the reigning prince, will be the supreme ruler over the nations of the world as the mediator between God and man for all things secular and sacred. Clarifying the role of both the Father and Son in relation to the temple is vital when attempting to understand the role of the temple as a place of worship and access to God.

Separation

After Christ's death and the rending of the veil of the temple (Matt. 27:51), there has been a change in how God relates to mankind. Now we can directly approach God through Christ (Heb. 4:16) rather than through the multitude of layers instituted by the sacrificial system. Since there was a change, where do the temple and its subsequent offerings in the millennial kingdom fit? First, Jews were given special access to God's presence because they were charged with constructing, possessing, and maintaining the temple. Second, the Mosaic sacrificial system was to keep man's sinfulness separate from God's holiness. It appears that God will continue to distance His presence from men to some extent simply by having a temple in place, but this concept needs to be unpacked. In attempting to identify the roles of Jews and Gentiles as well as to understand the level of holy separation within the context of the millennial temple, there are a few basic elements to consider.

In Ezekiel's vision of the temple are both an outer and inner court (Ezek. 40:17, 32), emulating both the tabernacle (Exod. 27:9–18) and the temple (1 Kings 6:1–5). These areas restricted access to God's presence. Minimally, the various courts would call to mind the seriousness of approaching God and may even give pause to ensure one's heart is right with God before approaching further. Additionally, Christ's actions during the Passover (Matt. 21:13, 14) prior to His

crucifixion are significant. After cleansing the temple of the greedy moneychangers, He took the ritually unclean (Lev. 13:45, 46), who were not permitted to serve in the temple, and healed them. Christ removed the individual, physical limitations that had been a means of separation from God's holiness (race, gender, physical deformity, etc.). Yet in spite of this access, Ezekiel's vision reveals limitations to accessing God via the temple. Ezekiel 44:9 states, "No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary." This verse presents a slight challenge to the proposition above. God's requirement for a physical representation of the internal condition is nothing new. It would seem that this division would create another physical barrier. Given the fact that Christ is present and God dwells within the temple, this requirement should be a joyful act of worship rather than a dreaded duty. Beyond that, someone missing either of these elements appears to be denied access to the temple. But again, both elements can be remedied without special intervention rather than becoming permanent restrictions prohibiting one from drawing near to God (John 4:21–24).

Beyond the removal of the seemingly arbitrarily physical restrictions, God's holiness and man's sinfulness are still factors. While the role of the priests has always been to teach and exemplify holy living (Lev. 10:10, 11; Ezek. 44:23), the role of the temple has been to create a barrier of separation between the "holy and the unholy" (Lev. 15:31; Num. 16:9). It does not appear to be any different in the Millennium (Ezek. 42:20). In the Millennium, the new Heaven and new earth will not yet have come; sin (Rev. 19:11) and death (Ezek. 40:39; 44:25; Rev. 19:21) will still be present. Christ has conquered death (1 Cor. 15:56, 57), but it will not be completely removed and destroyed until after His millennial reign (Rev. 20:14). Nevertheless, God will give unprecedented peace during this time (Hag. 2:9; Zech. 6:13), and it will be a time of exceptionally holy living due to the rule of Christ and the binding of Satan. With Satan's release, the last vestige of sin will strike out at God, only to be permanently quelled (Rev. 20:7–15). Since death is the product of sin, it comprises the foundation of what God regards as unholy; while sin remains, a barrier must

also remain to distance sinful mankind from the direct presence of God. Thus, in the millennial kingdom, God has chosen the temple as the means by which all men can come to know and worship Him until the full restoration of creation takes place (Rev. 21). To that end the temple is, to those living during the millennium, a reminder that sin and death create separation from God. Ezekiel 43:10 states, "Son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities."

Culmination

Ultimately, even the millennial temple is just a shadow of the heavenly reality that will come after the thousand-year reign of Christ. Only then will the temple be removed completely (Rev. 21:22, 23). Until then the presence of the temple is a reminder that there once was a wall between us and God, but it is in the process of permanent removal (Matt. 27:46–51). And even though God will remove sin and death at some point in the future, there will still be reminders of our past rebellion against God and its consequences (John 20:20). During the millennium Christ finally fulfills all of the remaining prophecies as the ruling and reigning Son of David serving as High Priest before God (Hag. 6:4–7; Heb. 7:26–28). God's temple in the millennium highlights the fact that our sins have been removed and that consequently we have the ability to come into His presence. The writer of Hebrews in 12:28, 29 gives an appropriate response in light of our brief study: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire." Until God brings the final judgment, the purpose of the temple is to direct our lives to this end by reminding us of the consequence of sin through sacrifice, allowing us access to God's presence, and confronting us with the reality that God's holiness demands that we are separated until we attain perfection.

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Scriptural Tests for Modern Dilemmas

Every Christian is faced with situations about which he must make decisions, but about which there seems to be no clear Scriptural statement. Many of the issues we face are not addressed or identified in the Bible by name. How, then, can I know what to do when faced with such questions?

I must first ask whether or not there is a principle taught in Scripture that I can apply to my situation. For those sincerely interested in knowing the will of God, the following tests should be applied. Failing any of the tests, the matter in question should be considered unacceptable.

These Scriptural principles are timeless. However, their application may change as the immediate context or circumstances change.

1. The Identity Test

A. Will it affect my identity as a child of God?

“Child”= born one, one sharing the nature of the parent.

Romans 8:29: *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed* [inwardly and outwardly] *to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Deuteronomy 14:1, 2: *Ye are the children of the Lord your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any*

baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.

B. Is it identified in the minds of others with that which is evil or wrong—does it communicate a wrong message about me to others?

Romans 12:1, 2: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to* [poured into the mold of] *this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

2. The Stumbling Test

A. Will it offend the conscience of a sincere Christian brother?

Romans 14:13, 15: *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. . . . But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat* [that which I may rightfully choose to do], *now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat* [exercise of my personal rights], *for whom Christ died.*

Romans 14:20, 21: *For meat [exercise of personal rights] destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but **it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.** It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.*

1 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 11, 12: *Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and **their conscience being weak is defiled [stained, made dirty]. . . . But take heed lest by any means **this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.**** . . . And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, **and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.***

B. Will it cause someone whether saved or unsaved to stumble?

1 Corinthians 10:25–29: *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of **them that believe not** bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, **eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake:** for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: **Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of **another man's conscience?*****

3. The Testimony Test

A. Can it easily be construed to be evil or wrong?

1 Thessalonians 5:22: *Abstain from **all appearance of evil.***

B. Will it cast a negative shadow on the good I am doing?

Romans 14:16: *Let not then your good **be evil spoken of.***

4. The Edifying Test

A. Does it contribute positively to my own spiritual upbuilding and strength?

1 Corinthians 10:23: *All things are lawful for me, but **all things are not expedient** [advantageous, profitable, useful]: all things are lawful for me, but **all things edify** [build up, help, strengthen] **not.***

Hebrews 12:1: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,** and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

B. Does it contribute positively to the upbuilding and strengthening of others?

Romans 15:2: *Let every one of us please **his neighbour for his good to edification.***

Romans 14:19, 20: *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and **things wherewith one may edify another.** For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but **it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.***

5. The Clear Conscience Test

A. Is it doubtful?

Romans 14:23: *And he that doubteth is damned [self-condemned of his own conscience] if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for **whatsoever is not of faith is sin.***

B. Can I do it without reservation of conscience?

Romans 14:23: *And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for **whatsoever is not of faith is sin.***

Acts 24:16: *And herein do I exercise myself, to have **always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.***

6. The "Others First" Test

A. Is it pleasing (helpful, unoffensive, acceptable) to others?

Romans 15:1–3: *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and **not to please ourselves.** Let every one of us **please his neighbour for his good to edification.** For **even Christ pleased not himself;** but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.*

B. Does it consider the feelings and welfare of others first?

1 Corinthians 10:24, 33: *Let no man seek his own, but every man **another's wealth** [benefit, welfare]. . . . Even as **I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit,** but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*

7. The Enslavement Test

A. Is it addictive?

1 Corinthians 6:12: *All things are **lawful** [allowed, permitted] unto me, but all things are not **expedient** [advantageous, profitable, useful]: all things are lawful for me, but **I will not be brought under the power** [mastery] of any.*

B. Will it bring me into bondage?

2 Peter 2:19: *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for **of whom [or what] a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.***

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

How Valuable to Me Is My Bible Today?

What would it feel like today not to own a Bible? What if I knew hardly anyone who did? What would I be willing to do to have one for myself?

Six Years and Fifty Miles?

One of the most heartwarming true stories I've ever read along this line is the experience of a determined Welsh girl named Mary Jones. Born just after our Revolutionary War (1784) into the home of a poor Christian weaver, Mary exhibited a tender heart toward the Lord even as a child. At six, she insisted on walking the rough trails with her mother to the humble Lord's Day services two miles distant in the home of a farmer named Evans. For her, the highlight of every service was the Bible reading. Bibles translated into Welsh were few, and, if available at all, impossibly costly. Jacob and Molly Jones had never owned one, and Mary could not have read it if they had. By the time she was eight, she still could not read a syllable.

But the child's hunger for Scripture was intense. When a grammar school opened in a neighboring village, she begged to enroll and learn to read. Though Mary's help in their little cottage industry was desperately needed, Jacob and Molly sacrificially encouraged her attending. Shortly she could read, and soon thereafter she began to walk the four-mile round trip to the Evans farm on Saturday afternoons to read the Bible for herself. One can only imagine her feelings that first day when Mrs. Evans led her into the room where she and her husband's prized copy was kept on a center table, covered reverently with a clean, white cloth. After kindly admonishing the

child to be careful not to tear its pages, Mrs. Evans left the room, and for the first time in her life, Mary Jones was alone with a Bible. The portions she read that day included the fifth chapter of John where her eyes fell upon the words, *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* It was then that a fervent passion took possession of her heart. Upon leaving the Evans home she exclaimed to herself right out loud, *I must have a Bible of my own! I must have one, if I have to save up for it for ten years!* By the time she arrived home, she'd formed a simple, child's plan.

She began to look for ways to salvage rare free moments for taking on little jobs for neighbors. She eagerly accepted babysitting, laundering, gathering sticks for fuel, mending and patching clothing, and anything else she could do for even a pittance. Jacob made a rough little money box with a hole in the lid into which she joyfully dropped her tiny earnings—a farthing and halfpenny at a time, even occasionally a copper coin.

Meantime, she was trekking the miles back and forth to school and back and forth to the Evans farm; learning to read and then reading the Bible. Soon she was memorizing entire chapters to share with her parents. And all the while she was saving coins, denying herself every indulgence, and often praying, *The time shall come when I shall have my Bible. Dear Lord, let the time come quickly.*

In the spring of 1800, after six long years of saving, the day at last arrived when enough small coins lay in the rude box to afford a Bible. But now the challenge was to locate one. Her father had no idea where to look. Even the local pastor did not know where a Welsh Bible might be obtained, except perhaps from a minister named Thomas Charles. But Rev. Charles lived in Bala, twenty-five miles down the valley from Mary's village. And the pastor added that he feared that whatever Bibles Mr. Charles might once have owned were probably long since sold.

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

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Undeterred, Mary rose one morning, washed and dressed with care, stowed her only shoes (too precious to be worn until she reached town) in a bag around her neck, and after family prayer set out on the journey that it was essential to complete by nightfall. (Today her

Since she had been eight years old she had been longing to be able to read a Bible. For six years she had worked, scrimped, saved, and prayed. She had walked twenty-five miles barefoot in a single day. She now needed to walk the same twenty-five miles back home, again in a single day. But finally, at the age of sixteen, she at last owned a Bible!

twenty-five-mile route is mapped for Christian tourists who wish to walk at least part of it for the sake of experiencing a little of the daunting trek she undertook.) Accustomed though she was to going about barefoot, the eighteenth-century rocky paths and the length of the trip blistered and cut her feet. But by evening she managed to arrive at the home of a respected Methodist pastor, David Edwards, where she was given a meal, a night's lodging, and the promise of an introduction to Rev. Charles the next day.

Early the next morning Edwards knocked on Charles's study door. He and Mary were invited in, and Mary told her story to the minister. At first Charles was elated at hearing of her schooling, her trudging back and forth to the Evans farm to read the Bible, and her recitation of the Bible passages she'd memorized. But his delight turned to deep sadness when he was compelled to reveal that the consignment of Welsh Bibles that he'd received from London the previous year was completely sold out, except for a few copies already promised. Even more disappointing, the society that had been supplying the Bibles had decided not to resume their printing. Mary was overcome and could only sob with her face buried in her hands.

Moments passed, the silence broken only by her crying. Finally, Mr. Charles stood up, walked over, and laying a tender hand upon her bowed head, said in a trembling voice, *My child, I see you **must** have a Bible, difficult as it is for me to spare you one. It is impossible, yes, simply impossible to refuse you.* Mary couldn't speak, but her joyous upturned face of inexpressible joy brought tears to the eyes of both men. Rev. Charles turned to a book-cupboard, opened a door, drew out a precious Welsh Bible, and with great emotion placed it in her hands. Since she had been eight years old she had been

longing to be able to read a Bible. For six years she had worked, scrimped, saved, and prayed. She had walked twenty-five miles barefoot in a single day. She now needed to walk the same twenty-five miles back home, again in a single day. But finally, at the age of sixteen, she at last owned a Bible!

Mary died in 1866 at the age of eighty-two. Today her Bible rests in the archives of the British and Foreign Bible Society. In her own handwriting are the words, *I bought this in the 16th year of my age. . . . The Lord may give me grace, Amen.*

Now, My Turn

You and I already own Bibles—perhaps quite a few of them. We don't have to walk two miles today to be able to read one (and then two miles back!). Nevertheless, we're confronted every day with the identical question that Mary Jones was. It's our turn to answer it. How valuable to me is my Bible today? Would you take just a second or two and ask yourself that question again, but very pointedly this time? *How valuable to me is my Bible today?* Maybe it would be good to ask it one more time. *How valuable to me is my Bible today?*

I've had to ask myself something like that many times, though not always in the same words. Generally the ones I use are suggested to me by certain statements I come across in my daily Scripture reading. Here are the ones that tend to punch my pause buttons and to make me question myself.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:10).

The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver (Ps. 119:72).

Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold (Ps. 119:127).

I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food (Job 23:12).

What I notice immediately in these statements is that the Bible is compared to things of great value.

- (1) things of intrinsic value, such as gold and silver,
- (2) things that give exquisite delight, such as honey and the honeycomb,
- (3) things that are vital necessities, such as food.

If my values are the same as God's, when it comes to things of intrinsic value, pleasure value, and even necessity value, His words are *more to be desired . . . sweeter than . . . better than . . . loved above . . . and more than any of these.* Or are they? I mean, are they to me?

Let's test our Bible's value intrinsically. Even as I write this morning, gold is trading on the commodities market at right about \$1600 an ounce. That's right, not a *pound*, but an *ounce*, the weight of only about eleven US pennies or of five quarters. What might I be willing to do to make an extra \$1600 in the next two months?

To get an ounce of gold? Take on a part time job? Get up an hour earlier five days a week? Skip my church's Wednesday night prayer meetings? Work on Sundays?

Many professing Christians make an easy, thoughtless trade of their early mornings, their Wednesday evenings, or their Sundays for just a little bit more money. They may not give sixty seconds to calculating what that will cost in terms of time forever lost for reading and studying their Bibles or for hearing God's Word preached. God's Word is *not* more valuable to them than gold and silver, let alone *thousands of gold and silver*. They cannot say, they wouldn't dare to say, *more to be desired . . . sweeter than . . . better than . . . loved above money*—or running, or biking, or playing soccer, or Facebook, or a thousand other personally chosen priorities that push their Bibles to the bottom of their want-to-do lists day after day after day after day. There's just no other way to explain their nearly Bibleless lives. They simply don't value the Scripture the way the Scripture values itself. It's light and weightless to them. It isn't worth even an ounce of whatever else they're after. Now why not?

Experiencing the Pleasure

There's an answer to that, at least in my own experience. I think that one of the main reasons that the Bible doesn't easily tip people's scales with way more intrinsic value than lots of other things is that it hasn't yet given them more *delight* than those pleasure-giving alternatives. In other words, people's estimate of its *intrinsic* value is directly proportional to their experience of its *delight* value. If lifting weights or running marathons or surfing the Internet or Facebooking my friends gives me more pleasure value than the Bible does, its intrinsic value—to me at least—goes way down. It may be worth more than money to somebody else, but not yet to me. My head may even concede that it ought to be the most valuable thing I possess, but my pleasure-seeking heart won't agree. And when it comes to what part of me makes the final call on what I'm going to do with my time, my head or my heart, my pleasure-loving heart wins almost every time.

So I think that most people have to experience the Bible as honey before they'll value it more than money. But how?

A child doesn't know the value of money. He'll hand over a dollar as soon as a dime for whatever it is he wants to buy. So we inform him of the difference. But he'll have to experience it for himself—and he will the first time he discovers that one dollar will buy him more than even nine dimes will. It's then that he starts to *experience* that a dollar is way better than a dime.

This is the kind of thing that the Scripture is talking about when it says that it is *sweeter than honey*. In other words, to be persuaded that it is of more intrinsic value than gold and silver, one needs to experience that it is has more *delightful* value than honey. Intrinsic values mean nothing in the abstract. But they can get

concrete real fast.

For instance, Jonathan Edwards, America's foremost eighteenth-century New England pastor, preached a message on "Spiritual Understanding" in which he attempted to help his people understand the difference between merely *notional* knowledge of God's Word and delightful *spiritual* knowledge of it.

If lifting weights or running marathons or surfing the Internet or Facebooking my friends gives me more pleasure value than the Bible does, its intrinsic value—to me at least—goes way down. It may be worth more than money to somebody else, but not yet to me. My head may even concede that it ought to be the most valuable thing I possess, but my pleasure-seeking heart won't agree.

It is not he that has heard the long description of the sweetness of honey that can be said to have the greatest understanding of it, but he that has tasted it. If a man should read whole volumes upon this one subject, the taste of honey, he would never get so lively an apprehension of it as he had that had tasted, though it were but from the tip of his rod.*

This explains why an adult man or a woman who grew up in a Christian home and attended a good church may know a great deal about the Bible but value it very little by comparison with a newly saved teenager growing up in the home of lost parents. We might tend to think that the difference is simply that the newly saved teenager is excited about the Bible because to him it's new. He's not been around it all of his life, so he's curious about it. It's novel to him.

There's no doubt some truth to that. But when that teenager's intense interest *persists* month after month and year by year, there's more to it than that. He (or she) is undoubtedly *experiencing* the Bible to be like honey. Or, to change the illustration, like colors or sounds. Edwards suggested that the knowledge that most people have about spiritual things is *very much like the knowledge of those that are born blind have of colors from the descriptions of them, or one born deaf has of sounds*. But the knowledge that those indwelt and enlightened by the Spirit of God have is like ecstasy over the colors of a sunset that only those who have eyes can know, or like exhilaration in musical sounds that only those who have ears can know. There is a mental knowing which many have of the Bible. It often estimates the Bible to be of very little worth. But there is

an inexpressibly intense emotional knowing of the Bible that compounds its intrinsic worth immeasurably. What is it that evokes that emotion?

I say this is supposed to work like this for God's true children. But what about when it doesn't? Well, if you've never known this experience, you would need to ask yourself straight out whether or not you truly possess new life in Christ. The longer I'm in the ministry, the more I am persuaded that the explanation to the spiritual apathy or dissatisfaction of many people in our churches is that they are simply not regenerated. Their appetite for the things of the flesh is high. Their appetite for the things of the Spirit is low or nearly nonexistent. Perhaps many of these folks don't possess the nature necessary to experience the value of God's Word.

Feeling the Necessity

Emotion isn't something one can turn on and off like a faucet. Something must spark and then keep on fueling it. It seems to me that recognizing this is the solution that many Christians need to their frustration over not feeling more in love with their Bibles. They read that Scripture is like honey and then feel convicted that, truth be known, they don't actually feel that way about it. They hear preaching that they *should* delight in it. Once again they're convicted. But for the life of them they can't seem to feel the pleasure. Other Christians apparently have it. But they don't, and don't know how to turn it on. Well, actually, it can't just be turned on. I hope that simple fact will help someone.

The thing that breaks this impasse is when the Word of God meets deep needs; when it satisfies like cool water on a blazing afternoon. Then we feel the delight. For instance, there's a vexing question in my mind, but one morning I open the Bible and read a particular chapter and it's as if all the lights go on in

my head. A mental need is met, and when it is, my soul rejoices.

Or there's an ache in my heart. Nothing comforts. Nothing relieves it. And then I read a certain psalm, or one of Christ's reassuring discourses, or one of God's unconditional promises. In an instant there's some kind of invisible, inexplicable healing applied to my spirit. I don't know how it happened. But it did! And my pain is not only gone, but my pleasure in the Word of God is profound.

This is supposed to work universally and inevitably for God's true children. They are new creations in Christ and partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). That nature instinctively hungers for things of its own kind, things that are divine. It especially hungers to hear divine words. There's no explanation for this except that it is a miraculous work of God in a human being when He regenerates him and imparts to him supernatural life. By God's design and determination, this supernatural life feeds on supernatural words; supernatural doctrines, supernatural explanations, supernatural promises. When it reads or hears them, it is satisfied. And when it is satisfied, it feels indescribable pleasure.

I say this is *supposed* to work like this for God's true children. But what about when it doesn't? Well, if you've never known this experience, you would need to ask yourself straight out whether or not you truly possess new life in Christ. The longer I'm in the ministry, the more I am persuaded that the explanation to the spiritual apathy or dissatisfaction of many people in our churches is that they are simply not regenerated. Their appetite for the things of the flesh is high. Their appetite for the things of the Spirit is low or nearly nonexistent. Perhaps many of these folks don't possess the nature necessary to experience the value of God's Word.

But if a person is truly God's child yet isn't finding the Bible to meet his needs and stoke his desires for more and more of God's words, he probably has drifted away from living Christianly. There can be other causes, some of them physical or even circumstantial, but most of the time the problem is as I'm describing it.

The Bible is designed to profit those who possess a new nature and who are attempting to live a new kind of life. It's of only limited value to those who are pursuing a life different in kind than the one it calls for. It isn't at all designed to help folks with any other kind of life, other than reproving and correcting them for their folly in attempting to live a subnormal Christian existence. But once a true child of God commits himself to walking the way of the Word (the experience described in Psalm 119), the Scriptures open up, feed his soul, satisfy his mind, and bring him pleasure that is joy unspeakable and full of glory. Deep calls unto deep, and God's new life in His new creature is nourished up and gloriously happy with its Bible. So . . . *how valuable to me is my Bible today?* ☞

* *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Sermons and Discourses 1723–1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (Yale University, 1997), 14:76.

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, where he has served since 1980.

Bring . . . the Books

Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland Jr

Servant of God, if you are blessed, God has granted to you a spiritual mentor to give wise counsel to you for all of the many-faceted circumstances that you must face. Many of us have known periods of comfort and challenge that such a relationship can bring. But just as many, if not all, of us have experienced the extreme isolation that often accompanies our calling and have longed for something better.

Wise Counsel was introduced to me by a ministry friend, and I will not soon forget the blessing that simple conversation has brought into my life. It is my hope that my feeble words will inspire many of you to run, not to walk, to secure this book and reap its benefits as well.

Though the meat of encouragement comes from the letters themselves, editor Grant Gordon provides a painstaking historical context for each of the eighty-three letters reproduced in the book. The people, dates, and circumstances behind these letters bring the richness of this correspondence to the bottom shelf, so each one is readily understood.

John Newton is best known to us as the author of "Amazing Grace." After a profligate early life, Newton was converted and experienced the growing conviction that he belonged in pastoral ministry. He was deeply influenced by the ministries of Whitefield and Wesley. After some rejection, Newton was finally ordained to gospel ministry as a member of the Church of England in 1764 at the age of thirty-eight. During the following year as Newton began his first pastorate in Olney, he became associated with John Collette Ryland Sr., a Baptist pastor in Northampton, ten miles from Newton's own parish. Through periods of fellowship between these two men, Newton was introduced to Ryland's son, also called John. Ryland Jr. was fifteen years old compared to Newton's forty-three, but a friendship was forged between the two men that age and denominational differences did not impede. As young Ryland began to approach the ministry, even before his own ordination, Newton took the initiative and forged a mentoring relationship that has been preserved in part by eighty-three letters that passed from Newton to Ryland. These letters are the meat of this work.

The letters are presented chronologically. You will not want to read quickly through Newton's advice. You will want to savor his words. Some advice will be more apparently helpful than other, but perhaps in a different time in your ministry you will find the other more profitable than you first realized. I am certain you will read this book again and again.

Newton's first letter to Ryland set the tone for transparency and gracious frankness that would characterize the relationship for years to come. Ryland, still a young man, had taken to writing poems against the Arminian teachers of his day. Newton's theology agreed with that of Ryland, but his spirit did not. Newton wrote, "You

will say, 'A humble Arminian! Surely that is impossible.' I believe it not more impossible to find a humble Arminian, than a proud self-sufficient Calvinist." The gentle rebuke that Newton offered was well received so that the continued ministry of mentorship existed till Newton's death.

The following are some nuggets of gold offered from Newton to Ryland. Addressing some of the strengths of brethren outside his denomination, Newton commented, "I can sit in a whole skin by the fire-side and find fault with some things in the system of the Brethren as they are called. But how far do I fall short of their zeal, faith and love which those missionaries were endowed with, and how far do I fall short of their success." Speaking to Ryland as if it were to our own day, he commented, "Civil liberty is a valuable blessing, but most people sin it away; it is the Lord [who] deprives them of it. I believe if the good old Puritans could have seen such times as ours, they would have thanked God for liberty."

Newton gave counsel to Ryland about seeking a wife, preparing for ordination, and struggling with the salary that his parish wanted him to divide with his father. When Ryland did marry, his marriage was short-lived. Shortly after the birth of their first son, Ryland's wife passed away. Newton's letters of comfort alone are worth the cost of the book! Later, when Newton's wife Mary passed away, his letters show the same man attempting to heed his own counsel in a similar trial. Newton wrote, "Trials, my dear friend, of one kind or other, to prove, exercise and manifest our faith, patience and grace, are necessary to us, as weights are to a clock; if they were not we should not have them. For the Lord does not grieve us for his own pleasure, but for our profit."

Newton showed his own struggle when called from Olney to London. He counseled Ryland through church fissions, the lure of larger ministries than his own, and his subsequent remarriage.

Newton's last letter to Ryland was dated four years before his death at age eighty-two. For forty years he mentored Ryland, and Ryland clearly demonstrated he was the better for it. Newton was buried next to his beloved Mary at St. Mary Woolnoth Church. His self-prepared epitaph still reads: "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." ☞

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

Bob Condict pastors Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church in Baldwin, Maryland.

This passage recounts Jesus’ parable about a widow who came to a judge seeking his intervention in a problem. When the judge wouldn’t listen, she kept badgering him until he did what she asked just so she would go away and leave him alone. Since Luke says the story is intended to teach us “always to pray, and not to faint,” readers often conclude that Jesus must mean we are to take our requests to God repeatedly and persistently until He grants what we ask. I believe that interpretation of this parable is incorrect. Jesus does not mean we are supposed to wear God out with constant begging until we manage to nag Him into capitulating just to silence us.

The eschatological context of the parable is often overlooked. Jesus is dealing with the question of end-times justice. He’s been teaching His disciples about His return, and He’s just explained that God will come and take some away for judgment and leave others to enter the kingdom (17:22–37). Here Jesus says that God, who is far superior to this judge, will surely execute justice on the earth (18:8). This parable isn’t about how prayer works, as if its purpose were to pressure God into doing what we want. It’s a parable about trusting God. Prayer is an important facet of the parable, but the emphasis is on constant faith as we wait for God to conclude His program of redemption.

There are two characters in the story, both intended as contrasts, not comparisons. The woman bringing the petition is a widow, powerless and insignificant in the eyes of the judge; but we come to God as those He’s chosen for Himself. The judge considered her a nuisance, but to God we are a delight. Second, this unjust judge is twice described as not fearing God and having no concern for man, but God is a righteous judge committed to enforcing justice. He will not fail to avenge His “own elect.”

Significantly, the widow wasn’t requesting a favor or boon, but simply that the judge would do his job. An enemy was causing her some unidentified problem, and she needed the judge to right the wrong. Like this widow, we may at times be tempted to despair because of the apparent delay in God’s defense of His people. Evil people seem to prosper while God’s people may appear as widows, struggling to survive the oppression of the wicked. We should take heart, because God will never forget or abandon “his own elect.” He will destroy all opposition “speedily,” but perhaps not immediately. God does not want His people to act like this importunate widow, as if they think He’s an “unjust judge” and doubt He will really do as He promised. Nevertheless,

He will “bear long with them” despite their “cry day and night.” God tolerates the nagging and badgering but doesn’t encourage it, because it implies unbelief.

What should we make of the introductory application that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint”? Doesn’t Luke mean we are to keep asking until God complies? We may be misunderstanding the meaning of “to faint.” “Fainting” does not mean “to stop asking.” We faint when we lose heart and our faith falters. Many of us are like that widow, finding it difficult to “walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). It’s dark and hard to see the way. The path itself is cluttered with obstacles, and enemies or difficulties surround us on every side. Isaiah says that God doesn’t want us to faint but to *walk* as an activity of faith, in complete confidence that He is directing our steps, even though we don’t sense His leadership and can’t see the way. Luke says Jesus doesn’t want us to faint but to *pray* as an activity of faith, in complete confidence that God is directing our lives, even though we don’t sense His leadership and we can’t see the way. In this sense “to pray” and “to walk” are synonymous. Prayer is mounting with wings. It is running without weariness. It is walking the uphill, rough and rugged road and never fainting.

“To pray and not to faint” does not mean that we have to badger God into keeping His promises, much less that we should try to annoy Him into giving us what we want. Nor does it mean we have to keep repeating the same prayer until He finally notices us, which is more the “prophets of Baal” approach to prayer (1 Kings 18:19–38). The parable in Luke 18:1–8 is intended to teach us that the prayer of faith includes what we might call a “sanctified indifference” that comes from absolute confidence. We are content in taking our burdens and needs to God, trusting His will to be superior to ours, believing He is powerful and just and good, and fully persuaded that we are His beloved elect. The more confident we are of those things, the less likely we are to think we have to nag Him into acquiescence, and the more likely we are to realize there is no need for us as we “cry night and day.” We can “cast our burdens” on Him and leave them there.

However, the Lord Jesus is also teaching that we must never stop praying. Prayer should define our lives. We should walk along the usually mundane and often hazardous path of life constantly communicating with God, relying on Him for strength and direction, and confident of His love and our ultimate glorification. That’s what “men ought always to pray and not to faint” means. ☞

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

Dr. Paul Downey has pastored Temple Baptist Church in Athens, Georgia, since 1998. He is the author of *More than Spectators, A Life of Conquest, The Man You Could Be*, and *Trusting God When Life Is Hard* and contributed to *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man* and *God’s Word in Our Hands*.

Some 78 percent of Americans claim to be Christian, yet behavior among professed Christians and non-Christians is nearly identical. Ronald Sider writes,

The findings in numerous national polls conducted by highly respected pollsters like The Gallup Organization and The Barna Group are simply shocking. “Gallup and Barna,” laments evangelical theologian Michael Horton, “hand us survey after survey demonstrating that evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general.” Divorce is more common among “born-again” Christians than in the general American population. Only 6 percent of evangelicals tithe. White evangelicals are the most likely people to object to neighbors of another race. Josh McDowell has pointed out that the sexual promiscuity of evangelical youth is only a little less outrageous than that of their nonevangelical peers.¹

I believe this serious disconnect between profession and behavior is what solicited a statement from a friend with whom I was speaking. During a Bible study I was sharing the gospel with the man. He acknowledged his need of forgiveness and the truth of what the Bible taught; then he said, “But I don’t want to be a hypocrite, you know, pray a prayer and never change.” The man was wrestling with his confidence in the power of the gospel. He had seen others profess “religion” and behave like everyone else, and to him there was no power for change in this gospel.

Paul writes in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” What is so powerful about the gospel? In Ephesians 1:17–20 Paul prays for believers to know the power of the gospel, as it is active in bringing one to salvation. He likens conversion to a resurrection and prays that believers would know by experience this amazing power of God which is worked in us when we are born again. The gospel is powerful and transforms lives. If anyone is truly in Christ he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

God used the testimony of the Moravians aboard a ship bound for America to make John Wesley realize that whatever religion he had was something short of the true power of the gospel. We often focus on the peace Wesley observed in the Moravians during the storm at sea, but note the effect their daily testimony had on him prior to and even after the storm.

Sunday, January 25, 1736

At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour. Of their humility they had given a continual

proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired, and would receive no pay, saying, “it was good for their proud hearts,” and “their loving Saviour had done more for them.” And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth.²

Having been impressed by their humble service to others, Wesley then looked for the reality of their faith as it was tested by a storm which threatened their lives.

There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the Spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, “Was you not afraid?” He answered, “I thank God, no.” I asked, “But were not your women and children afraid?” He replied, mildly, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.”³

Having survived the storm at sea Wesley and the others arrived in Georgia. About a month later Wesley was still enamored with the behavior of these Moravians.

Tuesday, February 24, 1736

At our return the next day, Mr. Delamotte and I took up our lodging with the Germans (the Moravians). We had now an opportunity, day by day, of observing their whole behaviour. For we were in one room with them from morning to night, unless for the little time I spent in walking. They were always employed, always cheerful themselves, and in good humour with one another; they had put away all anger and strife, and wrath, and bitterness, and clamor, and evil-speaking; they walked worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, and adorned the Gospel of our Lord in all things.⁴

Wesley was beholding new creations in Christ brought about by the power of the gospel. The transformed lives of the Moravians did not escape his notice but rather heightened his thirst to know more of this transformation.

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

Charles Spurgeon

The power of the gospel to change people is also noted in the journal of David Brainerd, missionary to the American Indians. Brainerd had experienced some frustration with his translator; he appeared to understand the truth he was communicating from Brainerd but had no experience of that truth. In his diary Brainerd records the power of the gospel to transform the man. In his journal for the Lord's Day, July 21, 1745, he writes,

But these exercises of soul were attended and followed with a very great change in the man, so that it might justly be said, he was become another man, if not a new man. His conversation and deportment were much altered, and even the careless world could not but admire what had befallen him to make so great a change in his temper, discourse, and behavior. And especially there was a surprising alteration in his public performances. He now addressed the Indians with admirable fervency, and scarce knew when to leave off; and sometimes when I had concluded my discourse, and was returning homeward, he would tarry behind to repeat and inculcate what had been spoken.⁵

The man possessed a new burden to communicate the gospel to the lost. This was the power of the gospel in the man's life. His changed life was a sustained change: "His change is abiding, and his life, so far as I know, unblemished to this day, though it is now more than six months since he experienced this change."⁶

Brainerd finally attributes the change to his being made new through the power of the gospel.

And upon a view and strict observation of his serious and savory conversation, his Christian temper, and unblemished behavior for so considerable a time, as well as his experience I have given account of, I think that I have reason to hope that he is "created anew in Christ Jesus to good works." His name is Moses Tinda Tautamy; he is about fifty years of age, and is pretty well acquainted with the pagan notions and customs of his countrymen, and so is the better able now to expose them.⁷

Church history provides us with great examples of the power of the gospel to change people's lives. However, if we are not careful we can easily fall prey to the notion that what we read in church history is an anomaly relegated to the past.


I was recently encouraged by reading about the conversion of Rosaria Butterfield, an associate English professor at Syracuse University. Rosaria was a self-proclaimed lesbian specializing in Queer Theory (a postmodern form of gay and lesbian studies). She and her partner were in charge of the welcoming committee at her Unitarian Universalist church, which involved incorporating those from the LGBT community into the church. She was an activist promoting a far-left agenda and ideals and was a popular professor among her

students. She viewed Bible-believing Christians as the enemy until at age thirty-six her life began to change. She was befriended by a believing pastor and his wife who shared the gospel with her while showing it in their lives. After some time God began to work on her heart and brought her to a point of surrender. She writes,

That night, I prayed, and asked God if the gospel message was for someone like me too. I viscerally felt the living presence of God as I prayed. Jesus seemed present and alive. I knew that I was not alone in my room. I prayed that if Jesus was truly a real and risen God, that he would change my heart. And if he was real and if I was his, I prayed that he would give me the strength of mind to follow him and the character to become a godly woman. I prayed for strength of character to repent for a sin that at that time didn't feel like sin at all—it felt like life, plain and simple. I prayed that if my life was actually his life, that he would take it back and make it what he wanted it to be. I asked him to take it all: my sexuality, my profession, my community, my tastes, my books, and my tomorrows. Two incommensurable worldviews clashed together: the reality of my lived experience and the truth of the word of God.⁸

She further states that it was the full weight of the gospel that transformed her life.

I needed (and need) faithful shepherding, not the glitz and glamor that has captured the soul of modern evangelical culture. I had to lean and lean hard on the full weight of scripture, on the fullness of the word of God, and I'm grateful that when I heard the Lord's call on my life, and I wanted to hedge my bets, keep my girlfriend and add a little God to my life, I had a pastor and friends in the Lord who asked nothing less of me than that I die to myself. Biblical orthodoxy can offer real compassion because in our struggle against sin, we cannot undermine God's power to change lives.⁹

The radical transformation of lives is the purest form of evidence to the power of the gospel. All who are in Christ are new creations. 

¹ Ronald J. Sider, "The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience," *Christianity Today* (January 2005).

² John Wesley, *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley*. Kindle e-book, location 160.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* (Chicago: Moody Press), 137–38.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012), Kindle e-book, location 501.

⁹ Ibid., location 566.

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Scriptural Tests for Modern Dilemmas

(Continued from page 19)

8. The Glory of God Test

A. Can I do it to God's glory?

1 Corinthians 10:31: *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

B. Can I do it in the name of Christ—with His endorsement and approval?

Colossians 3:17: *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

9. The Heart Motive Test

A. Does it come out of a pure (unmixed) heart?

Matthew 15:19: *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

B. Does it come out of pure motives?

Titus 1:15: *Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.*

10. The Love Test

A. Does genuine concern for others prevail over rationalization (intellectual justification)?

1 Corinthians 8:1: *Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up [makes arrogant], but charity edifieth.*

B. Will love prevail?

1 John 3:16: *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

11. The Total Commitment Test

A. Does our love for God ultimately determine and settle every issue?

1 Corinthians 8:3: *But if any man love God, the same is known [known, recognized or approved] of him.*

B. Is God's approval more important than anything else to us?

Matthew 25:21: *His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

12. The Fruit Test

A. What is the product of the proposed course of conduct?

Galatians 5:19–23: *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

B. Are we willing to put aside the immediate for the sake of the permanent?

Hebrews 11:24–26: *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.*

13. The Defrauding Test

A. Am I taking for my own pleasure that which really belongs to another?

1 Thessalonians 4:3–6: *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication [sexual sin]: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence [passion of lust], even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond [overstep or overreach] and defraud [take more than one's due] his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.*

B. Am I taking for my own pleasure at the personal expense of another?

(1) His purity or the sanctity of his physical body?

(2) His life, without a reciprocal commitment of my own life?

14. The "Garbage In" Test

A. Am I willingly participating in my own temptation or the corrupting of my own mind?

Psalms 101:2, 3: *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.*

B. Am I protecting my own heart and mind in a responsible manner?

Proverbs 4:23: *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

15. The “Temple” Test

“Temple” in the following verses is the word used to describe the Old Testament Holy of Holies, the most sacred place of God’s dwelling on earth!

A. Does it result in harm to my physical body?

1 Corinthians 3:16, 17: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

B. Does it give due reverence for this “dwelling place” of the Holy Spirit?

2 Corinthians 6:16: *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20: *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For*

ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

16. The Intrinsic Value Test

A. Is it good, worthful, of significant or of permanent value?

2 Corinthians 5:10: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad [worthless].*

B. Is it a waste of time and effort in the light of real needs and eternal values?

1 Corinthians 3:15: *If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

17. The Definite Command Test

A. Is there a command or statement of Scripture that clearly and definitively addresses the issue in question? If so, the issue is settled once and for all.

B. Where there is no direct reference to the issue in question, the issue must be put under the scrutiny of the tests listed above.

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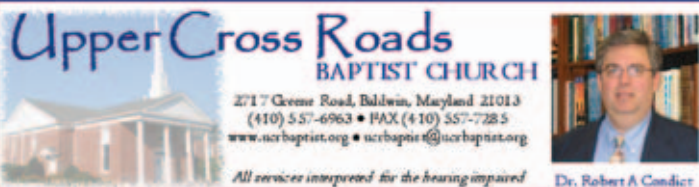
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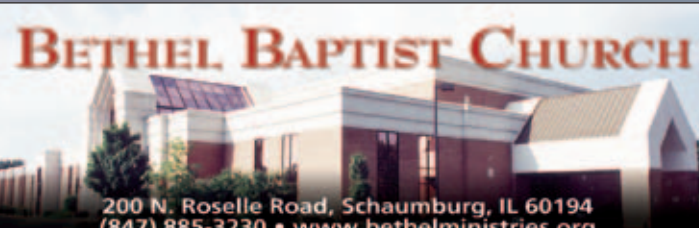
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Give God thy heart, thy service and thy gold;
The day wears on and time is waxing old.
—On a sundial near Gloucester Cathedral

By the time we realize our parents were right, we have
children who think we're wrong.—Guillermo Hernandez

There will come a time when in this world holiness shall
be more general, and more eminent, than ever it hath
been since Adam fell in paradise. —Thomas Brooks

The King's cry is not, "Forward." It is, "Follow."
—William Guthrie

The Scottish Covenanters used to say that they were
jealous for the crown rights of King Jesus.
—David M. Atkinson

To tear the name of Jesus from this world would shake
it to its foundations. —Joseph Ernest Renan

I must know Jesus Christ as Savior before His teach-
ing has any meaning for me other than that of an ideal
which leads to despair. —Oswald Chambers

The flag flown from the castle of the heart is to show
that the King is in residence there. —Unknown

Jesus Christ is a threefold King: First His enemies'
King; secondly, His saints' King; thirdly, His Father's
King. . . . He is His Father's King because He rules for
His Father. —William Dyer

Who stumbles upon Christ
(Who is a granite stone)
Lies shattered; grasp Him
And be led securely home.
—Angelus Silesius

There's no place where success comes before work,
except in the dictionary. —Donald Kendall

Independence is not strength but unrealized weakness
and is the very essence of sin. There was no indepen-
dence in our Lord. The great characteristic of His life
was submission to His Father. —Oswald Chambers

Though Christ's coat was once divided, He will never
suffer His crown to be divided. —Thomas Brooks

Research has proven that if all the people who sleep
in church were laid end to end . . . they would be a lot
more comfortable. —Raymond McHenry

The man who sees both sides of an issue is very likely
on the fence or up a tree. —Unknown

Literature, music, art, and the sciences are worthy of
our respectful attention; but when Jesus Christ comes
into the heart, He must be King and all lesser subjects
take their lesser place. —John Henry Jowett

The self-centered suffer when others disappoint them.
The Christ-centered suffer when they disappoint others.
—Leonard Ravenhill

At the time of the Messiah the people were divided.
The spiritual ones embraced the Messiah, the grosser
ones remained to bear witness to Him. —Blaise Pascal

I will place no value on anything I have or may possess
except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ.
—David Livingstone

Nothing will do except righteousness; and no other
conception of righteousness will do except Christ's con-
ception of it. —Matthew Arnold

I am no more of a Christian than Pilate was . . . and I
am ready to admit that I see no way out of the world's
misery but the way which would have been found by
his will. —George Bernard Shaw

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

FBFI Annual Fellowship at Faith Baptist Bible College, Ankeny, Iowa

It seems that every year someone says, "I believe this was the best Annual Fellowship we have ever had!" This year we heard that exclamation many times. Another encouraging response heard from many in attendance was, "I don't see how this meeting could have been any better."

For many reasons, the conference at FBBC was an outstanding example of the great value of the FBFI Annual Fellowship. Iowa was blessed with beautiful late spring weather. Although the spring rains had hindered some of the farmers with their planting, the grass was lush and green. Beautiful trees, perfectly spaced, standing sentinel on the long walkways, signaled the disciplined yet graceful character of the campus. Red brick buildings, accented with random white bricks, white exterior molding and columns, were surrounded by manicured shrubbery and decorative trees. The impact was peaceful and impressive; an evening stroll was inevitable.

On the one hand, we had the impression that everything had been freshly painted, trimmed, or polished just for our conference. On the other, we were convinced that what we saw was routine institutional excellence, typical of this well-established ministry in the Midwest. The reason for this excellence is not just in the well-maintained facilities; it is, no doubt, in the hearts of the people who serve there. Everyone—everyone!—demonstrated joyful, attentive, exemplary servanthood. Watching those who were serving in this way compelled the rest of us to do our best. In congregational singing, we found ourselves wanting to sing better. When listening to the speakers, we knew we were hearing important things and wanted to listen more carefully. When speaking, we sensed the importance of disciplined preparation and wanted to start and stop our sessions on time.

Many years ago it was my privilege to participate twice in the weeklong Kentucky All-State Band under the direction of renowned director from Michigan State University, Leonard Falcone. From the first minute that he took the baton, we knew he was serious. Under his leadership, we worked very hard and endured moments of realization that we were not nearly as good as we had thought we were. But on Friday night, when the University of Kentucky auditorium was filled with parents, band directors, and others from around the state, we could hardly believe it when we heard the music. As I recall over these many years, no one said, "I can't believe how well I played," but many exclaimed, "I never dreamed I would be a part of something like this! What an experience!" The best ever? In many ways, indeed it was.





New England Regional Fellowship

The theme for the New England Regional Fellowship held on April 30 at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Scarborough, Maine, was "Be on Guard! Pay close attention to your life and your teaching." This theme was taken from 1 Timothy 4:16, *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine. . . .* The hope was that the meeting would both challenge and encourage pastors and other attendees to be watchful.

Specific sessions by various New England pastors were on guarding our devotional life, doctrinal integrity, the minister's family, moral integrity, and Christ-honoring worship. There was also a separate time for the ladies to meet and a roundtable discussion where opportunity was available to glean wisdom and offer input in practical ministry application. The spirit of fellowship was a tremendous blessing.

Each pastor who attended was given a copy of Vol. 3 of Rolland McCune's *Systematic Theology*.



PURPOSES OF PREDICTIVE

This column has been exploring why God has given us prophecy, and why so much. We have explored that question with a view to understanding what we are to do with the prophecies that are yet future—how we are to interpret and apply them. The most definitive way to answer these questions is to explore what God Himself says are the purposes and effects of prophetic revelation.

Part 1 examined NT passages that reveal some of the purposes of prophecy. Part 2 turned to the OT, particularly Isaiah and Ezekiel. In spite of multiple passages that shed light on the purposes of prophecy, however, I posited that there is one that tends to be downplayed (sometimes even denigrated), especially by those of a nonpremillennial persuasion. The most fundamental function of prophecy, I posited, is to *provide understandable information and certain knowledge about future events*. All the other purposes are hollow without this. All the other purposes are meaningful only if God communicates reliable, understandable, precise, verifiable, and *essentially* clear predictions about the future.

Certainly prophecy is intended to have a present impact on the believer's faith and practice. No one should dispute that. But some posit that viewing eschatological prophecy as a detailed prediction of specific events short-circuits the ethical intention of such prophecy. I am positing that God tells us about the future because He actually wants us to know what is going to happen and expects us to believe that it is going to happen just as He says. As I mentioned in the previous column, this may seem obvious, but it's worth stating unambiguously because the emphasis in many works on interpreting prophecy tends to undermine this role of predictive prophecy. Many argue that prophecy doesn't so much provide information about the future as it does highly symbolic, metaphorical pictures of the future. In the last column I cited the alarming assertion of Graeme Goldsworthy that "a method of interpretation that demands that the promises of the OT be literally fulfilled, so that there is exact correspondence between what is promised and what eventually comes to pass, does not fit the evidence of the Bible" (*According to Plan*, 65–66). Another hermeneutical text argues,

Prophecy has a notorious reputation for being difficult to interpret, and that reputation is justified because prophecy . . . tends to be expressed in highly

metaphoric language. . . . But a great deal of the notoriety comes not from the difficulties of the symbolic language, but from misconceived notions about what kind of information prophecy is conveying. . . . Prophecy encourages us regarding the future not by giving us the news headlines in advance, but by pointing out our victorious God, who has already won the decisive *heavenly* battle (McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 232–33).

Yet another popular work on Bible interpretation asserts that because prophecy is so intrinsically metaphorical, the details simply cannot be pressed (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2nd ed., 183). Of course, there is a greater concentration of symbols in prophecy than in most other genres, but what is inadequately appreciated by many is that (a) there are not nearly so many "symbols" as many suppose, and (b) beneath every symbol is an intended literal reality.

We should not eagerly rush to concede the primacy of the ethical purpose without adequate reflection on what that concession entails. The pendulum has swung so far that otherwise premillennial interpreters can be intimidated into interpretational uncertainty, swayed by the overemphasis on the ethical purpose of prophecy to the diminishing, or even ignoring, of the informational function of prophecy.

One hermeneutics text is quite correct: "Fundamentally, prophecy is a biblical phenomenon by which God conveyed messages to his people through human speakers or writers. It assumes that *God has something important he wants his people to understand—that he wishes to communicate not obfuscate . . .*" (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 371, emphasis added). Their agreement on this point is gratifying, even though some of their proposed prophetic fulfillments seem inconsistent with this assertion.

Someone may rightly object, "This is all fine theory, but is there any *Scriptural* confirmation that this 'informational function' is one of the important purposes of prophecy?" Besides the intuitive fact, already noted, that virtually none of the other purposes carry any meaning and weight apart from God's purposeful communication of knowable information, there are a number of other passages that underscore this purpose. Here are just a few.

PROPHECY (PART 3)

Daniel 2

Why did God reveal to Nebuchadnezzar, then to Daniel, and through Daniel to every reader of Daniel's prophecy, the subsequent course of human history over the next several centuries? Daniel himself answers this question: "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and **maketh known** to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. . . . He that revealeth secrets **maketh known** to thee what shall come to pass. . . . The great God **hath made known** to the king what shall come to pass hereafter" (2:28, 29, 45). This assertion counters one commentator's remark about interpreting Revelation:

The Book of Revelation was inspired by God to help hurting disciples cope with the realities of spiritual warfare for his name. . . . If you were a first-century disciple being persecuted for your faith, a history lesson about people and events that had absolutely no connection with your plight would be of little comfort (Gordon Ferguson, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 10, 19).

But it seems "a history lesson about people and events that had absolutely no connection" with the immediate plight of Daniel and his fellow Jews in captivity was exactly what God wanted to reveal.

Matthew 24

In Jesus' most detailed and extended prophetic discourse, He repeatedly states that one of the purposes of these details is to forewarn people how to react when prophesied events begin to unfold (see 24:15–20, 23–26).

Jesus then inserts a parable about the obvious, recognizable, unmistakable signs of spring. The analogy itself emphasizes that His purpose in giving this detailed predictive information is so that people will **know** *what* will happen, will be able to anticipate it, and will recognize *when* it happens (24:32–35)—even though the *precise* timing is withheld to constrain watchfulness (24:42; 25:13), readiness (24:44; 25:10), and faithfulness (24:46; 25:21, 23) in the meantime.

Revelation

A perpetual debate simmers regarding the intent of the opening statement. The letter is described as "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." Does this refer to a revelation *by* Jesus Christ or a revelation *about* Jesus Christ? In the vernacular of Greek grammar, is this a subjective or objective

genitive? However the subsequent content of Revelation may supplement our answer, the rest of the verse would seem to settle the question decisively: it is a revelation given by Jesus Christ. How do we know? Because of the next phrase: it is a revelation "which God gave unto him." Why did God give this revelation to Jesus? Next phrase: "to **shew unto his servants**." To show them what? Next phrase: "things which must shortly [or suddenly, swiftly] come to pass." It sounds as if God actually intends His people to know and understand what is going to happen. The letter ends on the same note: "These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly [or suddenly, swiftly] be done" (22:6).

Conclusion

The pendulum needs to be pulled back to the center of gravity. We should never minimize, ignore, or (God forbid) scoff at the notion that one of the driving purposes for predictive prophecy is accurate, understandable, interpretable *information*. God means for His people to know what He has purposed, what will happen, what He is going to do. It is one of the primary ways in which He magnifies His power, His sovereignty, His wisdom, His trustworthiness and reliability, and His uniqueness as God who alone can and will do everything He has said, just as He has said. And *that* should always have a powerful, immediate, ethical impact on God's people—on their relationship to Him, their confidence in Him, and their conception of Him—no matter how near or distant the prophesied events may be.

Each of the twenty-two purposes/effects of prophecy explored in the previous two *Glance* columns could be categorized under one of these major headings of the purposes of prophecy:

1. **Doxological**—The glory of God (to display His unique deity and attributes).
2. **Informational**—The communication of future events.
3. **Inspirational**—The encouragement of believers in God's control and victory.
4. **Transformational**—The conformity of believers to God's purposes and priorities.
5. **Ethical**—The repentance of sinners and the purity of saints.

The Kingdom in Matthew

(Continued from page 9)

ecclesiological passages (16:17–19; 18:18–19), and the Great Commission (28:18–20).⁹ Putting all of Matthew's themes together presents the reader with God as the King of the heavenly realm, which stands in opposition to the earth. But Matthew's emphasis on the earth also includes the idea of kingship. From the very beginning of his Gospel (2:1–3), Matthew notes that Jesus is the King in opposition to Herod as the archetypal earthly king:

- Jesus was born in the days of "Herod the king";
- the magi asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"; and,
- "Herod the king had heard these things."

"Matthew sandwiches the Kingship of Jesus amidst the two proclamations of Herod's kingship."¹⁰ Later Matthew brings into stark contrast the kingship promised to Jesus from the Father in Heaven with the kingship offered from Satan, king of this world (4:8). Matthew speaks of the kingdoms of the earth in both human and satanic terms, an analogy likely derived from Daniel 10:13.¹¹ This theme of heavenly kingship and earthly kingship runs throughout the text, culminating in the Great Commission when Jesus notes that the authority in Heaven *and* earth has been given to Him.¹²

The clearest text in Matthew that brings all of these themes together is the Lord's Prayer (6:9–13):

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

The prayer begins with a recognition that the Father is in the heavens, from which the kingdom will come. Further, it presents a contrast between the things done on earth and those done in Heaven. The implication is that God's will is accomplished in the heavens because that realm is presently subject to His kingly authority. The earth, by contrast, is not presently under the kingly authority of God, but one day, in God's timing, it will be subject to Him. The prayer further recognizes that though the earth is not in total subjection at the present moment, God has control over the physical (earth's resources) and spiritual (forgiveness) aspects of existence on earth.¹³

In union with past believers in Babylon and Rome, today's believers can also have hope that, while the world's kingdoms continue to rage against the King of Heaven (Ps. 2), the kingdom of Heaven will one day supplant all the unrighteousness of this earth. And while earthly kingdoms appear to be independent of the sovereignty of the Father, they are subject to His power. Though modern believers

are often ostracized and rejected, they are ultimately members of the kingdom of Heaven and will be united to Jesus in His kingdom at His second coming. Matthew masterfully concludes his Gospel with the promise of this kingdom, noting that Jesus has been given all authority in Heaven and earth (28:18). He will return on the clouds of Heaven to take His royal throne (24:30; 26:64). The battle is already over, and those aligned with God's kingdom await the future victory march.

Tim Miller holds advanced degrees in theology and is working on his dissertation for his PhD. He has served as an assistant pastor and is currently teaching at Maranatha Baptist Bible College.



¹ For extended critiques see David Edward Hagelberg, "The Designation 'The Kingdom of Heaven'" (Master's Thesis, Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1983), 11–24; George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 109–111; Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 65–67.

² C. C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God/Heaven," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1997), 426.

³ Pennington notes that "the assumption of reverential circumlocution is so widespread that it functions as a consensus in Matthean studies" (Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 32).

⁴ Hagelberg, "The Designation," 25.

⁵ Hagelberg, "The Designation," 30.

⁶ There is a textual problem in Matthew 6:33.

⁷ See Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 268–72.

⁸ Jonathan T. Pennington, "The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12.1 (2008): 47.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hagelberg, "The Designation,"

¹¹ Hagelberg notes, "This combination of human and supernatural leadership over the kingdom of earth is reminiscent of Daniel 10:13 where the angel speaks of his battle with the 'Prince of the Persian kingdom,' the 'King of Persia'" (Ibid., 40).

¹² While Matthew does not explicitly mention the kingdom in Matthew 28, he does mention that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world in Matthew 24, which seems to be fulfilled through the Great Commission. Further, the reader who has caught the constant repetition in Matthew between the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdoms of earth will not miss the implication of Jesus' statement when He states that all power has been given to Him in *Heaven and earth*. Daniel 7:14 argues that the kingdom will embrace people from every tribe and tongue, and Matthew's text expresses the authority of Christ to those who are to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

¹³ Matthew stresses God's provision over both of these in other places in his text. In Matthew 9:6 Jesus states that He has been given authority on earth to forgive sins, and in 6:33 he notes that seeking God's kingdom results in God's meeting the believer's physical needs.

Iris Scan

Students from some of the schools in Polk County, Florida, had their irises scanned as part of a pilot study program by Stanley Convergent Security Solutions to increase security in public schools. The problem—the school system failed to get parental consent.

Rob Davis, the school board's senior director of support services, described the project and its purpose as a harmlessly gathering of the biometric data found in the irises of each student. Each iris is unique to the individual and could replace student ID cards in the future.

Davis issued an apology and indicated that the information retrieved was destroyed.

This article can be accessed at <http://rt.com/usa/school-scan-iris-students-023/>.

ELCA Elects First Openly Gay Bishop

On June first of this year, the four million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) voted to elect its first openly gay bishop. Dr. R. Guy Erwin won the vote of the Southwest California Synod by a margin of 210–171. Erwin is not only open about his homosexual orientation but is presently living in a partnered relationship. Before receiving this post, he served as an interim pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in Canoga Park, California. He also serves the denomination as a professor of Lutheran confessional

theology at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks. And he represented the denomination on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

In remarks made to the pro-gay media monitoring group GLAAD, Erwin stated he hoped “be a positive representation for both communities.” Recalling his own journey he stated, “There was a time when I believed that I would not be able to serve as a pastor in the ELCA. Our church has now recognized the God-given gifts and abilities that LGBT people can bring to the denomination.”

This article can be accessed at <http://thenewamerican.com/culture/faith-and-morals/item/15637-nations-largest-lutheran-denomination-elects-first-homosexual-bishop>.

Contraceptive Mandate

More than sixty lawsuits have already been filed by religious nonprofits regarding the Affordable Health Care Act, otherwise known as Obama Care. People of faith have varying degrees of concern regarding issues of contraception, but most reject morning-after remedies as tantamount to abortion. A February 2012 ruling indicated that all employers, except churches, would be required to provide this type of service without cost. Other religious institutions, such as schools, hospitals, or soup kitchens, would need to comply with the provision.

The final word handed down in the end of June from the Department of Health and Human

Services simply stated that the department would make the process for filing grievance easier, but they did nothing to deal with the moral concerns of the employers.

Such cases are expected to make their way to the Supreme Court.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/ap/politics/government-issues-final-obamacare-rules-for-faith-groups#.UdHRAhbvyCc>.

Atheist Monument

The first monument to atheism has been erected on public property in Bradford County, Florida. The monument is part of the results of a court settlement that initially was designed to remove a monument to the Ten Commandments from the same property. According to the settlement, American Atheists, a New Jersey-based group, was permitted to erect the monument with privately solicited funds, but the Decalogue would also be permitted to stay.

Dave Muscato, director of public relations for American Atheists, would have preferred to see the Ten Commandments removed, but was satisfied for “equal time.” The monument cost the group \$6000. The unveiling ceremony lasted for about an hour and a half.

The 1500-pound monument also features a quote from the group's founding leader, Madalyn Murray O'Hair: “An atheist believes that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An atheist believes that a deed must be done

instead of a prayer said. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty banished, war eliminated.”

This article can be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/group-builds-first-ever-atheist-monument-at-fla-courthouse-promises-more-sites-99165/>.

Exodus International Closes its Doors

A day after apologizing to the homosexual community, the president of Exodus International, Alan Chambers, announced the closing down of the thirty-seven-year old ministry. (Exodus International was founded in 1976 as a Christian organization with the goal of turning people away from the homosexual lifestyle.)

“For quite some time we've been imprisoned in a worldview that's neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical,” Chambers stated. “From a Judeo-Christian perspective, gay, straight or otherwise, we're all prodigal sons and daughters. Exodus International is the prodigal's older brother, trying to impose its will on God's promises, and make judgments on who's worthy of His Kingdom. God is calling us to be the Father—to welcome everyone, to love unhindered.”

Thomas Moore, Exodus International board member, stated, “We're not negating the ways God used Exodus to positively affect thousands of people, but a new generation of Christians is looking for change.”

This article can be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/exodus-international-to-shut-down-ministry-president-apologizes-to-gay-community-98407/#ORdBdD2CsFhYllkD.99>.

Chinese Domestic Adoptions

The Chinese government has tightened its policies regarding the domestic adoption of abandoned children. Chinese policy limiting urban couples to one child and rural families to two children has led to tens of thousands of children being abandoned annually. One study indicated that there are more than 200,000 babies are abandoned in China each year. In the past, families could choose to adopt these abandoned children when they found them. Now they are no longer permitted to do so.

The new policy requires that for domestic adoptions to take place, the adopting couple must be in their thirties, in good health, and have no children of their own. Now abandoned children must be taken to governmental authorities as soon as they are found.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.religiontoday.com/blog/china-clamps-down-families-rescue-abandoned-babies.html>.

Marvel Comic-Style Bible

Kingstone, a publishing company from Florida, is about to release four of its twelve planned volumes of a comic book version of the Bible. In a release about the 2000-page project, a representative of Kingstone stated, "Each volume is a rich narrative sequentially illustrated to teach and explain the major stories and themes in the Bible in a historical and chronological manner."

In an interview, creators stated that they hope to capture the attention of boys with

NOTABLE QUOTES

Take heed of driving so hard after this world, as to hinder thyself and family from those duties towards God, which thou art by grace obliged to; as private prayer, reading the scriptures, and Christian conference. It is a base thing for men so to spend themselves and families after this world, as that they disengage their heart to God's worship.—John Bunyan

Rest in this—it is His business to lead, command, impel, send, call or whatever you want to call it. It is your business to obey, follow, move, respond, or what have you.—Jim Elliot

Unless we are willing to pay the price, and sacrifice time and attention and what appear legitimate or necessary duties, for the sake of the heavenly gifts we need not look for a large experience of the power of the heavenly world in our work.—Andrew Murray

If I see aright, the cross of popular evangelicalism is not the cross of the New Testament. It is, rather, a new bright ornament upon the bosom of a self-assured and carnal Christianity. The old cross slew men, the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it.—A. W. Tozer

Wicked men obey from fear; good men, from love.—Augustine

He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even this He does with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son who is coming every day to look more and more like the One whose child he is.—A. W. Tozer

their "testosterone-driven" philosophy. The rest of the Old Testament is to be released in 2014.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/publisher-to-release-first-four-volumes-of-2000-page-marvel-comics-style-bible-this-year-99121/#fQpD4AsHtDloUycV.99>.

Canada Reaches Out to Pakistani Girl

A Pakistani girl who was falsely accused under Pakistan's blasphemy laws has recently found asylum in Canada. Rimsha Masih, who is believed to be between the ages of eleven and fourteen, was initially accused of throwing away a copy of the Qur'an, placing it in a bag and tossing it into the trash. She was later acquitted of the charges when it was discovered that a local cleric had placed the pages of the Qur'an into a bag that Rimsha had been carrying. In spite of her acquittal, she and her family continued to receive death threats.

Jason Kenney, Canada's Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, told CTV News, "This was an extraordinary example of brutal persecution. Rimsha was accused of blasphemy which was completely trumped up by people in her local village."

This article may be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pakistani-girl-falsely-accused-of-blasphemy-moves-to-canada-99098/#qHtquCOXOyRfgl6f.99>.

Compiled by Robert Conduct, FBFI Executive Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

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Kingdom Offers

(Continued from page 11)

appealed to the same Isaiah prophecy that Christ did (Acts 28:25–27; Isa. 6:9, 10; Matt. 13:13–15; Luke 8:10). He then spent two more years in Rome preaching the kingdom and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 28:30, 31). Why would Paul preach the kingdom during the church age if it was a completely different program?

Third, the coming of the kingdom is contingent upon Israel's response, but the offer of the kingdom is not contingent upon Israel's response. Jesus continued to offer the kingdom to Israel even after it became apparent that she would reject His offer. McClain asserts, "Although His rejection had now become historically certain, our Lord nevertheless proceeds to Jerusalem, there to offer Himself officially and finally as the King of the Messianic Kingdom in exact fulfillment of prophecy."²⁷ In other words, Christ continued to offer the kingdom to Israel even after His rejection was historically certain. Israel's continual rejection of His offer did not cause Christ to withdraw the offer. He persisted in offering the kingdom even during His final week on earth. The offer of the kingdom continued regardless of Israel's response.²⁸ Only the coming of the future kingdom is contingent on Israel's response. The offer of the future kingdom is not contingent on Israel's response.

Summary

While the number of kingdom offers is not an easy question to answer, several facts are apparent. First, Jesus offered the kingdom to Israel during His earthly ministry. Second, it is likely that the church is in some way related to God's kingdom program. Third, in the future Israel will repent and the kingdom will be established in its fullness. Perhaps, rather than counting the number of kingdom offers, it would be more profitable to emphasize Israel's need to repent and church saints' mission of preaching, as Paul did, Christ and the coming kingdom (Acts 28:31).

Andrew Hudson serves a professor of New Testament at Maranatha Baptist Seminary. He thanks God for his wife and three children.



¹ Stanley Toussaint, "No Not Yet: The Contingency of God's Promised Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (April–June 2007), 132.

² Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1958), 446ff.

³ McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), 429.

⁴ Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1993), 101.

⁵ Pentecost, 446ff.

⁶ Ibid., 463.

⁷ Ibid., 464.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 468.

¹⁰ Ibid., 472.

¹¹ McClain, 304ff.

¹² Ibid., 324–25, 362–63. McClain calls this "parenthesis of time" an interregnum. During the interregnum Christ focuses His attention on the church. Israel is set aside until the second coming.

¹³ Ibid., 403.

¹⁴ Ibid., 426.

¹⁵ Ibid., 430.

¹⁶ Ibid., 427–28.

¹⁷ Saucy, 101. Saucy says, "Our survey of Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom reveals that it was announced as 'near' at the opening of his ministry. In the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom and the supernatural power displayed in miraculous signs, the kingdom actually invaded human history. The salvation blessings prophesied of the kingdom age were now present."

¹⁸ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 270.

¹⁹ Saucy, 216–17.

²⁰ Ibid., 216.

²¹ Blaising and Bock, 258–59.

²² Ibid., 265.

²³ J. Lanier Burns, "The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. by Craig A. Blaising

and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 211.

²⁴ These concerns presuppose that even the spiritual aspects of the kingdom are contingent upon Israel's repentance. A thorough evaluation of the progressive dispensational objections to this presupposition is not possible here due to space constraints.

²⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, ed. by Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 227.

²⁶ It is assumed here that Paul's lifelong pattern is normative for the church, since we are exhorted to follow his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9).

²⁷ McClain, 343.

²⁸ Christ continued to offer the kingdom to Israel even though He knew that their hearts were hardened in fulfillment of OT prophecy (see Matt. 13:13–15).

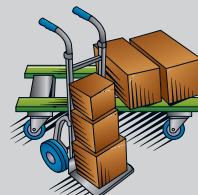
Mail Bag (Continued from page 5)

etc., constantly appear on the market. Which are the best tools? How about new works in progress such as Zondervan's Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series? Many men do not even know these books exist unless they have recently pursued a seminary degree. While reviews are available from some evangelical sites, it would be wonderful to read reviews from knowledgeable men within fundamental circles.

Pastor Carlos D. Galvan
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Answers and Encouragement for

As a reserve chaplain, I don't receive orders to drive six hours for preaching opportunities. I am regularly dispatched, however, when a soldier has a problem and needs counsel. For every hour spent preaching, at least five are spent counseling. The Bible-believing chaplain's approach to counseling is simple: whatever the issue and whoever the audience, the answer can be found in the Scriptures. Starting with the gospel, the chaplain skillfully applies the good news to the specific problem at hand.

Not all counseling is one-on-one. Occasionally, the chaplain counsels small groups or briefs large assemblies on issues that apply to individuals. When the Army identifies something as a "spiritual issue," it is normally assigned to the chaplain. Although an imminent threat of suicide must be brought to the attention of medical professionals, the chaplain's ministry is an integral part of suicide prevention; every soldier in our battalion has heard me give the Army suicide prevention brief at least once a year. This standardized brief never fails to generate individual follow-up counseling opportunities. The 2012 weekend for suicide briefs was scheduled in September during our weapons training and qualification. Instead of briefing everybody at once, the battalion scheduled me to brief each company individually. Thus, I gave the same lecture six times in a two-day period! Halfway through the two days, things got interesting.

After my last brief on the first evening, a First Sergeant approached me and asked if I had minute. After we stepped off to the side, he explained to me that one of his soldiers had not shown up for the trip to Fort McCoy

that morning. After trying to contact him, because of the schedule, they left without him. When three of his buddies finally made contact through Facebook, he was in a crisis. Already dealing with family and financial issues, now his sleeping through his wake up time that morning was the last straw. "Wanting it all to go away," he told his buddies he was going to kill himself. His friends attempted to talk him out of it, but they were not getting very far with him. However, they refused to give up, continuing to encourage him to get help and not quit. This had been going on for nearly eight hours when I was brought in as the "expert."

Using text messaging to talk a stranger out of committing suicide sounds like a movie plot. I am not a genius, but I was pretty sure having an officer he had never met suddenly attempt to contact him was not exactly what that soldier needed at the moment. My immediate problem lay in the mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion of his friends. After eight hours, they were at the end of their resources. We gathered in a circle and began to pray. We prayed for strength and the right words to say. We prayed for their friend. We read Scripture. After about thirty minutes, I had to leave, but those soldiers were encouraged to finish the job. Four hours later, their friend finally told them where he was and they were able to help to him. What a relief that was the next morning!

Normally, other than some paperwork to wrap things up, that would have been the end of it. But because of a shift in focus from ongoing operations to recuperation from ten years of war, a major emphasis has been placed on suicide prevention. My boss's excitement got his boss excited, and so on up the chain of command. Eventually, an article on the incident was published in an Army publication. But it didn't end there. Soon I received a call from an Army reporter wanting my perspective on the story. I explained my limited part in the incident and assumed I had heard the last of it. To my surprise, three months later I got another phone call and learned that the Army wanted to make a movie out of it!

On orders to report to a Reserve Center in Elwood, Illinois, south of Chicago, I drove from two hours north of Green Bay, Wisconsin. When I arrived, I was relieved to find out the project was an Army training video that required no



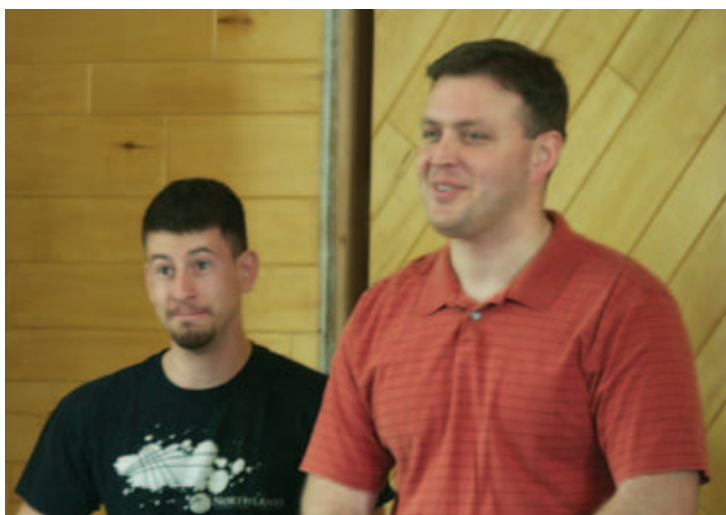
In addition to pastoring Lakeland Baptist Church in Crandon, Wisconsin, FBFI Army Reserve Chaplain (CPT) Seth Hamilton (shown here having some fun with members of his congregation) is chaplain for the 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

My Soldiers

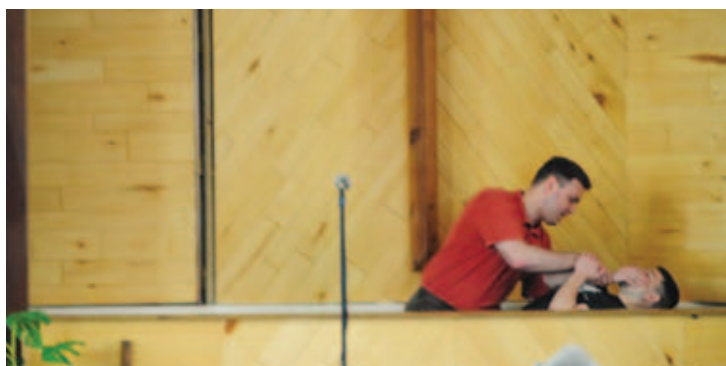
Seth Hamilton

acting! The purpose of the video was to emphasize the importance of caring for fellow soldiers as an essential part of suicide prevention. On the day the video was made, I finally got to meet the soldier who had been rescued the night his company heard my suicide briefing. He had gotten some things figured out in his life, and I was able to witness to him and his friends who were all there to participate in the video. Individual and group interviews took most of the day, so we had a lot of time to talk among ourselves. One interesting result of the whole situation was the openness of the soldiers in that company to my ministry. All of them were Roman Catholic, but they listened eagerly to my testimony and provided me with a clear opportunity for ministry, extended through lunch together before we were released to return home.

Thankfully, this counseling situation was not typical of most, but it underscores the need for chaplains and all other preachers to be, as it has been said, “always ready to preach, pray, or die!” Several years ago, when I was concerned about what to say if I found myself in an unfamiliar counseling situation, Dr. Vaughn reassured me: “Seth, you know the Bible. You have everything you need.” Whenever I find myself in a situation in which I feel I am in over my head, I remember what he told me. It is settling to know that no matter what issue I encounter in counseling, I know that in the Scriptures I will find answers and encouragement for my soldiers.



Pastor Hamilton baptizes Matthew Myers at their local church, Lakeland Baptist. Matt was recently interviewed as an FBFI chaplain candidate.



Gospel Soaked or Gospel Thirsty?

As I have traveled in evangelism for the last forty-three years, I want to voice a concern that greatly disturbs me. Before I do, I must preface it with the acknowledgement that I do not know it all. I do not set myself up as an authority with a superior knowledge of what is going on in this country or around the world. I am just sharing what I have seen in our local churches.

When I started in evangelism, more than ninety-five percent of our churches were involved in an outreach ministry. Most of these churches had a vibrant zeal in reaching the lost in their communities. Most of these churches also had evangelistic meetings for one or two weeks during the year; in the meetings I held, it would not be uncommon to have fifty to seventy-five unsaved people attend the services during the week. Now, we didn't have that many saved during the week, but they did come and hear the gospel. We still have some meetings where we average a lot of unsaved attending the meetings, but it's more the exception than the rule.

I live in South Carolina, and I love the South, and I'm not mocking anyone from there, but it seems like everyone here says he's saved! The common remark is, "I was baptized and joined the church when I was a child." In some Southern states, there is a church on just about every street corner. Even our politicians and movie stars state that they are saved.

We are gospel drenched here in America, yet we have more murder, rape, drugs, pornography, divorce, lying, and thievery than ever. Today we have more tools in the ministry than ever. Technology is advanced; commentaries, books, DVDs, and computers are bountiful. So what is wrong? Why are our local churches diminishing in growth and outreach? Could it be that we are like the church in Laodicea? Observe the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation 3:15-17:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

A man of God once remarked that the church of Laodicea was so wrapped up with material things that it did not realize its impoverished state. These Christians thought they were "rich," but God said they were "poor." My observation is that many Christians are rich in Bible doctrine, rich in Biblical separation, and rich in the right kind of music; however, many are poor in their outreach for the lost. They have spiritual stomachs that are bulging with the hearing of the Word of God. They are

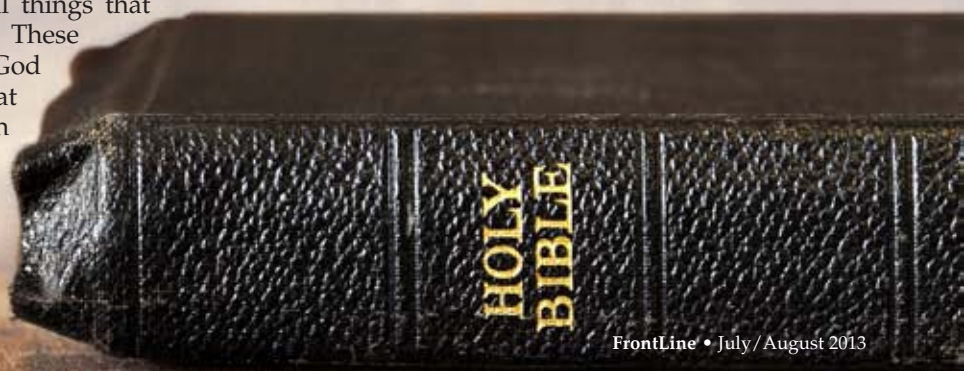
"gospel logged" from drinking deep at the conferences and seminars they attend. Like the Dead Sea, they are rich, but there is no outlet in their lives for taking all their spiritual riches and presenting them to others. What is the problem? Many are gospel-filled clear to the brim!

On the other hand, there are those who are gospel thirsty. In John 4:35 Christ said, "Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

This past January I was in Nairobi, Kenya, for almost two weeks. What a refreshing and wonderful experience to labor where people are open to the gospel. I was absolutely amazed at the attitude of even the public schools—they want the students to hear the truth of the Bible. Here in America, we do not want prayer or the Bible in our public schools, but in Nairobi they welcome it. As we were walking to one of the schools, I saw a sign outside that said, "If you are lazy, find another school to attend." Another sign read, "Here we eat books and drink knowledge." When we walked into the assembly room, all the students stood up out of respect for our being there, and when I preached, there was not a single sound from the students. Several hundred made professions of faith in Christ; some of the schools wanted the youth pastor to come back and hold Bible classes to help those who received Christ as their Savior—can you believe that? What a contrast to here in America, where teens drink iniquity like water and have little or no respect for the preaching of God's Word. As we passed out gospel tracts in Nairobi, almost every person accepted them; in fact, some people even asked us to give them a tract. When I preached, it was thrilling to see the attention given to the Word of God. Most of all, it was wonderful to see the immediate response of many coming to Christ.

I pray that the Lord will use this article to cause us to evaluate our spiritual condition. Are we gospel soaked—full and in need of nothing—or are we gospel thirsty? Are we desirous to be used of the Lord to bring others to our Savior? In Matthew 9:37, 38 Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

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