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# FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

**Should We Legislate Morality?**

*Joel Arnold*

**An Urgent Matter**

*Jonathan Threlfall*

**What Can We Do?**

*Keith Hamblen*

# Religious Liberty

# Religious Liberty



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We would like to thank Dr. Joel Arnold for coordinating this issue.



# Should We Legislate Morality?

For years I have been perplexed when it comes to religious liberty. Should gay marriage be illegal? Definitely. What about adultery? Not so sure. No question in my mind that heroin should be illegal. But should we outlaw alcohol too?

One over-worn stock phrase is that “you can’t legislate morality.” And in fact, history demonstrates that people won’t become more obedient to God’s Word just because disobedience is illegal. So do we try to legislate morality, or do we accept people’s choices as they are?

## **Laws Are Inherently Moral**

All legislation is fundamentally moral. In fact, the only way to really avoid legislating morality is not to legislate. Even if the moral basis is unstated, every legal mandate must contain underlying ethical judgments. This is fairly obvious with laws against murder or theft—these actions wouldn’t be illegal unless killing people or taking their property was wrong. Nor can I do whatever I want as long as it doesn’t hurt other people. Even if a group decided to privately harm themselves or commit suicide, it would still be wrong, and in most societies it is rightfully illegal.

That’s because legal mandates exist not only to protect us from each other but also from ourselves. Sin is so ravaging, so potent, so awful, that human societies would tear themselves apart were it not for God’s goodness and grace. He lovingly instituted rulers as “God’s ministers” (Rom. 13:3–6) in order to help fallen humanity survive on this sin-ridden planet.

And even the fact that we institute these laws manifests the common grace of God. Disparate societies all over the world display God’s image by establishing moral laws to restrain their sin-natures from running out of control. This is God’s morality, manifest in our consciences, enshrined in legal mandates, and testifying to His wisdom and grace. But we also foolishly resist.

## **Laws Are a Moral Indicator for Society**

Legislation always reflects moral values, but not all legislation reflects God’s values. This is yet another reason that “not legislating morality” is utterly vacuous—both legal constraint and legal inaction are moral judgments. Make abortions illegal and you’ve asserted that killing infants is wrong. Make them available and you’ve asserted that it’s okay.

And many societies have done just that.

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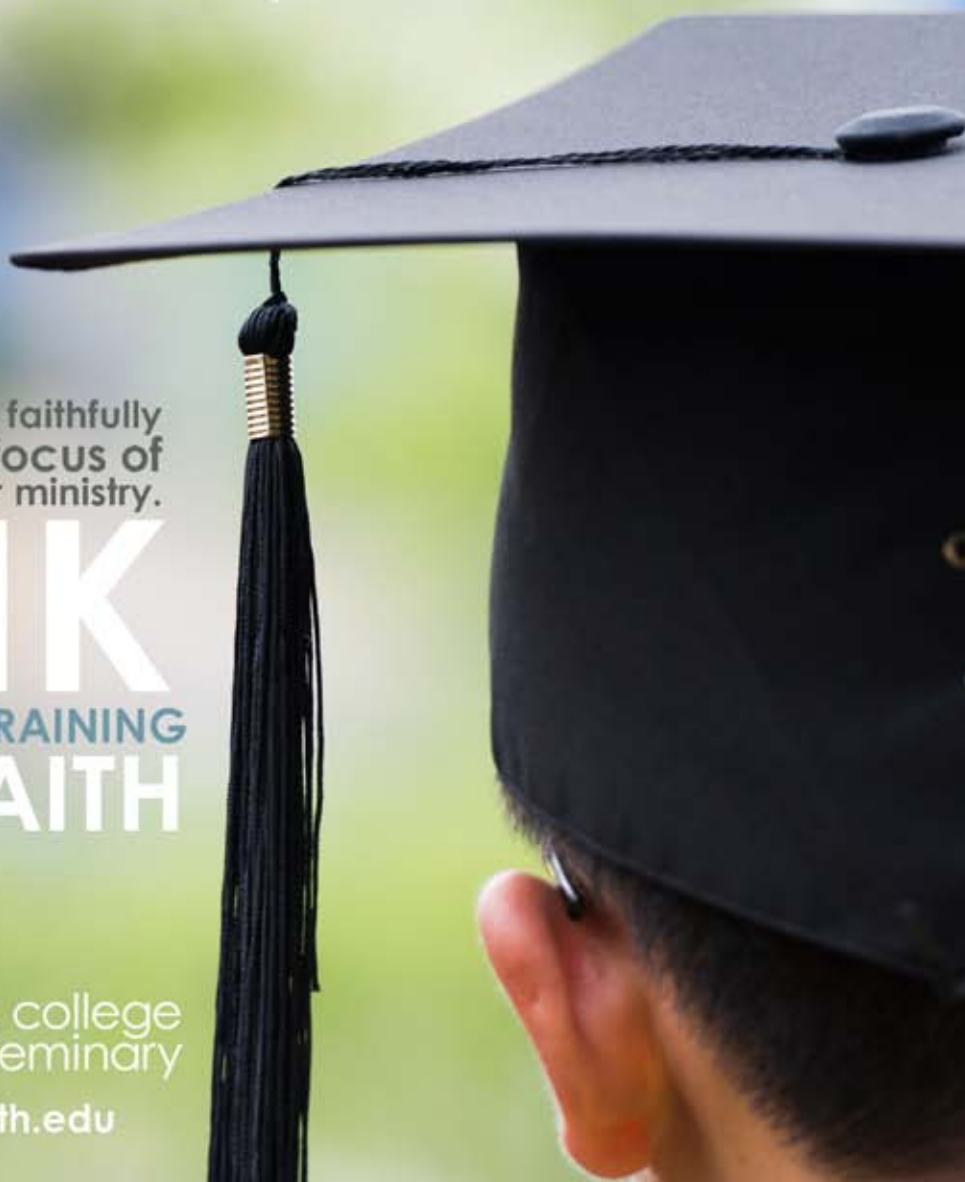
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# In Loving Memory

Readers of *FrontLine* are no doubt familiar with the ministry and recent tragedy in the lives of FBFI Board Vice Chairman Dr. Chuck Phelps and his dear wife, Linda. We want to make sure that our readers have the opportunity to see the following words from the Phelps that were posted very soon after the bus crash in Indianapolis that impacted so many families. Please join us in continued prayer support of the Phelps family and the Colonial Hills Baptist Church as their powerful testimonies continue to shine forth to the glory of God.



Chad and Courtney Phelps

Linda and I have not been able to answer all of the calls, e-mails, text-messages, and postings that have been sent our way. We do, however, want you to know that we thank every single one that has reached out. Most importantly, we thank God for your prayers. They are sustaining us in ways inexplicable and undeniable.

There are those who will say, "They were so young; they had such potential." It's true. But Chad and Courtney lived the truth of Philippians 1:20—"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." We are already discovering that God is being magnified in amazing ways through their deaths and so we are comforted that the prayers of our sweet children are being answered in ways that we could have never known and would never have chosen—but now would never change.

---

Brenda Vaughn, wife of FBFI President Dr. John Vaughn, was a dear and personal friend to so many. She "never knew a stranger" and was loved by people all over the world as evidenced by the response from thousands after hearing of her homegoing on September 2, 2013. Below is just a sampling of stories people shared with the family in loving memory of our friend, Brenda.

*Malinda Duvall, Managing Editor*

I had the privilege of getting to know Brenda during a small Sunday school class our church had for pastors' wives and wives of husbands going into the ministry. It ended up only being five of us in the class. I remember sitting in the office we met in, feeling I had plopped down into the middle of the Heroes of Faith for my generation. During those few short weeks I sat at the feet of my new mentors and gleaned important

life lessons. From that time on Brenda and I would write back and forth. When our family would come through Greenville, she would make it a point to try to see us if her health would allow. We would exchange prayer requests, heartaches, praises, and joys through our long-distance friendship. She once told me how she always wanted to visit Spain and enjoyed looking through my pictures. While she was never able to visit in person, she was here with me in my prayers and thoughts. She was my Titus 2 mentor, and I thank the Lord for her.

*Ester Johnson, Rota, Spain*

John and Brenda came to speak at our church one Sunday, probably around 2001 or 2002, and we had the pleasure of inviting them to our home for lunch rather unexpectedly. . . . [We] had a wonderful time around the table sharing, laughing, and joking along with our pastor, Kyle Paisley. We then had to drive them forty-five miles to the train station so they could catch their train to London to meet their next engagement, but with little time to make it, I drove them as fast as I could, . . . and dashed onto the station, just as the guard was blowing his whistle. . . . We yanked open the train door, pushed them on, shouted goodbye, and the train pulled out . . . phew! We have laughed with John and Brenda about that journey since as it will always stay in our memories. Brenda was such a sweet lady and remains close to us in our hearts for the friendship she showed my wife, Julie, and me.

*Nigel, Julie, and Abigail Tompsett  
Lowestoft, England*

Pastor and Mrs. Vaughn came to Japan in 2004 and we were privileged to have them to the church I just started to pastor. On the way back to where they stayed, we stopped . . . near Tokyo Bay, called Odaiba. They looked very happy, walking hand in hand. I am sure she was very tired after a long trip, but she was willing to ride two hours with us one way. It was such an encouragement to have both Pastor and Mrs. Vaughn in Japan.

*Yoichi Izu, Japan*

I have many precious memories, but probably the most special one was two about months before the fire, they were visiting our home in Myrtle Beach, and she said that she was willing for God to do whatever He had to in order for her to be used of Him. We loved to hear her sing that song "To Be Used of God." We had no idea what God had in mind.

*Linda Harper, North Carolina*

In April of 1991 the Lord called my husband into the military chaplaincy. . . . The Vaughns came to Pensacola to the church we were attending for special services. It

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## Should We Legislate Morality?

(Continued from page 3)

Following their warped collective conscience and values, they openly set God's ways aside by creating laws that contravene His morality. Why does our society still make moral demands on its citizens? Because of God's universal grace and His image in human hearts. Why does our society create laws contrary to His Word? Because fallen people resist His gracious rule.

And so delighting in the "freedom" that culminates in their own destruction, people cast off God's gracious protections, given from His loving hand. To whatever extent our laws reflect fallen morality rather than God's, it represents the fraying of our society and the sign of our self-destruction.

That's why legislation is a bellwether. Compare the laws of a society against the ethical absolutes of God's Word and you have a picture of its moral state. But legislation leads as well as follows. In other words, laws represent the group-think of a society on moral issues, but they also serve to instruct that society on what they will soon come to believe.

And that's exactly the threat that existing legislation can come to have on God's people. Should homosexuality be illegal? What about alcohol, recreational marijuana, pornography, or adultery? For many Christians, our views on these questions simply reflect the moral judgments of those around us. Without reflection or analysis, we imbibe the views of our culture because it's all we've ever known. We assume that many morally opprobrious actions should be legal; with more time, we might even view them as acceptable. Many believers have already given way, precisely because their thinking was shaped more by society than by Scripture. But the challenging process of unsorting and filtering through a Biblical worldview points us back to reality.

### Laws Point Us to the Perfect Judge

Most believers feel helpless before the tsunami of moral relativism that is now crashing through our national institutions. Faithful believers should be grieved at the destructive onslaught of sin afflicting our nation. The legal code of any secular state intermingles just and righteous moral guidelines with immoral assertions of autonomy and rebellion against the Most High. In the last few years, the latter has only increased.

But these distortions of truth, justice, and equity are an ongoing reminder that the present world is broken. Some nations' laws are better than others'. The founding documents of the United States may have been some of the best. But at the core there are no perfect systems, and there cannot be until Jesus comes.

Rather than despairing before the corruption of our present world and government, can we view it Biblically and theologically? Good laws are a wonderful exception in human history, but we shouldn't be surprised by moral confusion. Morally bankrupt laws point us to another time and place, where righteousness dwells. Every time you see the destructive forces of sin, let it remind you that Jesus is coming. Let every corrupt ruler, every societal perversion, and every distorted law point you again to the One who will finally establish justice and righteousness in the earth (Isa. 9:7).

And ironically, this is the one sense in which it's true that you can't legislate morality. Civil laws are only a partial curb to the destructive process of sin. There can be no true change apart from the crucified Christ. As we longingly await His return, may the despair and moral bankruptcy of our nation's laws wean us from our love of this present world. May our longing hearts look upward in hope and gladly confess, "Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come."

And while we wait, let us confront the moral bankruptcy of our society by clearly speaking the truth. The ultimate question of religious liberty is not whether to legislate morality or not. The question is whose morality we will use. Living in a democratic society, it is all too easy to assume that we determine civil morality through group-think. But consensus doesn't make things right or wrong. Right moral judgments come only from the perfect moral Judge—God Himself. We must be courageous, living as salt and light in a decaying morass of sin. When we declare God's light in the darkness, many will ridicule us, but some will be silently pricked in their hearts, and some will believe.

All laws legislate morality. The problem is that the moral judgments they legislate are occasionally Biblical, but generally they are not. And so we wait for the Savior whose rule will finally bring a flood of righteousness, filling the whole earth. May we live out the tension of being strangers and sojourners in a fallen world while we wait for the One who will finally make all things new.

Joel Arnold (PhD, Bob Jones University) is raising support to train national church planters in the Philippines, beginning this fall. He writes regularly at [EveryTribeAndTongue.com](http://EveryTribeAndTongue.com).



**"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. 2:1–3).**





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# Facing Religious Persecution in a Free Country

## The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States

begins, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Unfortunately, enemies of religion attack this constitutional right. For example, because a believer shared his faith in Christ with friends he made at work, he lost his long-time position in the large company he worked for. Because a high school teacher read her Bible during lunch at school, she was threatened with disciplinary action. Accounts such as these are common, but why must citizens of a free country have to fight for a right that their country's Constitution guarantees? The Bible gives us the answer to this question along with guidelines for responding to religious persecution in any country, free or not.

### Expect Persecution . . .

Christians should expect persecution, because "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). No human law can prevent Satan's attacks against the church until the day that Jesus Christ ends them forever (Rev. 21:5). We know the apostle Paul experienced illegal religious persecution. Although Roman law prohibited flogging a Roman citizen without a trial (Acts 16), the Philippian magistrates did just that and cast Paul into prison before a trial could be held. In 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul told to Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Jesus taught His followers in Matthew 5 that the world would persecute believers just as God's chosen people persecuted His prophets in Old



Testament times, even though God had written the laws for His people.

Since believers are to expect religious persecution, defending religious liberty may seem like a lost cause. But legitimate forms of resistance are available to those who are persecuted, and Christ-honoring attitudes are always possible. Believers in the United States of America enjoy remembering “the good old days” when Christians were free to openly express their faith. However, they must also remember that American freedom does not give us the spiritual freedom to be sarcastic or to sin against God in our attitudes against our persecutors. In other countries, such as China, believers actually pray that Americans will experience enough persecution to take their faith more seriously.

Historically, some believers looked back to “the good old days” of the early church with a desire for persecution. In the first three centuries of Christianity, believers faced gruesome deaths for bearing the name of Jesus Christ. During this time the Christian theologian and apologist Tertullian observed, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed (of the church).”<sup>\*</sup> As Christians died for their faith while joyfully singing praises to Christ, unbelievers came to Christ through their powerful testimony. However, some believers began to seek the “martyr’s crown,” and pastors had to counsel zealous church members not to voluntarily offer themselves as martyrs. After Christianity was legalized by Constantine, some sought the glory of martyrdom through self-imposed deprivation of food, sleep, or family.

### ... But Don't Seek It

Such a desire for martyrdom or other forms of persecution contradicts the plain teaching of Christ. While Christians are to expect persecution, they are not to seek it or unnecessarily provoke it. Rather, they are to flee from it. In Matthew 10:23 Christ commanded His disciples to flee when persecution came. While Paul suffered greatly for Christ and spoke of his desire to be in Heaven, the Book of Acts records several times when he fled persecution or used legal means to escape it. Shortly after his conversion Paul escaped persecution in Damascus with the aid of fellow believers who let him down a city wall in a basket. In Acts 22:25 he claimed his rights under Roman law to avoid a flogging without a trial. In Acts 25:10 Paul appealed to his right as a Roman citizen to be heard by Caesar when Festus would turn Paul over to the Jews who had covenanted to kill him. In 1 Timothy 2:2 Paul charged Timothy to teach the church to pray for political leaders so that believers might live godly lives in peace. Clearly, believers should neither fear death nor seek martyrdom.

A first step in fighting any war is to identify the enemy. Had Hitler been identified as an enemy in time, the Allies might have avoided the horrors of World War II, or at least of the Holocaust. In the same way, we must realize that our

enemies are not just those who ban public prayer in Jesus’ name, ban the public display of the Ten Commandments, or work to make Biblical statements about homosexuality a hate crime. Those efforts should be resisted in legal and godly ways, but those who seek such prohibitions are not our enemies; they are the captives of our real enemy, Satan. It is he whom we should fight with the Word of God. Paul suffered greatly at the hands of the Jews and the Romans (cf. 2 Cor. 11:21–33), yet he knew that his real enemy was not human (Eph. 6:10, 11) and that those who oppose Christ have been “taken captive by [Satan] at his will” (2 Tim. 2:26). Remember that Christ commanded believers to conquer their human persecutors with love (Matt. 5–7).

Taking the metaphor of the Nazi threat a step further, our objective is similar to that of the Allied soldiers landing on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. What followed involved great destruction. General Eisenhower’s goal was to destroy the German army, and much property and many lives were lost in that colossal effort. Hitler bears the responsibility for those losses. In the same way, Christ will destroy Satan, who will, in turn, bear the responsibility for the destruction necessary to bring liberation. Recognizing that we are soldiers in a great spiritual conflict with a certain outcome to the glory of God, we must speak the truth in gentle love, trusting God to rescue us from persecution and our human oppressors from their captivity to the father of lies (2 Tim. 2:24–26). Christ came not to condemn but to save;

His patient message of mercy is offered now, through us, before certain judgment falls. Just as airmen dropped warning notes over Japan before the atomic bombs were dropped, we are Christ’s ambassadors offering a message to all mankind, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:18–21)!

### The Right Weapon

After we identify our ultimate enemy as Satan and understand that our objective is to proclaim Christ’s victory, inviting men to be reconciled with God, we must make sure we are using the right weapon: the truth. Christ plainly taught in John 8:44 that unbelievers do not recognize the truth because they are children of the father of lies. As 2 Corinthians 4:4 states, “The god of this world hath blinded [their] minds.” But Christ also promised that His truth would set men free from Satan’s chains of deception (John 8:32). The armor issued to us for this battle includes the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Thus, early Christian apologists worked hard to expose the lies used by their persecutors to defend the slaughter of Christians. They refuted the slanderous accusation that the Lord’s Supper was a cannibalistic orgy. Satan’s minions spread the lie that Christians were atheists because they did not worship the gods of Rome—that they were political revolutionaries because they called Jesus Christ their King. In the same way, believers today must expose lies about the Christian faith.

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# An Urgent Matter



Before Wednesday, June 26, 2013, Bible-believing Christians were aware of the importance of knowing and articulating their convictions about same-sex marriage. But after June 26, when the Supreme Court struck down parts of the Defense of Marriage Act and sent Proposition 8 into “legal limbo,”<sup>1</sup> that awareness has grown from important to urgent. When we trace the trajectory of these decisions, we see an America in which opponents of same-sex marriage are a curious and despised minority. The dots are in place. Only the line remains to be drawn.

But the gravest danger we face is not that we will be culturally marginalized or legally punished for opposing same-sex marriage. Our gravest danger is that we either discard our beliefs in response to this pressure or swap our mission of proclaiming the gospel for a mission of social change through politics. To avoid either extreme we must remind ourselves of Scripture’s clear teaching on marriage and sexuality and place it within the broader framework of God’s redemptive plan. In other words, Bible-believing Christians must be able to answer two questions: (1) What does the Bible say about same-sex marriage? And, (2) how does it relate to the gospel?



## What Does the Bible Say About Same-Sex Marriage?

Scripture's answer to the first question is straightforward, and it is helpful to see it in two parts, one positive, the other negative. Positively, God designed marriage to be a permanent union between one man and one woman: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, also cited in Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; 1 Cor. 6:16; and Eph. 5:31). Since Scripture defines marriage as a union between two members of the opposite sex, the question of same-sex marriage is actually oxymoronic. We accept the term "same-sex marriage" so that we can intelligibly discuss the issue. But from a Scriptural standpoint, same-sex marriage is a contradiction of terms. There is no such thing.

The second part of Scripture's answer to this question is negative: sexual intimacy outside male-female marriage is forbidden. The actions of fornication, adultery, and homosexuality are all aberrations of what God intended for sex, but Scripture reserves the severest condemnation for the action of homosexuality, since it not only violates God's design for marriage but also exhibits a fundamental confusion of the sexes. Two passages in the Pentateuch explicitly forbid homosexual intercourse, and one passage refers to it using the name of the infamous city of Sodom (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17). The most notable passage in the New Testament dealing with homosexuality is Romans 1:26, 27. Here Paul presents homosexuality as the moral cul-de-sac of a route that began with people willfully suppressing knowledge about God. Using descriptors such as "vile affections," "against nature," and "working that which is unseemly," Paul paints a picture of a practice of life that is utterly immoral and self-destructive ("receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet"). Contrary to what some people claim, these passages cannot be restricted to prohibiting only homosexual abuse or homosexual prostitution.

## What about People Who Say They Believe the Bible but Accept Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage?

Given Scripture's clarity on this issue, it seems that Christians would be united on whether same-sex marriage is right or wrong. But many who claim Scripture as their authority also affirm homosexuality and same-sex marriage. One such person is Rob Bell, author of *Love Wins*, who in March of 2013 publicly came out in support of same-sex marriage: "Some people are gay and want to share their life with someone, and they should be able to. And that's how the world is, and we should affirm that and we should affirm monogamy, fidelity and commitment, both gay and straight."<sup>2</sup> What disturbs me most is not that Rob Bell publicly affirms same-sex marriage but that many Christians I know find his thinking to be compelling—Christians who were nurtured in Bible-believing homes and schools. They might not have arrived at Bell's conclusions (although many have), but they have bought into the thinking that got him there.

So in order to effectively evaluate the issue of same-sex marriage, we must do more than remind ourselves that

God intends marriage to be between a man and woman exclusively. We must also point out the errors that compel even professing Christians to prefer support for same-sex marriage over support for the clear teaching of the Bible. As I carefully listen to these people (especially Rob Bell) defend their support of same-sex marriage, I detect four major strands of thought that bind them to their support of same-sex marriage. First, they allow culture to dictate morality. "This is where our culture is, and God is in it," they say. After all, Christians dare not find themselves on the wrong side of history. Second, they adopt a pragmatic approach to promoting the Christian faith. "Opposing homosexuality isn't working. It repels, rather than attracts people to Christ," they say. Third, they define sin as harm to individuals. They ask, "How is anyone being harmed by two men living together in a loving, monogamous relationship?" Fourth, they see homosexuality as an inborn trait rather than a chosen action or lifestyle. They say, "God made them gay. Who are we to tell them they can't marry whom they love?"

## Authority and Sin

To Christians who are confused or convinced by these errors, we must faithfully affirm the Scriptural truths about authority and sin. First, with regard to authority, we must constantly affirm the supremacy of God's Word over culture. We do not evaluate the Word of God by our culture. Rather, we evaluate our culture by the Word of God. Neither may we reinvent God to keep Him up to date with our culture's shifting moral values. When Scripture says that God is against something, we can be certain that He will never be "in" it (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). Neither do we need to rescue God's public image by changing His policies. If He is God, and if His Word is true, then He is perfectly capable of vindicating Himself (Rom. 3:4). Second, with regard to sin, we acknowledge that all sin ultimately causes harm. But we begin with the definition of sin as the transgression of God's law, not merely what we perceive to be harm to ourselves or others.

## Why Is This Issue So Important to Us?

We have discussed what Scripture says about same-sex marriage and explored the faulty thinking of those who claim the name of Christ and uphold homosexuality. Now we must answer the question, "Why is this important?" Isn't it arbitrary for us (as some would claim) to raise arms about this issue when problems like poverty, sex trafficking, and human slavery should occupy our attention? Why the big deal about same-sex marriage?

There are three main answers to this question, and I present them from least important to most important. First, at no other point in history has the Biblical conception of marriage come under such attack. We are seeing a radical redefinition of marriage, the consequences of which we can't even begin to surmise. Second, with the issue of same-sex marriage, we are seeing just the tip of iceberg of a worldview that is aggressively rejecting God's most fundamental categories.

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# Prospects for Religious Liberty in the United States

Questions We Are  
(or Ought to Be) Asking

Recent political debates have raised the question of the status and future of religious freedom in America. In January of this year the Barna Group reported the results of a fifty-state telephone survey. A little over half of the total respondents,

including 71% of Evangelicals, said that they were either “very or somewhat concerned that religious freedom in the U.S. will become more restricted in the next five years.<sup>1</sup> In light of recent developments, the following are some of the questions that we should be asking related to religious freedom for believers in Christ.<sup>2</sup>



**Q What is the most important thing for Christians to understand about religious freedom?**

**A** We must distinguish between our religious civil liberties and our spiritual freedom in Christ. Our spiritual freedom is absolute and inviolable. No one can do anything to take away the believer's peace with God, his forgiveness of sins in Christ, or his joy, peace and power in the Holy Spirit. A failure to understand this truth will lead us to unnecessary anxiety and will damage our testimony for Christ.

**Q Why then should we care about freedom of religion?**

**A** There are at least two reasons that religious freedom is important. First, it is good for our society since it protects the consciences of those who believe there is truth higher than the current social or political consensus. This is a bulwark against tyranny of all sorts. Second, religious freedom, like other legal protections, is a useful tool for the work of the ministry. Paul instructed believers who were slaves to realize that they were free people spiritually in Christ. Nevertheless, if they could obtain their emancipation, they should do so (1 Cor. 7:21, 22). Paul himself used his Roman citizenship to protect himself as he served Christ (Acts 16:37; 22:25; 25:11). American Christians are also American citizens. They have constitutional rights as well as the privilege of participating in the process of self-government. Therefore we have a stewardship, both for the good of the society and for the sake of the gospel, and must exercise that stewardship in a responsible fashion.

**Q Don't Americans enjoy an almost unprecedented level of religious freedom?**

**A** Absolutely. Compared with much of the history of the Church and much of the world today, in the United States we are blessed with an abundance of religious liberty, much more than we currently exercise, especially with regard to evangelizing the lost. To complain that we are martyrs is an insult to our brothers and sisters around the world who are truly suffering for the faith. While we should defend religious liberty, we must also recognize the great blessings of liberty that we have in this country and thank God for them. We must also pray for and support persecuted fellow believers around the world.

**Q What is currently the greatest challenge to Christians' religious liberty in America?**

**A** In human terms, the greatest current challenge comes from the broad social and legal acceptance of the Sexual Revolution. A fundamental belief of that movement is that sexual desires and orientation are essential to personhood and are entitled to be expressed freely. Because under this view consenting adults should be able to "love whom they wish," to deny them that right is to attack their personhood. As one advocate put it, "same-sex relationships constitute lesbian and gay identity. . . . Marriage is merely one form of sexual orientation identity enactment."<sup>3</sup>

The Christian (and traditional) understanding is squarely opposed to this philosophy of sexual "self-expression." Contrary to the popular idea, just because something comes naturally does not mean that it is right. All people are born sinners, and many of our "natural" impulses are evil. As society increasingly adopts the self-actualization view of personhood, the Christian worldview is going to be increasingly seen as intolerant and antisocial.

**Q How should Christians respond to being called "bigots" and "haters" simply for supporting Biblical sexual morality?**

**A** First we must realize that it is nonsensical. If belief that marriage is between a man and a woman is hateful bigotry, then virtually everyone in the history of civilization (including President Obama) was until very recently a hateful bigot. In this context the term "bigot" is a classic *ad hominem* attack, designed not primarily to debate but to insult and intimidate. Second, we must realize that name calling is nothing new or unusual. Jesus said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall . . . say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11).<sup>4</sup> The Romans called the Christians "atheists" and "haters of mankind." A number of terms for religious groups, such as "Anabaptists," were coined by their opponents as insults. Most importantly we must, in the power of the Spirit, bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28), focus on a Christlike response (1 Pet. 2:23), and seek to demonstrate the falsity of the slanders by our godly conduct (1 Pet. 3:5, 6).

**Q How is the inversion of moral values affecting public policy discussions?**

**A** A striking example of this effect can be seen in the ACLU's campaign to "end the use of religion in discrimination." The list of offending practices listed on their website is instructive:

"Religiously affiliated schools firing women because they became pregnant while not married;

"Business owners refusing to provide insurance coverage for contraception for their employees;

"Graduate students, training to be social workers, refusing to counsel gay people;

"Pharmacies turning away women seeking to fill birth control prescriptions;

"Bridal salons, photo studios, and reception halls closing their doors to same-sex couples planning their weddings."<sup>5</sup>

Notice that *every one* of these examples directly or indirectly involves the refusal to acquiesce to the new sexual ethic. Increasingly public policy and law are being invoked to codify the Sexual Revolution.

**Q Are there any other significant trends that threaten religious liberties?**

**A** Probably the most important has been the rise of the regulatory state. At the time of the country's founding, government regulation of everyday activity was orders of magnitude less than it is today. For example, in 2011 alone over 81,000 new federal regulations were added to the Federal Register.<sup>6</sup> The more we are regulated by the government the more likely it is that the working out of our religious beliefs in our daily lives is going to come into conflict with government policies and rules.<sup>7</sup>

**Q Does the legal redefinition of marriage pose a challenge to the religious freedom of those who disagree?**

**A** The short answer is yes, although the situation is somewhat complicated. In just a few years a number of conflicts have already arisen. As of the time of writing, a photographer in New Mexico, a florist in Washington, and a baker in Colorado are facing legal sanctions for "discrimination" for refusing to provide their services for same-sex weddings or related activities. They join a restaurant in Vermont, a farm-based wedding venue in New York, and a bed and breakfast in Illinois. As a Heritage Foundation report concludes, "Same-sex marriage is likely to increase the number of conflicts between religious freedom and nondiscrimination laws."<sup>8</sup>

**Q Don't same-sex marriage statutes and amendments include religious freedom protections?**

**A** When marriage laws are changed by courts, as in Iowa and California, there is typically no explicit religious exemption since that question was not part of the court case. Therefore, any such protections would have to come from other places (federal or state constitutions and statutes). This would be one very significant consequence should the Supreme Court rule that same-sex marriage is a Constitutional right. In the case of state statutes redefining marriage, the only religious protection that has been universally adopted is one that says ministers and churches will not be forced to "solemnize" same-sex marriages, that is, perform the ceremony. This is a quite narrow exception and one that is undoubtedly required by the First Amendment anyway.

**Q Do some state statutes provide additional religious freedom protections?**

**A** States such as New York and Minnesota have provided somewhat broader protections. Each state statute is different, but religious exemptions tend to be restricted to ministers and religious organizations. This means that religious individuals or businesses will unlikely be granted an exemption. It is also sometimes unclear what types of ministries (besides churches, mosques, temples, etc.) would be covered. Similarly, only a few states allow religious organizations to refuse to recognize the status of same-sex unions in the course of their employment and ministry activities. Religious organizations will not have to hold the ceremony, but they may be forced to recognize the marriage.

**Q What about the tax exemption?**

**A** For the present, churches' tax exemptions are probably safe (not even the tax-exempt status of the odious Westboro Baptist Church has been revoked). But the same cannot necessarily be said of parachurch ministries that are deemed to be involved in "secular" activities such as education or social work. For example, a bill in the California legislature would strip state tax exemption from nonprofit youth organizations that do not allow homosexuals to participate or serve as leaders.<sup>9</sup> Unless protected by statute, Christian colleges may, for example, be required to make married student housing available to same-sex couples, and religious schools may not be able to insist on Biblical moral norms (such as chastity apart from a Biblically defined marriage) for their students or employees. In fact, one of our biggest concerns should be for our Christian schools and colleges.

**Q What about the First Amendment?**

**A** The First Amendment forbids the government to take action "prohibiting the free exercise" of religion. As you may imagine, the body of legal opinions interpreting religious freedom is voluminous and complex. No constitutional right is absolute, but if the government infringes the exercise of religion, it will typically be required to show that its action is necessary to further a "compelling" state interest and is the "least restrictive means" of accomplishing its objective. Any statute that specifically targets one or more religious groups would have to meet this high legal standard.

Laws that explicitly discriminate against religious groups and individuals, however, are relatively rare. Much more commonly, conflict arises when a law of "general applicability" (such as an antidiscrimination law) incidentally operates so as to impose "substantial burden" on the exercise of a "sincerely held religious belief." In 1990 the Supreme Court held in *Employment Division v. Smith* that such laws need only have a "rational basis" (a much lower threshold than strict scrutiny). In many cases, therefore, the Free Exercise Clause is not going to provide much protection.

**Q What about the Religious Freedom Restoration Act?**

**A** In response to the *Smith* case mentioned above, Congress in 1993 overwhelmingly passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which re-established the strict scrutiny test. However, in the 1997 case of *City of Boerne v. Flores*,<sup>10</sup> the Court held that RFRA was unconstitutional when applied to state law. The RFRA has continued to be upheld, however, as applied to the federal government, so that when a federal law or regulation substantially burden the exercise of religion the government must satisfy the strict scrutiny test.



## Q Are there other legal protections?

A In addition to the Federal Constitution each state has its own constitutional freedom of religion protections. It is up to state courts to determine how much protection each affords. A number of states have passed religious freedom restoration acts of their own that provide various levels of protection. The specific situation varies from state to state.

## Q Is there less interest today than in the past in preserving religious liberty?

A This is hard to gauge. It is true that most people in our society would say that protecting religious liberty is important. On the other hand, the less important religion becomes for people, the less interest they will have in protecting it. One contested area today is the scope and nature of religious liberty. For example as a number of commentators have noted, the Obama Administration seems to be shifting from speaking of “freedom of religion” to speaking of “freedom of worship.”<sup>11</sup> The latter is substantially narrower than the former, which is closer to the language of the First Amendment. To be sure, the freedom to worship is an essential protection, but it probably does not include many religiously motivated decisions in daily life.

## Q Has this apparently narrower understanding of religious freedom been reflected in any practical ways?

A A rather cramped interpretation of religious liberty seems to be reflected by positions the current administration has taken in court. For example, the Justice Department argues that religious freedom does not extend to Hobby Lobby, since it is a for-profit corporation. In another example, in the case of *Hosanna-Tabor Lutheran School v. EEOC* lawyers for the government argued before the Supreme Court that when it comes to employment law (1) the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment grant churches no special freedom to choose their ministers beyond the right any organization has to choose its leaders,<sup>12</sup> and (2) even if there is such a freedom, it should be strictly limited to only those employees that perform “exclusively religious functions.”<sup>13</sup>

## Q In what areas are religious protections the strongest?

A First, the courts have held that the Religion Clauses prohibit the government from interfering with the “internal governance” of religious institutions. This prohibition extends to four main areas: (1) receiving, disciplining, and dismissing members, (2) the exercise of church polity and administration, (3) the definition and propagation of church doctrine, and (4) the selection, conditions, and discipline of ministers.<sup>14</sup> Although not every employee of a church is a minister, the Supreme Court stated that the term did not refer only to the leaders of the congregation.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the Supreme Court said in the *Smith* case discussed above that religious exercise merits heightened protection when it also involves other constitutionally protected freedoms. So, for example, the right of free exercise coupled with the liberty of free speech should continue to guarantee a very broad right for believers to proclaim Biblical truth even when that truth is offensive to others. Free exercise coupled with freedom of association provides strong protections for churches’ decisions to admit and dismiss members. In addition there are broad constitutional and statutory protections for the freedom to gather for worship without unreasonable barriers from things such as land-use restrictions.<sup>16</sup>

## Q What are some things that ministries should do, given current trends?

A The first thing that we should do is pray that the Lord would fill us with His Spirit and give us trust in Him and a Christlike attitude. Second, we should inform ourselves about religious liberty issues and protections. A number of groups publish regularly on the subject of religious liberty (see sidebar, p. 16). Third, religious institutions should clearly articulate how their practices, including their employment practices, relate to their spiritual mission and functions.

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<sup>1</sup> “Americans Concerned about Religious Freedom,” Barna Update, January 18, 2013 (<https://www.barna.org/culture-articles/600-most-americans-are-concerned-about-restrictions-in-religious-freedom?q=regional+differences>, accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The answers here are not prophecies, of course, and do not constitute legal advice. Given the nature of the issues involved, legal counsel may sometimes be necessary.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Nejaime, “Marriage Inequality: Same-Sex Relationships, Religious Exemptions, and the Production of Sexual Orientation Discrimination,” *California Law Review*, vol. 100 (2013), p. 1169.

<sup>4</sup> Of course the slander of one’s opponents is a common practice of fallen humanity. It is all over the Internet and is common in arguments over politics, religion, morality, and even sports. When walking in the flesh instead of in the Spirit, Christians are just as susceptible to this evil practice as unbelievers.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aclu.org/using-religion-discriminate>, accessed July 4, 2013

<sup>6</sup> Clyde Wayne Crews Jr., “Ten Thousand Commandments 2012: An Annual Snapshot of the Federal Regulatory State,” Competitive Enterprise Institute, <http://cei.org/studies/ten-thousand-commandments-2012>, accessed July 5, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> A current example of this is the contraception (and abortifacient) mandate, which has produced over sixty lawsuits with over two hundred plaintiffs (“HHS Mandate Information Central,” The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, <http://www.becketfund.org/hhsinformationcentral/>, accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Messner, “Same-Sex Marriage and Threats to Religious Freedom: How Nondiscrimination Laws Factor In,” Heritage

Foundation Backgrounder no. 2589, July 29, 2011, p. 2 (<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/07/same-sex-marriage-and-threats-to-religious-freedom-how-nondiscrimination-laws-factor-in>, accessed July 3, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> California Senate Bill 323 as amended. (See [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/postquery?bill\\_number=sb\\_323&sess=CUR&house=B&author=lara](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/postquery?bill_number=sb_323&sess=CUR&house=B&author=lara), accessed July 3, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> 521 U.S. 507

<sup>11</sup> Ashley Samelson, "Why 'Freedom of Worship' Is Not Enough," *First Things*, Feb. 22, 2010 (<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2010/02/why-ldquoof-freedom-of-worshiprdquo-is-not-enough>, accessed July 5, 2013). Jeremy Weber, "Becket Fund Pushes Back on Obama's 'Religious Freedom Day' Proclamation," *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/january/becket-fund-pushes-back-on-obamas-religious-freedom-day.html> (posted January 16, 2013, accessed July 5, 2013). Terence Jeffrey, "Obama on This July 4: Americans Free to 'Worship'—But Not Freely Exercise Their Religion," *cnsnews.com*, July 4, 2013, <http://cnsnews.com/blog/terence-p-jeffrey/obama-july-4-americans-free-worship-not-freely-exercise-their-religion>, accessed July 4, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> The Supreme Court in a unanimous decision rejected the administration's view, saying, "We cannot accept the remarkable view that the Religion Clauses have nothing to say about a religious organization's freedom to select its own ministers" (*Hosanna-Tabor Lutheran Church v. EEOC*, 132 S.Ct. 694 [2012]).

<sup>13</sup> Justice Roberts observed during oral arguments that even the Pope does not exercise "exclusively" religious functions since he is the head of the Vatican State (James Vicini, "Top court hears fired teacher church-state case," *Reuters*, Wed. Oct. 5, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/05/us-usa-religion-court-idUSTRE7944YF20111005>, accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> "Church Autonomy: Protecting Churches from Government Interference," Alliance Defending Freedom whitepaper, 7/13/2012, [http://www.speakupmovement.org/church/content/userfiles/Church\\_Autonomy-v2.pdf](http://www.speakupmovement.org/church/content/userfiles/Church_Autonomy-v2.pdf), accessed July 5, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> *Hosanna-Tabor Lutheran Church v. EEOC*, 132 S.Ct. 694 (2012).

<sup>16</sup> One statutory protection is the federal *Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act* (Public Law 106-274; 42 U.S. Code sec. 2000cc and following).

**Provisions that churches should include in their governing documents** (from "Seven Things All Churches Should Have in Their By-Laws," Alliance Defending Freedom, <http://factn.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Church-by-law-recommendations-memo.pdf>, accessed July 5, 2013):

- Formal membership policy
- Procedure for member discipline/membership revocation
- Procedure for rescinding membership
- Job descriptions and religious grounds for limiting employment opportunities
- Statement of religious belief regarding marriage
- Identify governing body that is the sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture
- Due diligence requirements for all volunteers and staff who work with children

#### Sources for information on religious liberty and related issues:

- Barna Group ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org))
- The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty ([www.becketfund.org](http://www.becketfund.org))
- The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention ([erlc.com](http://erlc.com))
- The Heritage Foundation ([www.heritage.org/issues/religion-and-civil-society](http://www.heritage.org/issues/religion-and-civil-society))
- The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life ([www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org))

#### Groups providing legal help to defend religious liberty:

- Alliance Defending Freedom ([www.alliancedefendingfreedom.org](http://www.alliancedefendingfreedom.org))
- Christian Law Association ([www.christianlaw.org](http://www.christianlaw.org))
- Christian Legal Society ([www.clsnet.org](http://www.clsnet.org))
- National Center for Life and Liberty ([www.ncdl.org](http://www.ncdl.org))
- Rutherford Institute ([www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org))



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# A Voice Long Silent Speaks for Today

## Isaac Backus—Baptist Defender of Religious Liberty

In recent times the separation of church and state has become an argument for barring the church from any input in the secular state. But the original idea was to bar the state from meddling in the church, not the converse. This critical distinction is evident in the thought and writing of Isaac Backus, an early defender of religious liberty.

Isaac Backus, born in 1724 into a Connecticut Congregationalist family, became one of the most important American Baptist leaders in the Revolutionary era. As a result of his conversion during the Great Awakening, Backus began to question the Congregational establishment in New England. The original Puritan vision of a pure church in a pure state had been lost. Backus's own pastor, though a supporter of the Awakening, was an example of this changed belief about the church. His pastor interpreted the parables of the wheat and the tares to teach that believers and unbelievers would exist in the church until the return of Christ. Christians should not try to root out the tares before then. Backus became convinced that the field in the parable is the world, not the church. The church has a responsibility to see to its purity. He, along with several other men, was also concerned that the Congregational churches were moving toward a more Presbyterian polity.

For these reasons the Separates, as they came to be known, separated from the established churches and founded their own churches on the principles of a converted membership and congregational government. Soon the Separates realized that the practice of paedobaptism and their ideal of a pure church stood in tension. Eventually, many of the Separates, Backus included, became Baptists.

At this time in New England, Anglicans, Old Baptists, and Quakers were tolerated by the establishment and did not have to pay taxes to support the clergy. But the Separates, and the Baptists who came from them, were considered schismatic and were not tolerated. They also established churches in many New England communities and thus proved more of a threat to the standing order. If large parts of the community aligned with the Separates and they weren't required to pay the ecclesiastical tax, then the tax burden on the rest of the community would go up proportionately. The New England colonies therefore worked to ensure that the Baptist churches that emerged from the Separates were not exempt from ecclesiastical taxes. In this context Isaac Backus emerged as a defender of religious liberty.<sup>1</sup>

Backus wrote around the time of the American Revolution so the rhetoric of liberty was in the air. He did make use of some of the prominent contemporary themes, but Backus's arguments for religious freedom are distinctly Christian. For instance, while he makes a "no taxation without representation" argument,<sup>2</sup> Backus also handles the theme of liberty with greater care than many of his contemporaries. In a 1773 book Backus comments, "It is supposed by multitudes, that in submitting to government we give up some part of our liberty, because they imagine that there is something in their nature incompatible with each other."<sup>3</sup> Backus says that this sentiment first appeared when the serpent tempted Eve in the garden.<sup>4</sup> But, contrary to the serpent, Backus says, "It is so far from being necessary for any man to give up any part of his real liberty in order to submit to government, that all nations have found it necessary to submit to some government in order to enjoy any liberty and security at all."<sup>5</sup> Doing whatever one wishes to do is not true freedom unless what one desires the most is love to God and neighbor.<sup>6</sup>

Backus's argument for religious liberty is based on the premise that God has established differing governments on earth with their own limits. He distinguishes between the civil government and church government.<sup>7</sup> To the civil government God has given the sword to ensure that we fulfill our responsibilities toward others (Rom. 13:1–10).<sup>8</sup> But the church is nowhere given the sword. The church pulls down strongholds with "truth and light."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the church is given its ministers by the ascended Lord (Eph. 4:8–11), and these ministers are to gain their living by preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9:13, 14; Gal. 6:6, 7). Backus finds tax-supported ministers appointed by civil magistrates inconsistent with these principles.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Christians are not to support teachers who do not give to the people the teaching of Christ. It is not the magistrate's job to determine this for the people. The people must themselves give account to God for this, so they must have the right to make this judgment of their pastors.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, since God commanded voluntary worship, the civil government was incapable of regulating right worship.<sup>12</sup>

Backus's argument for religious liberty stood in contrast to the more secular arguments.<sup>13</sup> The basis of his arguments for religious liberty are firmly Biblical rather than rationalist. He also believed that the Christian religion "is

Continued on page 30



# What Can We Do?

Keith Hamblen

As believers feel increasingly marginalized in our secular culture, it's tempting to simply withdraw. Political involvement doesn't seem to be working, so why even try?

God established the three institutions of **family** (Gen. 2:21–24), **state** (Gen. 9:6), and **church** (Matt. 16:17, 18). Most Christians seem to actively and even aggressively participate in two of these institutions but are reluctant about the third. Perhaps we think of Jesus' words that "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), or we're concerned about being identified with postmillennialism and "Christian Reconstructionism." But there is a multitude of Biblical commands and principles that require our participation in the affairs of civil government.

## **Biblical Considerations for Involvement in Politics**

1. **"There is no power but of God"** (Rom. 13:1). The sphere ("jurisdiction") of civil government is ordained of God and is good. A godly man runs to his responsibilities in all of his God-placed spheres, and Scripture does not excuse us from our responsibilities in this sphere.

2. **"When the righteous are in authority ["government"], the people rejoice"** (Prov. 29:2). Our civil government is "of the people," but we should be seeking for righteous people to receive that authority! Our form of government calls for participation, and we ought to use any influence we have to see good men in authoritative positions.<sup>1</sup> Thus, political involvement is a matter of "loving our neighbors."

3. **Pray "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life"** (1 Tim. 2:1–3). To think that when we have prayed we have done everything doesn't match how we believe God expects us to operate in other areas of our lives. We shouldn't look for God to work while shirking our own responsibility (Exod. 4:2).

4. **"Ye are the salt [and light] of the earth"** (Matt. 5:13–16). Salt retards corruption, as does good political involvement. "Light" exposes that corruption through the clarity of God's truth (Eph. 5:8–14). If we aren't advocating the truth within our wicked society, who will?

5. **"When I went out to the gate through the city . . ."** (Job 29:7). The godliest of men were active politically, including Job, Joseph, Moses, David, and Daniel (Ezek. 14:14). Paul did not cease being a Roman citizen or cease fulfilling his responsibilities of Roman citizenship after becoming a Christian (Acts 21:39; 25:6–11). He did not deny his privilege of citizenship by shirking the responsibility. Paul asserted his political rights in insisting that the magistrates treat him with respect when he could have simply meekly departed from Philippi upon his release from prison (Acts 16:35–39).

6. **"Render . . . unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's"** (Luke 20:25). While Jesus' words designate two spheres, they also require our involvement in both. Our Caesar ("we the people") calls for our involvement!



# "Let not your children curse you for giving up those rights and prostrating those institutions which your fathers delivered to you"

(Mathias Burnett, Congregational pastor).

7. **"Blessed are the peacemakers"** (Matt. 5:9). Can I be a better peacemaker by not having a strong national defense (Matt. 12:29)? Can I better provide for my family by not protecting them physically or by not being involved politically (1 Tim. 5:8)?

Of course, some take the position that Christians as individual citizens should participate in politics but that the local church should stay away. But the idea that local churches cannot speak to the wide range of moral issues facing our local, state, and national governments is not Biblical.

## Christian Responsibilities to Civil Government

So where should we begin in our efforts to influence our nation and culture for good? Let's look at a list of practical recommendations for political involvement.

1. **Be righteous** (Prov. 14:34; Ps. 33:12). Righteousness exalts a nation, and that nation is blessed whose God is the Lord. It seems that the single greatest thing one can do for his community is to live a righteous life before God. This would certainly include obedience to magistrates (1 Pet. 2:13–17; Rom. 12:1, 2) and paying taxes (Rom. 13:7; Mark 12:17), but righteous living by individuals, families, and churches ripples outward throughout a nation.<sup>2</sup>

2. **Be informed** (Prov. 18:15; 19:2; 24:3–6; Hos. 4:6) so that you can pray. The heart of the prudent gets knowledge, and through wisdom is a nation built.

3. **Pray for those in authority** (1 Tim. 2:1, 2). Because this is a Biblical command, obedience is not optional.

4. **Build strong families** (Prov. 14:1; Gen. 18:19). All wise families "build their houses," and Abraham modeled a family emphasis that brought blessing. The strength of a nation is the strength of its families.

5. **Build strong local churches** (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24, 25). The hope of America continues to be changed lives resulting from the preaching of the Word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit. Politics is not the solution to our problems, but it is part of the solution when Christians, in obedience to the Word of God, are involved in the community. Our position politically is similar to that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:17, 18—we stand, and God delivers at the moment, or He doesn't. "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other" (John Adams).

6. **Maintain law and order** immediately around you and in your larger community (Prov. 24:11, 12). If we know evil is happening and can do something about it, how can we choose not to act before Him "that pondereth the heart"?

7. **Require civil government to be righteous** (Prov. 14:34). Our government is designed to self-regulate through mutual accountability. We ought to take the time to express political pressure for righteousness. "It does not take a majority to prevail . . . but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men" (Samuel Adams).

8. **Vote** (James 4:17). When I have the ability to vote to put into office one who will seek to protect the innocent (Prov. 24:11–12) or one who will promote moral economic policies (2 Thess. 3:10) and I refuse to do so, why would I not bear responsibility for the "slaughter of the innocent"?

9. **Be involved in a special project.** Give time, energy, and money (Prov. 22:29; 31:23; Esther 4:14; Acts 13:36). Be diligent in your business, and stand before kings; be known to some degree "in the gates." Who knows whether or not you "art come to the kingdom for such a time as this"!

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<sup>1</sup>"If righteous rulers are a cause for rejoicing and a source of national blessing, then it is imperative that righteous, God-fearing citizens become engaged in the selection and maintenance of their civil magistrates. No passage in Scripture makes a more succinct and compelling case than Proverbs 29:2 for committed Christians to be involved in civil government, in both selecting magistrates and serving in public office" (Professor Daniel Dreisbach).

<sup>2</sup>"Do Christians ever have the right, duty, or obligation to resist someone who occupies the seat of civil magistrate? The proof text for an answer in the affirmative could be Acts 5:29. Those answering in the negative usually cite Romans 13. There are those who offer a close reading of Romans 13 and conclude that, in fact, Romans 13 suggests an answer in the affirmative. There were a number of political sermons in the American founding era that took this position—for example, Jonathan Mayhew's famous and influential 'discourse concerning the unlimited submission and non-resistance to the high powers'" (Professor Daniel Dreisbach).

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# SOUND WORDS

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

## First Partaker

### Graced to Spend and Be Spent

#### Seeing the Green Pastures in the Care of Souls, Part 1

In 1984 my home church affectionately commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of Dr. DeWayne Felber, the pastor of Burge Terrace Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. At the formal introduction of the special occasion, our music pastor memorably summarized our senior pastor's endearing and enduring ministry: "A message from a head will reach the head; a message from the heart will reach the heart; yet a message from a life will reach a life." On that notable occasion, the hundreds of us who gathered remembered together and thanked God for the way He had used an undershepherd who daily expended his life for his sheep.

Ministers who are fully obedient to their calling are godly men; but they are more. They are preachers, too; but they are still more. They are pastors. Pastors pastor sheep. They must. Sheep need pastoring. God commands pastors to pastor. And though the pains of pastoring are often deeply personal, costly, and rigorous, ministers are to pastor with joy and delight.

The pastor is a *curate*, . . . derived from the Latin, *curare*, to take care of. A curate is one who has the care of souls. The Apostle Paul speaks of "watching for souls." The pastor, or curate, is a watcher for souls (W.G.T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, 280).

From the earliest years of church history, leaders in the church have seen the need to provide instructive

warnings to the leaders of God's people—directives about avoiding abuses of ministerial privilege, correcting ministerial carelessness, the necessity of detecting and rectifying personal pitfalls, and so on. These are deceitful

dangers that lure a man away from caring for souls to a selfish preoccupation. The New Testament itself warns not merely against false teachers but about false and corrupting motives in shepherds—the love of money, the love of ambition and authority, and other temptations to which ministers are not exempt; indeed, to which they are potentially more vulnerable.

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

### Historical Counsel

One historical window exposing distractions that often beset pastors appears in the canons affixed to the creedal formulations of the early church. The canons are full of counsel addressed to pastors, including confronting and correcting abuses that arise in the ministry of caring for souls. Ironically, the councils' formulations of correct doctrine over the centuries also exposes a rot eating at the church from within, explaining some of the reasons for the steady decline of the early church as it passed into the Middle Ages. Council after council wrestles against the "deformation" of the church at the pastoral level, repeatedly identifying concerns developing within pastoral ministry: the same temptations to self-indulgence, the same personal ambition for prestige, the same covetous spirit that prompted a man to multiply parishes yet neglect his duties, the same willingness to abuse the very flocks they had been appointed to feed. The councils lent their strong voices to alert and prevent the abuses and ambitions of the clergy from stamping an indelible impression upon the church. Yet the deformation continued apace as pastors were seduced by a pastoral life not commanded in Scripture; instead, they neglected their spiritual calling, hired it out for others to fulfill, professionalized their performance to public duties, minimized the importance of personal

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piety, and relinquished genuine pastoral care of the souls entrusted to them, doing people spiritual injury instead of spiritual good. The continual and cumulative neglect of pastoral ministry and responsibilities opened the door to the impoverished spiritual conditions for which the Reformation ultimately would be necessary. Unscriptural pastoral lives and labors paved the trail of decline.

Many years later, Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715), a bishop within the Church of England in Scotland, writing in 1713 (two years before his death), was burdened because he observed pastors in the post-Reformation era succumbing to the same resurging temptations. He wrote *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, and he reminded pastors how powerfully their examples in personal character and ministry affected the health of the church:

For the manners and the labours of the clergy, these are real arguments, which all people do both understand and feel; they have a much more convincing force, they are more visible, and persuade more universally, than books can do, which are little read and less considered (Gilbert Burnet, *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, xxii).

Burnet lamented the prevailing laxity so evident in the ministry:

Zeal in devotion, and diligence in the pastoral care, are fallen under too visible and too scandalous a decay. And whereas the understanding and application to that sacred study, was at first the distinguishing character of protestants, for which they were generally nicknamed gospellers: these holy writings are now so little studied, that such as are obliged to look narrowly into the matter, find great cause of regret and lamentation, from the gross ignorance of such as are either in orders, or that pretend to be put in them (xxiv).

And he noted that the tendency to emphasize nearly exclusively the public elements of ministry to the neglect of private character and pastoral care was the “most capital and comprehensive” of the abuses:

But the most capital and comprehensive of all the abuses is . . . that made the chief, if not the only obligation of priests to be the performing offices, and judged, that if these were done, the chief part of their business was also done, by which the pastoral care came to be in a great measure neglected, does continue still to leaven us: while men imagine that their whole work consists in public functions, and so reckon, that if they either do these themselves, or procure and hire another person in holy orders to do them, that they answer the obligation that lies on them. And thus the pastoral care, the instructing, the exhorting, the admonishing and reproving, the directing and conducting, the visiting and comforting the people of the parish, is generally neglected (xxiv–xxv).

Crossing the Atlantic and advancing more than 200 years, Charles Jefferson (1860–1937), an American who

pastored the Broadway Tabernacle in New York from 1898–1930, observed that the decline in the care of souls typically begins in the heart of a man during his formative training years. He lamented that in his day *men have been trained not to scoff at pastoral work, but to place it in a subordinate rank* (*The Minister as Shepherd*, 28).

Bridges challenges his readers with the mission of a true shepherd and urges them to assess its personal costs:

It is by no means easy for a young man to become a shepherd, and he ought not to be discouraged if he cannot become one in a day, or a year. An orator he can be without difficulty, a reformer he can become at once. . . . But a shepherd he can become only slowly, and by patiently traveling the way of the cross. . . . It is a form of service which eats up a man’s life. It makes a man old before his time (32).

The finest test of the consecration of a minister of Christ is not in his public performances, but in what he does when the world is not looking. . . . But in the obscurity of pastoral service he has opportunity to ascertain whether he really loves God and how much he is willing to do for people simply for Jesus’ sake (35–36).

Men shirk pastoral service not because they are strong, but because they are weak. They have not sufficient strength to bend their life to the life of Christ (36).

## A God-Given Duty

Scripturally, though pastors may be gifted preachers and may prefer preaching to pastoring, pastoring is a God-given duty that cannot be relinquished or dismissed carelessly.

A clergyman . . . ought to admonish, to reprove, and to comfort them, not only by his general doctrine in sermons, but from house to house; that so he may do these things more home [personally] and effectually than can be done in a pulpit. He is to watch over their souls, to keep them from error, and to alarm them out of their sins, by giving them warning of the judgments of God; to visit the sick, and to prepare them for the judgment and the life to come (Burnet, 52).

It is unwise for men to make a sharp dichotomy between the preaching and pastoring functions of his office. William Garden Blaikie (1820–99), who held the chair of apologetics and pastoral theology at New College in Scotland for nearly thirty years, wisely observed,

Between these two functions of ministry, there need be no opposition, though sometimes the impression prevails that diligence in one is incompatible with success in the other. The fact however is, that where this has seemed to be the case, it has generally been due to the fact of the minister giving himself too exclusively to that department of work for which he has the greatest aptitude and inclination. . . . But in point of fact, there is no real antagonism between



the pastorate and the pulpit, nor does it appear a very impracticable achievement that the one should be made the useful, happy handmaid of the other. The pastoral duty of the minister may easily be made a most valuable auxiliary to his pulpit work, and the pulpit duty, rightly performed, will seek its natural outlet and application in the pastoral (W. G. Blaikie, *For the Work of the Ministry: A Manual of Homiletical and Pastoral Theology*, 275–77).

Into the conversation we can wisely allow the apostle Paul to enter and let his own testimony enlighten our understanding of pastoral ministry: *And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved* (2 Cor. 12:15). This verse captures Paul's own ministerial application of the self-denying law of spiritual progress that Jesus lived by and articulated powerfully in John 12:24, 25:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

At the age of thirty-three, John Newton (1725–1807) prayerfully considered the possibility that God might be calling him into the ministry. For six weeks he meditated through passages related to the life of a New Testament minister. During that season of preparatory meditation, he wrote:

I desire therefore by the grace of God carefully to weigh these things [counting costs of ministerial labor] beforehand that I may not hereafter be either discouraged or offended, when the sun waxes hot. Besides the general course of diligence, self-denial, and defiance to the world, which I am engaged to observe as a Christian, I shall find much to be done, much to be endured, much to be forborne, if I am ever called to the high office of a minister, with which I am yet unacquainted (John Newton, *Ministry on My Mind*, 6).

The apostle Paul, in other places, views his life as a drink offering being poured out, devoted exclusively to God's service (*spendo*; *For I am now ready to be offered*, 2 Tim. 4:6). He prepared himself to die as he had lived: *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all* (Phil. 2:17).

## Amazingly Graced

Though there is a sense in which pastoral ministry is a burden, it is a glorious burden, hand-crafted and customized by God Himself that He intends for pastors to carry. Ministers of God are amazingly graced by God to be able to spend themselves and be spent, and they are amazingly graced by God to be able to do so with gladness and joy. The following outline attempts to fill out a Scriptural understanding of the first of these realities.

### I. Ministers are Amazingly Graced to Be Able to Spend and Be Spent

They are graced to be placed in a position to give, to have spiritual resources to give, and to be enabled to give.

- A. It is evident that the ministry is a *spending* occupation because the Scriptural role is itself a “gift” (Eph. 4:7, 8, 11).

The object of the apostle, in harmony with the quotation which he has introduced, is not simply to affirm the fact that there are various offices in the church, or that they are of divine institution; but also to show that they exist in the form of donations, and are among the peculiar and distinctive gifts which the exalted Lord has bequeathed. The writer wishes his readers to contemplate them more as gifts than as functions (John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 297–98).

Ministers are gifts from Christ to be expended in promoting, maintaining the unity of Christ's body, and working for its growth.

- B. It is evident that the ministry is a *spending* occupation because Christ grace-gifts men for their service (Eph. 4:7).

The gift was a double gift. Christ first endowed the man, and then He gave them, so endowed, to the Church (B. F. Westcott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 62).

Ministers are gifted to give of themselves by exercising their gifts to promote the edification and maturity of the body. These gifts naturally include verbal gifts, and often combine the verbal gifts with other gifts that minister grace (Eph. 4:29; Phil. 1:7).

- C. It is evident that the ministry is a *spending* occupation from the Scriptural titles employed.

The ministry was never intended to provide a safe place or a comfortable living for preachers. If the cross and not a cushion is our symbol we should not be shocked by the antagonisms of life. We shall be a target for animosity and misunderstanding by the very nature of our work and vocation. “The fellowship of His sufferings” is not a pious quotation, but a veritable highway of living dangerously and courageously with Christ. And the tribulation experiences, the heartaches, the wounds, the slights, the sense of disappointment and frustration may be caused by human channels within professing Christendom, even within the church itself. Human nature, although redeemed, is queer and unyielding stuff; small wonder that we who are working with it in our own hearts and in other lives should not

escape its contrariness (Ralph G. Turnbull, *A Minister's Obstacles*, 180).

Pastoral duties are often exceedingly difficult to be performed. They require so much self-denial, so much benevolence and compassion, and so much spiritual wisdom, that it may be calculated on as a matter of certainty, that they will be neglected, or carelessly performed, unless the minister be actuated by deep and strong feelings of piety (Archibald Alexander, "On the Importance of Aiming at Eminent Piety," in James Garretson, *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, 2 vols., 1:232–33).

In addition to the multiple Scriptural titles for the pastoral office, the New Testament records at least fifteen different word pictures that capture self-denying aspects of the minister's pastoral role.

He is called a "minister," that is, a deacon/servant (Eph. 3:7, 8; 2 Cor. 6:3, 4) who serves God by serving others.

The Christian leader is primarily a servant of God, not a servant of the sheep. . . . In addition, a shepherd does not expect his compensation, blessing, or reward to come from the sheep. He expects it to come from the owner of the sheep. I don't know of any sheep that ever gathered around to applaud the shepherd. All they do is cause him trouble. Sheep are the work. They're not the wage. If we don't watch ourselves, we start manipulating things to get strokes from the sheep. . . . You can lead with an eye on crowd approval, but if you lead primarily to be rewarded by the sheep, you're not going to be rewarded by the owner of the sheep (Fred Smith, *Learning to Lead: Bringing Out the Best in People*, 24–25).

He is likened to a bond-servant, a nurse (1 Thess. 2:7, 8), an under-oarsman of Christ (1 Cor. 4:1), a steward (1 Cor. 4:1), an ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:19, 20), a physician (Matt. 9:12, 13), a father (1 Thess. 2:10–12; 1 Cor. 4:15), a master-builder (1 Cor. 3:10–15), and a fellow worker of God (1 Cor. 3:9) and men (2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23).

Jesus Christ has graced this calling by his entering into it. Other men work in their trade; ministers work with God. "We are labourers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). O high honour! God and his ministers have one and the same work. They both negotiate about souls. Let the sons of the prophets wear this as their crown and diadem (Thomas Watson, *Beatitudes: An Exposition of Matthew 5:1–12*, 6).

He is a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3, 4; Phil. 2:25), and a farmer who sows and waters (1 Cor. 3:6, 7), waits patiently (James 5:7, 8), and partakes (2 Tim. 2:6). He is an athlete (2 Tim 2:5) and an example (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3).

D. It is evident that the ministry is a *spending* occupation from the Scriptural verbs used of ministry.


The labours of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten old age and death. They are fitly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labours of a woman in travail, and to the agonies of soldiers in the extremity of a battle. We must watch when others sleep. And indeed it is not so much the expense of our labours, as the loss of them, that kills us. It is not with us, as with other labourers: They find their work as they leave it, so do not we. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do, the impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon, vanish before the next. How many truths have we to study! How many wiles of Satan, and mysteries of corruption, to detect! How many cases of conscience to resolve! Yea, we must fight in the defence of the truths we preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them unto faintness: but well-spent head, heart, lungs, and all; welcome pained breasts, aching backs, and trembling legs; if we can all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, "Well done, good and faithful servants" (John Flavel, "The Character of a Complete Evangelical Pastor Drawn by Christ," *Works of John Flavel*, 6 vols., 6:568–69).

Even an incomplete list of verbs depicts the expending of the life of the minister. The costliness of the labor is self-evident: agonize, tenderly care; minister; watch over souls, travail in labor, beg, suffer hardship; reprove, rebuke, exhort, preach, pray, do the work of an evangelist, be instant in season and out of season, feed, build up, convince, correct, comfort, warn, admonish, exhort, strive, discipline, take heed, fight, flee the love of money and youthful lusts, stir up one's gift, endure hardship, preside, labor and travail, etc.

E. It is evident that the ministry is a *spending* occupation from the qualifications delineated (Titus 1:6–9; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 2 Tim. 2:22–26).

F. It is evident that the ministry is a *spending* occupation from the personal examples given (i.e., Christ, Paul, John).

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Cor. 15:10).

To be continued. 



# Bring . . . the Books

*The Flaming Tongue*

The name J. Edwin Orr is perhaps best known by some as the author of the song entitled “Cleanse Me,” which begins with “Search me, O God.” Yet his far greater contribution consists of many historical revival accounts. He was both an evangelist and a historian.

Saved at age nine and baptized at seventeen in a Baptist church in Belfast, Orr became more serious about the things of God at age twenty. Soon after, in the early 1930s, he became interested in revival and at the same time gained a greater understanding and experience of the filling of the Spirit. Burdened to both preach the gospel and stir up the saints to pray for a spiritual awakening through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Orr launched on “an apprenticeship of faith” across Great Britain on a bicycle with just small change in his pocket. Orr would not ask for meetings or money, and as a result the stories of God’s providential leading and miraculous provision reveal the genuine faith that marked the life of this evangelist. Never veering from his life’s burden, over the years Orr traversed at least 150 of the world’s 160 countries, actually visiting 400 of the world’s 600 major cities. Many times God granted great revival blessing in connection with Orr’s ministry, attested to by men such as Oswald J. Smith and J. Oswald Sanders. Orr earned a ThD from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and a PhD from Oxford, and his revival accounts reveal scholarly research. His works always show careful investigation into the origins of prayer, documented accounts of the revivals themselves (including many interesting statistics), the impact on society, and then insightful assessments of the good and sometimes the bad that occurred. In the 1970s Moody Press printed a trilogy of awakening accounts by Orr, including *The Flaming Tongue*.

Since *The Flaming Tongue* details the impact of the early twentieth-century revivals, several years ago I read this account, realizing we were on the centennial anniversary of that time period. Although other Orr books have blessed me greatly, *The Flaming Tongue* encouraged me the most since it is not that “far away.” Of the many books I have read on revival, when I read this one I thought, “Every preacher needs to read this account.” It builds faith.

The introduction is worth the book. Orr begins, “An Evangelical Awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity” (p. vii). He addresses the essence of revival as well as the evidences of revival. Then starting with the Book of Acts he chronicles revival movements throughout history up to 1900, which sets the stage for the account of the early twentieth-century revivals. From the early 1700s onward, Orr distinguishes five “Great Awakenings.” This makes the revivals recorded in *The Flaming Tongue* the last of those five. From 1901 to 1913 Orr details a tidal wave of revival in at least

fifty-seven nations. Many of the names we remember such as Gipsy Smith, Evan Roberts, Billy Sunday, John Hyde, and R. A. Torrey were not isolated islands of blessed instruments but were rather a part of a worldwide tsunami of blessing.

Since the Welsh Revival of 1904–1905 became the impetus for prayer in other countries that later saw revival, Orr devotes the first three chapters to revival in Wales. After a chapter covering the Irish and Scottish awakenings, he gives two chapters to the revival in England. Then after providing a chapter a piece chronicling revival in Scandinavia and the European continent, Orr devotes four chapters to North America, much of which concerns the United States. A chapter each covers the Australasian awakening, South African awakening, and then other revivals throughout Africa. Next, Orr devotes four chapters to mighty revivals in India. This is followed by a chapter a piece given to China, Korea, and Japan. Finally, Orr takes a chapter each to assess “The Pentecostal Aftermath,” “Theology and Psychology,” concluding with a summary, which again is worth the book.

Orr states, “It was the most extensive awakening of all time, reviving Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Disciple, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed churches and other evangelical bodies . . . winning more than five million folk to an evangelical faith in the two years of the greatest impact in each country” (p. 191). When the foremost revival historian of the twentieth century assesses this worldwide movement of revival as “the most extensive awakening of all time,” it is noteworthy. Reading a two-hundred-page account like this deeply stirs the hungry heart and reminds you of the mighty power of the Spirit of God. Throughout the account Orr makes statements such as, “The movement was characterized by an intense sensation of the presence of God” (p. 71). This is one of those books that God uses to bring you to your knees and cry out as so many did in the various revival accounts, “Lord, manifest Your mighty reviving presence to our generation!”

Seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord produce many new songs. When the revival blessing came to America in 1905, Bessie Porter Head penned words that express the hearts of many:

O Breath of Life, come sweeping through us,  
Revive Thy Church with life and power;  
O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us  
And fit Thy Church to meet this hour. ☞

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

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# Straight Cuts

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*  
John 7:17

Sometimes this verse is pulled out as a kind of apologetic silver bullet, a guarantee to the honest and sincere seeker—"If you are genuinely willing to do God's will, He will verify the truth of Jesus' teaching to you and convince you of the truth of Christianity." But this can backfire. Sometimes the verse is turned around and used to legitimize *not* believing. If I am genuinely willing to know the truth, but still unconvinced by Jesus' teachings, wouldn't that "prove" that Jesus' teachings are invalid? Thus Jesus' words are turned back on Himself and His claims are invalidated by His own invitation. Of course we have an answer to that: "If you are not convinced, you must not be truly willing to do God's will." But this sounds uncomfortably analogous to the Mormon notion of the burning in the bosom given to anyone sincerely searching for the truth; if it doesn't come, the seeker wasn't truly sincere. We rightly object that such a conclusion is suspiciously simplistic and self-fulfilling; yet we often use John 7:17 the same way. Is Jesus really putting Himself and His words on probation, to be judged by human sincerity?

Contextually, verse 17 is Jesus' answer to the Jews' astonishment at the competence of His teaching (v. 14), specifically His knowledge and use of the Scriptures. Some translations capture the best sense of *grammata* (letters) as a reference to the OT Scriptures (cf. John 5:47; 2 Tim. 3:15). Jesus' reply to their astonishment is that His interpretation and use of the OT will be verified as originating from God—not His own maverick imagination—by anyone who is willing to do whatever God says in the Scriptures.

In other words, *it is not a promise by which Jesus' teaching may be put on probation and verified; it is an assertion by which people are put on probation and verified as genuinely willing to do what God says (or not)*. This is affirmed by the fact that the conversation immediately shifts into a controversy with those who are not submissive to God's revealed will (7:19, 22, 23).

This is similar to, yet importantly different from, the traditional use of the verse (or its Mormon counterpart). If we challenge someone with this verse and he decides, in all honesty, that Jesus' teaching is *not* from God after all, we are inclined to conclude, "Well then, you must not *really* want to do God's will (or else you would have concluded otherwise)." But like the Mormon test, that conclusion is too neat, too convenient—the deck was stacked from the start; if it fails, you didn't "do" it right. But if Jesus' words in John 7:17 are understood,

## Using an Apologetic Text Contextually

from the outset, to be a *test of people* and *not a test of Jesus*, then to conclude that anyone who rejects Jesus' teaching has actually only condemned himself (not Jesus) is consistent with Jesus' other teachings that always place the *hearer* on trial, not Himself.

Consider, for example, the following four passages.

John 5:46, 47—To the Jews' insistence that they believed Moses, Jesus audaciously insisted that actually they did *not* believe Moses: "*Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me.*" This is a contrary-to-fact construction. In other words, Jesus says, "The litmus test of whether you believe Moses is whether you believe me, not vice versa."

John 8:39—To the Jews' claim to be Abraham's children, Jesus replied, "*If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*" This could be read as a concessional construction: "Since you are Abraham's children, you should be doing the works of Abraham; but your response toward Me contradicts your heritage and ancestry." John, however, has a proclivity for recording Jesus' double meanings, speaking on a spiritual plane while his audience (mis)understands Him on a physical plane. Probably, then, this statement is to be read as another contrary-to-fact construction: "The test of whether you are truly Abraham's children—I mean spiritually, not merely genetically—is how you respond to Me, not vice versa." Remember where this conversation heads in verses 56–59.

John 8:41, 42—To the Jews' claim that God is their Father, Jesus replied, "*If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*" It is another contrary-to-fact construction; the test of whether God is truly their Father is their response to Jesus.

John 8:54, 55—To the Jews' assumption that God is their God, Jesus replies, "*Ye have not known him.*" Again, the test of whether God is really their God is their response to Jesus.

Understanding 7:17 in light of the broader context of John 7, as well as against the larger background of Jesus' confrontations with the Jews, makes this passage dovetail more consistently with the NT's prime directive to *believe*—not to search and decide for oneself whether or not Jesus is legitimate. He is not something different for different people depending on their decision about Him based on this verse. He is what He is, and what He is is not determined by human decision or sincerity.

Adjusting the traditional application of this verse is not an artificial way to press someone to faith; it is a more contextual interpretation that presses the rights of Christ to evaluate us. ☞

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

Layton Talbert is the author of *Not by Chance* and *Beyond Suffering*, both published by BJU Press. He and his wife, Esther, are active members of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.



*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Matthew 5:38–42*

This portion of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount is one of the most misinterpreted and misapplied sections in all of His preaching.

The Old Testament did call for equivalency in punishment (cf. Lev. 24:17–22; Deut. 19:15–21). Jesus highlighted this truth when He cited the expression in verse 38, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” *Lex talionis* is the Latin label often used in the judicial and penal systems when referring to this concept. *Lex talionis* is the law of retribution or the law of retaliation. Punishment administered should correspond in degree and kind to the offense of the wrongdoer.

The law God gave to Israel through Moses both prescribes punishment and at the same time limits punishment. Leviticus 24:20 asserts that equivalency in punishment will serve as a deterrent to others' committing the same offenses. The conscience of man assents to this principle of equitable retribution as right and fair.

However, man's conscience is depraved and fallen and thus flawed. So while our conscience assents to equivalency, our natural response very often is to respond with greater force than the original offense. The Code of Hammurabi, which predates Moses by about 250 years, stated punishments that in some cases were similar to the Mosaic Law but in some cases called for severe penalties for petty offenses. The punishment was not limited. Those dynamics are perpetuated today in strict Muslim systems but can also be observed in everyday living. Sometimes my ten-year-old son, who is rather small for his age, irritates his thirteen-year-old brother, who is rather large for his age. On those occasions there are times when the response is not equitable but, on the contrary, is akin to the thirteen-year-old attempting to launch the ten-year-old into orbit. *Lex talionis* steps in and says, “It is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If he bumps you, you don't get to knock his teeth out.”

Not only does God's law prescribe and limit punishment, it also points to the proper context of the administration of that punishment. Deuteronomy 19:15ff calls for appropriate witnesses and adjudicators—a duly constituted court of law in the context of the civil government of a society, not a context of tribal warfare or personal retribution.

When Jesus cited this prescription of the law and then followed the citation by declaring, “But I say unto you,” some have mistakenly concluded that Jesus intended to overthrow the very principle known today as *lex talionis*.

In the name of Christianity some have called for leniency instead of equivalency in punishment when it comes to the government of society. The “Christian” argument against capital punishment will often cite this text of Scripture, and professing Christians will participate in rallies and wave signs with messages such as “Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right!” and “What Would Jesus Do?”

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

*Charles Spurgeon*

### Tolstoy and Brat-Proofing

In the name of Christianity some have called for pacifism on the level of national and international dealings with enemies. Leo Tolstoy was a Russian novelist and playwright who after a “moral crisis” and “spiritual awakening” became known as a moral thinker and social reformer. Wikipedia gives a helpful summary of Tolstoy's thought that is especially relevant to our present consideration: “His literal interpretation of the ethical teachings of Jesus, centering on the Sermon on the Mount, caused him in later life to become a fervent Christian anarchist and anarcho-pacifist. His ideas on nonviolent resistance were to have a profound impact on such pivotal twentieth-century figures as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. . . . Tolstoy believed being a Christian required him to be a pacifist.”

Though many would not cite the Sermon on the Mount as support for their thinking, some of the social “experts” of our current day are applying pacifistic thinking to child-rearing. On May 30, 2013, author and *TODAY Moms* contributor Amy McCready appeared on the *TODAY* show with adolescent psychologist Jennifer Hartstein. McCready then posted an article entitled “How to Brat-Proof Your Kids.” Readers were assured that if they followed some simple guidelines their kids would never become the three-year-old throwing the tantrum in the grocery store or the older neighbor kid who never has a nice word to say to his parents. “Follow these guidelines, and the bratty behavior at your house will turn into better behavior, fast.” The following is a summary of her brat-proofing tips.

Distinguish between a meltdown and a manipulative tantrum. If in fact your child is throwing a tantrum give them as little attention as possible and display as little parental “power” as possible.

Be observant and proactive in catching your child “in the right.” Dish out the positive attention when they’re not misbehaving, encouraging good behavior so they learn how to act early on.

When you see bratty behavior on TV turn it off or talk about why we shouldn’t act that way.

Ignore them when they are being bratty. They won’t get attention and you are letting them know you won’t get into a power struggle with them.

According to McCready, “When they realize bad behavior doesn’t work they aren’t likely to try it again.” Then after offering these words of wisdom she concludes once again, “Follow these guidelines, and the bratty behavior at your house will turn into better behavior, fast.” One action it appears must be avoided at all costs is the “attention” and “power” displayed by the exercise of corporal discipline.

This flawed philosophy of child-rearing reflects some of the same errors as pacifistic thinking on the levels of civil government and national/international relations which has misinterpreted the words of Jesus.

## Correction of Misinterpretations

The first correction to these misinterpretations of our Lord’s teaching is to point to the context and target audience of His message. The section of the Sermon on the Mount we are considering in this column is introduced back in verse 20. There the Lord states that to enter His kingdom a man must have a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. The text we are considering is the fifth of six illustrations of such a type of righteousness. The target audience Jesus addresses is the individual on a personal basis. He isn’t addressing civil servants or statesmen or parents in any of their God-ordained roles of authority. He is addressing individuals who have been wronged by others and calling them to a response on a personal level that goes beyond the justice of equivalency in punishment.

A second correction to the misinterpretations of the Lord’s teaching is to compare Scripture with Scripture. Earlier in this same broader section of the sermon, Jesus refers (vv. 25, 26) to an accuser handing a man over to a judge, a judge handing the man over to a guard, and a guard keeping the offender in prison until an extensive penalty has been paid. The Lord does nothing to suggest that there is something wrong with such an action in a civil context or that withholding punishment would have been more appropriate. The clearest statements in opposition to Christian pacifism are found in Romans 13. There, civil authorities are described as “a terror” to those committing crimes, “God’s servant,” “not bearing the sword in vain,” “an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer,” and “ministers of God.”

The last correction to the misinterpretations of the Lord’s teaching is provided by the broader theological consideration of man’s true nature. “Christian” pacifism, whether displayed in parenting, in the civil judicial and penal systems, or on the national/international level, generally assumes that people are essentially reasonable and good. The Scripture’s witness from start to finish is exactly the opposite. Furthermore, as we have already seen, Scripture declares that one of the means of deterring the display and spread of sin and its devastating consequences is the threat of punishment and retribution.

The teaching of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount was not intended to overthrow the principle of equivalency in punishment. On the contrary, He was forbidding personal retaliation and vengeance. He intended His preaching to expose the retaliatory spirit that is characteristic of our depraved flesh. His message makes us face our selfishness and feel our need of God’s grace. There will be occasions when we will need His wisdom to know how to pursue appropriate justice in an appropriate context while being free from retaliation and vengeance in our hearts. What we need more than anything is forgiveness for our fleshly sin found in Christ, supernatural power to be delivered from our flesh, and the very likeness of Jesus Christ imparted to us by the Spirit as we look to Christ. These emphases are far removed from the error of pacifism and anarchism.

Oh! to be like Thee, lowly in spirit,  
Holy and harmless, patient and brave;  
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches,  
Willing to suffer others to save.

Oh! to be like Thee, oh! to be like Thee,  
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;  
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;  
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart. ☞



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Tom Fuller has been senior pastor of Kettle Moraine Baptist Church in Whitewater, Wisconsin, since 2004.



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# Because It Is October— Breast Cancer Awareness Month



My journey began in October 2011. I went in for a routine mammogram because it was time, and the fact that one of our staff member's wives had been diagnosed with breast cancer was a motivator as well. I was called back because they wanted "more pictures," and when they did another mammogram and an ultrasound, I was told I had two lumps on the right side and needed to see a surgeon as soon as possible. My regular doctor sent me to Dr. Claire Carman, a leading breast surgeon in our area. As I look back, I am thankful that the Lord gave my doctor wisdom in leading me to the right place. I knew the first time I talked to Dr. Carman that she cared and would do her best to take care of me. A biopsy followed the next week, and Dr. Carman confirmed that it was indeed breast cancer. She told me that day that I would need a mastectomy. That was a shock, but, again, it was of the Lord. Knowing the course of action early helped me mentally to prepare myself for what lay ahead.

The next week I was sent to Norfolk General Hospital for a battery of tests for a lot of things but also to check for cancer anywhere else. What a blessing to have good reports on all those tests—more reminders of God's watch care! That week I also saw the breast surgeon and the plastic surgeon, Dr. Robert Schnarrs, to discuss the surgery and reconstruction, and in addition I saw a radiation oncologist in case I would need radiation. During my first appointment with the radiation oncologist, he told me that he did not think I would need radiation. My cancer was in the early stages. Another blessing! In the next eight days I saw the breast surgeon, the plastic surgeon, and my regular doctor for pre-op information and checks for surgery. Dr. Carman also had my husband and me go in with our daughters (our son-in-law went too), and she talked to all of us about what was going to happen and what to expect; she also let all of us ask any questions we had on our minds. My husband has been so strong for me through all of this—from the first bit of information until today. How thankful I am for a man who lives what he believes! And I also know now, without a shadow of a doubt, why the Lord brought all my girls back to Virginia Beach—for such a time as this! What a comfort to have them all here in the area as we went through this trial! They were so kind and caring to me.

On November 14, 2011, I underwent surgery—a mastectomy of my right breast. In the days that followed there was a lot of pain, but there were also a lot of wonderful people who showed that they cared by making visits, bringing food, sending flowers, mailing cards of good wishes, e-mailing encouragement, phoning to check on me, telling me stories of other experiences, stopping by with one of my favorite things, and most of all, praying fervently for me. I never doubted that people cared, but the pain

was intense. Eight days after the surgery I had to have more tissue taken so that the margins of the area where the cancer was would be safe. That was a difficult day, but there was no cancer in the lymph nodes. God was good then as He continues to be today! Thanksgiving came and went. Some dear friends from Ohio, Jerry and Gloria Fletcher, came on Sunday, November 27, to help us for a week. Monday, November 28, I returned to work. I should have waited—it was too soon to return. Shortly after that, though, Dr. Carman confirmed that I would not have to have radiation. What a blessing!

In the middle of December I went back to see the doctors, still in serious pain. Dr. Carman set me up to see a massage therapist who would help me with lymphedema. (Lymphedema is a condition in which fluid collects where lymph nodes have been removed. The lymph system had to be "trained" by massage to send the fluid to other lymph nodes in my body.) She was sure it would help with the pain. Dr. Carman told me that because of "onca typing" done on the tissue, I was in the ten-percent range for a recurrence of cancer—I would not have to have chemotherapy. Again, how blessed I felt; God is so faithful! I saw a wonderful Christian lady for the massage therapy for two months, and I did improve. She also helped me get the mobility back in my right arm by doing some physical therapy.

In January I also saw an oncologist whom I continue to see every six months for now. He started me on hormone therapy (a pill) that I will take for five years as a preventative measure. Doctor visits are still frequent. Eventually, the plan is to see one doctor every three months of the year, with the breast surgeon, oncologist, gynecologist, and regular doctor all checking for the same things. However, from January to June I saw several of the doctors again and was cleared for the reconstructive surgery, and I had that done in June 2012. I still have frequent tests, of course, but those too are opportunities to share what I have been through and where God has brought me.

And so, here we are, October again, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, only this year I am not a victim of breast cancer, I am a SURVIVOR of breast cancer, and I am extremely thankful for all the lessons I have learned and the health I enjoy. As I reflect on the lesson of God's loving care, for me this October is "God Awareness Month." As Ron Hamilton has so wonderfully written, "God never moves without purpose or plan." What a true statement in my life! For me, October will always be a time to "Rejoice in the Lord."

Mrs. Marci Baker is the wife of Dr. James W. Baker, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia. They have three adult daughters and four grandchildren.



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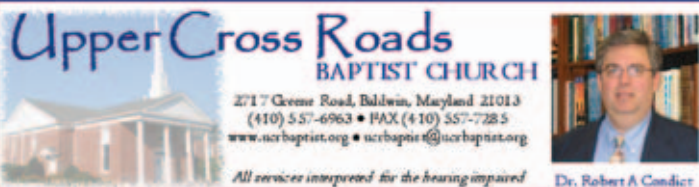
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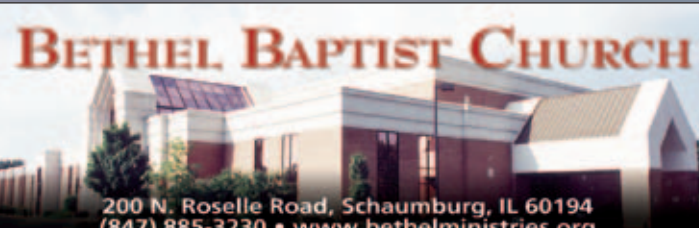
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All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.  
—Edmund Burke

The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance.  
—John Philpot Curran

The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom but its master.  
—P. T. Forsyth

We are in bondage to the law in order that we may be free.  
—Cicero

True religion must teach us both the source of greatness (love of God) and source of wretchedness (being cut off from God).  
—Blaise Pascal

Freedom can be a frightening endeavor. Far too many choose familiar slavery rather than taking a risk for freedom.  
—Don McCullough

Any child can tell you that the sole purpose of a middle name is so he can tell when he's really in trouble.  
—Dennis Fakes

Man, considered as a creature, must necessarily be subject to the laws of his Creator, for he is entirely a dependent being. . . . It is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker's will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature.—William Blackstone

It must be felt that there is no national security but in the nation's humble, acknowledged dependence upon God and His overruling providence.  
—President Franklin Pierce

We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being. We guarantee the freedom to worship as one chooses. . . . We sponsor an attitude on the part of government that shows no partiality to any one group and that lets each flourish according to . . . the appeal of its dogma.  
—The US Supreme Court, 1952

Freedom is not the right to do as a person pleases, but the liberty to do as he ought.  
—Unknown

We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.  
—James Madison

If God is dead, then everything is permitted.  
—Fyodor Dostoevsky

All religious expression is protected in America [but] the religion of the American people is not the religion of Mahomet [Mohammed] or of the Grand Lama; and for this plain reason, [the law] assumes that we are a Christian people, and the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity.  
—Supreme Court Justice David Brewer, the *Trinity* decision, 1892

And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.  
—George Washington

When morality is strong, laws need not be. So if the scope of freedom is to widen, that of the law should not. . . . Moral principles have been hacked down. . . . All that is not legally prohibited is socially allowed. Someday these radical rule-breakers will wake up to a world without rules. Then they will lament either the moral dust-bowl they have created or the dense underbrush of laws they have had to grow hastily in its place.  
—Os Guinness in *The American Hour: A Time of Reckoning*

These rights then which God and nature have established, and are therefore called natural rights, such as are life and liberty, need not the aid of human laws to be more effectually invested in every man than they are.  
—William Blackstone

I see no reason for attributing to man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand.  
—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Supreme Court Justice, 1929

Modern secularism has taken the heart out of the chest of man and then expected him to act as if he still has one.  
—C. S. Lewis, paraphrased

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

# Alaska Regional Fellowship

The Alaska Regional Fellowship of Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International met July 29–31, 2013, at Maranatha Baptist Church in Anchorage. Pastor Charles England and the Maranatha Church family were magnificent hosts for this our twenty-third annual meeting. It was a great time of food, fellowship, and fervent preaching of the Word of God.

Our keynote speakers were Dr. Larry Oats from Maranatha Baptist Seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin, and Dr. Larry Curtis from Brevard, North Carolina. This was Dr. Oats's first time with us, and he fed our souls with timely messages, bringing a very powerful and informative presentation on postmodernism. Dr. Curtis also brought a very timely series of messages on the resurrection from the Book of Acts. Army CH (MAJ) Bryan Palmer from Fort Greely, Alaska, spoke at one of the sessions as did Pastor Ben Burtch, the FBFi state rep, and Pastor Charles England, our host pastor.

Mrs. Vickie Daniels from Calvary Baptist Church in Ninilchik blessed the ladies through her ministry at the ladies' session on Tuesday morning. One special blessing was that for the first time we had a native Aleut Baptist pastor who attended all the services and provided special music for one of the sessions.

Our next meeting will be at Immanuel Baptist Church in Palmer, July 28–30, 2014.





# A Calling Is the Best Career

The Bible tells us in Psalm 37:16, “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.” As I have meditated on this verse, the Lord has helped me to trust Him in pursuing a freelance writing career, an odyssey that began in the late summer of 2004. We are often encouraged to focus on financial security when making career decisions. But sometimes God gives us a vocational calling that may not reflect society’s obsession with material security. Thankfully, God’s direction for our lives leads to other kinds of abundance—such as the satisfaction of fulfillment and the opportunity to edify other believers. For example, Moses gave up an elevated social status and material advantages in Pharaoh’s kingdom to follow God’s call to lead the children of Israel out of bondage. He placed the eternal above the temporal.

When Christians are in tune with God’s plan for them, they need not worry about the Lord’s provision. Elijah obeyed the Lord’s commandment by pulling up his stakes to depart for the Cherith brook (1 Kings 17). There, God used ravens to deliver nourishment to His prophet. In the same way, God’s directives include God’s plans to provide for our needs. That provision may come in unexpected ways, just as it did through Elijah’s ravens. When the Lord burdened me to write, I had been resting in

the security of a steady paycheck and decent health-care benefits. Yet the compensation from writing brings both income and satisfaction in knowing that I am following God’s calling.

The truths of Psalm 37 enable us to put faith in God to meet our material needs. For me, that is now through writing. As a result, some surprising blessings have come my way from being in harmony with God’s direction for my life. I have seen travel articles, personal experience essays, craft-themed works, and poetry all published for pay. As well, I have been able to enjoy expense-paid trips to different parts of the United States while researching my subjects. But had I not decided to pursue writing as a calling, I would never have seen these blessings.

I encourage all Christians to seek the Lord’s guidance for a calling and not to fear responding in faith to a vocational calling. What good would it be to have material security if you were out of tune with the will of God? “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

Roy A. Barnes lives in Cheyenne, Wyoming. His articles about travel and writing have appeared in numerous publications.

Written and Compiled by Dr. Layton Talbert

## LEARNING FROM A

*Author's Note: On rare occasions I come across a book or topic that I believe deserves a wider audience and is worth suspending the normal focus of this column. This issue is devoted to just such a subject.*

I've been telling people recently that *Temple Grandin* (HBO, 2010) is one of the best movies I have ever seen. It is the true story of a mother's battle for her autistic child at a time (1950s) when autism was little understood, grossly misinterpreted, and virtually dismissed as hopelessly untreatable. Through the relentless persistence of a loving mother and the intervention of caring mentors at critical points in her life, Temple triumphed not merely in spite of but because of her autism. Today Dr. Grandin is a renowned authority and a household name in two fields: autism and cattle. (You have to watch the film to understand.)

If you read any Evangelical newsmagazines, you have probably heard the name Rosaria Champagne Butterfield recently. Her testimony, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Crown & Covenant, 2012), is one of the best books I have ever read, and for some of the same reasons as the movie *Temple Grandin*. Though they are very different stories about very different people, both are extremely engaging, well-presented, modern, true-life accounts. On different levels and in their own ways, both challenge how we look at people who are very different from us in some ways—and yet surprisingly like us in others.

The full title of Butterfield's book is *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. A wry irony lurks in the book's subtitle. After all, the conversion of an English professor is not particularly "unlikely"—unless that professor also happens to be an outspoken and influential lesbian activist tenured at a major institution (Syracuse University), who served as the faculty advisor for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students, and whose academic specialty was Queer Theory (described as "a postmodern form of gay and lesbian studies"). She declared her lesbianism at age twenty-eight, though her journey into Christian faith did not begin until age thirty-six (in the late 1990s). Today, a little over a decade after her conversion, she is a classical homeschooling mother and the wife of a Reformed Presbyterian pastor living in Durham, North Carolina. One can hardly imagine more radically polar opposites.

*Secret Thoughts* is the author's account of her conversion; actually, "train wreck" is her preferred metaphor—long, involved, painful, and worldview-shattering. Told not with luridness or fanfare but with modesty and (appropriate) frankness, her story furnishes a unique window into a subculture that is utterly alien and incomprehensible to most Christians but which is becoming increasingly ubiquitous. It is a culture that is raw and unashamed, and occasionally that element shows through the cracks as she relates her story. But the larger point is that it is a culture full of people just like us—people created in the image of God, for whom Christ died, and whose identity and sins and needs are bound up in something much deeper and more internal than mere sexuality. The author's own struggles in emerging from that culture and transitioning into the Christian community are palpable. The reader gets a front-row seat to what it meant and what it took for her to reckon with the claims of Christ; it meant the loss of everything and the gain of everything, and it took the total conquest of infinite grace. But that was only the beginning; what to do now as a tenured academic in a secular institution with responsibilities she could no longer fulfill? How did it come to this?

It all started when she wrote an article critical of what she described as the "gender politics" of Promise Keepers. Dividing the responses between fan mail and hate mail, she came across a reply from an older Presbyterian pastor. "It was a kind and inquiring letter. . . . He didn't argue with my article; he asked me to explore and defend the presuppositions that undergirded it. I didn't really know how to respond to Ken's letter, but I found myself reading and re-reading it. I didn't know which box to file this letter in, so it sat on my desk and haunted me."

She kept throwing it away only to dig it back out of the trash. Tellingly, for one immersed in secular academia, she confesses, "It may seem strange to you, but no one had ever asked me those questions before or led me to ask them of myself." Finally her curiosity (and the Holy Spirit) got the better of her; she called the pastor, he invited her over to his home for dinner with him and his wife, their contact and conversation became regular, and the long, slow, "train wreck" of her life began.

It took two years of informal dinner conversations and intense personal Bible reading "voraciously and compulsively" (sometimes up to five hours a day) before she even came to church for the first time. Nor was this pastor's the



# CONVERTED LESBIAN

only voice she was hearing at the time: **"During this time of struggle, others tried to help. A Methodist pastor and Dean of the Chapel at Syracuse University . . . told me that I could have Jesus and my lesbian lover. This was a very appealing prospect. But I had been reading and rereading scripture and there are no such marks of post-modern 'both/and' in the Bible."**

Fortunately, providentially, she rejected that counsel. **"How did the Lord heal me? The way he always heals: The word of God got to be bigger inside me than I."** And, **"God's people surrounded me. Not to manipulate. Not to badger. But to love and to listen and to watch and to pray. And eventually instead of resisting, I surrendered."** That is the essence of conversion to Christ—surrender and submission to him, to His death in your place, and therefore to His claims on your life and your identity.

Even apart from the captivating life-story, her writing is peppered with insightful observations.

**"Without the proper response to failure, we don't grow, we only age."**

**"The Bible makes it clear that reason is not the front door of faith."**

**"My past was my shrine and any person or world-view that entered into my little world had to genuflect to this."**

**"I learned that sin roots not in outward behaviors but in patterns of thinking."**

**"Homosexuality—like all sin—is symptomatic and not causal—that is, it tells us where our heart has been, not who we inherently are or what we are destined to become."**

Passages such as Matthew 11 **"forced me to see pride and not sexual orientation as the root of sin."** Her reflections on the nature of homosexual sin and its symptomatic linkage to other more basic sins (see, for example, pp. 29–32) are profoundly insightful, because they are radically Biblical.

Beyond her conversion story proper, she also shares other dimensions of her post-conversion life—the aftermath at Syracuse University, her reasons for joining the Reformed Presbyterian Church, her church's worship practices, her eventual marriage to a pastor, adoption (transracial), and homeschooling (classical). However

controversial some of her opinions and remarks may be, they are always thoughtful and insightful. I identify most with Carl Trueman's comment: "I cannot recommend this book highly enough. I do not agree with everything she says, but I learned from everything she wrote."

One of the biggest takeaways for Christian readers is not only the power of the gospel to transform others, but the power of her story to transform *us* and how we look at those we regard as most decidedly and radically unlike us. I also think it is important to say that for a Christian reader, the predominant emotional reaction to reading her story is not triumph (my side won) or pride (my side is right), but wonder and worship. Christ really is a great Savior who will love anyone who will let Him, out of their sin and bondage (any sin, all bondage) and into the joy and liberty of knowing the Maker and Lover of his or her soul. "We" are not better than "them"; the righteous are not righteous because they are better. That response to this book—wonder and worship—happens because every alert Christian reader will see himself in her and his own struggles in hers. Because we are all just like her, and she is just like us. In a very important sense, there is no "us" and "them"—there are only rebels and sinners who have come to Christ for life and cleansing, and rebels and sinners who have not, yet. That's a gloriously humbling reminder for every believer to take away from this book.

Paul reminded the Corinthians: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

It is instructive that homosexuality is listed, without any qualification, as an "equal" right alongside the "normal" sins with which we are accustomed (and, sadly, more comfortable). But Paul continues, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, . . . sanctified, . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). The implication (indeed, given Corinth's reputation, the near-certainty) is that the church included not only former adulterers and idolaters and thieves but also former homosexuals. Rosaria's story is one more modern reminder, to the glory of God, that it is still happening today.



## A Voice Long Silent Speaks for Today

(Continued from page 17)

as necessary for the well-being of human society as salt is to preserve from putrefaction or as light is to direct our way and guard against enemies, confusion, and misery.”<sup>14</sup> Though the civil government was not to rule the church, it remained under the law of God. The state should support Protestant Christianity, though it should not interfere with the churches.<sup>15</sup> He thought it right for the state to pass laws prohibiting Sabbath-breaking, gambling, blasphemy, and attendance at the theater.<sup>16</sup> Backus envisioned a nation made up largely of Christians who were free to worship according to their consciences and who largely agreed on the morality that the state should enforce.

The contemporary American situation is more pluralistic than Backus’s situation. But a number of lessons can be learned from Backus that are applicable today. First, the separation of church and state need not entail a secular public square. Indeed, it ought not, for secularism is not a neutral but an ideological player in the debate over religious ideas.<sup>17</sup> While recognizing that we now live in a pluralistic society, Christians should not shrink from making public policy arguments from explicitly Christian premises.<sup>18</sup> Put simply, believers should be prepared to oppose ungodly policies on the basic grounds that they are wrong.

Second, Backus teaches us that religious freedom extends to more than worship alone. American Christians today have the freedom to worship. But will Christian employers be permitted to exclude abortion-inducing drugs from their health plans? Will military chaplains be permitted to teach that homosexual lusts and actions are sinful? Will Christian employers be permitted to hire employees based on Biblical-based ethical criteria? Since the Christian life extends to more than what we do at church, our religious liberty must also include these freedoms. Christians should resist all attempts to limit religious freedom to worship alone.

Though Isaac Backus lived in different circumstances than modern Baptists, his Biblical arguments for religious freedom remain relevant today.

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<sup>1</sup> Biographical and historical information based on William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967) and Stanley Grenz, *Isaac Backus—Puritan and Baptist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 63–91.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Backus, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty* (Boston: John Boyle, 1773), 56–60; Isaac Backus, “Government and Liberty Described [1778],” in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754–1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968), 357.

<sup>3</sup> Backus, *Appeal*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8; Backus, “Government and Liberty,” 350.

<sup>6</sup> Backus, *Appeal*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–18, 22–23.

<sup>11</sup> Backus, “Government and Liberty,” 358. For instance, the magistrate ought not simply decide that paedobaptism was the doctrine of Christ and force a convinced Baptist to support paedobaptist ministers.

<sup>12</sup> McLoughlin, 143.

<sup>13</sup> McLoughlin, 142–43, 149.

<sup>14</sup> Backus, “Policy as Well as Honesty [1779],” in *Pamphlets*, 372.

<sup>15</sup> Backus, *Appeal*, 27–28; cf. McLoughlin, 150; James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 162.

<sup>16</sup> McLoughlin, 149.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter Baker, *The End of Secularism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 106–107.

<sup>18</sup> Harvard professor Michael Sandel comments, “Asking democratic citizens to leave their moral and religious convictions behind when they enter the public realm may seem a way of ensuring toleration and mutual respect. In practice, however, the opposite can be true. Deciding important public questions while pretending to a neutrality that cannot be achieved is a recipe for backlash and resentment. A politics emptied of substantive moral engagement makes for an impoverished civic life. . . . To achieve a just society we have to reason together about the meaning of the good life, and to create a public culture hospitable to the disagreements that will inevitably arise” (Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009], 243, 261).

## Facing Religious Persecution in a Free Country

(Continued from page 9)

As believers affirm a commitment to religious freedom for all faiths, they expose the lie that Fundamental Baptists have more in common with radical Islamic terrorists than with other believers. As believers teach that God’s Word is clear, teaching both God’s love for homosexuals and His condemnation of their sin, some will come to realize that He is offering salvation to all repentant sinners.

In brief, believers should expect religious persecution even in a free nation because their struggle is not political but spiritual. Believers must face religious persecution Biblically by identifying the real enemy of Christ, by remembering our mission, and by using the truth of God to claim the victory over the lies of the enemy.

Jason Armstrong served as a pastoral assistant at Iglesia Bautista Fundamental Tabernaculo in Greenville, South Carolina, and as an administrative assistant in the office of the Dean of Men at Bob Jones University while preparing for missionary service. Jason, his wife, Heather, and their family are now missionary candidates to Monterrey, Mexico, with Gospel Fellowship Association.



\* Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866–72), with brief prefaces and occasional notes by A. Cleveland Coxe, DD.

**One Table Club at Fuller**

CBN reported that Fuller Theological Seminary has now given approval for the formation of a LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) club as an official student organization. The club exists, according to its charter, "to support the LGBTQ community at Fuller" as well as to be a "safe place for dialogue between LGBTQ students and the wider Fuller community." The club already boasts thirty-six members.

The announcement is puzzling since Fuller still insists that the club does not stand in contradiction to the behavior policies required of students: (1) single students must remain celibate, (2) marriage is defined as the union of one man and one woman, and (3) the students may not "advocate politically for their lifestyle of choice."

The group's founder, Nick Palacios, shared his troubling belief system when he stated, "It quickly became apparent to me that I was going to be OK and that I would not have to forsake my faith for my sexuality."

This article can be accessed at <http://www.thenewamerican.com/culture/faith-and-morals/item/16012-evangelical-fuller-seminary-says-yes-to-homosexual-campus-club>.

**California AB 1266**

On January 1, 2014, California school children will be given the option to use the restroom of their choice, depending on what sexual identity they have

formed in their minds. The confusion will not end there but will also include athletic teams, locker rooms, and any other segregated activity that schools provide—including showers.

The Pacific Justice Institute and other profamily organizations have filed for a referendum and have secured 500,000 signatures within a ninety-day period, qualifying them to move this issue to the ballot in 2014. Legal strategists are also appealing to the right to privacy and warn that lawsuits will follow, coming from those who deem their privacy to have been compromised.

This article can be accessed at [http://onenewsnow.com/culture/2013/08/20/fallout-from-calif-%E2%80%98transgender-bathroom%E2%80%9999-bill-begins#.UhaozrHD\\_Dc](http://onenewsnow.com/culture/2013/08/20/fallout-from-calif-%E2%80%98transgender-bathroom%E2%80%9999-bill-begins#.UhaozrHD_Dc).

**Leaving Islam?**

The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) has continued to resist the "Leaving Islam" advertising campaign in the Detroit area designed to be placed on the side of public buses. The campaign is promoted by the American Freedom Defense Initiative and is designed to help Muslim people who are seeking to leave Islam but are facing threats and harassment.

SMART has responded that the ads are "political" and "scornful" toward Muslims. Robert Muise, cofounder and senior trial counsel of the American Freedom Law Center, has argued in response, "We learned that this transportation agency has run all sorts

of controversial and contentious advertisements, including an atheist advertisement that says 'Don't believe in God. You're not alone.' So this is plainly an example of viewpoint discrimination."

This article can be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/legal-courts/2013/08/20/%E2%80%98leaving-islam%E2%80%9999-campaign-in-another-court-battle#.UhONmxbIZz8>.

**Gay Conversion Therapy**

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie signed a bill into law on Monday, August 19, 2013, making it illegal to either seek or offer reparative therapy for people with same-sex attraction. Christie appeals to the notion that people are born a particular way and homosexuality should not be considered sin (a notion, by the way, that is contradictory to his Catholic faith).

Both Christie and the legislature were relying on a 2009 American Psychological Association Task Force Report, which, if properly understood, does not confirm their conclusion. The report indicated that change therapy does have some benefit in adults, but no data were available to indicate how such therapy would affect children.

The Pacific Justice Institute has filed a lawsuit against a similar bill in California and has won a temporary injunction until the case can be decided. This law will most likely face a similar fate.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/culture/2013/08/20/nj's-ban-on-gay-conversion-therapy-to-face-legal-challenges#.UhOScBbIZz8>.

**Membership Losses**

Episcopal Bishop and head of the Episcopal Church Katharine Jefferts Schori presented her understanding of the diminishing membership in her and other similar denominations to the general Assembly of the ELCA: "Some have judged our smaller numbers as faithlessness but it may actually be the Spirit's way of pruning for greater fruitfulness."

The ELCA and the Episcopal Church practice "full communion relations." The denominations accept one another's baptisms and ordinations and validate each other's practice of communion. These denominations also share communion with the Presbyterian Church USA, the Moravian Church, the United Methodist Church, the Reformed Church of America, and the United Church of Christ. Schori made these comments the day after the ELCA elected its first female head. The Episcopal Church lost nearly 212,000 members between 2010 and 2011, with a total US membership just over four million. The ELCA lost 28,000 members, dipping its US membership below two million.

No consideration seems to be given to the church's departure from orthodox teachings on marriage and human sexuality.

Read more at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/episcopal-leader-membership-losses-are-spirits-way-of-pruning-for-greater-fruitfulness-102573/#jBx8edxoUKemmOOA.99>.



## Pastor Killed

Detroit area pastor Tim Kirby was killed for asking his neighbors to turn down their party music. Kirby left his family in their apartment and went to talk with his neighbors around 11:30 one evening. The request so infuriated a group of men at the party that they started shouting at him. One of them shot the pastor three times, leaving him dead on the pavement. The murder is still under investigation, with a church and community struggling to understand how this crime could occur.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/heartbreak-after-pastor-father-of-four-murdered-for-asking-neighbors-to-turn-down-party-noise-101573/>.

## Church Fined

Faith Community Baptist Church, a Singapore megachurch, has been ordered to pay \$5,500 to a woman whom they dismissed from her role as administrative assistant because of adultery. The church vigorously maintains its right to have terminated her employment. "If we concede that the dismissal was unjust, it means we are condoning adultery, and it will weaken our moral and spiritual authority in the organization," stated Pastor Lawrence Khong.

Sadly, the state views the situation differently. "This kind of behavior (by the church) is archaic and has no place in a modern country that has ambitions to become a global city." The woman was going through the final stage of her divorce when it became evident she was pregnant. The father of the child, also a church worker, resigned at the news. She had been given the opportunity to keep her job by ending the inappropriate relationship. She declined. The settlement is related to a

## NOTABLE QUOTES

**A**lways respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text. I would make an absolute law of this—always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. This often leads to some of the most remarkable experiences in the life of the minister. So never resist, never postpone it, never push it aside because you are busy. Give yourself to it, yield to it; and you will find not only that you have not been wasting time with respect to the matter with which you are dealing but that actually it has helped you greatly in that respect. You will experience an ease and a facility in understanding what you were reading, in thinking, in ordering matter for a sermon, in writing, in everything which is quite astonishing. Such a call to prayer must never be regarded as a distraction; always respond to it immediately, and thank God if it happens to you frequently. —D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

**T**ill sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. —Thomas Watson

**A**h! believers, you are a tempted people. You are always poor and needy. And God intends it should be so, to give you constant errands to go to Jesus. Some may say, it is not good to be a believer; but ah! see to whom we can go. —Robert Murray McCheyne

**N**ot to be occupied with your sin, but to be occupied with God brings deliverance from self. —Andrew Murray

**W**ith the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack? Surely we are the most favored of all creatures. —A. W. Tozer

**T**here, poor sinner, take my garment, and put it on; you shall stand before God as if you were Christ, and I will stand before God as if I had been the sinner; I will suffer in the sinner's stead, and you shall be rewarded for works that you did not do, but which I did for you. —Charles Spurgeon

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

governmental law protecting pregnant women from being dismissed too close to their delivery date.

Read more at <http://global.christianpost.com/news/singapore-megachurch-ordered-to-compensate-woman-it-fired-for-committing-adultery-102636/#8mOSDMwtvxPCSyTT.99>.

## Facility Fee

The Liberty Counsel has announced that it has filed suit against the Cleveland Metropolitan School District on behalf of Child Evangelism Fellowship. CEF has provided after-school clubs for children in public schools for over seventy years in 183 different countries. This year the school district charged CEF a \$69.50-per-month fee to use their facility. According to the Liberty Counsel, this is a new policy and disturbingly has been applied only to CEF and not to other clubs using the school facilities. CEF has been forced to close its club in the area because of the fee, which they deem to be discriminatory.

This article may be accessed at [http://www.onenewsnw.com/legal-courts/2013/08/21/liberty-counsel-religious-club-singled-out-for-facility-fee#.UhasMrHD\\_Dc](http://www.onenewsnw.com/legal-courts/2013/08/21/liberty-counsel-religious-club-singled-out-for-facility-fee#.UhasMrHD_Dc).

## Ugandans Sue US Evangelist

Evangelist Scott Lively, president of Abiding Truth Ministries, ministered a gospel campaign in Uganda. While there he also taught that homosexuality is a sin. He is now facing a lawsuit in federal courts brought against him by the Sexual Minority Uganda Group (SMUG).

This article may be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnw.com/legal-courts/2013/08/21/homosexual-ugandans-sue-american-evangelist-in-federal-court#.UhUMdRbla3c>.

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

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## An Urgent Matter

(Continued from page 11)

Third, and most importantly, the issue of same-sex marriage is important to us because of the role that marriage occupies in God's redemptive plan. God's intention for marriage wasn't arbitrary. In the words of Ray Ortlund, "Marriage is not merely a human institution, completely malleable in the hands of human custom. It is a divine creation, intended to project onto the screen of the human imagination the beauty of a Saviour who gives himself sacrificially for his bride and of his bride who yields herself gratefully back to him" (EDT, 654). Ephesians 5:23–32 opens the mystery of marriage to us, revealing that marriage is a "gospel tract" demonstrating Christ's covenant love for his church. That marriage is the union of two members of the opposite sex has essential gospel implications, for

only heterosexual marriage can portray the sort of relationship Christ has with His church. Only heterosexual marriage unites the two sexes, which both bear distinctive aspects of the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Only heterosexual marriage is capable of sexual reproduction, which, besides being essential to human flourishing, also resonates with an important theme throughout Scripture, that God's redemptive blessing is accompanied with abundant offspring (Gen. 1:28; 17:2; 22:17; cf. Isa. 53:10, 11; Gal. 4:19). The big deal about same-sex marriage is that it contradicts the most tangible and universal picture of salvation God has offered us: the union of a man and woman in marriage.

While we Christians must reaffirm God's purpose for marriage and sexuality, we must also take action—not political action, but personal action. The Supreme Court may dismantle marriage in the law books, but we have dismantled marriage by winking

at divorce and failing to cultivate strong marriages of our own. Before we can expect our culture to feel the moral bankruptcy and frustration of sexuality that is outside God's boundaries, we must show to them the joy and fulfillment of marriages that thrive within God's boundaries.

Jonathan Threlfall serves as youth pastor at Bible Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina, with his wife, Christa, and their three children. He blogs about theology, ministry, and culture at [jonathanthrelfall.com](http://jonathanthrelfall.com).



<sup>1</sup>Joe Carter, "Nine Things You Should Know About the Supreme Court's Same-Sex Marriage Cases." Accessed June 26, 2013. <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/06/26/9-things-you-should-know-about-the-supreme-courts-same-sex-marriage-cases/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.christianpost.com/news/rob-bell-grows-frustrated-amid-questions-on-sinfulness-of-homosexuality-95209/>, accessed 7/2/13

## In Loving Memory

(Continued from page 5)

was a joy to meet Mrs Vaughn and have her over to our home. She was such an encouragement to me as we faced the big challenge of moving to Greenville. In 1993 she became our pastor's wife for the next six years. I had the privilege of gaining insight from her wisdom while attending Bible studies, ladies' conferences, Sunday school classes, and through personal interaction. No matter how she really felt, she always had a smile on her face. The joy of the Lord was very evident in her life. She loved her God, her husband, her family, the ladies [of] her church, and the many other ladies she mentored along the way. I knew she understood the challenges my family and I would be facing as we embarked into [the] military. I think she had a special place in her heart for us military wives. Thank you for showing us how to live graciously through adversity.

Carissa Fisher  
Fort Jackson, South Carolina

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# Deployment

Before leaving active duty to become an assistant pastor of the church where I have now been the senior pastor for many years, I understood military deployment a bit differently than now. Having balanced continued chaplaincy in the Arizona Air Guard with full-time pastoring, I knew that eventually I would again be deployed. This report is coming from Kyrgyzstan, which is pronounced just like it looks. So, what is ministry like for a deployed Air Force chaplain in this transition base where we serve tens of thousands of troops coming from and going to the war zone?

As the chaplain sits in his office in central Asia, a special forces operator who is finishing up his eighth deployment walks in and immediately begins crying—yes, crying. Having just landed at our base just north of Afghanistan, he had called his wife. She asked if he was out of Afghanistan, and when he said yes, she told him, “Good, because I need to tell you something now that you aren’t there any longer.” She went on, “When you come home in two days, I am all packed and I am leaving the two kids with you and divorcing you. You can take care of them because after eight deployments I’m tired of being a single mom. It’s your turn.”

On another day a different Special Forces guy who has seen a lot of combat walks in and asks, “Chaplain, I am an atheist, but I know the world is just destroying itself; can you give me any hope, while respecting my belief that there is no god?”

Another day, a young man walks in crying and when asked, “What’s wrong?” he says, “Chaps, I’ve been down range for four months, and my wife is strapped to a gurney where we are stationed in Germany because last night she tried to kill herself.” He goes on, “We need help, but I don’t know where to start.”

## The Toughest Day

Likely the toughest day for me was when I walked out of my office because our Wi-Fi was off and walked to another chaplain’s office to find out whether his Wi-Fi was down. It was. My first thought was, “There is something going on that leadership doesn’t want us to tell the world about just yet—like a plane going down.” I immediately prayed for the C-17 loaded with nearly two hundred Marines that had just taken off for Afghanistan. Thankfully, that plane made a safe flight. But, tragically, I was right. We did lose a different plane that day and lost the three crew members on board.

The pilot and co-pilot had been seniors at the Air Force Academy the year my son was a freshman. They were flying the same plane he will soon fly, and for some reason just fifty miles from our base it exploded with no previous indication of a problem. Our base mobilized

and, while fully continuing our regular mission, spent the next week in extremely harsh mountains looking for remains. When they were found, it was my duty to conduct the Memorial Service for our heroes. Two weeks later a young woman walked in crying and, using a common nickname for the chaplain, said, “Padre, every day we fly over the scene where we lost three friends when the KC-135 went down in May. I don’t know if I can fly over that spot anymore.”

## Being the Light

That is just a smattering of what a deployment looks like. It is six, nine, or twelve months of working six days a week at a minimum of twelve hours a day. No holidays, no vacations, constant stress to be the light in an often very dark place.

The chaplain rises at 0500 and usually does not get back to his room until 2100 (9 p.m.) or later. He ministers to the most senior leadership of his base as well as the lowest ranks. He ministers at every meal and while walking the roadway. He ministers in staff meetings, at his office, and at every Morale Wellness Recreation facility he frequents. He ministers by preaching sermons, teaching Bible studies, and conducting marriage enrichment seminars. As soon as he walks out of his room in the morning, he is “on,” and he doesn’t shut “off.” Calls come in the night (“Chaplain, we have a guy going home on emergency leave as his wife just died. Do you have any civilian clothes at the chapel so he can get on a commercial flight?”). The work that all pastors do is emotionally and physically draining, but deployed chaplaincy is like no other work a pastor would ever do. By God’s grace, halfway through this deployment my RST (religious support team) partner and I have seen twenty-three accept Christ as Lord and Savior. By the time you read this in *FrontLine*, we should be close to returning home. Until then, we labor under the truth that God has “much people in this city” who need the Lord.

As a Guardsman I have the additional responsibility of maintaining contact with my home church, Tri-City Baptist in Chandler, Arizona. In addition to preaching a few times via FuzeBox, modern communication systems allow me to lead a weekly staff meeting, monthly deacons’ meetings, and other meetings as necessary. However, no computer has yet been invented that can make it 10:30 a.m. on both sides of the globe. Kyrgyzstan, where I am stationed, is thirteen hours ahead of Phoenix, where I live. On Sunday I preach at “ten hundred,” and “thirteen hundred” (10 a.m. and 1 p.m.) local time, then at “twenty-three thirty” (11:30 p.m.) for the home church service at 10:30 a.m. Phoenix time!

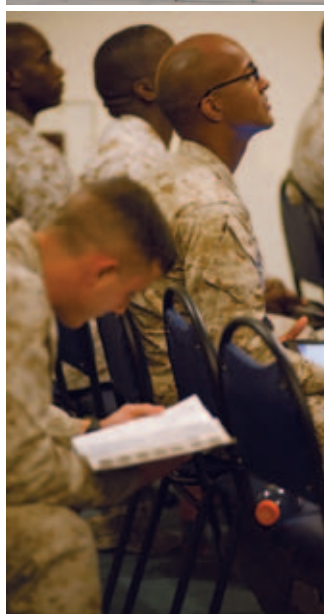
## Abounding Blessings

In spite of the time difference and intense ministry tempo, the blessings of deployed chaplaincy abound. For example, remember the man who came into my office after eight deployments with news of his wife leaving him with his two children? He found Christ in my office that day. Recently he told me that when he came in he was coming to a chaplain as a last resort. He explained that he hated God and cursed Him every chance he got. After spending two hours with him that day, I gave him materials produced by The Exchange. He came back the next day having finished all four lessons. We went over the lessons, and when I asked him if there was anything preventing him from accepting Christ, he answered, "Fear." I was amazed that a man who had, at close quarters, killed the enemy both in Iraq and Afghanistan, was afraid of the life-changing implications of accepting the Prince of Peace.

That day a hardened soldier bowed his head, weeping through his prayer, as he confessed, "God, I don't know why You would love someone who has cursed You as often as he has thought about You, but if You would forgive me and make me the man You want me to be, I want Your forgiveness." To paraphrase the words of Jesus, "That man went up to his house justified." I saw him once more the day after our Sunday morning service, just hours before he left for home. I wanted to show him how to read his Bible, but he had already Googled "where to begin reading Bible new Christian." He told me it said "John and Acts," but he didn't know where John was and just started thumbing through the Bible I gave him until he found it. He had already read eleven chapters of John in less than twelve hours after holding the only Bible he had ever owned.

When pastors are away from their home churches, whether on missions trips, speaking at conferences, or, yes, on vacation, when they return home, someone asks, "So, how was your vacation?" As Active Duty chaplains can attest, deployments are the hardest "vacation" you will ever experience, but they are far and away the most rewarding!

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# Getting Back to the Basics, Part 1

In any sport, it's vital to learn the basics and practice them until they are mastered. When I played football in high school, my coach would lecture us players to get back to the basics in playing the game. He reminded us that we had to run our routes, play only our zone, focus on catching the ball before running down the field, and to wrap our arms around our opponent when tackling. He would yell, "Get back to the basics! Get back to the basics!" In the spiritual realm, too, we must get back to the basics. We need to realize where we are in our relationship with the Lord since He saved us.

It's ironic that as I was contemplating writing this article, my cell phone rang. It was a dear friend of mine from West Virginia who was saved in the same church as I. He said to me, "Jerry, do you ever think back to the time when you were first saved and remember those early days of your walk with the Lord?" As he began to voice his love and gratitude for those who helped him to grow spiritually, he became emotional. He loved my father, who took him on visitation. He loved my mother and was grateful that she prayed daily for him. He had no idea that I was going to write this article and how timely his phone call was. What a flashback of those days when I was first saved! I greatly treasure the thrill, excitement, and impact of those "newborn" days. I'm afraid that among many of the Lord's people, their hearts have become full of lethargy—we need to get back to the spiritual basics, because this is vitally important in being effective for the Lord. What are these spiritual basics? I am going to list seven of them, which I feel are crucial in our living for the Lord.

The first one we need to get back to is **Bible study, memorization, and meditation**. First Peter 2:2 states, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I

hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Psalm 119:97 reads, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." What a trilogy for reading, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture!

Many Christians have become too blasé about the Word of God, just as the children of Israel did with the manna God had sent and began to despise it (Num. 11:6; Ps. 78:25). They became so used to it that they took it for granted and started complaining and wanting something else—meat. They were saying in essence, "We've had enough of this manna stuff! We want meat, give us meat!" So what did God do? Psalm 106:15 says, "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." Some Bible scholars believe that the phrase "leanness into their soul" means "a wasting disease among them." I'm afraid that many Christians are searching for something new—the Bible is not enough! They want something more exciting, more entertaining, and they grab at those things like a child in a candy store. But there is no nourishment or substance in those things; therefore, they began to spiritually waste away. I believe this is happening all across our country, and that is why I strongly urge that we get back to the basics, get back to the Word of God! Echo the psalmist's cry in Psalm 119:18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Begin to memorize the Scriptures again, begin to meditate on them again, for they are your authority for living as God's child. And in your decisions of life, get back to the basics of making much of God's Word.

In my next article, I will discuss the other spiritual basics.

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