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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



Closing the Generation Gap

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For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. Ecclesiastes 2:21

Is this verse just reflecting a ubiquitous bad attitude of old age or communicating a specific personal experience? In either case, it's a common frustration. But whose fault?

The difficulty in producing a magazine on the generation gap is that the parameters are so fuzzy and no generation is monolithic. None of us see things the same, and that includes people of the same generation!

So how do we even start to address the problem that Solomon articulates—preserving what is most precious from generation to generation?

We first have to take a look in the mirror. If there is a problem, how have I contributed to it?

Each writer in this issue will address problems that his own generation must confront. But there are also problems common to both generations that need to be addressed.

Not realizing we are the older generation. We tend to think of ourselves as younger than we are. As a result, our focus is often on the older generation we love, revere, fear, or despise. We can fail to notice that our influence on the coming generation might be most significant right now.

Living in fear of our predecessors rather than learning from them. We are often afraid to ask why, or we ask only when we are in the depths of frustration. We end up becoming people-pleasers, and such hypocrisy is easily seen by the next generation.

Not welcoming "Why?" Assume questions are sincere. We sometimes foolishly believe the younger generation starts out "with" us and sometimes "leaves" us. Fundamentalists are not born, they are made by the eternal Word of God. They have to form convictions based upon the Word of God—not because we taught it or believe it. If it's worth believing, it's defensible and worth explaining.

Not listening. When I was a young person in ministry, I remember a conversation I had with a peer who had just come out of a meeting with a respected man who should have been his mentor. "Did he give you an answer?" I asked. "He didn't even listen to the question" was his response. Instead, the leader presumed he understood the question and lit into an oft-repeated long-winded answer that completely submarined any real communication or teaching. "It's like putting a coin in a jukebox," he said. "Oh, here comes that same old song again." I wonder how many times I do that. Failure to listen is not confined to one generation.

Laziness. Laziness is not always a lack of effort. Sometimes it is doing what I like, that which comes easily, over what is most important. Influence demands the risk of rejection or failure. It requires revisiting issues and ideas we thought were settled over and over again—sometimes with new audiences, and other times with the same audience. For a young person it might include getting multiple perspectives rather than just assuming one represents all.

The pride of age or education. We sometimes foolishly think our success, experience, wisdom, education, or even just age is what gives us success and qualifies us to give advice or reject the advice of others. We must always remain desperately dependent upon the Holy Spirit to do His work in and through us. We must always remember that our only authority is the Word of God.

Hanging on too long or quitting too early. There is usually a time in a person's ministry when he is ready to quit but should not—and there also may be a time when he should step aside and will not. The first instance is usually sometime in early midlife when facing personal or ministry problems that are disheartening. The second is toward transition age. We sometimes refuse to trust "our" ministries to God as His. And sadly, sometimes we just have not wisely planned for transition, and we ruin what God has done in our lives.

Not scheduling interaction. A relationship does not just happen. It is planned. It has to go on the calendar. And it is not always pleasant, but it is a biblical mandate. We are commanded to reach generations to come. Failure to put a plan to that command is disobedience.

Taking things personally. "Loyalty" is a dangerous word when used by one who is demanding it. It is often a form of manipulation. Personal feelings of hurt when our counsel is rejected or when we are corrected become an obstacle that often ends a relationship.

Not admitting when I am wrong.

Quitting on the other generation too soon. We either think the other generation has departed before they actually have or think they have rejected us before they have. Even when things seem to be going wrong in a relationship, keep talking, keep connected, keep answering questions. After all, the primary attitude that should characterize relationships between generations is enduring, honest, confronting, hoping love.

—Kevin Schaal



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Thank you for your magazine and the stand you take. We appreciate all that you do. Keep up the good work you do for us. Please use this gift as needed.

*Mrs. And Mrs. James R. Clark
Blairsville, Georgia*

Dear FBFI Family,
On September 20, 2018, after Hurricane Maria passed through the island of Puerto Rico, the facilities of Calvary Baptist Bible College were completely destroyed.

After the demolition of what was left of the buildings, my son informed me that it would cost \$6000 to remove the debris. Although we did not have the \$6000, this job had to be done so I told him to tell the person who would do the work to go ahead.

On that same day, Dr. David Shumate was visiting the ministry and heard about this need. He asked me if we had received a check from the FBFI. Since we had not, he asked me to call Pastor Doug Wright, who informed me that the amount of the check was \$6100, which would cover the \$6000 we had just committed to.

Sometimes when God puts us into a situation that is beyond our abilities, He knows what He is going to do. John 6:5-6 says "When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Phillip, whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove Him; for He Himself knew what He would do."

Your act of sacrificial giving is a very humbling thing not only to me personally but also to our church.

*Dr. James E. Daniels
Calvary Baptist Tabernacle
Carolina, Puerto Rico*

Jill Hamilton wrote this precious note on the day her husband, CH (CPT) Seth Hamilton, deployed for a nine-month rotation.

I also wanted to let you know that Seth left yesterday for deployment. As of this morning they were in Alaska and loading for their eight-hour flight. He should be there in another hour or two. I'm excited for this opportunity for him. I am also already seeing how God is going to use this in my life. I'm so thankful for this edition of *FrontLine*. I received it yesterday—on day one of our

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In 2009 **John** (pastor of Gateway Baptist Church in Ketchikan, southeast Alaska) and **Connie Judson** bought a boat and started a respite ministry to pastors and other full-time Christian workers. Time at the Judsons' enables visitors to "come apart" as well as to bring home some great table fare. In the summertime the Judsons take them fishing where the salmon and halibut abound. Last year their guests included an evangelist and two grandsons, a senior pastor and his dad, another pastor and his daughter (who caught the biggest fish of the season—a 110-pound halibut), and ten other full-time ministers.



.....
nine-month deployment right after my phone broke and we couldn't call Seth to say "Good-bye." (Everything breaks during deployments.) When I saw the title [Be Anxious for Nothing] I thought, "Perfect timing, Lord." I don't know who influenced the topic and timing of this issue, but it not only reminds me that God cares about me individually but that He continues to give me everything I need for life and godliness. He is so good to me! Now, to keep from reading it cover to cover when I should be napping.

*Jill Hamilton
Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

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Gordon A. Dickson

Genuine Fellowship



Life is too short to be shallow. This article is devoted to those who have been in the Lord's service for a few decades. Now we know that it's all about the *bema*; every one of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.¹ We want to hear "well done, thou good and faithful servant."² So with that in mind, read along while I ask myself some honest questions. "Have I wasted time reacting to the reactions of the generation before me?" (I have.) Even worse: "Have I justified my sins, my poor example, or my failures by blaming others?" (I have.) "Have I wasted time pointing at 'the feet of clay' in an earlier generation of leaders without carefully examining my own fragile feet?" (I'm guilty on all three counts.) If any of this resonates with you, read on.

The Lord called each of us to be an example. We can do this by following Christ's example: becoming what we want others to be.³ Each of us is weak; each one wrestles with wickedness. To pretend otherwise is to be hypocritical. This short life is a misty vapor. And there is a new generation behind you, also living a short life. They desperately need your guidance. Hazards await them; pitfalls abound. If you are willing, they could use the transparent lens of your life to understand the way ahead. Knowing that "the day is at hand," you could help them "walk honestly, as in the day."⁴ In order to accomplish this task, we need to invite each new generation into deeper, sincere fellowship with Jesus Christ. Commitment, transparency, and accountability are fundamental to genuine Christian fellowship.

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. . . . Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:22, 23–25). This text helps us to grasp the fundamentals of fellowship.

Commitment

Hebrews 10:19–22 calls us to draw near to worship God with bold commitment. We must stir ourselves up to take hold of Him⁵ because Jesus sacrificed Himself for us. If we have truly embraced Him by faith, our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Therefore, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." "Let us hold fast the profession [confession] of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)." This determined commitment is not based on our promises but on His promises.

Commitment is a fundamental part of Christian fellowship. But each of us must carefully consider the manner with which he does this. We are in danger of failing by trusting our flesh, as Peter did.⁶ Yes, we can be like Elijah who was "very jealous for the LORD God of hosts."⁷ But Elijah also wrongly insisted "and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." We are not self-sufficient and we are not alone.

Transparency

Hebrews 10:22 teaches transparency with the words "true [sincere] heart." If we are transparent with the Lord, we will also be transparent with others. For example, every one of us has to "flee youthful lusts" and follow righteousness.⁸ So have you said to your followers, "I want to show you how the Lord delivered me from personal sin," and explained how He did so? Have you used your personal failures to show your followers how to avoid the quicksand?

By this honest approach, we can stir others to do good works from hearts of love. Yes, if you've been around for a while, you know that some people will try to take advantage of your transparency. When you admit your weaknesses, they will go for the jugular (demonstrating

that they are like the accuser of our brethren).⁹ So why should you "drop your guard" and sincerely invest in the new generation of leaders behind you? It is because the Scriptures portray the attitudes and actions of godly men in a transparent manner to encourage us. If God could use them, he could use us! Jeremiah railed against God, but in the end he admitted that God's Word was like a burning fire in his bones rekindling his zeal.¹⁰ Habakkuk strongly protested before he peacefully submitted to the Lord. John Mark eventually proved to be a valued team member.¹¹ "Failures" aren't finished.

Among committed brethren, there has to be a way for a disciple to know and fully follow the conduct, goals, and characteristics of a disciple-maker.¹² This helps him follow the pattern of "sound words."¹³ Even Jesus gave us a window into His soul when He told His disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."¹⁴ He admitted how He struggled with the bitter cup placed before Him but that He was determined to do His Father's will.¹⁵ This new generation needs to see how we wrestle with bitter grief and how we find joy.

This can be as painful as it is powerful. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul demonstrated excruciating transparency when he chose to magnify Christ in the midst of his miseries. He frankly admitted that his "thorn" (Greek *skolops*, "stake") was given to him to prevent spiritual pride.¹⁶ So Paul testified that he boasted in physical weakness, insults, hardship and calamities, so "that the power of Christ may rest upon me."¹⁷ Satan's sharp stake became the Savior's shepherd staff. Have we shown others how the Lord has humbled us and turned us from sin? Like Paul, we are earthen vessels bearing a heavenly message so that people can see that the amazing power belongs to God, not to us.¹⁸

Accountability

Hebrews 10:23–25 gives us practical steps of accountability to enter into genuine fellowship. In a considerate manner, we are to motivate others to lead a life of love and good works. With the right attitude and the right actions, they also can effectively minister to others in your local fellowship. Let them watch you humbly and painfully "take the beam out of your own eye" to see clearly.¹⁹ They will learn how to be transparent and accountable. Help them to be what they want others to become.

Obviously, this instruction in accountability is designed for the local church. The congregation assembles for the purpose of exhorting each other—especially "as ye see the day approaching." Biblical accountability is a weekly reminder that one day each of us will all give a personal account to the Lord. Hebrews 3:13 reminds us, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." This text teaches that if any one of us fails to exhort or be exhorted, he is in danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

How can you go about demonstrating this kind of accountability for the next generation? One way is to make

Continued on page 26

The “Acceptable Sin” of Millennial Leaders



The Millennial Generation of leaders is ready to step up to the plate. They are enthusiastic, well-educated, and ready to serve. Many of them are the exact same age as their pastor or mentor was when he entered the ministry. But they feel a significant disconnect with the older generation. I am a “young guy.” I’m a seminary-trained, twenty-five-year-old, Millennial pastor. I know what it’s like to sit around with my peers and nitpick the “old guys.” I’ve been part of conversations where we talked about how we need to “fix fundamentalism.”

I've been part of other conversations that talked about how we just needed to leave biblical fundamentalism altogether since fundamentalism was no longer relevant. But as I read my Bible I can't help but come to the conclusion that maybe we young guys have it all wrong. Maybe we should think thrice before critiquing the older generation.

Scripture's Admonitions

Scripture is very clear that we ought to respect those who exercise God-ordained authority. The Old Testament will at times make this argument explicitly. Of the older men in general, Leviticus 19:32 teaches, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God." The youth in those days who were "insolent" toward their elders were a sign of God's judgment on Israel (Isa. 3:5). Daniel must have understood this. Even when he was under the authority of ungodly rulers, he still demonstrated respect (Dan. 2:21). Rehoboam, however, did not understand this. He ignored the elders and paid a big price. It's interesting to note that his peers appealed to his pride—something I fear too many of those who want to throw off the old guard are persuaded by.

Fast-forward to the New Testament and we see an even stronger case for respecting elders. Peter ties that respect to godly humility: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Sometimes the New Testament speaks of respect for older brothers in general. Paul writes to young Timothy, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father" (1 Tim. 5:1). As for respecting church leaders, Paul writes, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:12–13). The author of Hebrews echoes this theme: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). Apparently the issue of young men in the ministry struggling to respect older men in the ministry is not a new one.

Our Culture's Perspective

Scripture has given us a wealth of resources from which to apply appropriate principles to our modern-day struggles. Sadly, our culture continues to disagree with what Scripture teaches. For example, if you were watching a movie and there was a young, energetic upstart who disagreed with his older, crusty mentor, by the end of the movie who would typically be viewed as closed-minded? If you came to Scripture and asked the same question, would you get the same answer?

In our current context social media provides a readily available forum for generational frustrations to be shared. Young ministers are often guilty of impudently arguing against the status quo of the ministries that they have inherited without demonstrating respect for the sacrifices of the generation that has gone before them. Whether it be moving from a hymnal to projecting hymns on the wall or

moving to a newer translation of God's Word, all of my fellow Millennials need to prayerfully, respectfully, patiently, and biblically approach the need for change with humility of spirit that seeks counsel from the generation above us and models respect for our mentors.

I'm not saying that older men in the ministry can't make or haven't made mistakes and even committed sins. Some of the wisest counselors in my life have been those who readily admit their own mistakes. What I am saying in writing all this is that younger men in the ministry might need to learn to show some respect. How many times have the things that caused the greatest divide in churches swelled from those who are younger and don't have an appreciation for those who came before them? In our endless debates about what music we should sing, have we forgotten what God has to say about respect? When we battle over which three letters are on the spine of our Bible, have we stopped to reflect on being clothed with humility? The Scripture presents a unified witness on this matter: Christians are to honor and respect their elders. Failure to do so is sin and carries significant consequences.

An Appropriate Response

So what should my generation do when we see something we don't like in some of our churches? Well, for starters we'd better be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking we have everything figured out. It's easy to move from discontent to disrespect. Once we do we can quickly begin to criticize where criticism isn't necessary. In many cases we begin to degrade older men in the ministry simply because we disagree with them, but disagreement on philosophy never validates degradation of character.

If you find yourself frustrated with the older generation, carefully read the verses I've laid out and see how they apply to your situation. Humbly allow Scripture to be your guide and live by it. You cannot magically create ministry experience that will convince the older generation that you have the right answers, but you do have access to the book that has all those answers. If they are going to accuse you of anything, let them accuse you of being a student of the Word (1 Tim. 4:12).

If you have conflict with the older generation, it may be wise that you go and talk to a trusted counselor outside the situation—particularly an older one.

Above all, be willing to humble yourself and let love cover a multitude of sins. If before the Lord you find you cannot in good conscience stay, then leave at cost to yourself and not at cost to unity in the ministry. If you are not the senior pastor, don't agitate for changes you know are not desired by the leadership or the body, even if you are convinced they are good changes. Respect your elders enough, at least, to leave without causing them added trouble or heartache. Whatever your situation, you must remember that respect is commanded by Scripture. Remember, those men that are in an older generation than yours are God's sheep too.

Caleb Phelps (BA, MA) serves as youth pastor at Crosspointe Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is a frequent speaker for junior and teen camps. You can follow his writings at pursuingthepursuer.org.



Evangelistic Extremes

Over Christmas my family and I drove from our home in Queens, New York City, to visit with my wife's family. Our rental car made the trip without incident (give or take a crying toddler), but I was reminded of the danger of drift. Several tired truckers would stray from their lanes, then jerk in the opposite direction. Similarly, I recognize the tendency to drift in my own personal life and ministry, swerving toward one imbalance then overcorrecting toward its opposite. And I need constant adjustment—just as one would steer down a long stretch of highway—to ensure that I am maintaining the biblical balance.

I sense the same danger from many of my peers, those who fall toward the younger end of the age spectrum. We have embraced the orthodox doctrines of historic biblical fundamentalism. We are also convinced of the need to reflect God's glory in our Christian living and worship.¹ And God in His providence has positioned us to continue the work of the ministry that others have advanced. Yet, in our efforts to continue that work, we are prone to ministry drift.

This drift is especially apparent in evangelism. I'd like to suggest some alternate extremes that you, my young brother or sister, would do well to watch for. These extremes represent parallel sides of an issue, the two ditches on the opposite sides of a road. Some warnings have been shared before, and some are newly needed.

Relationship Evangelism, Extreme #1

Be careful lest you allow warm relationships to disarm you of the confrontational gospel. More recent trends urge us to build bridges with unbelievers and connect with them on a personal level before we evangelize. This is a healthy idea, and most believers come to Christ through personal relationships. Yet there will come a time when you must cross the bridge that you have built. Connecting with unbelievers without presenting the gospel to them could actually prevent true ministry.

As a corollary, be careful lest you disregard corporate evangelism. It is not possible for relationship evangelism to impact all the people in your community. Acts 19:10

indicates that all the inhabitants of Asia heard the Word; this would necessarily have included mass evangelism of some form. You and your church can both be lighthouses for the gospel.

Relationship Evangelism, Extreme #2

Be careful lest you present the gospel in an offensive or disconnected manner. Few people in our society would be open to deep, private discussions with a stranger, so your efforts should be as personal as possible. For instance, you will want to make sure that you present the message in a loving and gracious way. Another danger arises when we fail to consider our audience and "translate" our Christianese into the common tongue. Scriptures bring faith, but Christianese can bring confusion.

We should not be so careful about our bridge that we forget to cross over, but neither should we be in the practice of hurling the gospel message across a chasm without first attempting to build a bridge.

The Evangelist's Role, Extreme #1

Be careful, my young brothers, lest you allow your understanding of doctrine of election to excuse you from the human means of evangelism. A logical (but unbiblical) extension of God's electing people to salvation is that they will be saved whether we witness or not. This is the danger that confronted young William Carey.² In fact, the very opposite response is expected. God is the One who gives increase, but we must plant and water (1 Cor. 3:6). It is assuredly His will that brings men to the new birth (John 1:13), but we must herald the Word that brings this birth (James 1:18). He alone can give the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8-9), but that faith can materialize only as a preacher shares the Word (Rom. 10:14).³

A more subtle drift begins when we wait for the "perfect opportunity" before witnessing. Though God does providentially lead a conversation toward the gospel, I have found that other quality opportunities came only after I intentionally changed the subject. It does not mean that we will witness to every single person (there are times when wedging the gospel into the conversation will actually push a person away), but it does mean that we must be *willing* to witness to every single person.

The Evangelist's Role, Extreme #2

Be careful lest a “whosoever will” promise empowers you to manipulate conversion prayers from unrepentant sinners. In an eager effort to see someone come to Christ, you may be tempted to push a decision or oversimplify the demands of the gospel. After all, we should win souls and compel the lost to come, right? Yes, but it is the Spirit’s work to bring conviction (John 16:8–11), and professions of faith may be based only on temporary emotions instead of true repentance and faith (Matt. 13:20–21). Just as a conversion experience without both repentance and faith is suspect, so any human influence without genuine Spirit-conviction is also suspect. The last thing we would want is to give an unrepentant unbeliever the false impression that he is “safe.”

There are times when we must be more earnest and bold in our evangelism. There will also be times when we must be more tactful in our evangelistic efforts.

The Use of Technology, Extreme #1

Be careful lest your digital outreach surpass your in-person connections. This is the age of blogs and tweets, posts and comments. It has never been easier to share your thoughts online. And it has never been easier to become obsessed with your digital presence. Yet this new form of communication, despite its broader appeal, cannot replace your personal impact. Love for Christ and others is most clearly demonstrated through a face, a voice, a touch. Don’t allow your love for an avatar, a “like,” or even a screen to surpass your love for your family, your barista, or your fellow patrons.

The Use of Technology, Extreme #2

Be careful lest your desire for personal connection minimize your voice. Though not as easily personal, the Internet does give you an excellent opportunity to minister to more people. Paul frequently communicated by letter when he couldn’t minister in person; this is the same rationale. Just as sermon recordings or magazines reach more people, so can podcasts and blogs. As a whole, people in our younger generations are already exposed to a whole host of voices and opinions online. Why not add your biblical voice to that conglomerate? You can use, and should seriously consider using, your digital voice.

The digital realm makes for a horrible world but a fantastic platform. Let’s make full use of that platform without living in its empty world.

Conclusion

“Marcus” was not a believer but a curious observer who had been attending services at our church in Queens. He had helped my family move apartments recently, allowing us to connect outside of church. Still, when I closed one Sunday service with announcements and prayer and then walked toward his seat, I was uncertain how he would respond to my probing question: “Marcus, how would you describe your relationship with God?”

He paused, then opened up, and God allowed a great gospel conversation that resulted in Marcus’s reading through Romans 10, repenting, and trusting in Christ. This is just the beginning of my ministry (and friendship) with Marcus. I trust it has been a truly balanced approach. And God has graciously reconciled another sinner to Himself. May He continue that same glorious work in each of our ministries for decades to come.

Andrew Snavelly, MDiv, has been the assistant pastor at Grace Baptist Church of Forest Hills, New York, since 2014.



¹ I have found a helpful synopsis in Doug McLachlan’s *Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism* (American Association of Christian Schools, 1993) and more recently in Kevin Bauder’s broad strokes in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, edited by Andrew Naselli (Zondervan, 2011).

² “Young man, sit down; when God is pleased to convert the heathen world, He will do it without your help or mine.” This was the response given by a minister in response to Carey’s inquiry. George Whitefield also offers wise counsel regarding this logical dilemma in his open letter addressing John Wesley’s sermon “Free Grace.”

³ Of course, there are elements of mystery here (Why exactly would God elect believers? How can we pray for God to do something He has already determined to do?), but mystery abounds within the character of God and Christian orthodoxy. How can Christ be simultaneously God and man? How can there be three Persons and one God? How can the Scriptures be preserved for all time and still accessible to each succeeding generation? Mystery demands humble faith.

Give Money to Your “Mom”

I have an alma mater—literally, a “nourishing mother”—and I’ll bet you do too.

And so I ask you, my fellow young people, 20ish–37ish,* how’s your mom?

How, in fact, are all the institutions that shaped you? Spiritually—are they thriving? Numerically and financially—are they surviving?

If you’re reading *FrontLine*, odds are that many of the institutions that have shaped you were biblical fundamentalist ones. Think, in fact, of the individuals in your life who have been true gifts from the Lord (other than your own literal mother and father), and I’ll bet a lot of them were given to you *through institutions*. Churches, firstly, but also institutions that come alongside churches: schools, camps, mission boards, blogs, book and music publishers. I don’t know who I would be without specific fundamentalist institutions, and not just my alma mater.

Now let me get right to my point: you need to give money to your mom. In other words, **if fundamentalist institutions did genuine good for you, then you need to give something back.** You need to reinvest: spend some prayer and time and effort, and maybe even some cash. You need to do what you can to ensure that others will receive the nurturing you did. Institutions don’t maintain themselves.

Mark Dever recently critiqued my generation, noting something that I also have observed.

In a lot of young pastors today there's a lack of patience with institutions; there's a lack of patience with taking on other people's problems. They don't see the value; they don't see the significance; everything is [in] very personal, subjective, immediate terms. I think that's a generational problem with the guys who are younger. . . . Integrating yourself into a larger institution is as alien [to them] as a thirty-year career in the same company. (Pastor's Talk #27)

The Bible and Institutions

That was the old me. But then the old me read the excellent book *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Andy Crouch, IVP 2013—part of a trilogy of profound books which contain some of the most incisive comments about worldliness you'll ever read). He effectively argued that my implicit anti-institutionalism, picked up from our culture's overall anti-authoritarianism, was both foolish and, more importantly, disobedient. God told us to “make something of our world” (as Crouch put it—see Genesis 1:26–28), and institutions are central to that task.

God created several institutions directly, including the family, the state, and the church. I can't say that any others are specifically God-ordained. But, truly, can you imagine a world without schools or businesses or cities? Would that world reflect the intentions of its Creator? I'm prepared to argue, following Crouch, that “deeply and persistently organized pattern[s] of human behavior” (169)—institutions—are a good thing intended by God.

Institutions are . . . incubators of habituation that make us a certain kind of people—indeed, they forge the very notion of an “us.”—Jamie Smith in *Awaiting the King*

That doesn't mean all institutions are good (Genesis 3 follows Genesis 1), but it does mean that purposeful rejection of the very concept of institutions goes against the grain of God's creation. It means that failure to invest in institutions may be for you an implicit rejection of the creation mandate.

Artifacts, Arenas, Rules, and Roles

Institutions, Crouch says, provide four things “essential to human flourishing” (182): (1) artifacts, (2) arenas, (3) rules, and (4) roles.

Healthy churches do this. So do healthy parachurch institutions. They provide **artifacts** you need for faithful ministry in the church: books, articles, conferences, blogs, graduate credits, etc. They provide **arenas**: bounded spaces in which people can unify their action behind a mission, such as a school campus, a camp property, or even a Facebook group. Good institutions also “transmit a clear set of **rules** about what counts as a faithful performance of the institution's story” (178). And finally—and I think this is key for young people—institutions provide **roles**. They give you opportunities to do far more than you could ever do on your own. The Internet isn't enough to give outlet to

your gifts. You can't be a teacher without a school, a pastor without a church, a writer without a paycheck.

The artifacts produced by the sector of biblical fundamentalism in which I find myself have shaped me deeply over the years. But our corner of Christianity isn't putting out as many **artifacts** as we used to, particularly books and articles. Our **arena** isn't what it used to be, either. It's smaller. Few big names. Few cool conferences. Our **rules** are in dispute, and the number of available **roles** is shrinking: I've watched quite a few guys who graduated from grueling seminary programs struggle to find jobs. We were trained to serve in a fundamentalism that isn't what it used to be.

Many in our generation have seen this weakness, mixed it with the anti-institutional ethos common to our peers, and said *Forget it; I don't need institutions. All I need is my Internet friends*. And I'm not immune to that temptation. I can't say I always enjoy working with people I disagree with—because, clearly, *I am right*; why can't they see it? (Insert smiley emoji here.)

But the Lord won't let me give up on the institutions that most shaped me. I want to go as far as I can on the right road, taking on the baggage (both real and perceived) that Dever spoke of and working to strengthen what remains. I do this so I can provide for others whom I love—especially my kids and my church's kids—the artifacts, arena, rules, and roles that so helped me in my formative years. We fundamentalists have always told ourselves we didn't need to be cool and big, just faithful. And I still believe that. That's why I'm reinvesting in the institutions that shaped me. As long as they and my conscience will let me.

Put Your Money Where Your Mom Is

My conscience won't let me give back directly to the particular church and school in which I was raised. I can't accept the “set of rules” that constitute “a faithful performance of the institution's story” because the one at the top of their list is bibliological error. And I haven't joined Mark Dever's institutions either, because I'd rather have my problems than the Southern Baptist Convention's problems.

If you can't in good conscience affirm that your goals are consistent with the trajectory of a given fundamentalist institution, don't invest in it. Pray for it, but invest elsewhere. But if you are letting grass-is-greener syndrome keep you from investing in fundamentalist institutions where you might actually make a difference, if you are afflicted by our younger generation's common apathy (or antipathy) toward institutions—and if you, positively speaking, love the people who made you who you are enough to carry on the institutions to which they gave their lives, then I suggest you put your money where your mom is.

Dr. Mark Ward is the author most recently of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



* On October 10, 2018, the definition of “young” people will shift to 20ish–38ish.

Humility, the Queen of Virtues for Both the Old and the Young

The fact that there is a “generation gap” within biblical fundamentalism should not be a surprise to anyone. This is what generations do: gap. The main issue is to determine the best way to bridge the gap. Humility must be exhibited by both the “younger” as well as the “older” fundamentalists. As a forty-four-year-old, I feel as though I am in a kind of generational limbo, being neither very “young” nor very “old.” As such, I offer perhaps a different perspective than others.

Generational Humility

I remember when I first came to New England seventeen years ago to serve in a church as an assistant pastor. In addition to my pastor, there were also four older, retired pastors at the church. I was one year removed from seminary, and as is the case with many seminarians, I thought I had things figured out and therefore did not need the wisdom of the older men.

However, over time I realized that all of these godly men offered insights and experiences about ministry that I needed to hear. While each man had his own theological perspectives and “pet issues,” each was used by God to help mold and shape me in my ministry. I simply needed humility in order to receive what they had to offer.

Rehoboam is a key example of the need for a younger man to embrace humility before the older. In 2 Chronicles 10, King Rehoboam abandoned the wisdom of the older counsellors of his father in favor of the counsel of his own younger peers. It was this decision

that brought division within the people of God and split the kingdom.

Even as younger men struggle with generational humility, so do older men in ministry. As I progress further into the “older” group within fundamentalism, I realize that the younger generation is exploring or expanding ideas that, while perhaps are different than what I was exposed to at their age, may be helpful in the ministry as well. I must learn to be humble enough to listen, and discern between what is helpful and true and what is not.

Humility acts as a kind of queen out of whose womb are born all Christian virtues and graces, including those of ministry. This humility, of course, was exemplified by our Savior in His earthly life and ministry. He did only those things that pleased His Father (John 8:29), spoke only those words that the Father wanted Him to say (John 8:26), and submitted His will to that of the Father (Matt. 26:39). He willingly and humbly gave His back to the smiters, the mockers, the false accusers, and the murderers. His

humility, even in the face of difficulty and death, is what all believers should strive for, no matter what age.

Five Requirements

What does humility require in this intergenerational relationship? First, humility requires honesty. Members of each generation must take their heads out of the sand and honestly assess their own faults and failures, admit the pride rooted deeply in their hearts, and repent. As C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step.

“The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At

Members of each generation must take their heads out of the sand and honestly assess their own faults and failures, admit the pride rooted deeply in their hearts, and repent.

least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."

Second, humility requires listening. We must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger with each other (James 1:19). We must be willing to have meaningful conversations about important topics (such as translation issues, worship, mentoring/discipleship, culture, etc.), and listen with the intention of learning, understanding, and sharpening each other's perspectives.

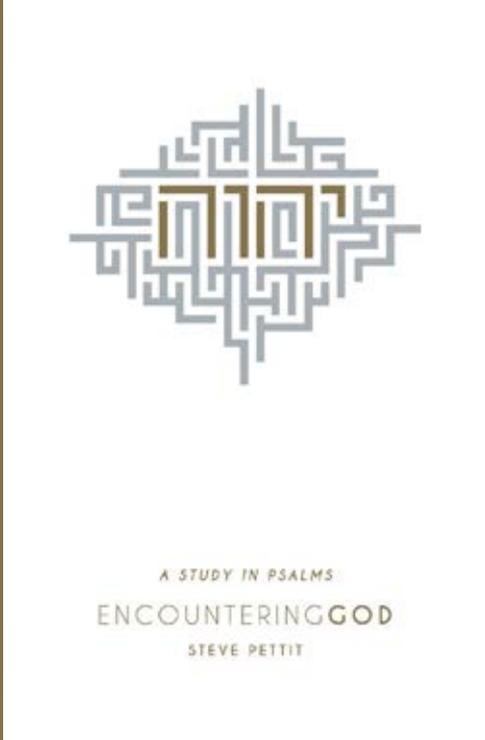
Third, humility requires deference. Biblically speaking, it is the younger who especially are to give deference to the older and be willing to be taught by them (Titus 2). We "younger" men need to give the "older" the respect that they deserve, yet the "older" need to be willing to listen and learn from the "younger" in a respectful way as well. There are things we can learn from each other.

Fourth, humility requires courtesy. Courtesy means that we do not hurl "verbal grenades" at one another because of our differences; rather, we show a gracious spirit even amidst any differences.

Fifth, humility requires interaction. No generation should fear another. Each generation has value in the overall growth of the body of Christ. How should we interact with each other? We should read the books that are influential to each generation, keeping in mind that not everything older is outdated, nor is everything newer compromising. We should hold conferences where both the younger and older are asked to preach, regardless of the size or popularity of their ministries. We should not be afraid of each other's biblical ideas and perspectives and be willing to hear and implement that which would be helpful for our ministries.

My struggle with humility as a "younger/older" fundamentalist will no doubt continue until the day I die. However, my prayer for us all is that God continues to grow and mature us into the image of Him who is gentle and lowly of heart (Matt. 11:29).

Taigen Joos has been the pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire, since 2007.



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The Time of My Departure

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

2 Timothy 4:6

Paul concluded his earthly stay was over. His death was imminent. He could have said, "My death is at hand." Choosing rather "my departure" to describe the end of a Christian's earthly life, he expressed that we go from one place, one stage, to another. This wasn't the end of Paul but the end of his present location. He was soon to be "present with the Lord." Something more and better was awaiting (v. 8). The ministry as he had known it was now over by Divine decree. He had been faithfully courageous, faithfully persistent, faithfully biblical (v. 7). He would soon exchange faith for sight. What a satisfying time of life it should be for every minister when his Master determines it is time to retire.

Transitions Are Part of Life

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reads, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." We also

know that from experience. "Seasons" are part of the life cycle from birth to death. Following adolescence, there is adulthood; then we usually transition to marriage, to parenthood, and grandparenthood; from working life to retirement; from vigor to vitamins; from pulsating energy to hoping we'll have enough energy to make our next doctor's appointment and remember which doctor it is this time.

Nothing remains the same except Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Transitions make life unpredictable and interesting, just as modulations, the passing from one musical key to another, help make music interesting.

Transitions Are Part of Ministry

The Old Testament Levitical priest knew that at age fifty his days officiating at the altar were over (Num. 8:25), but preachers have no biblically mandated stop sign before them. Some, by reason of health or heredity, are old at fifty. Some remain young at seventy. The apostle John was active into his nineties.

It is to a man's credit when he knows the time to step aside. There will be no handwriting on the wall as there

was to tell Belshazzar that his time had come, but there are some commonsense indications:

- When your energy level tells you.
- When your mental condition tells you.
- When your wife or children who love you tell you.
One of the hardest things my father said he had to do was to tell his father at about the age of eighty that his preaching days were over when dementia set in. He had begun repeating himself in the pulpit. People understood and made allowance, but my father did not want those who knew him only at that stage and had never heard him in his better days to remember him this way. He did the loving thing.
- When your church leadership tells you it is time. They act out of love for you and the church.
- When your loss of passion for the task tells you.
In 2005, after thirty-four years as president of BJU, I stepped aside, and the board appointed our son, Stephen, as president. I enjoyed every minute of those years. I went to the office each morning with excitement about what God would have me to do that day. I often told my wife that I was so confident in God's calling and so energized by the challenge and opportunity that the Lord would have to take away my passion for it, lest I overstay my usefulness. In later years I began praying for the Lord to do that. I knew that otherwise I would become a liability to the school by overstaying my usefulness. He answered my prayer over a span of about three years. I grew less enthusiastic about certain aspects of my role. It was time to set the transition process in motion.
- When attendance decline tells you that the sheep are no longer following the shepherd.
I hasten to add that decline is not irrefutable evidence that the church needs a new pastor. Sometimes people walk out of a good church because they won't endure sound doctrine. Second Timothy 4:10–11 tells us that some of Paul's collaborators left him for unacceptable reasons (vv. 14–18). "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil. . . . At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. . . . Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." Opposition, betrayal, and aloneness are not in themselves causes to transition out of your ministry. Sometimes it is honorable and commendable to be in the minority. When you take the Lord's side in a biblical controversy, you and God will make a majority.

Do the Honorable Thing When the Time Comes

When common sense, counsel, and evidence tell us that the ministry needs a new leader, remaining because of our personal best interest reveals something very ugly about us.

- We are self-serving, not others-serving.
- We need the income and can't afford to leave.
- Our pride won't let us face the truth—we are old and tired.
- Our pride has persuaded us we are indispensable and that things would fall apart without us. If the ministry has been built on the Word and on the Savior, not on our personality, it won't fall. The foundation of truth we have laid allows our replacement something to build upon that takes the ministry to new heights.
- Our pride winces at the thought that retirement means we lose the deference which attends pulpit privilege.

Look Ahead. Plan Ahead.

Not all transitions can be prepared for, but those that can be, should be. Each of us can think of churches and Christian colleges that are in ruin because the leadership failed to look ahead and plan ahead.

- If possible, give your board at least two years' notice of your departure.
- Work with your board to find a successor. Mentor him.
The BJU board had expressed their will for Stephen to succeed me whenever I felt the time was right. I informed Stephen he was their choice and that for two years I would assist him to prepare.
- When a glance in the mirror tells you that you are beginning to look like your grandpa, hire an assistant that you think might have the qualifications to be your successor. Let him and your board know what you have in mind and what your timetable is. Don't expect him to hang around as your understudy for more than two or three years.

This, of course, is the ideal and isn't always possible. Unexpected transitions beyond your control will occur, but when transition can be managed, do it.

A good shepherd doesn't abuse his sheep by inconsideration of their best interest or by selfish consideration of his. It is better to have the sheep weep over your departure than weep over their plight because you just couldn't, or wouldn't, leave.

Peter told his hearers he was going to depart, and he admonished them not to forget what he had taught them (2 Peter 1:14–15). Lead your people in finding a replacement who will be committed to build on what you taught them and to "have these things always in remembrance."

The "time" of a servant's departure is determined by his Master. If you confidently entered the door of service by your Master's bestowment, you should be equally sanguine, as Paul was about God's sovereignty, over your exit.

Dr. Bob Jones III serves as chancellor of Bob Jones University.



From the day my children were born my heart's desire for them in life

has been that they love God with all their hearts and walk in sincere obedience to Him. After all, isn't that the most we can desire for our children? But as they become adults there are potential consequences that come with that goal that I did not expect. How do I respond when loving God and walking in obedience to Him—at least in the sincerity of their own hearts—means they disagree with me?

Galatians 1:10: For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:4: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

Proverbs 29:25: The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

John 12:43: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Colossians 3:23: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

Acts 5:29: Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

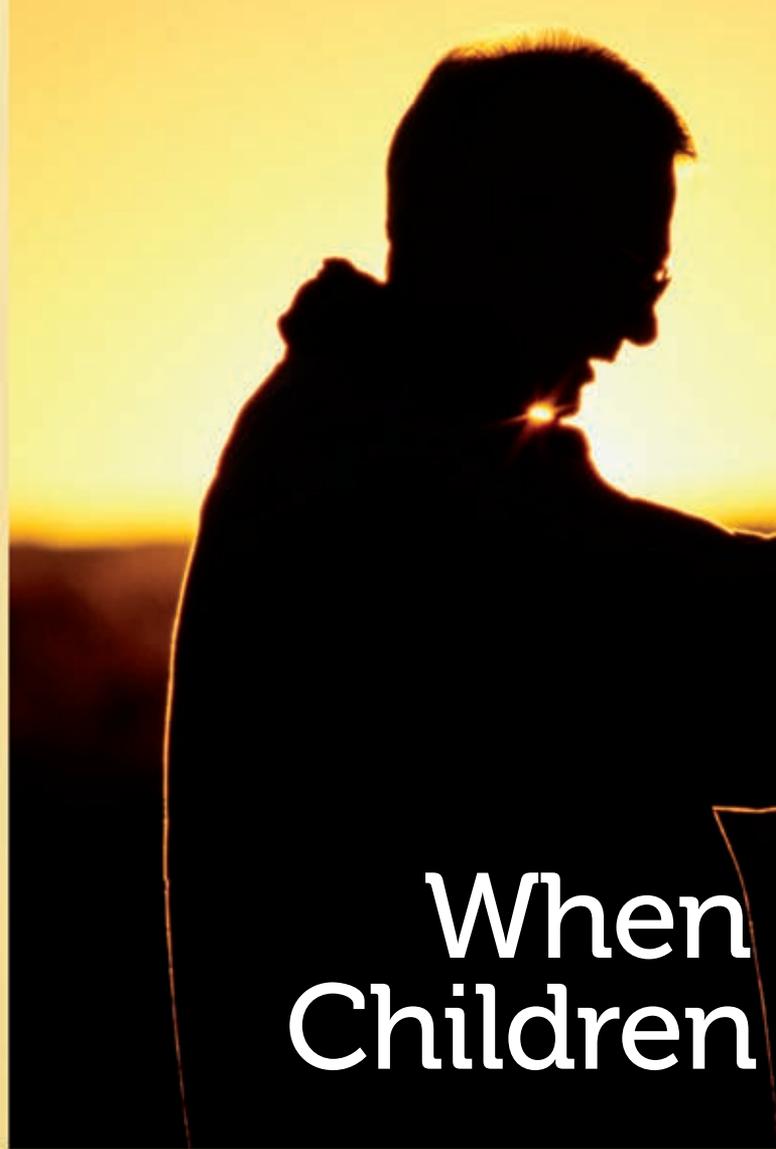
We know that we must obey God rather than men. Our children must do the same. But we seldom imagine ourselves as the “authority” that must be “disobeyed.” But here is the inevitable truth. Our children will sincerely disagree with us in something. It might not be a “big thing.” But let's be honest, when it comes to us and our children, we tend to look at everything as a “big thing.” In fact, if our children agree with us in everything, there should be genuine cause for alarm! Either, we have gotten everything right, and they managed to get everything right too—or as man-pleasers, they have followed us and repeated our errors. Unfortunately, the latter is more likely.

My children must not grow up to be man-pleasers, even if that man is me.

Who's Right and Who's Wrong?

“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand” (2 Cor. 1:24).

As Baptists, this is a core value. We believe in individual soul-liberty and responsibility. And it applies to more than just our children. It applies to everyone whom we have the privilege of discipling. Our adult children must answer to God for what they believe and how they live. They must believe, act, and worship based upon the dictates of their own consciences. We can challenge them on what they do,



When Children

but it is not our prerogative as parents of adult children to rule their consciences. That role belongs to God alone.

We all believe we are right about the positions we take and the choices we make regarding our daily walk. So if our children disagree with us, we naturally assume that they are wrong. It is easy to believe that the solution is for them is to admit that they are wrong and do what *we* think that they should do. But doing that leads to two significant errors.

One error is the very real possibility that we might have been wrong or have become wrong. After all, the same biblical principle can look very different when applied in different contexts. And contexts do change over time. We have to admit this possibility and sincerely evaluate our convictions and actions before God and in the present circumstances. When our children question our position, we might find that *we* have been the men-pleasers. We have been doing what we have doing out of respect for the previous generation and not based upon our own Scripture-formed convictions.

A second error is subtler. When our adult children do the right thing just to please us but in so doing violate their own consciences—even if that conscience is misguided—



Our Disagree

they are still wrong. Doing the right thing for the wrong reason is still wrong (Rom. 14:23).

The Right Focus

“But they are just choosing to trust my judgment on this issue!”

Really? They are adults. A mature believer does not just trust his own conscience to someone else. He searches the Scriptures, verifies, and make his convictions his own. When the Bereans did this, Luke called it noble (Acts 17:10–11).

So how do we respond in this difficult situation? First, focus on the heart. When we face this type of disagreement, it is a worthy time for us to examine our own hearts. We should take more joy in seeing our children follow God than in seeing them follow us. The tendency for some parents is to be hurt that their children are not following them. They see it as disrespect. It is wicked for us to demand that our children show us a misguided form of respect at the expense of their own consciences.

It might be wise to challenge our children about their spiritual condition and its bearing on their decisions of conscience (Rom. 15:14). Kids sometimes just want to be different from Mom and Dad. Sometimes they are

swayed more by peers than by the Word. But we must not simply assume that a heart problem is the reason for the disagreement. Challenge them, but trust the Holy Spirit. It is His responsibility to reveal to them their own hearts (John 16:13).

Second, communicate clearly. Talk about the issue and how you came to the position you hold. There is nothing wrong with vigorously making your case for your position from the Scriptures (2 Tim. 4:1–2). We often just assume our children will believe what we believe just because we believe it. We have an obligation to teach and explain clearly so that they can become convinced of God in their own hearts based upon a sound understanding of His Word (Deut. 6:7).

Third, do not violate your own conscience or abandon your own convictions for the sake of peace with your child. That is also being a man-pleaser and is sin before God. For many parents, this is the core problem. The misguided heart's desire is for the parent and child to be in complete unity on everything. Their path to unity is to force the children to conform to the convictions of the parents. If that does not work, the parents abandon their convictions for the sake of their children. Both responses are wrong.

Fourth, remember that sin is still sin. I am not here advocating treating everything just as a difference of conscience. We cannot be afraid to call sin sin and confront others regarding sin, even our own children.

Fifth, love always. For the true child of God, our relationship with Him is eternally secure. So should be our relationships with our children. Love manifests itself in different ways, but the relationship must always remain. God does not disown us, and we must not disown our own children. We do not have to agree with them or approve of all they believe or do to have relationship with them.

Sixth, trust God always. The Holy Spirit does live in us *and* in our saved children. He can show them when they are in error. There comes a time where we must trust the Holy Spirit to do in them what we cannot and should not try to force in them ourselves.

Finally, pray always. We must never stop praying for our children. Pray for God to guide them into His truth.

We were heirs of the generation that went before us. We journeyed forward with a deep appreciation for their wisdom and sacrifice. But we also took a slightly different path at times based upon our own understanding of the Word of God. Our children will be the leaders of tomorrow. The way ahead is in their hands. They will face issues we cannot possibly imagine. We want them to learn from us. We want them to avoid our mistakes and climb on our successes and go higher. But our greatest gift to them will be to instill in them a reverent regard for the Word of God, an accurate method of interpreting it, and a deep commitment to be obedient to God regardless of the cost. We must trust them to God, to lead them as He has led us.

Dr. Kevin Schaal has served as the pastor of Northwest Valley Baptist Church since its beginning in 1987. In addition, he teaches as an adjunct professor at colleges in the States and overseas. He and his wife, Sandra, have five children.



2018

April 9–10, 2018

Chesapeake Bay Region Regional Fellowship
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Street, MD 21154

April 9–11, 2018

South Regional Fellowship
Swan Creek Baptist Church
2501 Swan Creek
Jonesville, NC 28642

April 23–24, 2018

Wyoming State Fellowship
Friendship Baptist Church
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Thayne, WY 83127

June 11–13, 2018

98th Annual Fellowship
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Troy, MI 48083-2399

July 30–August 1, 2018

Alaska Regional Fellowship
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Fairbanks, AK 99701
907.456.5995

September 11, 2018

NYC Regional Fellowship
Bethel Baptist Fellowship
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Brooklyn, NY 11235
718.615.1002

September 22, 2018

New England Regional Fellowship
(Meeting with the New England Foundations Conference)
Heritage Baptist Church
186 Dover Point Road
Dover, NH 03820

September 27–28, 2018

New Mexico Regional Fellowship
Grace Baptist Church
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Farmington, NM 87401
505.330.5632

October 15–16, 2018

Central Regional Fellowship
Midland Baptist Church
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Wichita, KS 67205
Host: Dr. Dale Heffernan

November 5–6, 2018

Southern California Regional Fellowship
Victory Baptist Church
PO Box 2462
California City, CA 93504

2019

April 1–3, 2019

South Regional Fellowship
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June 11–13, 2019

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

That Man of Granite . . . Prepared to Stand Alone

“J. C. Ryle is an evangelical champion. One of the bravest and best of men” (C. H. Spurgeon).

The pastors’ reading group of which I’m a part chose a biography of John (J.) Charles (C.) Ryle for our January meeting. I’m very glad that we did. My introduction to Ryle came while I was still an undergraduate student when someone put me on to his classic work on sanctification, *Holiness*. Years ago I finally replaced the cheap paperback copy that I had purchased then. I wish now that I’d kept it and could review the sentences that I had underlined in those early years when I was struggling so hard to understand the nature of consecration and the necessities for victory over the flesh and the world.



Reading this life of J. C. Ryle over this past Christmas holiday brought back warm memories of those student years over forty years ago. It did, however, provoke a feeling of real regret that I didn’t begin and resolutely pursue a steady, working acquaintance with others of his writings.

Back in October 1982 a friend presented me with a copy of Peter Toon’s biography of Ryle. But from thumbing through it, it doesn’t appear that I finished it or gleaned much from what I did read. Sometime in the early 1990s I read Ryle’s biographical sketches of five

English martyrs, published by Banner of Truth as *Five English Reformers*. Its opening chapter (“Why Were Our Reformers Burned?”) made the Roman Catholic mass and dogma lastingly abhorrent. To this day I almost always find myself involuntarily recalling that chapter title whenever I encounter any reference to the mass in print, media, or conversation. The only other work by Ryle which I can recall having used, and this more for research than reading, is *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century*. Its chapters are Ryle’s highlights of eleven notable Welsh and English evangelicals including John Wesley, Daniel Rowland, and Henry Venn.

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

I cannot account for why I wasn’t more “alive” to Ryle earlier in my ministry. I certainly appreciated him—enough so that when a British autograph dealer made one of his signed letters affordably available about ten years ago, I eagerly purchased it. But even that didn’t prompt me to anything like a systematic reading of his works.

Perhaps it has been the Lord’s providence to save him for my blessing now. I do know that I’ve discovered through the years that particular writers or titles have been brought to my attention (by the Spirit’s prompting, I’ve come to believe) at certain seasons in my life rather than at others. And for what purpose I can’t yet say, but at the opening of this year I’m drawn powerfully to Ryle and to his works.

In January of the last two years, my wife, Linda, and I have taken a few days for holing up in a cabin in the mountains for uninterrupted reading and devotion. It’s one of the best things that I’ve ever done. I heartily recommend it or something similar to every pastor. Of course it involves some expense and a certain vague uneasiness about leaving responsibilities dangling at the beginning of a new year. But a preacher’s heart is truly the heart of his ministry. And I can testify that there’s nothing I’ve ever done that has been more beneficial to my own heart and, I trust, to my ministry at church than

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to set aside a few days a year for uninterrupted time with the Lord. It's been so precious that this year we elongated the time from three days to five. And this year, it was Ryle who took first place in my reading. For the month preceding I'd been dipping into him with great interest. The result was a pile of his titles mounting on the floor beside my desk that accompanied me to the mountains in early January.

I'd like to encourage you to discover Ryle for yourself if you haven't already. What I've attempted here is to stake out four corners (like those of a jigsaw puzzle your family may work on from time to time) to frame an acquaintance with Ryle that you can fill out for yourself if you wish. It'll take two columns to complete, but I trust

Perhaps it has been the Lord's providence to save him for my blessing now. I do know that I've discovered through the years that particular writers or titles have been brought to my attention (by the Spirit's prompting, I've come to believe) at certain seasons in my life rather than at others. And for what purpose I can't yet say, but at the opening of this year I'm drawn powerfully to Ryle and to his works.

that it will be valuable to someone. Let me know!

Ryle's Recent Biographers

Until this millennium Ryle's standard biography was *John Charles Ryle, Evangelical Bishop* by Peter Toon and Michael Smout (1976). I find it regrettably uninspiring. But there's been substantial progress in popularizing Ryle since then. Five titles, in particular, can be credited.

The first, Eric Russell's *That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (2001), opens with an attention-grabbing assessment by a cleric who had been his contemporary: *Few men in the nineteenth century did so much for God, for righteousness, among the English-speaking race and in the world as our late Bishop.* Easily read in a few evenings, Russell's biography is spiritually warm.

The second was J. I. Packer's "appreciation," published in *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle* (2002). Packer's seventy-five pages of biography are followed by the full text of the first edition of Ryle's most well-known and widely appreciated work, *Holiness*. Packer credits *Holiness* with having rescued him from defective teaching on sanctification when he was just a young Christian. So he writes out of gratitude, a quality which generally adds welcome color to any biography.

The third was Alan Munden's *Bishop J C Ryle: Prince*

of Tract Writers (2012), in DayOne's "Travel With" series. Although just 128 narrow (4½-inch) pages, it gives attractiveness to Ryle through some 150 portraits and photographs of people and places associated with him. One of my favorites is of a letter written to a faithful friend in January 1900 (the year of his death). *I send you, he opens, as a parting gift, a marked copy of "The Best of Books," and ask you to accept it from me (with all its marks of daily reading) as my grateful remembrance of helps given by you, and received by me during my life in Liverpool.* "All its marks of daily reading." That's intriguing. Eric Russell says (whether of this Bible or some other, I cannot tell), *Every page from Genesis to Revelation showed evidence of painstaking study.* I wish I could see those pages.

Happily, DayOne has included a small (much too small!) picture of two pages of one of Ryle's preaching Bibles. Squinting down on it under a magnifying glass, I discover that it's opened to Jeremiah 7 and 8. Across the top of those pages, and at the bottom of one, are places and dates marking, I assume, his preaching from these chapters. At least half a dozen verses on each page contain underlining. Almost all appear to have to do with Judah's apostasy and backsliding. One of the most heavily scored is Jeremiah 7:28, *This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.* There could be few verses which express more cogently Ryle's ministry-long viewpoint of his own nineteenth-century nation.

The fourth, and what may prove to be the most influential factor in arousing renewed interest in Ryle, is Iain Murray's 2016 biography, *J. C. Ryle: Prepared to Stand Alone*. Murray writes, as Packer, with gratitude. Of himself and his wife, Jeane, he testifies, *We have read Ryle together since teenage years.* More importantly, Murray has been for over fifty years a chief evangelical advocate and inspiring example of employing church history's indisputable facts for confirming scriptural truths. He always has a spiritual point to make. In this case, his title trumpets no uncertain sound: *Prepared to Stand Alone*. Under a photograph of Ryle printed across from the title page, Murray opens by quoting, *We want more boldness among the friends of truth. There is far too much tendency to sit still, and wait for committees, and number our adherents. We want more men who are not afraid to stand alone. . . . It is truth, not numbers, which shall always in the end prevail. . . . We have the truth, and we need not be ashamed to say so. The judgment day will prove who is right, and to that day we boldly appeal.*

The fifth recent heralding of Ryle is the printing of his hitherto unpublished autobiography, edited by Andrew Atherstone (*Banner of Truth*, 2016). Ryle dictated it in 1873, when he was just fifty-seven. Actually, he didn't complete his story even up to that year of his life. The account concludes with the death of his second wife thirteen years earlier. But it includes details that Ryle's biographers didn't know or didn't include. And it contains dozens of photographs, including a number of family pictures! It turns out that Ryle's third wife, Henrietta, was an avid photographer. Seven appendices cover such fascinating topics as "The Ryle Family Bible,"

“Ryle’s Tracts” (a must-read for anyone wanting to understand Ryle’s ministerial burdens), and “Ryle’s Last Will and Testament” (in which each of his three sons were bequeathed, among other things, *two hundred fifty volumes of my books*).

I should prepare you for the fact that all biographers find it especially challenging to write as thoroughly of the years after the close of Ryle’s autobiographical account. Murray says that he *appears to have discouraged the use of any of his personal archives, so that little of a personal nature to help a biographer has survived apart from the autobiography*. I find this to be particularly regrettable when it comes to his final, influential twenty years as bishop of Liverpool (1880–1900). But Packer feels that his own research confirms that *Ryle honed his skills, but never changed his tune*. So perhaps we gain all the fundamentals of his life and ministry from what is available previous to those last two decades.

Ryle’s Writings

We resurrect the ministries of most preachers of the past through reading their sermons. But in Ryle’s case we’re often dependent on another medium: tracts. Well, not exactly “tracts” as we think of them, but tracts nonetheless.

During his first pastorate Ryle distributed tracts prolifically. *My regular work*, he related, *was . . . to visit, confer with, and distribute tracts among 60 families every week*. Some were just brief pamphlets, but others elongated to over a hundred pages. And not all of them were exclusively evangelistic. Some were written to stimulate growth in grace or to address issues of the day, particularly within the Church of England. It’s estimated that eventually there were nearly two hundred different pamphlets and that even within Ryle’s lifetime the number of copies in circulation amounted to over twelve million!

Soon after Ryle began writing tracts, William Hunt of Ipswich began binding various ones together and issuing them in volumes entitled *Home Truths*. Eventually there were eight such volumes, running to around three hundred pages apiece. I have the first of these sitting beside me, and it contains just nine chapters. There’s a note at the bottom of the “Contents” page that announces, *Each of the above works is also printed separately as a tract, and may be obtained at the Publisher’s*. Yet they average over thirty pages apiece. One is over sixty. Eventually Ryle reissued new combinations of many of these tracts under new titles. Four of these, *Knots Untied*, *Old Paths*, *Practical Religion*, and *Holiness*, were read widely.

Then there are Ryle’s biographical studies. They are reprinted today as *Light from Old Times* and *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century*. Like his best biographers, Ryle attempts to draw timeless scriptural lessons out his historical subjects. I’m certain that you’ll find them to be interesting and instructive. You’ll probably start pasting many of the enlightening anecdotes and quotations into your sermons.

The other series for which Ryle is renowned is entitled *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. A single

volume is given to Matthew and Mark. Luke is in two volumes (1858), and John in three (1865, 1869, 1873). I strongly recommend the series on John to any pastor. In his preface to the third volume Ryle testifies that his work is the result of *a patient study of about seventy Commentators, both ancient and modern, of almost every Church and theological school in Christendom*. When I preached through John over the course of four years (1999–2002), I found Ryle to be consistently thorough, succinct, insightful, and spiritually vibrant. Of all commentators, I enjoyed him most.

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Ryle’s Pivotal Experiences

Rather than sketching an overview of Ryle’s life and ministry, let me relate some of the high-water marks. The first, of course, is his conversion; but let me begin with some brief background. Ryle’s grandfather (1744–1808) had been a devout evangelical Christian who supported John Wesley energetically. But his father was an unbeliever, amiable but nevertheless uncomfortable with anything approaching enthusiastic Christianity. The consequence was that his children were nothing more than baptized (as infants), unconverted, occasional attendees of the Church of England. But God chose to intervene.

Conversion. Several incidents contributed to Ryle’s closing with Christ. One was the salvation of his sister, Susan. *Evangelical religion in one way or another began to be talked of . . . in our family*, he relates. A second was when a friend rebuked him for swearing. *He was the first person who ever told me to think, repent, and pray*. A third was illness. A chest inflammation confined him to bed and left him very weak. *This was the time I remember distinctly when I first began to read my Bible, or began to pray*. But the most influential seems to have been the public reading of a single verse one Sunday in St. Aldgate’s, Oxford, which he was occasionally attending while a student. The appointed reader took Ephesians 2, and when he

reached verse 8, he paused briefly between each clause: *By grace are ye saved—through faith—and that not of yourselves—it is the gift of God.*

By the end of the year the twenty-one-year-old Oxford student could testify, *Nothing I remember to this day appeared to me so clear and distinct as my own sinfulness, Christ's preciousness, the value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out from the world, the need of being born again, and the enormous folly of the whole doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration. All these things . . . seemed to flash upon me like a sunbeam in the winter of 1837, and have stuck in my mind from that time to this.*

Ryle testified that he never would have entered the ministry were it not for the seismic shift in his family's fortunes that occurred in June 1841, just after his twenty-fifth birthday. We got up one summer's morning, with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same evening completely and entirely ruined.

Ryle continued, *People may account for such a change as they like, my own belief is, that no rational explanation can be given of it, but that of the Bible; it is what the Bible calls "conversion," and "regeneration." Before that time I was dead in sins, and on the high road to hell, and from that time, I became alive, and had a hope of heaven. And nothing to my mind can account for it, but the free sovereign grace of God.*

Entrance into the ministry. J. C. Ryle's becoming a preacher was the direct consequence of a stunning reversal. He had grown up in the lap of luxury. His father had inherited a fortune worth an estimated \$100 million in today's currency. When Ryle was converted as a student at Oxford, his unconverted father and mother both discouraged his making any "show" of his religion. They encouraged his settling into the family businesses, marrying a girl suitable to his station, and setting up home in a splendid house offered to him by his father.

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Both branches of Ryle's father's bank had failed virtually overnight due to the foolish mismanagement of one his employees. When word got out, there was a public stampede to withdraw any available funds with the result that everything collapsed. Besieged by creditors, the Ryles lost their entire family fortune in virtually a day. The bank, the silk mill, their real estate, the family

home, livestock, farm implements, and even their household furniture were all forfeited in order to pay off notes. There was not money even to keep the family together. They were constrained to disperse. Even Ryle's beloved mastiff, Caesar, had to be turned over to a neighbor. The son of the once fabulously wealthy landowner had nowhere to take even his dog and no way to feed him if he did. *God alone knows, Ryle related, how my whole frame, body, mind and spirit reeled and were shaken to the foundation under my father's ruin. . . . It did crush me terribly and for many years I could hardly lift up my head. . . . If I had not been a Christian at this time, he confessed, I do not know if I should not have committed suicide.*

Less than six months after the family's ruin, an evangelical clergyman named William Gibson offered him a curacy (assistant pastorate). It wasn't what Ryle wanted to do, but he felt *shut up to it, and saw no other course of life open to me.* He confessed in his autobiography, *If my father's affairs had prospered, and I had never been ruined . . . I should never have been a clergyman, never have preached a sermon, written a tract, or a book.*

Beginning to write. Two rural churches (in Exbury and Winchester) provided Ryle with his first two and half years of opportunities. He read substantive books, visited his people systematically, evangelized aggressively, and learned a thing or two about preaching. *The first year of my preaching was a series of experiments, he said. His third pastoral charge was at Helmingham. It was here (at twenty-eight) that he found his first wife, Matilda Plumtre, and here (at twenty-nine) that he wrote (anonymously) and distributed his first tract. The occasion was remarkable.*

On a bright May day a famous clown attempted a stunt to advertise William Cooke's Circus, setting up near Norwich. He set out to cross the North River under a newly constructed bridge in a washtub pulled by four geese! As the geese paddled serenely near the bridge, a great throng of people straining to see the strange sight from the bridge rushed to one side, and the chains holding it in suspension snapped, throwing an estimated four hundred into the water. Seventy-nine drowned.

Bodies pulled from the river were laid out in three local inns. The two youngest were just two years old. Altogether, fifty-nine were sixteen or younger. The local newspaper lamented, *In every street are to be seen one or more bodies extended on biers, returning to that home from which but short minutes before they had passed in health and life. The consternation—the agony of the town is not to be described—it is as if some dread punishment was felt to have fallen upon its inhabitants—every face is horror stricken—every eye is dim.*

Ryle responded to the tragedy by writing and circulating a tract, authorship credited only to a *spiritual watchman*, in which he asserted that it was a fearful thing to be unprepared to meet God. He probed his readers, *Are you living unto God? Are you a true Christian? Have you really repented of your sins?* The public response is unknown. But it was the beginning of one of the most effectual tract ministries in the history of the Christian Church.

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Bring . . . the Books

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

Perhaps the most treasured volume in my library is a 1659 leather-bound edition of *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. The yellowed pages, musty smell, and archaic spelling remind me that I am entering a different age when I take up this volume. I always handle this book with great care and keep it in a secure place because it is precious to me. However, what is more valuable than the ancient parchment and calfskin binding is the timeless instruction printed on every page.

This is one of a handful of Puritan titles that I regularly pass on to others because it speaks so powerfully to Christians in a variety of circumstances. Fortunately, Banner of Truth has published an edition that is much easier to read than my 1659 edition. This extended exposition of Philippians 4:11 is like medicine for the Christian's soul, curative for virtually any ailment. It is Jeremiah Burroughs's most popular work and one of the best-known Puritan titles of all time; Joel Beeke rightly calls it a classic in his very helpful book *Meet the Puritans* (124). You may have read a recommendation of *The Rare Jewel* in a recent review by Emily Whitten in *World* magazine (Nov. 25, 2017, vol. 32, no. 22). This is Puritan literature at its best—biblical, practical, and challenging. If you have never read a book from the Puritan age before, Jeremiah Burroughs's *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* would be a great place to start. Let me give you some reasons to add this to your reading list for 2018.

First, Burroughs was writing as one who had personally learned the value of Christian contentment. Phillip Simpson's recent biography of Jeremiah Burroughs, *A Life of Gospel Peace*, provides the background of this famous treatise. Burroughs graduated from the Puritan stronghold, Emmanuel College, full of promise. However, he encountered many difficulties in his early years of ministry. Pastor Burroughs was effectively forced out of his first ministerial post because he denounced the sin of a local government official from the pulpit. In his next ministry assignment, he was restricted from preaching because he refused to comply with what he considered to be unbiblical aspects of public worship. Eventually, he was forced to flee England to avoid imprisonment. Burroughs left for Rotterdam, Holland, and said of his departure, "The thought of going out of the Kingdom in this manner grieved me" (Phillips, *A Life of Gospel Peace*, 78). Burroughs's ministry had not worked out the way he had imagined. However, the Lord used these early disappointments to teach him to be content. Burroughs concludes his book with the insightful counsel, "If any good interpretation can be made of God's way towards you, make it" (223).

Second, this classic volume is relatively easy to read. I must qualify what I say because probably no Puritan writing can be considered light reading by today's standards. The archaic vocabulary, lengthy sentences, and complex divisions turn away many well-

intentioned Christian readers from ever completing a Puritan book. However, Burroughs's *Rare Jewel* is one of the most accessible of all Puritan titles. It is not too lengthy (only 228 pages in the Banner edition). The concrete illustrations and metaphors that Burroughs regularly employs also make this volume more readable. For example, he compares those who think that they would be content if their circumstances were different to children who imagine that if they were to climb a distant hill, they would be able to touch the clouds. "But when they are on top of the hill, alas, they are as far from the clouds as they were before" (52).

Burroughs has also organized this book in a helpful way. He begins by defining what he means by Christian contentment: "that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition" (19). Next, he describes the "mystery of contentment" in which he further explains what true contentment looks like in a believer. Other divisions include "How Christ Teaches Contentment," "The Excellence of Contentment," and "The Evils of a Murmuring Spirit," the most convicting chapter in the book. Burroughs concludes his treatise by explaining from Scripture "How to Attain Contentment." His instructions are both pointed and practical. The many divisions of this book enable readers to digest smaller portions in a devotional manner. This is probably the best way to read this classic—slowly and reflectively.

Finally, I would commend this book to you because Burroughs addresses an issue that is still relevant today. He wrote this classic because he perceived that contentment was something his people needed in "sad and sinking times" (17). His title suggests that even in the Puritan age contentment was an unusual virtue in the lives of Christian people. Certainly, the situation has not improved today, although our outward circumstances as twenty-first-century believers may be much more comfortable. Just about every message of our contemporary culture tends to produce discontentment in the hearts of people. How many serious spiritual problems today can be traced to a lack of contentment among Christian people? People abandon their marriages because they become discontent with the spouse that God has given them. They leave their local churches because of some minor disagreement. They live in perpetual financial debt because they have listened more to the materialistic call of the world than to the clear admonitions of Scripture. How desperately we need to obtain *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. ☞

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

Tim Leaman is the senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Westminster, Maryland.

Straight Cuts

Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. (2 Tim. 2:23)

In this very verse (2 Tim. 2:23) lies a good example of what Paul is talking about: the word “questions.” In older English usage, “question” could mean what we usually mean by it: an interrogative sentence, “a sentence worded or expressed so as to elicit information: *we hope this leaflet has been helpful in answering your questions*” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). If this is what the KJV translators meant, then Paul would be telling us to avoid dumb questions—like, “Is it safe for my eyes to look at a picture of the sun?” (Thank you, Internet, for this real-life example.)

Now, avoiding such questions is no doubt wise. But it’s not what the translators meant—and not what Paul was talking about. The translators’ choice here was excellent. In older English usage and in specific academic and formal settings today, there is an additional sense of the word “questions” that we rarely use in common conversation: “A (subject of) debate, dispute, or contention.” This is what the translators intended.

I know this because it so closely matches the Greek word here (*zētēseis*), which always in the NT refers to a matter in dispute, not merely an information-seeking question.

The sharper, conflict-ridden meaning of the English word “question” is still around today in sentences such as, “The question before the committee today is whether we should build or buy.” But my feel is that most readers in 2018 would not think of this sense when reading 2 Timothy 2:23.

The modern English translations go for renderings such as “debates,” “discussions,” “disputes.” Here’s the NET Bible: “Reject foolish and ignorant controversies.”

The difference in meaning we’re talking about here is not massive: there’s a “question” at the heart of every “controversy,” and I think modern readers pretty much get the gist of what Paul is saying. But I want more than the gist if I can get it. It

matters whether I’m supposed to avoid “dumb questions” or “ignorant controversies.” The translators meant the latter, not the former.

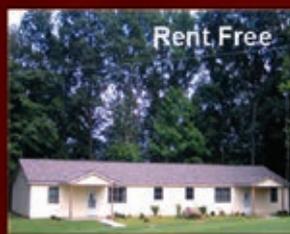
Right after Paul warns Timothy to avoid “unlearned questions,” he encourages him to meekly “[instruct] [*paideuonta*] those that oppose themselves” (2 Tim. 2:25). He is not telling pastors of Christ’s sheep through the centuries not to jump into debates that cannot possibly be won, to be careful where they cast their pearls. Avoid ignorant controversies—they “gender strifes” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:7).

(Did Paul have “gender strifes” back in his day? I thought they were a modern phenomenon!)

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

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The book of 1 Peter is addressed to believers who are enduring harsh conditions for their faith in Christ. The theme of suffering for faith runs throughout the letter, and Peter encourages his readers to stand firm in God's grace (5:12). So what do suffering believers need in order to endure the harsh conditions brought about because of their faith? In any hunter-safety or survival course, you learn the Rule of Three: you can survive for only three minutes without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food. These things are essential to survival in the physical world. For believers living in a world that is often hostile to their faith, an essential element to survival is hope. Can anyone survive without hope?

Hope in a Concentration Camp

Viktor Frankl survived a German concentration camp during the Second World War. He later wrote of his experience in *Man's Search for Meaning* and told the true but tragic tale of a fellow prisoner who lost all hope.

The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate. We all feared this moment—not for ourselves, which would have been pointless, but for our friends. Usually it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick-bay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up.

I once had a dramatic demonstration of the close link between the loss of faith in the future and this dangerous giving up. F, my senior block warden, a fairly well-known composer and librettist, confided in me one day: "I would like to tell you something, Doctor. I have had a strange dream. A voice told me that I could wish for something, that I should only say what I wanted to know, and all my questions would be answered. What do you think I asked? That I would like to know when the war would be over for me. You know what I mean, Doctor—for me! I wanted to know when we, when our camp, would be liberated and our sufferings come to an end."

"And when did you have this dream?" I asked. "In February 1945," he answered. It was then the beginning of March. "What did your

dream voice answer?" Furtively he whispered to me, "March thirtieth." When F told me about his dream, he was still full of hope and convinced that the voice of his dream would be right. But as the promised day drew nearer, the war news which reached our camp made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March twenty-ninth, F suddenly became ill and ran a high temperature. On March thirtieth, the day his prophecy had told him that the war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March thirty-first, he was dead. To all outward appearances, he had died of typhus.

Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man—his courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect. The ultimate cause of my friend's death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed. This suddenly lowered his body's resistance against the latent typhus infection. His faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed and his body fell victim to illness—and thus the voice of his dream was right after all.

Hope is essential to survival in a world that is frequently hostile to faith. The believer's hope, however, is unlike any other in that it is grounded in the new birth and focused on God, who cannot lie. Believers are encouraged to set their hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to us at the coming of Christ and live accordingly in the present world (1 Pet. 1:13). In this present broken world, it is this sure hope that lifts the spirit of suffering believers.

Hope When Grieving

Lisa Beamer is the widow of Todd Beamer, who was on United flight 93 that went down in Pennsylvania on 9/11. Todd was the man who apparently organized the other passengers to resist the terrorists in their attempt to use the airplane as a weapon. Todd left behind Lisa and three small children. In an interview with *Modern Reformation* Lisa stated,

God knew the terrible choices the terrorists would make and that Todd Beamer would die as a result. He knew my children would be left without a

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

Charles Spurgeon

father and me without a husband. . . . Yet in his sovereignty and in his perspective on the big picture, he knew it was better to allow the events to unfold as they did rather than redirect Todd's plans to avoid death. . . . I can't see all the reasons he might have allowed this when I know he could have stopped it. . . . I don't like how his plan looks from my perspective right now, but knowing that he loves me and can see the world from start to finish helps me say, "It's OK."

How is this OK? Lisa would testify of a hope that sustains in time of loss. She recalled attending the memorial service in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at the crash site where her husband died, and finding a stark contrast between that service and the one she had attended the day before in her church. She said,

I couldn't help but compare this service to the one in Plainsboro the day before. Todd's memorial service had been so uplifting, so inspiring, because the emphasis had been on the hope that God provides, especially in the midst of crisis. On Monday, as I listened to the well-intentioned speakers, who were doing their best to comfort but with little if any direct reference to the power of God to sustain us, I felt I was sliding helplessly down a high mountain into a deep crevasse. As much as I appreciated the kindness of the wonderful people who tried to encourage us, that afternoon was actually one of the lowest points in my grieving. It wasn't the people, or event, or the place. Instead, it struck me how hopeless the world is when God is factored out of the equation. My brother Paul noticed it, too. A deeply compassionate man, he later said, "It was heart-wrenching for me to see people grieving without hope. I've never seen a more vivid illustration of the truth: We mourn but not as those who have no hope."

The sure hope of Jesus Christ coming again, the hope of the redemption of our bodies, the hope of eternity with God has always sustained God's people when they suffer. In his later years John Calvin was afflicted with fever, asthma, and gout. In the early part of 1564 his sufferings became so severe that it was apparent that his life was rapidly drawing to a close. On February 6, 1564, Calvin preached his last sermon, finding it difficult to maintain enough breath to speak. After this he was on several occasions carried to church but never again was able to take any part in the service. On May 27, 1564, Calvin died with these last words on his lips: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." To the end, Calvin set his hope on the glory that is to come, and that hope sustained him in his suffering.

We are challenged by Peter to discipline our minds to focus on this grace that will be brought to us at

Christ's coming especially when we suffer (1 Pet. 1:13). Our mindful focus on the brevity of this life and the glory of eternity will help us keep our suffering in perspective and enable us to finish well.

The Focus of Our Hope

Lanny Bassham is a marksman. He won the gold medal in small-bore rifle competition in the 1976 Summer Olympics. In an interview with *Sports Illustrated* Bassham reveals the level of concentration required of a marksman. He says,

Our sport is controlled non-movement. We are shooting from 50 meters—over half a football field—at a bull's eye three-quarters the size of a dime. If the angle of error at the point of the barrel is more than .005 of a millimeter (that is five one-thousandths), you drop into the next circle and lose a point. So we have to learn how to make everything stop. I stop my breathing. I stop my digestion by not eating for 12 hours before the competition. I train by running to keep my pulse around 60, so I have a full second between beats—I have gotten it lower, but found that the stroke-volume increased so much that each beat really jolted me. You do all of this and you have the technical control. But you have to have some years of experience in reading conditions: the wind, the mirage. Then you have the other 80% of the problems—the mind.

One of the reasons we crumble under the pressure of suffering in a sin-cursed world is that we spend too little time focusing on what is to come. Our energy, time, and our best thoughts tend to be wrapped up in this present world, and we miss the mark of achieving the hope God intends to sustain us. It is living in the reality of the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ that enables us to endure present suffering.

In the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, a Japanese gymnast, Shun Fujimoto, was competing in the team competition. Somehow, during the floor exercises, he broke his right knee. It was obvious to all reasonable observers that he would be forced to withdraw. But they reckoned without the determination of a true competitor. On the following day, Fujimoto competed in his strongest event, the rings. His routine was excellent, but the critical point lay ahead—the dismount. Without hesitation, Fujimoto ended with a twisting, triple somersault. There was a moment of intense quiet as he landed with tremendous impact on his wounded knee. Then came thundering applause as he stood his ground. Later, reporters asked about that moment and he replied, "The pain shot through me like a knife. It brought tears to my eyes. But now I have a gold medal and the pain is gone."

Far greater than gold that perishes is a genuine faith that leads to a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5). 



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Fractions always breed factions.—Richard Sibbes

Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect for older people. Children nowadays are tyrants. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room, they contradict their parents . . . and tyrannize their teachers. —Socrates

The error of youth is to believe intelligence is a substitute for experience, while the error of age is to believe that experience is a substitute for intelligence. —Lyman Bryson

The average age of the Pilgrim fathers was twenty-six. William Cullen Bryant was only nineteen when he wrote *Thanatopsis*. Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Hush! I’m telling myself a story,” at age six. —Howard Harris

Young men are fitter to invent than to judge, fitter to implement than to counsel, fitter for new projects than for settled business. —Francis Bacon

The world is divided into people who do things and people who get the credit. Try if you can to belong to the first class. There’s far less competition. —Dwight Morrow, to his son

Everyone wants to live long, but no one wants to be called old. —Icelandic proverb

It is better to have divisions than an evil uniformity. —Walter Cradock

Ageing seems to be the only way to live a long time. —Daniel Auber

We have always needed old people to keep things from going too fast and young people to keep them from going too slow. Youth has fire and age has light, and we need them both. —Vance Havner

Look at the bright side: no matter how old you are, you’re younger than you’ll ever be again. —Bob Orben

Christ would not have His coat rent, and can He endure to have His body rent? —Thomas Watson

Better a holy discord than a profane concord. —Thomas Adams

Don’t think of yourself as growing old. Just think of yourself as getting one day closer to Medicare. —Unknown

The young and the old have all the answers. Those in between are stuck with the questions. —Bits & Pieces

Old and young, we are all on our last cruise. —Robert Louis Stevenson in *Virginibus Puerisque*

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



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A Commitment to Pray for God's Working

As we observe current events touching on both the state of the church and of the world, we are again impressed by two great realities: the enormity of man's sin and the redemptive power of our God. Therefore, the Board of FBFI thought it necessary to rededicate ourselves to earnest prayer for the reviving work of God's Spirit among His people and the consequent manifestation of His glory in the world.

David Shumate, Chairman

We acknowledge:

God, the all-wise, all-righteous Creator and Ruler of the universe, always demonstrates His greatness, goodness, and holiness in all His dealings with His creation and with us, His creatures.¹

The entire human race has rebelled against God and His rightful rule over our lives; we have forfeited any claim to the life and blessing found in God alone; and we are rightfully deserving of the full measure of God's righteous anger and the entire weight of His divine and eternal judgment.²

God continues throughout the world to convince individuals of their sin and rebellion; to bring them to faith in His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ; to deliver them from the rule of sin; and to give them abundant and eternal life and blessing.³

Nevertheless, as those redeemed and forgiven by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, we must confess that we have often been unmindful of the gravity of sin, of its life-destroying power, and of its offensiveness to our Holy God. We have failed to mourn for people all around us lost and undone, without Christ and without hope in the world. We have also frequently had our focus drawn away from the glory of Jesus Christ and the greatness of His salvation and have been entangled by the allurements of this world.

Only God has the power to open our eyes to spiritual reality, to awaken and energize His servants to genuine love and holiness and to convince the lost ones of their great need and great danger.⁴ Only God through Jesus Christ has the power to save from sin and destruction and to redeem for Himself a treasured and special people, zealous for holiness and service.⁵

Therefore, we commit ourselves to humble and earnest prayer for the working of God:

First for ourselves: That we, by the Word and Spirit of God would have our understanding opened to the holiness of God, to the ugliness of sin, to the riches of God's mercy, and to our great privileges and responsibilities as children of God and as ambassadors for Christ.⁶ We pray that He would renew our love and gratitude toward Him, intensify our zeal to demonstrate His greatness and goodness to the world, and cause us to rejoice in His Son with joy unspeakable and full of glory.⁷

Second, for our churches: That God would cause the Word to be preached with genuine spiritual power and received in the heart so that it will produce spiritual fruit.⁸ We pray that God would open the eyes of those who profess to be Christians but do not have a genuine saving knowledge of Christ, bringing them to an acute awareness of their true condition and danger and moving them to repentance and faith.⁹ We pray that we would as local assemblies demonstrate the excellency of God by loving one another and by living in godliness and purity.¹⁰

Third, for our world: That the Holy Spirit would thrust out Christlike and Christ-empowered workers into His harvest.¹¹ We pray that the gospel would have free course and that many sinners would respond to the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment by the Holy Spirit and would be saved by grace through faith.¹²

In all this, we earnestly plead for God's providential control and sovereign intervention to protect His people from the attacks of the Evil One and to convert all opposition into opportunities to glorify God and spread the gospel.¹³

¹ Psalm 33:4–5; 119:137.

² Rom. 3:9–18; Eph. 2:1–3.

³ Isa. 45:22; John 3:16; Rev. 5:9; Col. 1:13.

⁴ Isa. 42:6–7; John 16:8–11.

⁵ Acts 26:15–18; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:14–16.

⁶ Eph. 1:16–18; 2 Cor 5:20; 7:1.

⁷ Jude 20–21; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; Psalm 67:1–2; 1 Peter 1:8.

⁸ 1 Cor. 2:4; Luke 8:15.

⁹ 2 Cor. 13:5; Matt. 7:21; Eph. 5:14.

¹⁰ John 13:34–35; 15:17; 1 Pet. 1:13–16.

¹¹ Matt. 9:37–38.

¹² John 16:8–11; Acts 14:1; Rom. 4:16.

¹³ Matt. 6:13; John 17:15; Eph. 6:10–20; Phil. 1:12; 2 Thess. 3:1–3.



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Genuine Fellowship

Continued from page 7

weekly “accountability discussions” a priority. For instance, you could use the “SWEEP” approach for regular meetings.

S—Scripture reading: Tell others what you are reading and learning. Ask them to do the same. They will be encouraged to find out that they can be a blessing to you, as you are to them.

W—Word-based Meditation: Reading is one thing; careful contemplation is another. Work toward sharing “that one thought” from Scripture that has dominated your thoughts recently. Ask them to do the same. They will succeed as they put Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8 into practice daily.

E—Exhortation: Look for people to encourage. Set personal goals for the number of believers that each of you will seek to encourage in the coming week.

E—Evangelism: Tell them about the folks that you are seeking to reach with the gospel. Share their names as prayer requests. Lead by example.

P—Prayer: Set goals for daily prayer. Share your prayer requests. Find out what they want you to pray for. Pray together.

When you meet again the following week, share what you’ve learned. Ask them what they have learned. Frankly admit your mistakes. Share memories of successful ministry. Be honest.

In 2 Kings 2 we read the remarkable account of the prophet Elijah’s last day on earth. The new generation (Elisha) was preparing to take “the mantle of Elijah.” What did the younger prophet see in his older mentor? Three times he testified, “As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I

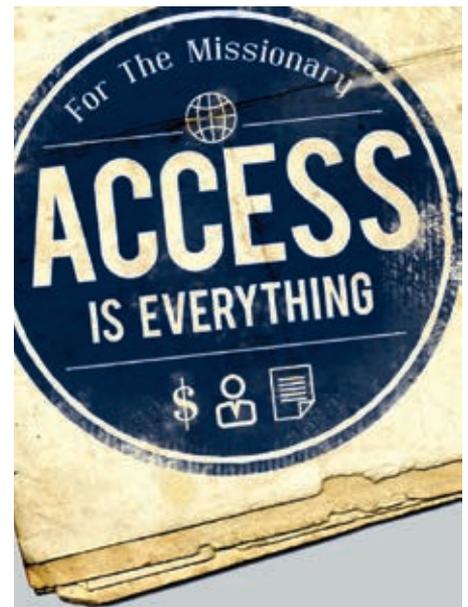
will not leave thee.”²⁰ Elisha could see the Person behind the power of the prophet. May God help us to live in such a transparent manner. Life is too short to be shallow.

Commitment, transparency and accountability are fundamental to genuine Christian fellowship. We are guiding this next generation through the short vapor we call life. Let’s use the lens of our lives to show them the path ahead.

Gordon Dickson is the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio.



- ¹ 2 Corinthians 5:10.
- ² Matthew 25:21.
- ³ 1 Peter 2:21–25; 1 Thessalonians 1:6–8; 1 Timothy 4:12; James 5:7–10.
- ⁴ Romans 13:12–13.
- ⁵ Isaiah 64:7.
- ⁶ Matthew 26:74–75.
- ⁷ 1 Kings 19:9–10.
- ⁸ 2 Timothy 2:22.
- ⁹ Revelation 12:10.
- ¹⁰ Jeremiah 20:7–9.
- ¹¹ 2 Timothy 4:11.
- ¹² 2 Timothy 3:10.
- ¹³ 2 Timothy 1:13.
- ¹⁴ Matthew 26:38.
- ¹⁵ Matthew 26:39, 42.
- ¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:7.
- ¹⁹ Luke 6:42.
- ²⁰ 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6.



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My First Fundamentalist



When I was six years old, I met my first fundamentalist, though I didn't realize it until much later.

My dad had just resigned from a big-city congregation to lead a tiny church plant in another state. His friends begged him to stay with phrases such as "working from within" and "losing your pension." I heard him answer that since our denomination was allowing unbiblical teaching in its seminaries, staying in it would be compromise. All I could figure out from all those big words was that compromise was a bad thing, and Daddy wouldn't do it. I was proud of him. (It was a long time before I could see any sort of compromise as being a good thing in any situation.)

So we left the life we knew and friends who didn't understand. I really didn't get it either—not then. But as time went by, I began to understand this: there was something my dad loved more than status or salary.

A Love for Truth

He loved the truth. His days began and ended with the Bible, the one with the wide margins filled up with notes, the one he studied in his office and read to us at the supper table, the one he opened to answer my questions, especially the edgy teenage ones. His Bible was always open; so was his life.

He lived the truth he loved. Living the truth meant living apart. There were things our family didn't do and places we didn't go, even when other Christians did. I pushed at the boundaries, but I knew why they were there. They weren't just traditional taboos or random rules; they were protections rooted in truth and motivated by love. He knew our world and wanted to keep us safe. Besides, even when standards frustrated me, I couldn't bring myself to argue with a man who was so careful to protect his marriage and testimony that he wouldn't be alone in a room with any woman who wasn't Mother, a man who would wrap a sleepy daughter in his warm overcoat so she could ride with him in the family car when a woman needed a ride home late on a chilly night.

A Love for People

His love for truth moved him to love people. Abused and hurting people, failing and lonely people, anyone who needed help was fed, housed, and prayed over in our house. But he loved people best by loving their souls.

He didn't—he couldn't—do quick errands, for he saw every contact with every person every day as a gospel opportunity. Knocking on doors with a New Testament and gospel tracts sticking out of his shirt pocket—it seemed

so normal to me then. Didn't every preacher daddy do that? It was a long time before I realized how rare his passion for souls was, and how fruitful.

As we travel in our own ministry, I meet people he led to Christ. I like to ask how he did it.

"I heard him preach the gospel and went forward to get saved—on about the fourteenth verse of 'Just as I Am!'"

"My wife and I had been under conviction. He didn't know that, but late one night, he came to our house saying he was so burdened for our souls that he couldn't sleep."

"No matter where I went, there he was, offering me another gospel tract, asking again if I was ready to accept the Lord. When I was, he's the one I called."

His love for sharing the gospel lasted his whole life. At his funeral, a tall man I recognized as a volunteer for Meals on Wheels told me, "Your dad asked me the same question over and over."

I began to apologize, mentioning Dad's failing memory, when this kind man interrupted, "No, that's not it at all. When I delivered a meal, we'd sit at the kitchen table and talk. I'm Jewish. Sometime in every conversation, your dad asked me if I was ready to believe in Jesus. And then he prayed for me. I will miss him."

I'm not sure I can give you an accurate definition of a fundamentalist, and because word meanings change, it's not my preferred label today. But whenever I hear that word used disdainfully, even scornfully, especially by other believers, I'm bewildered.

The ugly caricature of a fundamentalist as ignorant, shallow, demanding, harsh, pompous, and abusive—that's not who my dad was, nor his friends. Nor were they tolerant of those who were. Their lives were simply grounded in sincere love for truth. They sacrificed for it and lived it as carefully as they could. They pursued purity and spread the gospel with rare consistency and fervency.

I wish you could have known them. I want to be more like them.

Claudia Barba grew up as the daughter of Dr. Otis R. Holmes, a pastor, church planter, and director of Church Planting at Bob Jones University. She and her husband, Dave, serve the Lord together through Press On! Ministries, their itinerant ministry helping new churches in the USA and abroad.



FBFI Advanced Israel Trip

Kent Ramler

Back in 2013 Malinda Duvall and I struck up a conversation at an FBFI Board dinner about getting a group together to tour Israel. We had both been on a fabulous familiarization tour with Shalom Ministries Inc. but were eager to visit additional sites not on the typical tour. On January 7, 2018, God did just that for twenty-three of us (most of whom were FBFI members and spouses) as we left for a twelve-day trip led by Dr. Craig Hartman and Shalom Ministries.

Ancient Shiloh was a personal favorite site visited on this trip. Archaeologists have uncovered the location of the tabernacle that established the religious capital of Israel for almost four centuries. Contemplating the significance of the Holy of Holies as the dwelling place of God was a moving experience as we sat where it once actually stood. Later as we stood on Mt. Gerizim and peered across the ruins of the ancient city of Shechem to Mt. Ebal and the distant Oak of Moreh, we sensed the collision of the Old and New Testaments. It was from here that God promised Abraham this land and a blessing to the nations. It was here that Joshua erected an altar (still visible) to worship and thank the God who brought them into the Promised Land, and it was here that Joseph's bones were buried. Our guide's knowledge of the land and the Bible added substantial depth to what we were able to observe. Our trip even included participation in an archaeological dig at Tel Mareshah and spending time in the home of an Israeli couple after our time on Mt. Tabor at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley. Of course, no trip is complete without a time of worship and giving praise at the Garden Tomb. The trip exceeded all our expectations!

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

Joe Willis

Monday evening, January 29, and Tuesday morning, January 30, more than thirty pastors and some wives met in Greeley, Colorado, for the Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship. The theme, "The Impact of God's Holiness," was fleshed out by each speaker: Jon Acker ("Times of Temptation"), Dave Hine ("Worship"), Nathan Steadman ("Christian Lifestyle"), Larry Robbins ("The Music in Our Lives"), Dan Unruh ("Missions"), and Les Heinze ("Suffering and Trials"). This meeting provided much-needed fellowship for the men and women who serve in this beautiful Rocky Mountain region. A special thanks to Pastor Unruh and his church family at Westside Baptist Church for their hospitality.

Sermons from this Fellowship may be accessed at wbcgreeley.org/sermons/



Connie Judson learning about her "find"

Suzanne and Jim Neighbors



Dr. John Whitcomb (center) at Winter Board Meeting

FBFI Winter Board Meeting

Doug Wright

Winter board meetings sound cold. Although convening in Indianapolis in mid-February (12–13), the fellowship at Colonial Hills Baptist Church was so warm—and our host’s hospitality so exemplary—that none of us paid much attention to the chilly temperatures outside. The church staff went the extra mile time after time, and the meeting was full of valuable information, encouragement, and an opportunity to forge new friendships.

Included in our agenda were presentations dedicated to specific subjects, followed by group discussions which were well received and profitable. We were challenged with sessions by Kevin Schaal (“The FBFI for the Twenty-First Century”), Larry Oats (“The SBC: What Has Changed, What Still Needs to Change”), Ben Hicks (“Twenty-Somethings: The New Youth Group”), and Matt Barfield, who encouraged us regarding a church’s potential to reach the area’s international community. The aged and gracious Dr. John Whitcomb was scheduled for a presentation on “The Importance of Six-Day Creationism,” but his health prevented him from doing the presentation. Instead, he joined us for a brief challenge and prayer time. Perhaps the greatest blessing was scheduled prayer time asking for God’s guidance as we discussed our topics. The group recognized that in discussing these topics, we cannot rely on man’s or worldly wisdom. These topics were bathed in prayer, and we asked God to give us clarity and a gracious spirit. The sweet spirit of prayer made a difference.

Even though we took the time to work through the regular business of the fellowship, the information and discussion time benefitted all. We were blessed with many new faces. The Winter Board Meeting is when we must conduct business, but it has also become an important component in addressing matters within or that are threatening to biblical Christianity.

NOTABLE QUOTES

The problem with Christianity is not that it has been tried and found wanting but that it has been found difficult and not tried.—G. K. Chesterton

If perchance the Church shall attract men without at the same time transforming them; if she shall attach them to her membership without assimilating them to her life, she only weakened herself by her increase and diminished herself by her additions.—A. J. Gordon

Don’t pray for easy lives; pray for stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your power. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.—Phillips Brooks

Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all—pray.—R. A. Torrey

There comes into the life of every man a task for which he and he alone is uniquely suited. What a shame if either that moment finds him unwilling or unprepared for that which would become his finest hour.—Winston Churchill

It is not enough for the believer to begin to pray, nor to pray correctly. Nor is it enough to continue for a time to pray. We must patiently, believingly continue in prayer until we obtain an answer. Further, we have not only to continue in prayer until the end, but we have also to believe that God does hear us and will answer our prayers.—George Mueller

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



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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

The Barbarians Might Could Getcha

I remember being told in freshman English class that “might could” was a common “barbarism.” I had never in my life heard someone use this expression, but I noted my teacher’s dictum duly, and I happily continued my practice of never being remotely tempted to say or write “might could.” I added something, however to my young soul: three ounces of grade-A pride. I called my father from my dorm room and said, “I thank thee, O Ward, that I am not as other men are, such as this barbarian [here I pointed to my roommate from Georgia].” (Okay, that part isn’t true, but it might as well be.)

Fast forward two decades, and I’m sitting in an airport waiting for a flight. A man nearby, speaking with a thick Southern accent, says into his cellphone, “Hello, I was wondering if I **might could** speak to Cletus.”

Should I go over there and tell him, “Excuse me, sir; what you just said was barbaric”? No, that would be gauche. No one would say this to someone’s face.

So why say it behind their backs? When is it ever appropriate to call a commonly accepted feature of the English of an entire region “barbaric”?

I acknowledge that “barbarism” was being used in my class as a technical term for “what English teachers teach American students not to say or write,” and some of the sneer of the word “barbaric” is leached out thereby. But I think there’s plenty sneer left in the term. Too much.

It is not “barbaric” to speak English the way you learned it at your mother’s knee. There’s nothing intrinsic to *might could* that makes it “wrong.” It just doesn’t happen to be the way that the dominant class in American culture talks. Maybe someday that will change. But that day is clearly not today.

So if you want to please and impress that class of people—and *sometimes that’s a good idea*, such as when you are seeking a job from them or giving them the gospel or trying to write persuasively for Christian truth in a more formal setting—then you probably want to train yourself to know when not to use “might could.”

English teachers should teach their students to avoid this particular locution—in settings where it would be inappropriate. But they should also warn against linguistic sneering. You may well be superior in some respects to the man who drawls, “Ah maht cooould”: you may be smarter than he, you may make more money, you may talk real good English. But if you sneer at his supposed ignorance, you just revealed yours. As for me and my house, we ain’t never gonna do that.

Dr. Mark Ward is the author of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



Select Studies in Isaiah

Isaiah 11:6–9 famously depicts predatory wild beasts—lions and leopards and bears (“Oh my!”)—living in peaceful harmony with the vulnerable domesticated animals that they “normally” (in our fallen experience, at least) prey upon. But what does it mean?

Loraine Boettner, one of the best-known evangelical postmillennialists in the twentieth century, argued for a figurative interpretation of 11:6–9 as an extended allegory:

A fitting example of the wolf dwelling with the lamb is seen in the change that came over the vicious persecutor Saul of Tarsus, who was a wolf ravaging and destroying, but who was so transformed by the Gospel of Christ that he became a lamb. . . . The lion eats straw like the ox when men who formerly were strong and cruel and wild by nature are so changed by the Gospel that they become gentle, meek, humble, and feed on the word of life along with those who are members of Christ’s Church (*The Millennium*, 88).

Contemporary postmillennialists John Jefferson Davis and Kenneth Gentry take a similarly figurative approach to this passage. The view is not a new one. Jerome considered a literal interpretation of these verses to be heretical and attributed such a view to “Jews and Judaizers among ourselves [who] maintain that all this shall be fulfilled according to the letter; that in the light of Christ who, they believe, shall come at the end of the days, all beasts shall be reduced to tameness.” Luther insisted that “these are allegories by which the Prophet intimates that the tyrants, the self-righteous and powerful ones in the world, shall be converted, and be received into the Church.” Likewise, John Calvin: “By these images, the prophet indicates that among the people of Christ there will be no disposition for injuring one another, nor any ferocity or inhumanity.” Is this what Isaiah meant and what God intended to communicate in this passage?

Interpretation or Illustration?

First, it’s important to differentiate between *illustration* and *interpretation*. The metaphorical or allegorical view of these verses may well be adopted as a useful *illustration* of the impact of genuine conversion. Unbelievers are sometimes likened to wild beasts (2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 10), and conversion undeniably transforms the beastly nature of even the most ferocious of sinners.

But that’s not what these interpreters mean. They don’t just think Isaiah’s description could be used as an *illustration* of a spiritual reality; they think that these words *actually mean to communicate only a spiritual reality*. In other words, the passage isn’t really saying *anything* about animals; it’s really talking only about people, metaphorically or allegorically.

Setting this passage off the table for a moment, every interpreter of any persuasion should be able to agree that a lot of really bad preaching and theology has arisen in the Church as a result of confusing these two concepts of *illustration* and *interpretation*. And it still does. *Illustration* is what a passage may legitimately be used to describe or elucidate because of certain parallels between the passage and the thing being pictured. *Interpretation* is what that passage, in its context, *actually means as intended by God*.

When *illustration* and *interpretation* are confused, you end up shutting God’s mouth in a passage and substituting something that *may* be true, but it’s not what God Himself is saying in that passage. When that happens, you never hear God’s own voice in that passage—only some preacher’s or teacher’s substitution for what they think that passage is saying. That’s a serious sin that bears an ominous resemblance to “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Hermeneutical Consistency

Since Boettner regarded the wolf-and-lamb prophecies of Isaiah 11 as strictly figurative, what do you suppose he did with the prophecy that “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1; cf. 51:3)? He took it *literally*.

A very real limitation for some interpretations of prophecy is whether or not the interpreter can realistically imagine it happening. If it seems too bizarre or outlandish or absurd, it is assumed to be spiritual or figurative. This is a repeated objection of non-premillennialists to an earthly millennium.

David Brown’s central objection to the premillennial scenario was the millennial mixture of mortality and immortality, sanctified and sinful, glorified and profane, together in one earthly existence—a notion which he asserted was “unscriptural and pernicious.” Boettner described the premillennial conception of the millennial age as

a mongrel kingdom, the new earth and glorified sinless humanity mingling with the old earth and sinful humanity, Christ and the saints in immortal resurrection bodies living in a world that still contains much of sin and amid scenes of death and decay. To bring Christ and the saints to live again in the sinful environment of this world would seem to be the equivalent of introducing sin into heaven (*The Millennium*, 20).

Actually, not quite the equivalent. That’s the whole premillennial point: the millennium *isn’t* heaven. Also, the objection to the mixture of glorified and nonglorified that some like Boettner find so objectionable is somewhat mystifying, since *that was precisely the situation when Christ remained on earth after His resurrection*.

—Chapter 11

God has sworn that nothing He has promised to do will echo back to Him unfulfilled (Isa. 55:10–13). His ways and thoughts are above and beyond our ways and thoughts. However unlikely or impossible or unimaginable what He promises may seem to us, He can do it because He is omnipotent; but more importantly, He will do it because He is trustworthy (see Zech. 8:1–8). Never let your imagination (or anyone else’s) limit God or manipulate your interpretation of His words.

Non-Premillennial Literalists

In his commentary on Isaiah, E. J. Young discounted the figurative interpretation of this passage at length. In defense of a literal interpretation, Young cited (a) the detailed and extended emphasis upon the animals themselves, (b) the apparent allusion to pre-Fall conditions, strongly suggesting that a return to that era of perfection is intended, and (c) other passages indicating that when sin ceases and righteousness reigns among men, it will affect the rest of creation as well (Isa. 65:25; 66:22).

But Young was not premillennial; he was an amillennialist. So when did he say 11:6–9 would be literally fulfilled? *In the new heavens and new earth*. He sought to corroborate his interpretation by appealing to Isaiah 65, which in some places uses very similar language (65:25) and seems to indicate a glorified new-earth context (65:17), but which also includes details that are seriously problematic for his view (65:20–23). If *sin* or *death* or *birth* are part of the prophetic picture, it’s hard to see how it could be describing the eternal state.

A Premillennial Interpretation

So *what on earth* are Isaiah 11 and 65 talking about? That’s precisely the point. They must be referring to a pre-eternal, this-earthly situation. The reference to “new heavens and a new earth” in 65:17 must be either (1) a hyperbolic reference to millennial conditions, so changed it’s as though it were a new creation (that’s the view taken by the NET); or (2) used in a broad sense, commencing with the millennial kingdom as the transition into the new creation, the bridge between this earth and the new earth; or (3) telescoping momentarily past this earthly period, and mixing references to future events within the same context, which is not uncommon in the prophetic genre. The point is, there is *textual* warrant for taking this passage literally. Many other amillennialists besides Young admit that.

John Oswalt, in his two-volume commentary on Isaiah, outlines three possible interpretational approaches to 11:6–9.

1. Literalistic. It describes actual alterations in the physical creation and is fulfilled either in the millennium (the

premillennial view) or in the new earth (an amillennial view). Oswalt opines, “While this interpretation is possible, the fact that a lion’s carnivorousness is fundamental to what a lion is and that literal fulfillment of the prophecy would require a basic alteration of the lion’s nature suggest that another interpretation is intended.”

2. Spiritualistic. It represents various changes in spiritual conditions of people. Oswalt objects to the inherent subjectivity of this view, noting the “absence in the text of any controls upon the [hermeneutical] process” so that the interpretation “depends solely upon the exegete’s ingenuity.”

3. Figurative. The passage is an “extended figure of speech used to make a single overarching point, namely, that in the Messiah’s reign the fears associated with insecurity, danger, and evil will be removed.” This is Oswalt’s view.

Option 2 seems sufficiently discredited. Option 3 has its attractions, except for three counter-considerations. First, Oswalt’s objection to Option 1—that carnivorousness is fundamental to the very nature of the lion—assumes that the post-Fall conception of “what a lion is” is the *normative* conception of a lion’s lion-ness; but it seems clear from Scripture’s doctrine of Creation and the Fall that the lion, as originally created, was not a destructive, predatory flesh-eater. If that’s the case, and this passage represents something of a return to Edenic conditions, then the description does not represent a *change* to the lion’s inherent nature so much as a *return* to its original nature. Second, any objection to the apparent unlikelihood of such literal-physical alterations in the animal world is a problem only for my imagination, not for God the original Creator, and it’s bad eschatology to limit God by my imagination. Finally, no prophetic warrant exists for taking such a passage metaphorically. We have a huge reservoir of fulfilled prophecy to guide our interpretational instincts, and there are no examples of an already-fulfilled prophecy where such a concrete prophetic description turns out to be fulfilled metaphorically rather than literally. There are, however, numerous examples where very concrete prophetic descriptions—including the unlikely and the unnatural—turn out to be fulfilled quite literally. Just for starters, see for example, 1 Kings 13:26; 16:34; 17:5–6; 20:36; 22:38; 2 Kings 3:20; 4:17; 5:27; 6:18; 7:16–20; 9:36; 23:15–16. (For simplicity, I’ve given only the fulfillment passage; I’ll let you look up the precise prophecy in each case.)

A literal fulfillment of 11:6–9 during an earthly millennial kingdom seems eminently justified from the prophetic paradigm we have in Scripture.



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“Put Faces on the Data”

Becky Halstead was my friend in high school, and we went to the same church in our small village of Candor, New York. “Rebecca ‘Becky’ Halstead, retired brigadier general, US Army, is a 1981 Graduate of the United States Military Academy. Becky achieved a historic milestone as the first female graduate of West Point to be promoted to general officer.” While at West Point back in the ‘70s, my mom and I used to sew her patches on her military uniforms.

In one chapter in her book, *24/7: The First Person You Must Lead Is You*, Becky talks about how to “accomplish the mission effectively by focusing on the human dimension”: “Put faces on the data.” She tells about a time while commanding in Iraq where “every day, [she] received battle updates in the morning and evening. The updates were designed to provide [her] with a macro view of the battlefield. A tremendous amount of data was presented.” During one of those briefings, she realized her staff was “briefing data and beginning to lose touch with the human dimension” No emotion. They had just experienced an attack on a convoy and were making it sound so matter-of-fact. As a result, she insisted that her Command Sergeant Major provide “a digital photo of every commander—company, battalion, and brigade—and every first sergeant and command sergeant major” to be hung on the walls of their operations center. From that point on, her staff began putting faces on the data, and, with the help of their digital cameras, a lot of pictures of faces began to appear on the wall.

FrontLine magazine has, at times, included a list of all our chaplains as a prayer list for our readers—black-and-white letters on a page. However, these men are people with families who are often left behind while they deploy, truly in harm’s way. The following excerpts are just a small representation of our chaplains with input from their recent quarterly reports—our attempt to “put faces on the data.”

- As usual, the number of young troops joining our chaplain families has increased. Greyson Christopher Koehn was born to Chris and Carly Koehn on January 10. After much delay in Chris’s paperwork, he was officially transferred to the Arizona Army National Guard from his unit in Wisconsin.



- Robert and Sarah Spivey welcomed Elliot Spivey to their family—also on January 10! As the chaplain at Naval Nuclear Power Training Unit in Ballston Spa, New York, Robert ministers to approximately 1600 active-duty personnel.



- Daniel Roland left for a six-month deployment to Afghanistan last September. He supports a chapel in Bagram Airfield and started a preaching series through the book of Ecclesiastes, which has given him great opportunities to talk about how meaningless life is without God and how God gives life meaning to those who faithfully work and walk with Him. His unit lost a soldier on November 4 and another Green Beret on New Year’s Day. Daniel’s commander sent him home in time to surprise his wife and his kids for Christmas and to welcome their sixth child, Eleanor Christina-Kay, on January 13. He returned to Afghanistan on January 19.



- Deployed to South Korea, CH Seth Hamilton and his unit, 2-7 Infantry Battalion, conduct training operations at various locations throughout the country to deter aggression from the North. These soldiers plan to retain their reputation as the Army’s most lethal battalion through intense missions for the next nine months. Chaplain Hamilton continues to experience an incredible number of opportunities to point soldiers to Christ on a daily basis. Seth and his wife, Jill, are expecting their sixth child in July.



- Chris Melvin is currently the Deputy Director of Religious Affairs, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. Since he deployed to Djibouti last summer, he's been "downrange" to forward locations, providing chapel services and counseling. He's also been a regular and fill-in at the Camp Lemonnier Djibouti (CLDJ) Chapel with services attended by thirty to sixty folks each, as well as weekly Bible studies in the barracks. He's coordinated troop visits to the local orphanage, Caritas Djibouti, as a regular weekly outing and has initiated troop visits and a Civil Affairs mission to a local village (in the Ali Sabieh district) where SeaBees (and the Infantry that protect them) are building a medical clinic. This has yielded several counseling sessions and follow-up ministry opportunities.
- Jeremy Van Delinder, a fire-service chaplain with the Round Rock Fire Department in Texas, was recently called to a double-fatality fire in a neighboring community. This gave him an opportunity to work with a group with whom he hadn't had previous contact. He has scheduled a number of training meetings, mostly his class "Stress Management in Emergency Services," in surrounding departments, giving him a full schedule until the end of March. Jeremy pastors North Hills Baptist church, which CH (LTC) Gary Fisher attends while at the War College in Austin, Texas. This gives Jeremy the opportunity to work closely with Gary as he's been researching "Moral Injury" for the Army.

- Chaplain (Colonel) Gary Fisher and his family also live in Round Rock, Texas, where Gary is participating in an Army Fellowship with the University of Texas in Austin in lieu of the Army War College. He was promoted to colonel on March 31. In June he will become the Garrison Chaplain at Fort Drum in New York, where he previously served as the 10th Mountain (Light) Division Chaplain. Gary has served as an active-duty chaplain since June 1999 and has had two deployments to Iraq and two deployments to Afghanistan. We're excited that our newest active-duty chaplain, Jonathan Yarbrough, who is presently at Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Class (CH-BOLC) at Fort Jackson, has also been assigned to Fort Drum when he's done with CH-BOLC.
- Mike Ascher, chaplain with the Chesapeake, Virginia, Police Department, serves as the FBFI Chaplaincy Commission Committee Chairman. The commission interviewed a new applicant at February's Winter Board Meeting. Don Karnes was recently awarded "Auxiliary Police Chaplain of the Year" by the City of Chesapeake and the Chesapeake Police Department.



Chaplains Chris Melvin, Rob Johnson and Mike Shellman



Chaplains Mike Ascher and Don Karnes

Malinda Duvall serves as office manager for FBFI. She and her husband, Roger, live in Taylors, South Carolina.

Spiritual Potholes in the Ministry (Part 2)

In the last article we addressed the pothole of discouragement; in this one we will look at the pothole of distraction. First Corinthians 7:35 gives us this admonition: “And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.” There could not be a greater warning for the Lord’s people in this verse—don’t get distracted!

The first distraction is the world itself. In 2 Timothy 4:10 we see that Demas became distracted: “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.” Apparently Demas was collaborating with the apostle Paul. No doubt at first he was zealous and enthusiastic in his ministry with Paul, but something happened to Demas. Dr. Bob Jones Sr. stated, “No man falls suddenly! It is a process of wicked thinking.” Allow me to let my imagination run wild and set the scene of what might have happened to Demas. Perhaps he thought, “It sure would be nice to have a new chariot like my neighbors. I would also love to have a new big boat to sail on the Sea of Galilee. And wouldn’t it be tremendous to get some fashionable robes instead of these outdated ones I’m wearing? I wonder what it would be like to buy some land and build a grand house instead of this dump I’m living in. It would be great to start saving money and making some solid investments.” Of course, this is just my speculation; we don’t know exactly what it was that caught Demas’s attention, but the Scriptures do tell us that he had left Paul and the ministry because he had a love for this present world and what it had to offer.

There are friends of mine that were on fire for the Lord just like Demas. They faithfully attended church, gave tithes to the Lord, and were bold witnesses of the gospel on a weekly basis. But something happened to them. One of my friends found out he could make a lot of money by selling a certain product. It ended up consuming him; he dropped out of church, stopped giving to the Lord, got spiritual lockjaw, and stopped witnessing. The world grabbed hold of him and squeezed all the spiritual life right out of him. The world will do this every time if we allow it!

The second distraction is extramarital attraction. There is a great man of God in the Bible who got distracted by a beautiful woman—that man is David. He had commanded

Joab to take the army of Israel and destroy the children of Ammon. Second Samuel 11:1 tells us, “But David tarried still at Jerusalem.” Verse 2 tells us what happened next: “And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.” Now at this point David could have turned his gaze away from her and quickly gone in another direction. You see, it is not a sin to be tempted, but it is a sin to yield to temptation. Instead of turning away, David kept looking at Bathsheba and lusted after her in his heart. Sadly, his distraction cost him greatly. It always does! Galatians 6:7 says, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” David sowed to the flesh and reaped the outcome of Galatians 6:8a: “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.” James 1:15 solemnly warns, “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” I am grieved to relate that many good friends who were once in full-time ministry got distracted by a woman and are now out of the ministry with shattered lives and wrecked marriages.

The third distraction that has claimed many is the distraction of financial gain. Second Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” When a person craves more money and possessions, he is feeding a spiritual monster in his life that will never be content. Instead of finding satisfaction, he will find sorrow. Instead of attaining happiness, he will attain heaviness. Instead of experiencing pleasure, he will experience pain. Ecclesiastes 5:10 declares, “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase.” Verse 13 warns, “There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.”

I trust that we all will be careful and avoid these distractions that would ruin our lives. We must guard our hearts!

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