

July/August 2019 • \$3.95

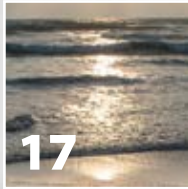
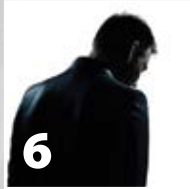
# FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



**Making Sense  
out of Suffering**

# Making Sense out of Suffering



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**A**s believers we have the privilege of magnifying the unique excellence of our God. When we glorify Him, we express our praise of His essential excellence. He is the Creator; everything else is the creation. God alone is the unique and perfect Spirit in whom all things have their source, support, and being. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name!

When we praise Him in our suffering, His power and grace are even more evident. The word “suffering” covers a broad category of difficulties; this word will mean something different to each one who reads these lines. But each believer learns to recognize how God’s glory intersects with his personal story. These intersections—“crossroads,” if you will—can be found throughout the Scriptures. In each of these the God of the Word speaks to rebellious and frail mankind. In a majestic manner, the Scriptures show us how God’s glorious deeds meet our most basic needs. As we apply our hearts to His Word, we meet Him at these intersections. There, in the midst of our difficulties, we have the opportunity to turn this knowledge about God into joyous fellowship with God. As we gain greater hope by experience, we learn to turn obstacles into opportunities; Christians can transform their problems into projects by the power of God’s grace. Life’s hurdles cause us to look to the heavens from whence comes our help. In a life-changing manner, injuries and insults lead us to greater intimacy with our God. This enables us to minister to others as they suffer.

God’s plan is to grow the believer’s faith. He frequently does this through suffering. We can see this in Jesus’ unusual announcement to His disciples in John 11:14–15: “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.” This announcement should give us pause. Why didn’t Jesus rush to the bedside of Lazarus? According to John 11:6, when Jesus received the news, He waited around for two days! Why? Why would He say that He was glad? What did Jesus mean when He said, “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there”? It’s when we come to the next phrase, “to the intent ye may believe,” that the issue comes into sharp focus. In John 11 Jesus reintroduced Himself to His followers, just as He had when He walked on the water. They knew that He could heal the sick, but now He would reintroduce Himself with the

words, “I am the resurrection, and the life,” and their faith would never be the same.

So when God seems to be absent from your abject suffering, watch for Him to reintroduce Himself to you. Some passage of the Scriptures will become more precious to you. The healing balm you find there will also be of comfort to others. A few years ago, I shared what I was learning from John 11:14–15 in a small-group discipleship meeting. Immediately one of the men said, “I can’t wait to get home to share this with my wife!” When we asked why, he replied, “Don’t you see? If the Lord had not taken my son home in a SIDS [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome] death, we would never have come to know the Lord. But now, he will be with us for all eternity.” It seemed as if a column of flame shot up from our dining room table when he uttered those words. For it had been during that time of grief that folks from our church had been able to minister the gospel of God’s grace to this dear family. On a recent trip back to his homeland, he shared their testimony and this Scripture with suffering believers in that land. Such is the power of faith when it is mixed with the promises of God. Suffering is transformed into serving; grief becomes a way to magnify God’s grace.

In this edition of *FrontLine* magazine, watch for those divine intersections. Look at the way that God’s glorious deeds have met the most basic needs of hurting believers:

- When a preacher loses his voice—permanently.
- When God’s people go through the valley of trouble.
- When a pastor must bring forward his own daughter for church discipline.
- When that daughter repents and glorifies God for that trying time.
- When you face your own thorn in the flesh.
- When you encounter a dangerous, invasive cancer in your own body.
- When a dear believer watches her spouse suffer with a dread disease.

Here you will find articles that you will want to share with others as they suffer.

Magnify God’s unique excellence as you see how God’s glory intersects each of these stories. His glorious deeds will meet our most basic needs.

**Gordon Dickson**



BACHELOR'S  
— TO —  
MASTER'S



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I have been in the leadership of the Alaska Regional for twenty-five years, and I will be eighty-one years old next month so I feel it is time for new leadership. I definitely feel that Bruce Hamilton is the man for our region. The Alaska Regional was a vision and became a reality of his dad, Dr. Hugh Hamilton, and until 2007 our meetings were either at Hamilton Acres Baptist or Soldotna Baptist.

Being a part of the FBFI has been a highlight of my life and ministry. As I look back over the speakers, we have had Bob Jones Jr., Monroe Parker, Ed Nelson, J. B. Williams, Bob Jones III, Jim Singleton, Hugh Hamilton, and Rod Bell, just to mention a few. I have been truly blessed. I need that fellowship more than ever in the ministry where we are today.

*Earl Barnett  
Pastor, King Cove Bible Church  
King Cove, Alaska*

In the [March/April] issue, small groups were promoted as vital. While we have seen them used with good results, I offer some critique for the sake of balance. Note first, some other fads for perspective. A few decades ago "Evangelism Explosion" was presented as the best path to church growth; then came a stretch when discipleship was pushed as vital. Now, small groups are THE KEY to church growth and vitality. They do much good. But like other programs, this can do harm if overemphasized. It is good that Pastor Deatruck in his article (page 7), acknowledges this.

*Dwight West  
Salem, Oregon*

I'm writing in behalf of my husband, Dr. Walter Kirk.

For the past few years, he has been in declining health, and is in a nursing home now with mental disabilities. He will be ninety-two years of age on June 20. . . . My husband was active with the FBF (now the FBFI) for many years. I had a hip replacement on April 2, and while in the hospital suffered a heart attack—had to have my heart fixed before I left the hospital. (Then—a stay at two different rehabilitation places.)

We both (hubby and me) have many blessed memories of times past with the FBFI—I think he was Southeast Regional Director for eighteen years.

When you lose your health in old age—life becomes so very different. For the first time I am humanly alone in our home.

Continued at right

After pastoring for twenty-five years at Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona, **Mike Sproul** has resigned to become the director of the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps, senior chaplain for all Air National Guard chaplains in the nation in Washington, DC; and



**Ken Endean** has been called as the next senior pastor of Tri-City. Pastor Endean arrived in Arizona in 2014 to serve as the fourth president of International Baptist College and Seminary after serving for eighteen years in Scarborough, Maine. In his role as senior pastor, Pastor Endean will also serve as the chairman of the board of International Baptist College and Seminary, Tri-City Christian Academy, and International Baptist Missions.

**Art and Debbie Cunningham** are

GFA missionaries to England with a burden to reach Muslims. They are preparing to work in Bradford, Yorkshire, which is known locally as "Bradistan"



because of the large number of Pakistani Muslims who live there. The Cunninghams' hope is to see precious Muslim souls saved, sanctified, and serving the Lord. They are currently on furlough here in the States.

## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Subscription prices for *FrontLine Magazine* are \$26.96 for one year and \$49.95 for two years.

Call us toll-free at 800-376-6856, visit [www.fbfi.org](http://www.fbfi.org), or use the subscription card on page 20.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this. God continue to bless you and the FBFI.

*Mrs. Virginia Kirk  
Salisbury, North Carolina*

I'm just writing to say THANK YOU!! for sending the last few issues of *FrontLine* here to Kenya. We just received two issues at once. We really appreciate your ministry to us.

*Dan Huffstutler,  
Kenya, East Africa*

# Everything Changed

**F**or all of our married life, my wife, Paula, and I have been in ministry of one sort or another. Everything changed for us on April 4, 2018. As the doctor gave us the final report, she knew the impact it would have on us. She said, “I think you need to find a new career.” After ten years of ministry as an evangelist and pastoring churches in Georgia and Ohio, my voice was reduced to less than a whisper. Now, just a little over a year later, my voice is completely gone. Many who will read these words are preachers themselves, and they will realize what a terrible shock this kind of loss would be. Paula and I have wrestled with this gut-wrenching reality. We are learning together what our Lord teaches about suffering.

According to Scripture, suffering is a universal certainty. Every creature on the planet and even the planet itself has, is, and/or will suffer (Gen. 3:14–17; Rom. 8:22–23). Just to be crystal clear, no one, repeat, no one who is clear-headed volunteers for suffering. It is not like dodgeball in elementary school: we wouldn’t mind being picked last for “Team Suffering.” Still, at some point everyone will be picked, and we will join the team.

You and I are incapable of imagining a world where suffering does not exist. We live in a sin-cursed and, therefore, suffering-cursed world. Every graveyard, funeral home, and hospital is a stark reminder that suffering is real, painful, and indiscriminate. Suffering will continue its devastating effects until Jesus makes all things new. Despite the devastation, God has a redeeming purpose for suffering; He has a divine purpose for the pain.

## **Suffering Has a Holy Purpose— Philippians 3:10**

When we speak of the holy purpose of suffering, we are referring to the process of becoming like Jesus. Biblically speaking, the terms “holiness” and “Christlikeness” are synonymous. Some believers mistakenly think of holiness in terms of a mantle to

be displayed or a monument of self-effort that should be very impressive to all who see. Suffering and pain are the scalpel that God uses to extract the idol of self-effort.

So how does suffering make us like Jesus? When our family had the privilege of traveling in full-time evangelistic ministry, we often took advantage of our itinerary to visit historical and interesting places. On one trip we were able to visit Niagara Falls. Words fail to describe how powerful and awe-inspiring the falls truly are. The torrent is deafening. To watch the water race over those cliffs and then descend seemingly in slow motion to the rocks and river below is shockingly overwhelming. There are some places in the park where you can stand surprisingly close to the raging water. I remember getting drenched just standing near the falls. The overspray is enough to leave you soaked to the skin.

Jesus and His glory are like that. Stand close, and His glory soaks in (2 Cor. 3:18). But standing close to Jesus is dangerous. To be close to Jesus means that you will certainly go to the place of suffering and sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that to be with Jesus means that we will have to go with Him outside the mainstream and bear His reproach (Heb. 13:12–13). Jesus Himself makes clear that suffering (His terminology is “bearing our cross”) is a mark of genuine salvation and true discipleship (Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27). The audience of Jesus’ day would have had a very clear understanding of what Jesus meant by “cross.” We have a very anemic concept of what He meant. The “American Dream” way of thinking has, sadly, stripped away the brutality of the term to simply mean arthritic joints or going without Wi-Fi. A cross is a place of unimaginable pain and, ultimately, a slow and agonizing death.

## **Suffering Has a Helping Purpose— 2 Corinthians 1:3–4**

Unquestionably, suffering produces questions. “Why?” “What now?” “How long?” “Whose fault?” In other words,



suffering leads to uncertainty, and most of us have difficulty living a life of uncertainty. “I don’t mind a life full of questions” . . . said no one ever! Some people may “deal with it” better than others do, but my guess is that no one is completely comfortable with it. We want concrete answers. We want to be able to make plans without the interference of unforeseen circumstances. When we go through suffering, we learn quickly that pain has a way of pulverizing the security of misplaced certainty.

As we have gone through this current trial, one of my most significant “uncertainties” centered on the question of *usefulness*. Without a voice, how could I, as a preacher, be useful to God or anybody else? God has a very clear answer to that question:

[He] comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (2 Cor. 1:4).

God’s answer is that suffering allows those who suffer to have a unique ministry of being able to comfort other sufferers. So, even without a voice, I can communicate grace. Do I always do that? What do you think? Of course, I don’t. I can, though, and I should. God help me!

### **Suffering Has a Higher Purpose—Psalm 29:9**

Years ago I was having a conversation with a young man who was struggling with some questions about God. As is often the case, many of his questions focused on the subject of God and suffering. I remember him, in desperation, exclaiming, “God would never want anyone to suffer!”

Let’s be honest, many believers live with this same philosophy. We may not say it the same way, but we live as though it’s true. Comfortable, Western Christianity has warped our thinking on the necessity of suffering. A wrong view of suffering reveals a wrong view of God. Ironically, though, suffering is one divinely designed means for growing in a right view of God.

Like so many others, suffering has made me, rather, compelled me to rethink my thinking about God. I still have so much to learn, and heaven will not be long enough to learn everything there is to know about Him, but I am slowly learning one thing:

*God not only **has** answers to my questions, He **is** the answer.*

He is the answer when nothing makes sense. He is the answer when human comprehension fails. He is the answer when platitudes ring hollow.

I have recently been slowly and methodically working my way through the Psalms. I am intentionally looking for reasons to praise. Honestly, having a totally different, suffering-produced, perspective has allowed me to see God in the Psalms as I never have before. A vivid illustration of seeing what I had never seen before is in Psalm 29.

This psalm describes the awesome and destructive power of the God’s voice. A psalm about a voice got my attention. The way God is poetically pictured in these verses is counterintuitive to much of our thinking about God. Verse 9 arrested my attention:

The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory (Ps. 29:9).

There is debate as to the meaning of some of the Hebrew terms used here by David.\* Please don’t let the debate divert your attention from David’s point. The voice of God causes such fear that deer give premature birth to their fawns. His voice has power to do more damage than a raging forest fire! David has described scenes of pain and destruction and devastating loss. Yet in the place of worship there is a collective choir of voices singing, “Glory!” The singers could be the angels mentioned in the first verse. The voices could be those of choirs assembled by David. The song, though, is very similar to another that was sung by heavenly host on the night our Savior was born. “Glory to God in the highest. . . .”

The lesson is powerful. David is saying that in our suffering, even through our tears, we can sing. We can worship and shout, “Glory to God!” Personally, I do sometimes shout while suffering, but it isn’t in praise. My spirit is shouting in anger and bitter complaining. Suffering will help us to see a higher purpose in our suffering. The very purpose for which we live. Pain, suffering and loss purge and purify so that our lives will be a “sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Heb. 13:15).

I truly believe that I have had the privilege of meeting some of the godliest and dearest saints to ever grace this fallen world. I have envied their joy, their wisdom, their visible and almost tangible peace. What I don’t envy is how they came to this point. They all suffered greatly. Their life stories read like the ones in Hebrews 11. Their suffering, while horrifying and heartbreaking, brought them closer to Jesus. So close that His glory soaked in and shined through.

How often do you either hear or use the phrase, “Easier said than done”? It certainly fits the scenario of suffering. It is much easier to talk about the purging fires of suffering than it is to wade through them. Yet we know that to be like Jesus requires suffering. Some sincere believers seem to think that Jesus is a panacea for whatever is hurtful or harmful: “I didn’t sign up for Team Suffering; I signed up for Team Jesus.” How can we be like Jesus if we are unwilling to suffer like Jesus? We can’t!

God is showing His grace and giving victory in our struggles. Although, I can no longer speak my prayers, I know that God still hears, and I am confident that He is good, what He does is right, and that He is doing His loving, perfecting work in us—through suffering.

After nearly thirty years of full-time ministry, Cary Grant lost his ability to verbally communicate. Cary and his wife, Paula, hope to use their experiences to help and encourage other believers. Cary is a contributing blogger at RootedThinking.com.



\* For instance, in verse 9 the KJV translates the Hebrew word *חָשַׁף* as “discovereth.” Other English versions (ESV, HCSB, NASB, NKJV) translate the term as “strips bare.” The latter rendering seems to be more in keeping with the tone of the rest of the psalm.

# The Valley of Trouble: A Door of Hope

**W**hat will you do when trouble comes? How will you confront “family calamities” or “career calamities”? Sometimes poor choices can bring us to the point of despair. Circumstances beyond our control can leave us depressed. What will you do when this kind of trouble surrounds you? And how will you counsel others who dwell in despair as they wrestle with depression, disease, or even the disintegration of life as they know it? You can help people who are in the valley of trouble find a door of hope.

In Hosea 2:15 we have a life-changing answer to the questions above. It was given to the people of Israel as a timeless reminder: “And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

Hosea’s task was to illustrate the idolatry of Israel as spiritual adultery. The Lord had commanded him to marry a woman who would prove to be adulterous (chs. 1–3). Hosea 1:2 makes the connection: Hosea was illustrating the dealings of the loving Lord with wicked people. The people had become so estranged that the Lord commanded Hosea to name his children names such as “Lo-ammi”—meaning “ye are not my people” (1:9). But in the very next verse the Lord gave them hope for restoration. This story in the first three chapters of Hosea is amplified and unpacked in the prophecies found in chapters 4–14. Hosea 2:15 reflects the theme of Hosea found in chapter 3:1–5: the loving Lord will restore His adulterous people, and they shall return to their God and fear Him.

The Lord said, “I will give . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” “Hope” from the Hebrew word *tiqwâ* comes

from a root word that means “to wait or to look for with eager expectation.” Waiting with steadfast endurance is an expression of faith. It means enduring patiently in confident hope that God will decisively act for the salvation of His people.<sup>1</sup> “A door” refers to an opening or a doorway. This is wonderful news, yet it is puzzling. It’s puzzling because God gives “the valley of Achor” for a door of hope. What is meant by the “valley of Achor”? The expression occurs for the first time in Joshua 7:26. Why is it called, “the valley of Achor”? Joshua 7:1 explains: “But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.” God’s anger was kindled against His people, and thirty-six men died in the battle of Ai. The hearts of the people melted with fright. Joshua and the elders fell on their faces in abject despair, confession, and repentance before the Lord (Joshua 7:4–6). When confronted with his sin, Achan confessed that he had greedily taken forbidden items during the conquest of Jericho. This was why God’s anger burned against Israel. God also threatened to remove His presence from His people until the matter was dealt with (Josh. 7:12). Because of Achan’s sin, men died at Ai. The name “Achan” means “trouble.” His crime and his family’s complicit crime were judged to be worthy of death. Achan was stoned to death and burned with all of his family. Verse 26 records that they piled up a heap of stones as a memorial, and they named that area “the Valley of Achor” (“the valley of the one who troubled us”). This is the valley that leads from the plain of the River Jordan into



the foothills of Canaan. Joshua 15:7 identifies this valley as part of the border of the tribe of Judah.

## Illustrations of the Door of Hope

Giving the valley of trouble for a door of hope illustrates the way God tenderly reconciles people to Himself. We can see these illustrations throughout the Scripture. Consider the grandeur of this door of hope, for Israel “shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.” In other words, this prophecy of hope is connected to the greatest, most joyous events in the history of Israel. Where else do we find this principle of “a valley of trouble: a door of hope” in the Scriptures?

In Genesis 3 we read of the deepest, darkest gorge in the valley of trouble. All the other valleys of trouble lead to this treacherous ravine where mankind rebelled against his Creator. And all the hope expressed anywhere in Scripture is connected to the door of hope (the promise of the Messiah) found in Genesis 3:15. In the ultimate “valley of trouble” near the end of the Bible, we find the words of Revelation 20:14–15: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” But there is a door of hope in this tragic passage. It is the reference to “the Book of Life.” And Revelation 21 begins with a reference to the new heaven and the new earth. Your only hope to escape the valley of trouble is to have your name written in God’s Book of Life.

In Exodus 14 the children of Israel stood on the shore of the Red Sea as the Egyptians pursued them. Now there was “a valley of trouble” if ever there was one. But Moses commanded, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”<sup>2</sup> And the Lord opened a door that extended all the way across the Red Sea! In Leviticus the God-ordained sacrifices were given with the promise that sinners would be forgiven. When the spies rebelled in the Book of Numbers, God promised that the earth would be filled with the glory of the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Joshua 7 explains the name of the Valley of Achor and how the people turned from their troubles to triumph over their enemies, and enter the Promised Land.

In Judges we read about humbled Samson that “the hair of his head began to grow again” (Judg. 16:22). In the Book of Ruth Naomi and Ruth in Moab were in the valley of trouble. But the Lord brought them back to the door of hope in Bethlehem—where the ultimate Door of Hope would be born! The Poetic Books of Scripture are replete with valleys of trouble and doors of hope. Repeatedly, when wickedness seems to be winning, wisdom triumphs through hope in God. In the shadow of the valley of death, the psalmist feared no evil, for there is a door of hope—**“Thou art with me!”**<sup>4</sup> These books help you to identify your own vales of trouble and the God-given doors that lead to ultimate hope. The major and minor prophets portray treacherous gorges of dark distress, but they give us glorious prophecies of an entrance by faith into confident expectation. For instance, the Messianic “Servant Song” of Isaiah 50 portrays the com-

ing torture of the Messiah. But consider how this prediction was applied for us: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”<sup>5</sup> Why? It is because God gives us a door of hope in the valley of trouble. Isaiah 65:10 prophesies that someday the Valley of Achor will be a place of blessing.

Can you just imagine what went through the minds of the apostles when they heard Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 16:21: “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day”? At first, these words seem to dash all hope. After all, Jesus had portrayed the imminent treachery of the three greatest classes in society against Himself. But He explained that He would go into the valley of trouble and emerge victorious—the ultimate Door of hope. And there is the gateway of the gospel: Jesus died for our sins and rose again in order to declare repentant sinners to be righteous (Rom. 4:25).

## The Progression of Hope

Romans 5:1-6 lays out the clear progression of hope that proceeds from this saving work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Here is our great door of hope in the valley of trouble: our great Shepherd, the door of the sheep, is the door of hope in our valley of trouble.

The noted fiction writer Dorothy Sayers described the great conflict in Scripture as “the drama in the dogma.” She used that phrase to emphasize the need for clear biblical, doctrinal teaching. Without it, we would never see the great drama in the Scriptures. Rightly understood, the stories in the Bible keep us on the edge of our seats. They reveal how grace triumphs in conflict after conflict. We find doors of hope in valleys of trouble. All these stories lead us to a change of heart to embrace the God of hope.

These few illustrations prove the point. You can comfort people who are in the valley of trouble with this transforming principle: there is a door of hope.

Years ago I entered the hospital room of a dear saint of God, named Betty, who was near death. Two days earlier, at her request, the doctors had removed her ventilator so that she could breathe on her own. But after forty-five minutes, they had to put her back on the breathing machine. Now Betty was requesting that the ventilator be removed, even if it meant that

Continued on page 26

# Church Discipline

A Gift Given by a Loving Church<sup>1</sup>

When my mother lived with us in her last years, she kept us amused with quaint sayings learned as a girl in the mountains of northern Georgia. A comment about something falling out of use in our culture (good manners, modesty, etc.) would begin, "It's as rare as hen's teeth." For the sake of any reader who has never seen a chicken, you should know that hens do not have teeth! Rare indeed.

Even a cursory glance at churches in America reveals that an important element of biblical polity is nearly as rare as hen's teeth: church discipline. The author grew up attending a Baptist church, attended Baptist churches while in college and seminary, and yet cannot recall ever seeing those churches publicly reprimand someone for flagrant sin. The reader should not assume that these churches were especially holy or that they were an aberration from the norm. Fifty-five percent of protestant pastors revealed in a recent poll that their church has never formally disciplined anyone.<sup>2</sup> Less than twenty-five percent have done so within the past three years.

## The Bible Is Clear . . .

The practice of church discipline is not an obscure practice based on questionable interpretation. It appears throughout the New Testament in numerous passages:

- Matthew 18:15–20.
- 1 Corinthians 5:1–13.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15.
- 1 Timothy 5:20.
- Titus 3:10–11.

While these texts contain some features open to variation in interpretation and application, the broad principles are clear enough for any church to understand and follow. Exegesis of key passages and full discussion of the principles and practices lie beyond the scope of this brief article. For those unfamiliar with the Bible's teaching on the subject, numerous excellent resources are available in print.<sup>3</sup>

## And the Benefits Are Obvious

The most obvious benefit belongs to the rebel whom the church holds accountable. Discipline puts affection in motion, saying, "Our love for you runs so deep that we refuse to stand by while you ruin your life and shipwreck your faith." It seeks restoration (Gal. 6:1–2) and ultimate deliverance by relentlessly pursuing the object of love down a path that winds through godly sorrow and settles for nothing less than true repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

Every Christian would agree that repentance and restoration benefit those reclaimed. However, many fail to recognize the benefits of discipline for the recalcitrant sinner. The final step of discipline outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18:17–20 clarifies and enforces the boundary between those who are in Christ and those who are not. The unrepentant sinner must be stripped of any false sense of security. The church summons the disobedient to holiness for their own good because "without [it] no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

While rebels benefit most obviously from church discipline, the most important benefits accrue to the assembly. For example, church discipline . . .

- Clarifies the true nature of the church (1 Cor. 3:16–17).
- Upholds purity in doctrine and practice (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5).
- Enhances true unity (2 Cor. 6:14–18).
- Cultivates appropriate fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31; 1 Tim. 5:19–20).
- Protects the larger community of faith (Acts 20:28–30; 2 John 7–11).

## So Why Do We Disobey?

Since the Scriptures command it and both saints and sinners benefit from it, why do so few churches practice church discipline? We should avoid painting every disobedient church with the same broad brushstroke. Circumstances and motives vary. Even so, several ideas present themselves as likely contenders. For example, undoubtedly

- Some value utility above purity; paying the mortgage is the greatest good.
- Some value the opinion of man rather than God; distasteful confrontation must be avoided at all costs.
- Some value autonomy above authority; the exercise of religion must remain a private matter.

These suggestions are merely representative, not exhaustive. To the list, we should add personal fear—the nagging angst that egregious sin might touch our own household, forcing us to practice what we preach. No one is immune from the possibility.

A common thread connects all these underlying causes of ecclesiastical disobedience—each reflects a misunderstanding (to put it charitably) of the role of the church. The local assembly does not exist merely as a preaching station in which proclamation of gospel truth discharges all responsibility. Rather, the assembly is the body of Christ, a visible representation of Him on earth. Above all else, our Head is "purely and undistractedly devoted to loving his own glory."<sup>4</sup> The body of which he is Head should serve no other purpose. Christ's doxological devotion must shape His church's affections. The assembly that loves Christ above all and upholds His glory will take seriously the responsibility to protect the truth and maintain the distinction between those inside and those outside the community of faith.

## When Church Discipline Touches the Parsonage: A Personal Testimony

One Sunday evening in 1996 I led our congregation to disfellowship my daughter. She was living at home at the time, having recently returned from Bible college. It came to light that she was engaged in an inappropriate relationship. When confronted according to the principles of Matthew 18:15–20, she refused to give it up. In view of her obstinate refusal to repent, we insisted she live elsewhere. As she left, I prayed with her, asking the Lord to prove to her that the "way of the transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

Many Christians deal with the unrepentant in a way that undercuts the intent of the process. They frantically attempt to reaffirm their love by pretending everything is okay. Yet Paul did not lack clarity nor did he carve out allowances for those we love most when he said,

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Cor. 5:11).

Therefore, for nearly six years my wife and I strictly applied Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians 5. We limited contact with our daughter to occasional reminders of love and concern (a note, a phone call: "Are you still alive?") always coupled with renewed calls for repentance. We refused to engage in any interaction that would make her comfortable in her sin. We spent no holidays together; we had no social interaction; she was not allowed to spend time with her little sister. These were the darkest, most painful days of our lives. The experience changed us forever. The way of the transgressor *is* hard, and all involved share the pain.



In the autumn of 2001 the Lord lavished His grace upon His church and our family. Our daughter, newly married, called to tell us of her recent repentance and expressed a desire to reconcile. Soon thereafter, she met with the church to seek forgiveness and was received with tears of love. The Lord also saved our son-in-law *whom we love*. Today they faithfully serve together in our church. The Lord blessed them with three delightful children whom I have baptized. The way of the transgressor is hard, but reconciliation displaces pain with indescribable joy.

### Important Lessons

God's wisdom undergirds biblical church polity. The last twenty-five years have afforded this pastor and his family ample opportunity to reflect on it. Here are just a few of the lessons the Lord taught us.

*Public opinion does not validate our choices.* Expect others, especially those outside the church, to compound pain experienced by those who enforce church discipline. The most painful barbs will come from untrained Christians who do not understand your choices. Some will question your love. Others will accuse you of arrogance. In the end, you must resolve that obedience brings its own reward. Critics do not dispense our rewards. "Wherefore we labour, that . . . we may be accepted of [Christ]. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:9–10).

*Leaders earn respect only through consistency.* Expect deeper, stronger influence within the assembly when you practice discipline. Some Christians attempt to hide familial sin because they think the public discipline process will weaken their influence. Exactly the opposite outcome occurs (1 Cor. 1:3–6). Those who love Christ respect and follow those who say sincerely, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1).

*God uses travail to accomplish His good purposes.* Expect the greatest personal spiritual advancement in these times. Those bleak years filled with affliction—"fightings without and fears within"—occasionally come to mind today. "I pray I'll never have to endure that again" is the instinctive, visceral response. But that soon gives way to this addendum: "But I wouldn't trade those years for anything!" The Lord uses sorrow to help His children topple their idols of self-assurance, deepen their sense of utter dependence, equip them better for selfless service, and set the trajectory of their affections toward Christ. And so, we "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial . . . But rejoice, inasmuch as [we] are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet. 4:12–13).

*God is gracious.* This is the final lesson; nothing more can be said.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from a 2011 presentation delivered at the Conference on the Church for God's Glory, <http://ccggrockford.org/church-discipline-the-responsibility-of-love-steve-thomas>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/04/05/churches-rarely-reprimand-members-new-survey-shows/>

<sup>3</sup> See especially Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010). Other helpful resources include Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) and Wayne A. Mack and David Swavelly, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love*, 100.

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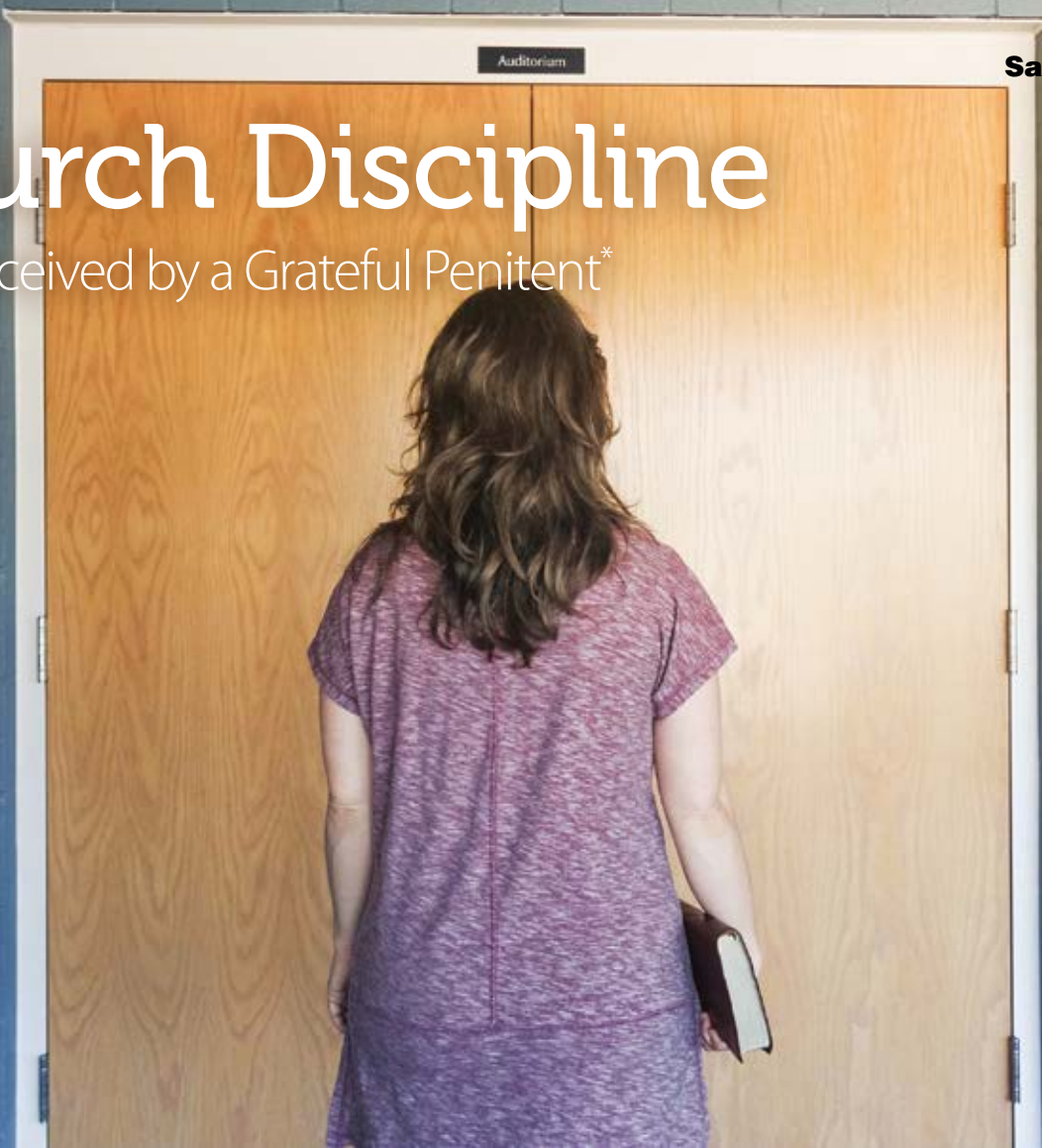
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# Church Discipline

A Gift Received by a Grateful Penitent\*



**Editor's Note:** *This article is a personal testimony that serves as a sequel to the companion article "Church Discipline: A Gift Given by a Loving Church."*

**Discipline:** *Training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).*

On the afternoon of June 16, 1996, I met with the pastoral leadership of the church in which I grew up. My father, Steven Thomas, was senior pastor. This meeting took place just before the service in which I was to stand before the congregation for the last step in the biblical process of church discipline (Matt. 18:15–20). This meeting was a final plea for repentance. I came with a prepared statement that acknowledged my sin and asked for forgiveness, but I knew I didn't mean it. Halfway through the meeting I said, "I can't do this," and left.

Blinded by my own sinful desires, I had never really considered the magnitude of what was about to happen. I understood that this was a big deal but had no idea of the extent to which this choice would impact my life. At first life felt like a party. No accountability, no one to answer to. I was able to indulge in those things that previously I only imagined. But my newfound euphoria didn't last long.

## Immediate Consequences

Choices always have consequences. The consequences of my choices descended on me rapidly. I felt the loss.

*Loss of Church Fellowship.* I suddenly realized that it was true: I could not continue my normal participation in church life, whether in my church or any other. I wanted to attend church because I refused to admit that I was turning from God. It was an attempt to pacify my conscience by "fitting in at a church." Other pastors would contact mine (my dad) if I attended their services. Sometimes he would reach out to pastors to make sure they knew about the disciplinary action. He insisted that I needed to reconcile with my church before blending into the life of another church, and the pastors agreed. Even so, I remained obstinate. My dad made it clear to me that I could not drag sin and rebellion into other churches, so I decided to stop going altogether.

*Loss of Family Relationships.* Since my parents would never facilitate my sinful lifestyle, they had given me a choice: repent and obey the Scriptures or find another place to live. I chose to continue my rebellion. Immediately, I realized that things had changed. I had to make arrangements to move my



belongings from my parents' home—and they didn't even help! I had to look for a new place to live. It was out of the question to depend on friends whose parents were faithful Christians. In the end, I had to call on the generosity of people I barely knew. Oh, how embarrassing!

Worse than the lost comfort of my family home was the wedge that I had driven between myself and family members. I was not allowed to visit my little sister. I thought that if I didn't talk to her about my sin, I should have visitation rights. My parents saw things differently. In fact, even the birthday gifts I sent were returned unopened. Notes or brief meetings designed to call me to repentance were the only contact we had.

Conversations with family and church friends (which, for the most part, were my only friends) became strained and formal. At first, many of them met with me often, but the event always felt like a meeting. No one ever masked their purpose; they met with me to express continued love, confront me with my sin, and plead with me to repent.

### The Way of the Transgressor

Proverbs says that the way of transgressors is hard (13:15), and it didn't take long for me to begin to learn that lesson. I had been paying \$50 per month for rent at my parents' house. (I realize now that that was a token amount, but I resented it at the time!). Suddenly my rent jumped to \$640. Everything that had to be paid for was abruptly my responsibility alone—as was every chore. My parents had taught me about all of this, but, frankly, I ignored them. Now there was no one with whom I could share responsibilities.

The initial illusion that life on my own would be a party soon vanished. Whether you're rebellious or not, reality is hard work. In addition, arguments and repeated breakups began to plague my relationship with the man I thought I couldn't live without. He was deeply troubled because he thought my parents sent me away because of him. I was forced to give a true explanation of that whole situation. It was like giving testimony to my faithlessness.

A nagging sense of my own guilt began to grow. I knew that the God of the Bible existed—I never denied that. But since that was true, it meant I had to agree with His assessment of my sinful condition. Instead, I suppressed the truth (Rom. 1:18). Although I became well practiced in pushing aside my feelings of guilt, I could never fully quiet my conscience.

The loss of family began to grow increasingly painful. I ached to see my precious baby sister. Holidays became deeply painful. How could I send a card that said, "Happy Mother's Day" or "Happy Father's Day"? Frequently I started to call my parents to share a funny story, only to realize I couldn't. *Life itself became a constant reminder of what I chose to leave behind.*

### The Grace and Joy of Restoration

I was married in the summer of 2001. Soon thereafter, we conceived our first child. At that point the turmoil in my soul began to boil over. Suddenly I felt the weight of responsibility for raising a young life. I knew that I could not raise my child to be like me! In fact, I have yet to meet a rebellious person who wants a child or sibling to be like him or her.

Changes had to be made in my own life before I could teach my child how to live.

Desperation gripped me because I didn't know how to fix what I had broken, but I knew who to ask. Getting started was the hard part, but finally I called my dad to tell him that he had a grandchild on the way. The conversation was similar to previous ones. He encouraged me to repent. Then he added something new: he pleaded with me not to raise his grandchild as a pagan. I knew this was the time to ask for help, but I knew tears would choke out my words, so I asked if I could write a letter to him. As you would expect, he said, "Of course!"

Stubborn pride resists repentance even when people know they are wrong. As I sat down to write my letter, I felt embarrassed and humiliated, but finally I swallowed my enormous pride. It was so hard finally to admit that I had been wrong all that time. It was hard to deal with the tears that began flowing. Yet, once I took this first step, the Lord graciously ordered the process. I met with my parents personally to ask for their forgiveness. I met with a delegation of church members to seek mercy from the church that loved me. The leadership allowed me to read a written statement humbly asking for their forgiveness. Oh, the joy of forgiveness sought and given! After these meetings I realized that I had been wrong about another thing: I believed that I was the only one affected by all of this, but my pain was nothing compared to the pain of those I had left behind.

Forgiveness begins with God. Human forgiveness is insufficient. I needed restoration with the holy God who loved me. Looking back, I believe that I was saved through the whole process. My frequent doubts were evidence that continuing sin steals any assurance of salvation, which turns out to be a gracious work of God (Heb. 12:5–8).

The first evidence of genuine repentance came with my commitment to submit to God in all things. At first my spiritual progress was slow. It seemed like I was starting from the beginning of the Christian life, and in a sense I was. I had to relearn basics forgotten after years of disuse. The Lord gave me a new appreciation for His truth as I reacquainted myself with Bible stories and essential doctrines. About the time of our marriage, the Lord saved my husband. Today we serve actively in the church that loved me enough to discipline me. The Lord has blessed us with three children, and He has saved each of them. As for my parents and my sister, our relationship has never been better. It is filled with the joy of God's grace.

As I reflect on my experience with church discipline, I know that there is no other way to handle unrepentant sin in the church. Where would I have heard the call to repent if I had been offered fun with family, fellowship with church friends, and the "pleasure of sin" as well?

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\*This article is adapted from a 2011 presentation delivered at the Conference on the Church for God's Glory (<http://ccgrockford.org/church-discipline-the-responsibility-of-love-steve-thomas>).



# Lessons from the Thorn

**H**ow will you endure excruciating pain? This is an all-too-familiar question for some who are reading this. They have experienced agonies in their bodies and in their souls. They will tell you that pain can grow so intense that you wonder if you want to keep on living.<sup>1</sup> Others wonder how they could ever endure such difficulties. While enduring such deep distress, many preachers have wondered if they will ever be able to preach again. And yet, by the grace of God, they are still preaching. They press on by the power described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, and you can too. By the power of God, believers can keep serving the Lord even in the thorniest of times.

Many people have speculated about Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). A few have insisted that Paul was describing eye trouble. Others think his reference is to epilepsy or malaria. But this speculation misses Paul's point in this passage. Paul purposefully paints with a broad brush so that you and I can see our general troubles in 2 Corinthians 12:10: "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake."

**Infirmities:** a state of incapacity to do or experience something—"incapacity, weakness, limitation."<sup>2</sup> You are familiar with the English word "calisthenics" (for exercises that build strength). This word is *asthenes*, describing an absence of strength. This word refers to weakness or disease. A fever, a cancer, an injury could affect your heart, your head, your hands, or your whole body. Paul's application of "the thorn" includes "infirmities."

**Reproaches:** This refers to arrogant mistreatment, disrespect, or insults. It may come in the form of stinging sarcasm or brutal cynicism. These were attacks on Paul's leadership. Paul was being insulted (when he should have been commended, 12:11).

**Necessities:** General troubles. These might be financial problems. They could be problems with neighbors or a member of one's immediate or extended family.

**Persecutions:** Physical and verbal abuse.

**Distresses:** This could be translated as "a narrow place." (Today, we use the expression "between a rock and a hard place" to convey a similar idea.) When we experience distress, it seems as if life is closing in.

It's important to note that these are the areas where Paul applied the lessons of the thorn. It's likely that he endured all of these. Surely every one of Christ's disciples is familiar with these problems. But God can be seen most plainly when you are under pressure. In a world that puts a great deal of

stress on prosperity and success, this passage helps us to give glory to God in our grief.

## There They Go Again

In Corinth false teachers were using their silver tongues to seduce the saints. False teachings are like sugary cotton candy that dissolves under a rainy downpour of distress. Like the religious truisms of today, they hold no real answers for the piercing thorns of life. But when you read Paul's lament in 2 Corinthians 11:30, "if I must needs glory [or boast]," you can see what was happening. The false teachers were presenting their spectacular stories and visions. Apparently, some believers wanted Paul to respond in kind. These wolves made insulting remarks about Paul (2 Cor. 10:10). They were sure that the apostle Paul would suffer by comparison. But note Paul's emphatic response in 2 Corinthians 10:12: "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

When you face these piercing insults, you will realize how foolish these comparisons really are. But one of the questions that Paul had to face was this: how should he defend himself without appearing to be defensive? We see part of the answer in 2 Corinthians 11:1—he decided to play the part of a fool in order to show them who the real fools were ("Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me"). And again in verses 18–19: "Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise." Like a cunning court jester, Paul played the part of a fool. And so, in a series of foolish comparisons, Paul compared his ancestry, religion, ministry for Christ (!), and sufferings (11:22–29).

## Boasting about Weakness?

But Paul turned the tables on them with his next remark: "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" (11:30). This is such a remarkable statement that Paul calls upon God as his witness to these words (v. 31). What on earth would bring him to do that? Why would he boast in his weaknesses? That is like delighting in a disease or frolicking over a failure. Who is overjoyed when he suffers under the outrage of insults? Who wants to give a soft answer when "Mr. Potshot" vents his spleen? Can anyone really win through this kind of weakness?<sup>3</sup>

Paul's real authority—his real credibility—was established by the way he endured these sufferings. The well-known evangelist George Whitefield knew this well: "Because George Whitefield refused to soft-pedal his preaching, he received a variety of

responses. His bluntness sometimes offended people, and many established ministers of his time refused to allow him to speak in their pulpits. While angry listeners occasionally pelted him with everything from rotten fruit to dead cats, many people loved to hear him preach.<sup>4</sup> These highs and lows are part of the very warp and woof of the ministry. When you pour out your soul to glorify God, you can expect to be targeted by Satan's fiery darts. Why must it be this way? Why does God give us "the thorn" described in 2 Corinthians 12:7–9?

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

## The Lessons of the Thorn

Here are four important lessons about "the thorn."

- 1. The Lord prepares you for the thorn.** How had the Lord prepared Paul for the thorn? He had given him an "abundance of . . . revelations." You and I are privileged today to possess the Bible—the complete special revelation of God. With this wonderful instrument, we have a great privilege: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). By this wonderful mirror, God is still delighting His people and preparing them for the thorny times ahead. Like Paul, our thorns may be bodily weakness and disease, insults, necessities, persecution, or general distress. But God has given us the glorious revelation of Himself—the precious Son of God. Look to Him. Study the sufferings of Christ and the glory which will follow. Use the window of the Word to look upon God's great love for you. Jesus poured out His soul unto death for your sins. He was buried, and yet He rose again on the third day to justify you in God's sight. This revelation of Christ is the very best preparation for all the thorny times ahead.
- 2. The Lord protects you with the thorn.** Consider the instructive phrase that occurs twice in verse 7: "lest I should be exalted above measure." This is the danger for those who revel in God's revelation: they may become spiritually proud. Our flesh will subtly try to take the credit that belongs to God alone.<sup>5</sup> The word "thorn" translates the Greek word *skolops*, which can mean a long thorn or a sharp stake. (Picture a nail or a bone with a sharp pinpoint on one end.) Difficult times will remind us of our Savior's crown of thorns; they call to mind the nails that pierced His hands and feet. When pain wracks our bodies, we can worship the One who willingly suffered these pains, and more, for us. We will remember that He prayed in the garden that, if it were possible, this cup might pass from Him. In the same way, Paul prayed three times that

his thorn might be removed, but the thorn remained. Why? God was protecting him with the thorn, lest he should "be exalted above measure" in spiritual pride. The Lord allows painful thorns into your life to protect you and point you toward Jesus' example. This is why we go through such difficulties. Yes, Satan buffets God's servants. But Satan's sharp stake becomes a shepherd's staff used skillfully by our Savior. God protects us with the thorn.

- 3. The Lord preserves you through the thorn.** What was God's response to Paul's prayer? "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." God's answer was not that the thorn would be removed. God's answer was that His unlimited, undeserved favor would continue to labor in His servant. God's grace and strength are still sufficient for you for all those thorny times ahead. We are like windows for the world, but we have mud on our windows. Through our sufferings, God's uses His squeegee to clean our windows so that the world can see God's light through us. They will see His grace. They will see His power. They will see how God preserves us in spite of the thorn.
- 4. The Lord perfects you with the thorn.** What's Paul's conclusion? "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He rejoiced exceedingly—yes, he even took pleasure in those thorny times. Why? Paul knew that the power of God rested upon him as God perfected him with the thorn. He was made complete in Christ by those trials. This is why he could boast about his infirmities: because he was boasting in the Lord. So this presents you with a choice: are you willing to go through pain so that the power of God may rest upon you? Are you willing to go through this misery so that Christ may have the mastery in your life?

By the gracious power of God, believers can keep serving the Lord even in the thorniest of times.

Dr. Gordon Dickson serves as senior pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio.



<sup>1</sup> Consider Job's words in Job 3.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 677.

<sup>3</sup> These sufferings are the common experience of so many of God's servants. For instance, read the story of William Carey at [wholesomewords.org/missions/bcarey6.html](http://wholesomewords.org/missions/bcarey6.html). Be sure to read the account of how God used a fire in the building housing Carey's printing press. Irreplaceable manuscripts—the product of years of labor—were destroyed in that fire. Yet the news of that fire caught the attention of Christians and linguists worldwide. And when the Scriptures were produced in the native languages of India, they were received as precious gifts by the people who had heard about the fire ([ccel.org/ccel/smith\\_geo/carey.xii.html](http://ccel.org/ccel/smith_geo/carey.xii.html)).

<sup>4</sup> [christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/controversial-george-whitefield-11630198.html](http://christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/controversial-george-whitefield-11630198.html)

<sup>5</sup> Consider Moses' words, "Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" in Numbers 20:10–12.



# God's Strength in Our Weakness


## Bill's Testimony

It was a blustery mid-November day in 2007. My wife, Joy, and I sat in an oncologist's office in Findlay, Ohio, waiting. The doctor sat before us, leafing through reports and bloodwork results. He abruptly closed the folder, looked straight at us and bluntly said, "Multiple myeloma—stage 3." As my shock turned to numbness, I thought that in a few months that I would be leaving this world. What led me to that conclusion? Ten years earlier my sister had passed away from the very same disease. Deep down, I knew I had two choices. I could run *from* God and use my own wisdom to carry me through, or I could run *to* God "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

As treatments were recommended and administered, we began to put God's truth into practice. We were able to apply our pastor's teaching about prayer, Bible reading, and Scripture memorization. In the months to come it would be these memorized verses we would quote together as I lay in a hospital bed in a cancer ward.

I had an allergic reaction to the first type of chemo that was prescribed. We had to wait for that to clear up, which took a few weeks. Then the doctor thought the initial dose was too strong, so he gave me the same drug at half dose—with the same results. So there was yet another period of waiting for the reaction to clear up. Through this period of waiting, I was wondering, "Lord, what's going on? Time's a-wasting." From my daily Bible reading came a familiar passage—Isaiah 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." Time waiting on the Lord in His Word is time well spent.

After several months of treatment, I was told that I should consider a bone-marrow transplant, which I did. This in itself brought on a host of new problems: a lengthy hospital stay, a place for my wife to stay during this time, and the funds to pay for her stay. Because of my weakened immune system, I would be contacting a host of hospital-borne infections. We rejoice in the fact that God took care of each one of these issues. He supplied a home for my wife to stay in free of charge (via a dear single lady who had been a member of a church pastored by my father-in-law years earlier). How



Just as the waves  
crash upon  
the shore, God  
continues time and  
time again to give  
us His grace . . .



we thanked the Lord for such a gracious answer to prayer! We wanted everything to be “to the praise of his glory.”

Recovery was a long, hard road, and we would often draw our strength from recalling the verses that we had memorized. We enjoyed listening to soothing, godly music. God, in His sovereignty, saw fit to allow me to go into remission and, praise the Lord, I’ve been in remission from multiple myeloma since 2010!

However, this was just a practice run for what I was to be told in 2017. To say it in a few words, I was diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer, which had already metastasized to the bones. Even as I write this, I am wrestling with this disease. But yet again, we are relying on God’s grace and mercy.

We heard a speaker a while back who stated, “Grace is not a one-time event.” He used the illustration of going down to the shore and trying to count the ocean waves. God has given us grace upon grace upon grace. Just as the waves crash upon the shore, God continues time and time again to give us His grace, His mercy, and in times when we are “down and out,” we have the presence of the Comforter (2 Cor. 1:3–4—“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God”).<sup>1</sup>

### Joy’s Testimony

It was Monday, June 5, 2017, at the hospital emergency room that we heard the same word for the third time: “cancer.”

For a while my husband, Bill, had been trying to get an appointment with a urologist. On this Monday morning he was very sick. I called our family doctor’s nurse and told her tearfully that Bill was going to die before we even were able to see the urologist. She calmly said, “Take him to the emergency room.” The emergency room doctor came in and out of the curtains drawn around the hospital bed. Then on his last visit into our cubicle he said, “I have bad news. You have prostate cancer, and it has already spread into your bones.” I couldn’t believe what I had just heard, and I asked him to repeat it. “Cancer again,” I thought.

Bill had had multiple myeloma, a cancer of his bone marrow in 2007; the doctor had said it would return. In April 2017 he had skin cancer on his forehead removed by Mohs surgery. The doctor told us his cancer was only one layer away from the cranium.

Once Bill was released from the hospital, I was busy getting him comfortably settled back home. In addition I ran errands to get medication and food items and made phone



calls to family members. When nighttime arrived, I was very, very tired. I was alone with my thoughts.

Our pastor in Ohio had encouraged his people to memorize Scripture to help in times of difficulty. Difficult times will come. He would ask, “What Scripture are you memorizing to help you through this difficult situation?” My good friend had shared Deuteronomy 31:8 with me: “And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.” Moses was talking to Joshua, and he told him to be strong and of good courage.

When I memorize Scripture, I like to write it in a pattern that my eyes will remember. I wanted to have a very clear view of Deuteronomy 31:8.

“And the LORD” (not a friend or relative but the Lord God). What will the Lord do? He goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you. He will not forsake (abandon) you. What am I supposed to do? Fear not and don’t be dismayed.

We don’t use the word “dismayed” very much, so I had to look it up. The dictionary used these describing words: “disturbed, upset, distress, rattled, horrified, and unnerved.” The opposite of being dismayed is to be encouraged. So my job was to fear not and be encouraged. I would much rather be encouraged than stressed out, rattled, horrified and upset. Moses wanted Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land and be encouraged.

Do I still get discouraged? Of course. As I write this, my husband is in pain with his hip. He had a fever of 101.2. He can hardly walk. He's been more in-bed than out for the last two days. It's easy to fret and think of how this affects me. My mind goes back to Deuteronomy 31:8; I repeat it over and over, and the Lord does bring calmness.

It's easy to let fear overtake your thoughts: I don't want to be a widow, I don't want to be left alone, I don't want to be doing the hard stuff that I see other widows (such as my sister) doing. So, I hope, I continue to run to Christ. I need God's Word to surround me. We had an empty wall near the refrigerator in our home. I made it a Scripture wall. I put Scripture verses in frames and made a large framed area with God's Word. I would stand in front of the frames and read the verses.

Now that you know more about our story, think about how significant these verses are to us. We would recommend them to you to help you face the troubles ahead.

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isa. 41:10).

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory (Ps. 73:24).

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy (Ps. 126:5).

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance (Ps. 42:5).

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11).

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:16).

At night lying in bed we would listen to Christian music. It was godly music that we had heard at the Wilds Christian Camp and Conference Center in Brevard, North Carolina. I made a list of those song titles and added this frame to my Scripture wall. The following songs became very helpful. "God Is Always Good," "Rejoice in the Lord," "God Makes No Mistakes," "May the Lord Find Us Faithful," "Be Strong in the Lord," "Be Thou Exalted," and "My God Is Near."

One author wrote, "God's goodness doesn't wax and wane. He's unchanging. He will never love us more, or less, than He does right now. He's constant even when it doesn't feel like it. We may not understand our current struggles, we can understand this: God loves us so much He sacrificed His Son to save us when we were His enemies. Let the gospel assure you that God is always good even when it doesn't feel like it."<sup>2</sup>

As you read our story, you also have a choice to make: When your troubles come, are you going to run *from* God and use your own wisdom to carry you through, or run *to* God "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3)? We can testify that the second choice is the better choice.

While living in Ohio, Bill and Joy Logan attended Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, and Pastor Gordon Dickson was their pastor. The Logans currently live in west Michigan. Bill is under the care of the hematologist for his stage 4 prostate cancer.



<sup>1</sup> You can read more about Bill's story and listen to his interviews at <http://www.glimpsesofcalvary.com/this-is-my-story-bill-logan>.

<sup>2</sup> *Gospel Meditations for the Hurting* by Chris Anderson and Joe Tyrpak.

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NYC Regional Fellowship  
Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11235  
718.615.1002

### September 21, 2019

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

### September 23–24, 2019

New Mexico Regional Fellowship  
Manzano Baptist Church  
12411 Linn Avenue NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123

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Missions meeting)  
Grace Baptist Church  
396 S. Carbon Avenue  
P.O. Box 665  
Price, UT 84501

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Harvest Hills Baptist Church  
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Yukon, OK 73099  
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## 2020

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Morningside Baptist Church  
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Greenville, SC 29615

### March 9–10, 2020

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Kent, WA 98031

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# SOUND WORDS

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

## First Partaker

### Preaching Passionately: A Legitimate Means to an Awakening?

Very few, if any, American pastors confess to having ever seen a genuine, widely influential awakening within their church or community. Many resigned themselves long ago to the sad prospect of never doing so.

Supernatural events are of God's determination solely. They cannot be worked up by any earthly efforts, no matter how well intentioned. However, there are human means by which God generally accomplishes His supernatural ends. One of them is a certain kind of preacher and a certain kind of preaching. To know for sure what kind that is, those of us who have never witnessed a genuine churchwide awakening are dependent upon the testimonies and explanations of those who have.

One of the most credible, detailed accounts of what a divine awakening is like, and what kind of preaching was a divinely blessed means to it, comes from the pen of Jonathan Edwards (1703–58). In three separate works, published between 1737 and 1742,<sup>1</sup> Edwards related and defended his and others' firsthand experiences of the unusual events of the First Great Awakening of the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. But Edwards was not without his naysayers.

One of the criticisms charged against him and other Awakening ministers was that they employed an excessively emotional style of preaching. Charles Chauncy, pastor of the First Church of Christ (Congregational) in Boston, was one of the more severe opponents of the Awakening. He attempted to discredit Edwards' third work (*Some Thoughts . . .*) in a 424-page publication of his own

entitled *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (obviously a play on Edwards' own title). Chauncy launched a fully-fledged attack on Jonathan Edwards and the awakening, denigrating the whole work as a religion of mere passion which was open to the wildest temptations of enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup>

This throws a slant upon Edwards and his preaching style that calls into question our general impressions. Generally, he's caricatured as stylistically cerebral to the point of almost dispassionate impassivity. Edwards' delivery most certainly was restrained by comparison with George Whitefield's freewheeling oratorical flights,<sup>3</sup> yet the Northampton pastor evidently exhibited in his awakening preaching an emotional enlargement which anyone accustomed to his personality would have marked as being, at least for him, unusually heightened.

This eighteenth-century controversy contains vital lessons for us. One is this narrow question of whether preaching that is marked by conspicuous passion is a means which we might employ hopefully. To stir some devout consideration of this possibility, I'd like to suggest a reading of a lightly edited excerpt from *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England*. The following excerpt is a portion of Edwards' defense of the *zealous promoters* of the revival who had been *injuriously blamed* for one thing or another. Its profit for us is its clearheaded, scriptural appeal for preaching that is blood-earnest, impassioned, and emotionally in keeping with the urgency of our time.

This work, that has lately been carried on in the land, is the work of God and not the work of man. Its beginning has not been of man's power or device, and its being carried on depends not on our strength or wisdom. Yet God expects of all that they should use their utmost endeavors to promote it, and that the hearts of all should be greatly engaged in it, and that we should improve our utmost strength in it, however vain human strength is without the power of God. And so he no less requires that we should

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

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improve our utmost care, wisdom and prudence, though human wisdom of itself be as vain as human strength. Though God is wont to carry on such a work in such a manner as, many ways, to show the weakness and vanity of means and human endeavors in themselves, yet at the same time he carries it on in such a manner as to encourage diligence and vigilance in the use of proper means and endeavors, and to punish the neglect of them. Therefore in our endeavors to promote this great work we ought to use the utmost caution, vigilance and skill in the measures we take in order to it.

A great work should be managed with great prudence. This is the most important work that ever New England was called to be concerned in. When a people are engaged in war with a powerful and crafty nation, it concerns them to manage an affair of such consequence with the utmost discretion.

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***Though the devil be strong, yet in such a war as this he depends more on his craft than his strength. The course he has chiefly taken from time to time, to clog, hinder and overthrow revivals of religion in the church of God has been, by his subtle, deceitful management, to beguile and mislead those that have been engaged therein.***

Of what vast importance then must it be that we should be vigilant and prudent in the management of this great war that New England now has with so great a host of such subtle and cruel enemies. We must either conquer or be conquered, and the consequence of the victory, on one side, will be our eternal destruction in both soul and body in hell, and on the other side, our obtaining the kingdom of heaven and reigning in it in eternal glory. We had need always to stand on our watch and to be well versed in the art of war, and not to be ignorant of the devices of our enemies, and to take heed lest by any means we be beguiled through their subtlety.

Though the devil be strong, yet in such a war as this he depends more on his craft than his strength. The course he has chiefly taken from time to time, to clog, hinder and overthrow revivals of religion in the church of God has been, by his subtle, deceitful management, to beguile and mislead those that have been engaged therein. In such a course God has been pleased, in his holy and sovereign providence, to suffer him to succeed, oftentimes in a great measure to overthrow that which in its beginning appeared most hopeful and glorious. The

work that is now begun in New England is, as I have shown, eminently glorious, and if it should go on and prevail, would make New England a kind of heaven upon earth. Is it not therefore greatly to be deprecated that it should be overthrown through wrong and improper management that we are led into by our subtle adversary in our endeavors to promote it?

I would now notice SOME THINGS AT WHICH OFFENCE HAS BEEN TAKEN WITHOUT OR BEYOND JUST CAUSE.

1. *The complaint that ministers address themselves too much to the affections, and with great earnestness of voice and manner.*

One thing that has been complained of, is ministers addressing themselves rather *to the affections* of their hearers than to their understandings, and striving to raise their passions to the utmost height rather by a very affectionate manner of speaking and a great appearance of earnestness in voice and gesture, than by clear reasoning and informing their judgment. It is objected that the affections are moved without a proportionable enlightening of the understanding.

I am far from thinking that it is unprofitable for ministers to endeavor clearly and distinctly to explain the doctrines of religion and unravel the difficulties that attend them, and to confirm them with strength of reason and argumentation. [I believe that they should] also observe some easy and clear method and order in their discourses for the help of the understanding and memory. And it is very probable that these things have been of late too much neglected by many ministers. Yet, I believe that the objection that is made, of affections raised without enlightening the understanding, is in a great measure built on a mistake and confused notions that some have about the nature and cause of the affections and the manner in which they depend on the understanding.

All affections are raised either by *light* in the understanding or by some *error and delusion* in the understanding. For all affections do certainly arise from some apprehension in the understanding. That apprehension must either be agreeable to truth or else be some mistake or delusion. If it be an apprehension or notion that is agreeable to truth, then it is *light in the understanding*.

Therefore the thing to be inquired into is, whether the apprehensions or notions of divine and eternal things that are raised in people's minds by these affectionate preachers, whence their affections are excited, be apprehensions that are *agreeable to truth*, or whether they are mistakes. If the former, then the affections are raised the way they should be, by informing the mind or conveying light to the understanding.

They go away with a wrong notion that think

that those preachers cannot affect their hearers by enlightening their understandings, who do not do it by such a *distinct and learned* handling of the doctrinal points of religion as depends on human discipline or the strength of natural reason and tends to enlarge their hearers' learning and speculative knowledge in divinity. The manner of preaching without this, may be such as shall tend very much to set divine and eternal things in a right view, and to give the hearers such ideas and apprehensions of them as are agreeable to truth, and make such impressions on their hearts as are answerable to the real nature of things. Not only the words that are spoken, but the manner of speaking is one thing that has a great tendency to this.

I think an exceedingly *affectionate* way of preaching about the great things of religion has in itself no tendency to beget false apprehensions of them. But, on the contrary, [it has] a much greater tendency to beget true apprehensions of them than a moderate, dull, indifferent way of speaking of them. An appearance of affection and earnestness in the manner of delivery, if it be very great indeed, yet if it be agreeable to the nature of the subject, and be not beyond a proportion to its importance and worthiness of affection, and if there be no appearance of its being feigned or forced, has so much the greater tendency to beget true ideas or apprehensions in the minds of the hearers of the subject spoken of, and so to enlighten the understanding. And this is the reason: that such a way or manner of speaking of these things does in fact more truly represent them than a more cold and indifferent way of speaking of them. If the subject be in its own nature worthy of very great affection, then a speaking of it with very great affection is most agreeable to the nature of that subject, or is the truest representation of it, and therefore has most of a tendency to beget true ideas of it in the minds of those to whom the representation is made. And I do not think ministers are to be blamed for raising the affections of their hearers too high, if that which they are affected with be only that which is worthy of affection, and their affections are not raised beyond a proportion to its importance or worthiness of affection.

I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with. I know it has long been fashionable to despise a very earnest and pathetic way of preaching. They, and they only have been valued as preachers that have shown the greatest extent of learning, and strength of reason, and correctness of method and language. But I humbly conceive it has been for want of understanding or duly considering human nature that such preaching

has been thought to have the greatest tendency to answer the ends of preaching. And the experience of the present and past ages abundantly confirms the same.

Though, as I said before, clearness of distinction and illustration, and strength of reason, and a good method in the doctrinal handling of the truths of religion is many ways needful and profitable, and not to be neglected. Yet an increase in speculative knowledge in divinity is not what is so much needed by our people as something else. Men may abound in this sort of light and have no heat. How much has there been of this sort of knowledge in the Christian world in this age! Was there ever an age wherein strength and penetration of reason, extent of learning, exactness of distinction, correctness of style, and clearness of expression did so abound? And yet was there ever an age wherein there has been so little sense of the evil of sin, so little love to God, heavenly-mindedness, and holiness of life among the professors of true religion? Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched. And they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching that has the greatest tendency to do this.

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***I am far from thinking that it is unprofitable for ministers to endeavor clearly and distinctly to explain the doctrines of religion and unravel the difficulties that attend them, and to confirm them with strength of reason and argumentation. [I believe that they should] also observe some easy and clear method and order in their discourses for the help of the understanding and memory. And it is very probable that these things have been of late too much neglected by many ministers.***

Those texts, Isa. 58:1, *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins,* and Ezek. 6:11, *Thus saith the Lord God, smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel!*, I say these texts (however the use that some have made of them has been laughed at) will fully



justify a great degree of *pathos* and manifestation of zeal and fervency in preaching the word of God. They may indeed be abused, to justify that which would be odd and unnatural amongst us, not making due allowance for difference of manners and customs in different ages and nations; but let us interpret them how we will, they at least imply that a most affectionate and earnest manner of delivery, in many cases, becomes a preacher of God's word.

Preaching the word of God is commonly spoken of in Scripture in such expressions as seem to import a loud and earnest speaking; as in Isa. 40:2, *Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her iniquity is pardoned*, and verse 3, *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord*. Ver. 6, *The voice said cry: and he said, what shall I cry! All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field*. Jer. 2:2, *Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, thus saith the Lord*, and Jonah 1:2, *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it*. Isa. 61:1–2, *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God*. Isa. 62:11, *Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, "Say ye to the daughter of Zion, behold thy salvation cometh."* Rom. 10:18, *Their sound went into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world*.

Jer. 11:6, *Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them*. So chap. 19:2, and 7:2. Prov. 8:1, *Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice*. Vv. 3, 4, *She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors; unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men! And chap. 1:20, Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets*. Chap. 9:3, *She hath sent forth her maidens, she crieth upon the high places of the city*. John 7:37, *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink*.

It seems to be foretold that the Gospel should be especially preached in a loud and earnest manner, at the introduction of the prosperous state of religion in the latter days. Isa. 40:9, *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain! O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength! Lift up, and be not afraid! Say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God!* Isa. 52:7, 8, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings! Thy watchmen shall lift up*

*the voice*. Isa. 27:13, *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish*.

And this will be one way that the church of God will cry at that time, like a travailing woman, when Christ mystical is going to be brought forth, as Rev. 12, at the beginning. It will be by ministers that are her mouth, and it will be this way that Christ will then cry like a travailing woman, as in Isa. 42:14, *I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself; now will I cry like a travailing woman*. Christ cries by his ministers, and the church cries by her officers. And it is worthy to be noted that the word commonly used in the New Testament, that we translate *preach*, properly signifies to *proclaim aloud like a crier*.

## Final Thoughts

It would be imprudent and unhelpful for any minister to attempt to emotionalize his preaching style for no other reason than to induce artificially some kind of passionate response in his congregation. But Edwards' defense of preaching that bursts forth from a fervent heart confronts us with a critical need. After preaching up and down throughout the colonies, George Whitefield wrote in his journal (Oct. 9, 1740) his own assessment of that need: *I am verily persuaded, the Generality of Preachers talk of an unknown, unfelt Christ. And the Reason why Congregations have been so dead, is because dead Men preach to them. O that the Lord may quicken and revive them for his own Name's sake!* ☞

<sup>1</sup> A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls . . . (1737), The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God (1741), and Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England . . . (1742). The brief, seminal account of the events described in A Faithful Narrative was first penned by Edwards in a letter in May of 1735 to Rev. Benjamin Colman of Brattle Street Church in Boston.

<sup>2</sup> Approaching Jonathan Edwards: The Evolution of a Persona, Carol Ball (2015), 87–88.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, by December 1740 (six months before he preached "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"), unmistakable evidence appears in Edwards's manuscript sermons that he had begun to experiment with and perfect his own revival rhetoric in Whitefieldian directions. . . . Edwards increasingly outlined his sermons in order to achieve the appearance of Whitefield's extemporaneity (Harry S. Stout, ed., Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 22, 31).



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Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. You may listen to his sermons at [mountcalvarybaptist.org/pages/sermons](http://mountcalvarybaptist.org/pages/sermons).

# Bring . . . the Books

Jonathan Edwards,  
*Charity and Its Fruits: Living in the Light of God's Love*

*Charity and Its Fruits* is the literary fruit of the sermon preparation of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards preached this exposition of 1 Corinthians 13 to his congregation in 1738 in the form of fifteen messages. The sermons were never published while Edwards was living. In fact, their first known publication took place in 1852, nearly one hundred years after his death, by Edwards' grandson, Tyron Edwards. In 1989 Yale published the sermons using Edwards' own preaching notes as the source. On comparison, the sermons published in 1852 endured a rather free editorial process. This edition was edited by Kyle Strobel and published by Crossway in 2012. Strobel's editorial comments are offset in boxes to differentiate explanation from Edwards' text.

Strobel created his volume to honor Edwards. He writes, "If nothing else, to honor Edwards is to actually read him and think his thoughts after him in an attempt not simply to mimic his theology but to be faithful to the gospel that he worked so hard to explain."

These sermons reflect Edwards' thorough exposition of 1 Corinthians 13. The fifteen sermons are divided into three sections. The first three sermons, covering verses 1–3, center on the theme that love is the most essential element. The second section contains nine sermons on verses 4–7 showing how "charity is the fountain of all that is good." The last three sermons, covering verses 8–10, expound on love as supreme over the other gifts of the Spirit.

Granted, Edwards' style and vocabulary are difficult, reflecting both the era in which he lived and his own intellectual brilliance. Do not consider this a book to read while unwinding from the day. It will demand a significant degree of careful reflection. I would recommend that you dedicate unfettered time to read an entire sermon in a single setting. Do not allow these cautions to dissuade you from reading this book, however. Strobel aids the reader by adding an outline structure to keep your meditation on point. The treasures you will find are worth the dig.

Consider the thesis statement for each sermon:

**Sermon One:** All that virtue which is saving, and distinguishing of true Christians from others, is summed up in Christian or divine love (13:1).

**Sermon Two:** The ordinary influence of God's Spirit, working saving grace in the heart, is a more excellent blessing than any of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

**Sermon Three:** All which men can do, and all which they can suffer, will not make up for the want of sincerity in the heart.

**Sermon Four:** A Christian spirit disposes persons meekly to bear ill that is received from others, and

cheerfully and freely to do good to others (13:4a).

**Sermon Five:** A truly Christian spirit is opposite to an envious spirit (13:4b).

**Sermon Six:** A Christian spirit is a humble spirit (13:4c–5a).

**Sermon Seven:** A Christian spirit is opposite to a selfish spirit (13:5b).

**Sermon Eight:** A Christian spirit is contrary to an angry or wrathful disposition (13:5c).

**Sermon Nine:** A Christian spirit is contrary to a censorious spirit; or in other words, it is contrary to a disposition uncharitable to judge others (13:5d).

**Sermon Ten:** All true Christian grace tends to holy practice (13:6).

**Sermon Eleven:** They who are truly gracious have a spirit for Christ's sake to undergo all sufferings to which they may be exposed in the way of their duty (13:7a).

**Sermon Twelve:** There is a concatenation [a linking together] of the graces of Christianity (13:7b).

**Sermon Thirteen:** True Christian grace is that which nothing that opposes it can ever overthrow (13:7c).

**Sermon Fourteen:** That great fruit of the Spirit in which the Holy Ghost shall not only for a season but everlastingly be communicated to the church of Christ is divine love (13:8).

**Sermon Fifteen:** Heaven is a world of love (13:8–10).

I leave you with the challenge that Edwards gave to those who would hear his exposition. In general it is a call to what Edwards termed "the Christian spirit," a spirit that is more "insisted on in the New Testament than anything concerning our duty or moral state." Though so commonly expected, it is also so necessarily commanded—man is a fickle soul. Using the response of Jesus' disciples to the unbelieving Samaritans as an illustration (Luke 9:52–55), Edwards exhorts, "What was manifest by these words of theirs was not so much that they did not know what their own hearts or dispositions were, as that they did not know what kind of spirit and temper was proper to the Christian dispensation and Christian character which Christ was come to set up, and of which they were called to be the first fruits." ☞

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

Robert Condict is the senior pastor at Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church in Baldwin, Maryland.

# Straight Cuts

## Do Appearances Matter for the Christian?

*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart* (1 Sam. 16:7).

Do appearances matter for the Christian? Does it matter how others view us? Is it appropriate for us to assess others by what we see? The opening text suggests an answer. God is not condemning man for looking on the outward but is simply stating that man has no other option for evaluation. Other texts will provide further help to answer these questions.

Jesus describes the Pharisees as appearing righteous on the outside but being full of corruption internally (Matt. 23:13–34) and mentions their corrupt *actions*, activities that others can see. Though they appear spiritual in religious settings, a scrutiny of their dealings with people would reveal that they mistreat and take advantage even of widows (v. 14). Similarly, Jesus says false prophets appear “in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). But there is more to their appearance than the sheep’s attire. What these charlatans are inside eventually breaks through their façade and exposes them to the discerning believer. Jesus states twice that we should and can “know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15, 20). Fruits seem to refer to their works, their general conduct. The point is that how a person appears in *all* settings not only matters but is highly instructive. Careful examination will usually unmask hypocrisy and expose the real person. *Appearances matter because, ironically, they can expose hypocrisy.*


In the Pastoral Epistles God commands that we make character assessments based on what we see, for the qualifications for a pastor/elder have to do with what others observe in his behavior and consequently infer about his character. Even what those “without” the church think about the man of God matters (1 Tim. 3:7). Clearly what one is inwardly shows itself more than we realize. *Appearances matter because they are one’s testimony.*

In Proverbs 24:30–34 Solomon illustrates how to make character assessments. While observing the state of the farmers’ fields, walls, and houses in his kingdom, he noticed that some of those fields were well-manicured, tilled, neatly protected by border walls and clearly productive. But one farm stood out in contrast: it “was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down” (24:31). Because only God knows the heart of the farmer, are we to avoid making any kind of evaluation of him? Is such

an evaluation judgmental? No, such evaluations are normal and natural. Solomon exemplifies the proper response: “I **saw**, and **considered it well**: I **looked upon it**, and **received instruction**. Yet a little sleep,

a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” (24:32–34). The bolded words teach us the appropriate use of life’s common observations. God expects us to look and learn. Learning from looking is not judgmental; it is almost inevitable. The problem is not that we look, but that we might look without proper consideration and without learning anything. This problem of a superficial look also seems to be what Jesus references when He warned the crowd who condemned Him for healing a man on the Sabbath. He charged them: “judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). His stress is not so much on what they saw but what they *thought* about what they saw. The appearance of a man healed should have elicited praise and sympathy, but they were thinking strict Sabbath observance, strict tradition, without any understanding of the law’s underlying focus on mercy. They learned nothing from an exhibition of Jesus’ merciful character. They could not see with spiritual discernment. *Appearances matter because when properly understood they reveal character.*

But back to Solomon’s illustration. What did he learn from what he observed? First, he learned that the owner was slothful and void of understanding. Solomon may not have known the man personally, but he concluded that he was a sluggard who understood neither how his neglect reflected upon himself nor the outcome of that neglect. In contrast to the oblivious sluggard, Solomon learned that this man’s character flaws resulted in poverty and want, and that those consequences can come speedily. *Appearances matter because they instruct on how character affects life.*

Do we mistakenly believe that we should not evaluate people by what we see? It is true that judging *motives* is forbidden, for we cannot see the heart, and God directly prohibits such guessing at motives (1 Cor. 4:5). On the other hand, God has taught us that a person’s poorly maintained properties and neglected opportunities are an open book for observers to read. What do others see and learn from observing our habits, temper, dress, and dealings with others? We cannot ignore the question. *Appearances do matter.* 

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



# Windows

## Displaying Joy Amid Trial for God's Glory

Suffering and persecution have followed faith from the time of the Fall. There was persecution of faith from the first two men born to the human race. It is an expression of Satan's hatred for God and at the same time an expression of God's grace to the believer. The believer is called to expect it and to embrace it as a privilege to be identified with the Savior's suffering. Paul expresses it as the "fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10).

The New Testament's description of the last days suggests that persecution will escalate. The believer's response to persecution or adversity is given to us in the following verses and is a wonderful means of displaying the glory of God. The classic biblical illustration is Joseph. He is prophetically prepared through dreams that he would have a position of authority and honor, but the path to that fulfillment was unimaginable oppression and hardship. Joseph's insightful conclusion, stated to his brothers who were the means of much of his suffering, was, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Joseph's example has been used by God to instruct and challenge God's people for several thousand years. The New Testament also teaches believers how they are to respond to these trials.

Matthew 5:10-12: *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Acts 5:41: *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

1 Peter 4:12-14: *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.*

The jewelry store display is by design. The black velvet backdrop and bright light give the most glorious presentation of the beauty of the stone. So the dark circumstances of our life can be the means of God's greatest glory when we reflect His light with our spirit of joy, happiness, and gladness.

### Recognition of the Source of the Trial

William Cowper was a hymn writer and poet who knew great struggle with depression, even to the point of attempting to take his own life. He lost his mother at

age six and didn't have a close relationship with his father. He came to faith in Christ in one of his times of deep depression when he came to understand Romans 3:25: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." His hymn writing was fostered by his association with John Newton. Together they wrote a hymnal for Pastor Newton's church. One of Cowper's hymns was "God Moves in a Mysterious Way."

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

Andrew Murray was a missionary sent by the Dutch Reformed Church from Scotland to South Africa. In a sermon on Acts 27:28-29 entitled "Anchors to Throw in a Time of Testing," he wrote these thoughts.

First, He brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place: in that fact I will rest.

Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child.

Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.

Last, in His good time He can bring me out again—how and when He knows.

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

Charles Spurgeon

- Let me say I am here,  
1) by God's appointment,  
2) in His keeping,  
3) under His training,  
4) for His time.

Equipping ourselves for the trials that will come is vital if we are to respond in a right way. We recognize it is spiritual warfare and good soldiers prepare for the day of battle. We must be fixed in the confidence of God, who is able to strengthen us in our hour of greatest test. William Gurnall, in his book *The Christian in Complete Armour*, makes this wise observation about Christian warfare from 2 Corinthians 10:4: "We must not confide in the armour of God, but in the God of this armour, because all our weapons are only mighty through God."

## Understanding God's Purposes in Allowing Us to Go through Trials

If we fail to understand God's purpose in allowing trials and persecution, we may come to affix blame on God and not allow Him to do His refining work in our lives. An illustration called "The Silversmith" (author unknown) reminds us of God's presence in the midst of the fire and His constant care of us through the trial.

Malachi 3:3 says: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible Study. That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot then she thought again about the verse that says: "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver." She watched as sweat poured from his brow due to the intensity of the heat from the fire he sat so close to. She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined? The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy—when I see my image in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.

## Facing Trials with Confident Trust and a Biblical Spirit

How we respond to these trials will determine whether God receives glory. It takes predetermined readiness by God's Spirit to respond for God's glory.

The story is told of a king in Africa who had a close friend with whom he grew up. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his life (positive or negative) and remarking, "This is good!"

One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing one of the guns, for after taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it, and his thumb was blown off.

Examining the situation, the friend remarked as usual, "This is good!" To which the king replied, "No, this is not good!" and proceeded to send his friend to jail. About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known to stay clear of. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They tied his hands, stacked some wood, set up a stake and bound him to the stake. As they came near to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king was missing a thumb. Being superstitious, they never ate anyone who was less than whole. So untying the king, they sent him on his way.

As he reached home, he was reminded of the event that had taken his thumb and felt remorse for his treatment of his friend. He went immediately to the jail to speak with his friend. "You were right," he said, "it was good that my thumb was blown off." And he proceeded to tell the friend all that had just happened.

"And so I am very sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this."


"No," his friend replied, "This is good!"

"What do you mean, 'This is good'? How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?"

"If I had not been in jail, I would have been with you."

Romans 8:28: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*

I fear that the church in America has lived in freedom and known such liberty that when tested by persecution, we will not respond biblically for God's glory. Compared to most places in the world, we have lived with religious liberty as a guaranteed right. We have come to expect, indeed, demand our right for the free exercise of religion. As governments change, and they all do, we need to be ready to respond biblically to impending persecution if God would allow it to come.

God's real glory does not come about simply by enduring the test. The real measure of success is going through the test with rejoicing and gladness, counting it our privilege to suffer for Him. May we learn to think and say, "This is good!" 

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# With Job in the School of Suffering

God's people can experience different kinds of suffering. First Peter focuses on a class of suffering that, humanly speaking, we do not deserve. We call it "persecution"—*suffering* for our faith in and faithfulness to Christ. Lamentations portrays another type of suffering that is deserved. We call it "chastisement"—suffering the remedial hand of God for our disobedience to Him. However, there is another kind of suffering that isn't deserved or even understood. It comes as plain old suffering, adversity, sometimes even as calamity or tragedy; we might call it the Job Syndrome. Sooner or later, to one degree or another, every Christian faces circumstances that fit into this category. God has graciously given us a book that not only raises the question of *why* bad things happen to good people but also answers the questions of *how* we face those situations, *what* is at stake in our response, and just *who* is responsible for it all.

## The Message of the Book

The story of Job is one of the most popular and well-known in all of literature. Paradoxically, it is probably one of the least-read books in Scripture. As we read the opening two or three chapters, we may get bogged down in the lengthy discourses and give up any serious attempt to understand what is really being communicated through the message of the whole book. We must remember that the Book of Job is not a static, neatly organized textbook of doctrine. It is a progressive, organic whole—an unfolding drama that reveals the experiences, growth and maturity of the main character, Job. While the story clearly revolves around the idea and experience of suffering, *neither the suffering itself nor the reason for the suffering is the key theme of the book*. Suffering is only the arena for the testing and communicating of far bigger and broader spiritual truths.

The prologue introduces Job as a godly man (1:1), a wealthy man (1:3), and a good father concerned for the spiritual welfare of his children (1:4–5). The threefold repetition of Job's exemplary character as a blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil (1:1; 1:8; 2:3) is crucial if we are to avoid the same mistakes his friends made. Although contrary to the assumptions and accusations of Job's friends, the writer and God Himself clarify from the outset that Job's experiences had *nothing* to do with sin or chastisement.

In a fascinating scene included by the writer through divine revelation, we are permitted a glimpse behind the earthly stage to the heavenly backstage. We understand from the beginning what Job never discovered—what initiated all of his suffering and what was at stake in his response to that

suffering. There is more to Job's suffering, and to ours, than meets the eye.

Interestingly, it was God who initiated the discussion of Job as a model of the faith and devotion that pleases Him (1:8). To this description Satan scornfully asserted that all of Job's behavior was purely self-serving: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" God has merely bought off Job's worship by rewarding him with protection, wealth, and benefits of all kinds. Remove all those hedges and fringe benefits, Satan sneeringly challenges God, and Job will curse You to Your face! Such is a challenge that *must* be answered, not only for our sake but for God's. This is not a cosmic game between God and Satan at the expense of a poor human pawn caught in the middle. An eternal principle was at stake that reaches to the very root of our existence and to our relationship with God. For if God's people fear, honor, and obey Him only because He blesses and protects them, God's own character is seriously called into question. Not only did Satan's accusation cast aspersion upon the genuineness of man's faith in and devotion to God, it simultaneously incriminated God Himself as a self-seeking favoritist who buys the worship of men in a gross spiritual *quid pro quo* (something given or received for something else) arrangement between a worship-hungry deity and calculating men interested only in self-aggrandizement.

Job suffers to prove, unwittingly, not only the sincerity of his faith in God but also the purity of God's character, motives, and actions in His relationship with man. This is not to say that when Christians face suffering for no apparent reason, it is the direct result of a similar interchange between God and Satan. However, it is to say that when we or someone we love faces difficulty, trial, loss, bereavement, calamity, tragedy, pain, or suffering of any kind—as well as the misunderstanding and rejection such experiences can bring from family, friends or brethren—we experience a fresh opportunity to stand in the company of Job and affirm that our faith in, our worship of, and our devotion to God is rooted in soil far deeper than personal advantage or material blessing. It is an opportunity to demonstrate to those around us, to God, and to all spiritual intelligences (Eph. 3:10) that the roots of our faith run deep, gripping the bedrock of the person and character of God in an unshakable confidence in His Word, in His justice, in His sovereignty and, yes, in His love: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). No amount of suffering can nullify John 3:16, Romans 5:8, or any other declaration of God's supreme love for us. Suffering neither creates nor indicates a rift between us and God's love. Rather, through

all such sufferings we can be “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:35–39).

Satan proclaimed that Job would “curse” God in response to his suffering. In a beautiful touch of irony, Job really did “curse” God (the Hebrew word for “curse” is *barach*), but not quite the way Satan had hoped. Job declared that God had given him all he had and that God had the perfect sovereign right to take any or all of it away. Job concluded, “Blessed [Hebrew *barach*] be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Job used the same word Satan predicted he would, but he used it in the opposite sense. It is a curious fact that the same Hebrew word can mean either “to curse” or “to bless,” depending on the context.

Chapter 2 records the next level of suffering Job encountered for his faith and for God’s reputation. It is amazing that God would again raise the issue of Job to Satan. Yet it invites the realization that every trial we face is, in fact, a vote of confidence from God by which He declares His trust in our ability—by His grace—to come through it triumphantly. He has already promised that nothing we ever encounter, either in terms of temptation or testing, will be more than we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). This truth automatically eliminates the excuse that “the temptation was just too strong for me” or that “the testing was just too severe for me to handle”; such excuses make God a liar.

Another critical truth revealed by this narrative is that even though God delivered Job into Satan’s power, with specific limitations (Job 1:12; 2:6), God Himself expressly claimed ultimate and absolute responsibility for everything that happened to Job (Job 2:3). God is not merely omniscient; He is completely sovereign, controlling every circumstance we face.

### “Battered but Triumphant”

Job faced his last phase of testing triumphantly, despite his wife’s satanic encouragement to “curse God, and die.” One commentator wryly remarked, “Job has lost his children but this wife he has retained, for he needed not to be tried by losing her; he was sufficiently tested by having her.” By the close of chapter 2, Job is battered but triumphant, with Satan gone and never to return, yet the book is just beginning! While we can glean much more from the rest of the story, we must appreciate at least one outstanding fact. Throughout his discourses Job’s agony over his circumstances and experiences can be summed up in the perpetual question, “Why?” “Why has all this happened to me? Why must I suffer all this? Why is God doing this to me?” Job asked. “Why?” explicitly surfaces at least twenty times and is implied many more times. It is not only interesting and instructive but crucial to our understanding of the book—and to our personal mastery of suffering—to observe that *God never offered any explanation or answer to that question*. Instead, He responded with an interrogation of His own (chapters 38–41) aimed at putting things back into proper perspective.

We must be satisfied, as Job was, when there is no answer to the question “why?”; we must learn to be satisfied, as Job was, with God’s wise, just, and benevolent sovereignty over every aspect of His creation—including us. Someone has observed that although the story of Job focuses attention on the arena of suffering, “the book does not set out to answer the problem of suffering but to proclaim a God so great no answer is needed.”

The story of Job is the stuff from which martyrdom is made. How little most of us endure! How easily we are confused and discouraged and turned aside from our devotion to God because of a little adversity. No one wants to suffer. No one enjoys it. It is somewhat “heroic” to suffer persecution inflicted by the ungodly because of our faith. It is not too difficult to cope with what we know is chastisement from God when we have sinned. However, when it is just plain suffering that we neither deserve nor understand—suffering inflicted or allowed by God for no apparent reason—that is the Job Syndrome. The real issue when we suffer is not why we are suffering, but who is in control of it, how we should respond to it, and what is at stake in our reaction to it. Job was a living martyr, suffering unwittingly for the integrity of his faith in God and the integrity of God’s relationship with man. We can be such an example—only if we are willing to learn from Job how to suffer well.

*Dr. Layton Talbert teaches theology and biblical exposition at Bob Jones Seminary, Greenville, South Carolina, and is a FrontLine contributing editor. He blogs regularly at Theology in 3D on the BJU Seminary website and is also the author of Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job. (This article was originally published in FrontLine January/February 1994.)*



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# What Is a Biblical Fundamentalist and Why Would Anyone Want to Be One?

On March 21–22, 2019, an event of historic significance occurred in Stockton, California. Pastor Steve Kihlthau, who is not a member of FBFI, agreed to host a meeting for all pastors and laymen in central California who identify as fundamentalists to meet for a two-day conference taught by my pastor, Dr. David Innes. Approximately seventy pastors and laymen from thirty different churches participated. Many of these were young, curious pastors whom we had not previously met. There were also seasoned pastors and laymen with strong opinions who came from varied backgrounds. There were also a few women in the group. God and His Word were glorified, and there was peace among the brethren.

“Fundamentalist.” The term conjures up a number of different reactions. Some people think of a set of books produced in the early 1900s and edited by R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, and others. Others think of dress standards and hairstyles, Bible versions, or music styles. There are those who consider colleges, seminaries, associations, or fellowships as the definition of fundamentalism. And if you ask a soldier, radical terrorists come to mind!

When I went to Bible college, I was introduced to the term and was told that I should be a fundamentalist. Having never previously heard the term, I looked for a list of “the fundamentals” and could come up only with the creed we recited in chapel on a regular basis. Oh! And we didn’t like Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell.

Then I went into the ministry and found myself serving in different regions of the country and in the islands of the Pacific. Everywhere I went, I found Christians who had their own definition of fundamentalism. Some of the good and godly “fundamentalists” I met in one place were called “new evangelicals” or “compromisers” by good and godly friends in another place. For a time, I was privileged to travel the country and preach for a Christian school organization and later a Christian camp, where I discovered even more versions of fundamentalism. Frankly, it was quite confusing and disheartening for me. Every group seemed to have a different list. They all loved God and wanted to live holy lives that pleased Him, but they couldn’t come to a point of agreement on “the list.”

Then, in His providence God brought Dr. David Innes across my path. He also had what I thought was “a list.” Having seen so many “lists,” I was skeptical and pretty close to just abandoning the fundamentalist nomenclature altogether. But while listening to and looking through a set of cassette tapes and a booklet that Pastor Innes had produced, the light came on.

Since then, even before I came on staff at Hamilton Square Baptist Church, I have shared these materials with everyone

who asked me what I thought it meant to be a fundamentalist. They have almost universally expressed their appreciation for it.

Dr. Innes developed these materials years ago when asked to teach on the topic at a conference in the Philippines. Like me, he had seen the diversity among fundamentalists (which seems like an oxymoron) and decided to try to define the term in basic and biblical fashion. Over the years he has meditated on the topic, redeveloped the materials, and has taught these materials in his own church, Bible colleges, and other places. It is a required part of the training we give to ministry interns who come to San Francisco for a summer of service and learning.

Pastor Innes has been in pastoral ministry now for close to sixty years. For many years he has served on the executive boards of FBFI and Bob Jones University. He has seen the history, the quirks, and the triumphs of biblical fundamentalism and has a passion to see that God’s people understand it. While he is approaching his octogenarian years, he still has the vigor of a much younger man. His mind is sharp. His approach is humble and gracious. His materials are easily understood. And he has expressed a desire to make these materials available in a two-day seminar format wherever they can benefit to God’s people.

Four major thoughts are at the core of Pastor Innes’s approach. First, God’s Word is the foundation of what is truly fundamental. Second is the absolute necessity to obey biblical imperatives on separation from sin and apostasy. And yet there are other commands regarding love and unity among the brethren that are often ignored. Finally, his charts on “Categories of Truth We Teach and Preach” and “The Genius of Apostasy” are worthy of serious consideration.

Most of the materials are available for download in mp3 and PDF format from our church website, [hamiltonsquare.net](http://hamiltonsquare.net). Feel free to use them your own ministry, but I recommend that you consider having Dr. Innes come and teach the materials in person. He has a unique approach that is extremely helpful. If you believe this would be helpful to your church, a fellowship of churches, or your ministerial students, please contact him directly at [dinnes@hamiltonsquare.org](mailto:dinnes@hamiltonsquare.org) or me at [pastordan@hamiltonsquare.org](mailto:pastordan@hamiltonsquare.org).





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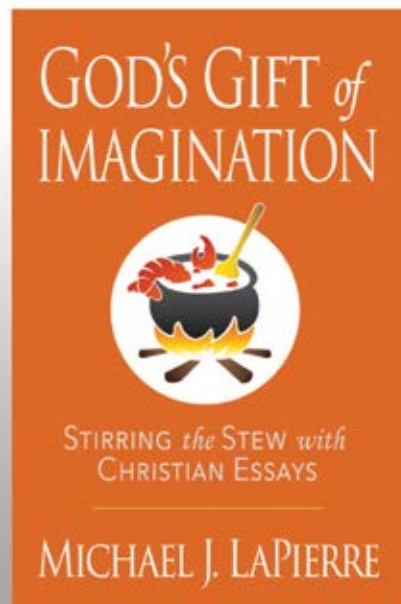
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Michael J. LaPierre is a former business executive who specializes in Christian leadership training and development.

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### The Valley of Trouble: A Door of Hope

Continued from page 9

she would go to be with the Lord. When I entered her room, she seemed discouraged and depressed. The nurse who was tinkering with the ventilator quickly excused herself. Betty was unable to talk, but I could see the discouragement in her eyes. As she faced death, the only thing I could offer her were the promises and principles of Scripture: Believers are transformed at death to be among "the spirits of just men made perfect."<sup>6</sup> If our earthly tent (our body) were to be destroyed, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.<sup>7</sup> To be absent with the body is to be present with the Lord.<sup>8</sup> So that in all this, we "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."<sup>9</sup> Each time I quoted one of these Scriptures, Betty sat up a little straighter. Now sitting totally erect, she looked me in the eye with a new boldness. In her demeanor, I saw the visible evidence that she was mixing her faith with the promises of God.<sup>10</sup> When I asked her if she had understood those Scriptures, she gave me a firm, courageous nod to assure me that she had. Like a bright beacon, those verses had illuminated the door of hope in her valley of trouble. Nine minutes later, after the ventilator had been removed, she confidently passed into the presence of her Lord.

May God be pleased that every one of us, as His children, will find the door of hope in our valleys of trouble.

Dr. Gordon A. Dickson has served as the senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, since 1994.



<sup>1</sup> John E. Hartley, "1994 𐤇𐤍𐤁𐤏," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 791.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 14:13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 14:1-21.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 23:4.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 50:10.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:23.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:1.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:8.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:18.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 4:2.



# Not So, Lord!

*“Not so, Lord!”* These words of Peter in Acts 10 have always caught my attention. Could there be a more contradictory demand? Calling one “Lord” and at the same time trying to correct Him! When life is calm and easy, we tend to sit in judgment on Peter. But when the gales begin to rise and our security is threatened, we have a strong tendency to join in chorus with the apostle of old.

My “not so, Lord” moment came in 2015 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It happened at the worst possible moment; it did not fit with my best-laid plans. I was in the midst of publishing a supplementary hymnal for our churches here in Brazil. Things were coming along fairly well, but there was much work left to be done. This was March. The music conference, where the book would be presented, was in July. It seemed like horrible timing. But God had not lost control. He brought me through surgery here in Brazil. I had begun working again in earnest on my hymnal about two weeks later. Soon I discovered that I had new limitations. Soon I realized that, as Paul David Tripp says in his book *Suffering*, I would not be able to “escape the regular disruption of [my] life and plans that happens in a world that doesn’t operate as God designed it to operate.” We call those disruptions “suffering.” And I was learning that my faithful God would be faithful through my suffering.

God was at work both humbling me and teaching me that He always has good intentions. Because of my new limitations, others were stepping up to do some of that things that I always had done. The hymnal came out on time, and the music conference was a success. I was extremely humbled to have to say that it was all in spite of me and my new weakness rather than because of me and my abilities.

Fast-forward to July of 2019. Our daughter and son-in-law and their two precious little ones (Aaron and Emily) left for their first term of service in Japan on July 23. Again my heart has a tendency to cry, “Not so, Lord!” I understand (at least in part) what they will face, and I want to spare them from the difficulties they will encounter. But the same God who helped us adapt to life here in Brazil thirty-three years ago will help them now. He is the same. He is able. He will be all that they will need. My grandmother-heart will suffer separation. But with the eyes of faith it is not hard to see that this momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

To quote C. H. Spurgeon, “Let us recall the frail claim we hold on our *temporal blessings*. . . . We should love with the love which expects death and separations. Our *health* is equally precarious. We are like the frail flowers of the field; we cannot expect to bloom forever. Do not set your affections upon things of earth, but seek those things which are above. . . . In heaven all joys are perpetual and eternal.”

May God grant us the eternal-sightedness to accept temporary suffering gladly from the hand of Him whom we call “Lord.”

Jan Alexander and her husband, Ed, have served in Brazil for the past thirty-three years. Ed is the director of a Bible college where Jan teaches piano lessons and English. She enjoys producing music for the Brazilian churches. They have four children who are currently serving the Lord in full-time ministry.





## Wyoming Regional Fellowship

Jay Sprecher

The Wyoming FBFI Regional Fellowship joined forces with Northwest Baptist Missions on April 29 and 30 for their spring meeting. Pastor Richard Hartman and Grace Baptist Church of Kemmerer, Wyoming, were gracious hosts of the meeting. Despite a spring snowstorm that closed some roads, there were seventeen-to-twenty pastors and wives at each of the sessions. The theme was "Ministry in Times like These." Evangelist Monte Leavell of Eagle, Idaho, preached both Monday evening and Tuesday morning. Pastor Richard Hartman preached on Monday evening, and Pastor Nathaniel Ensley of Blessed Hope Baptist Church, Burns, Wyoming, preached on Tuesday. Pastor Joe Lacey of Grace Baptist Church, Rexburg, Idaho, conducted a helpful summit session on Tuesday morning.

One attendee shared the following summary: "I've been to larger fellowships but never one in which the messages and fellowship were a better hand-in-glove fit for our needs."



## Chesapeake Bay Regional Fellowship

Robert Condict

The Chesapeake Bay Region of FBFI had its regional meeting at Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church in Baldwin, Maryland, on April 8–9. Matt Recker served as our keynote speaker. On Tuesday a group of men met at Restoration Farm for a morning of Scripture challenge and fellowship. Kent Ramler, Tim Leaman, and Matt Recker ministered to the group. Twelve men participated in the fellowship.



## Annual Fellowship

Doug Wright

Red Rocks Baptist Church in Morrison, Colorado, is hard to beat not only when it comes to the location but also when it comes to care from a gracious church family. Pastor Les Heinze, his staff, and other hardworking people hosted the 99<sup>th</sup> Annual FBFI Fellowship on June 10–12. On Monday chaplains Mike Ascher and Tavis Long spearheaded excellent training sessions for the chaplains. Before the opening session Monday night, FBFI board members and their wives joined the chaplains and their families for dinner.

Main-sessions speakers spoke on the priority of common prayer, true Christian fellowship, evangelism, and perseverance in keeping with this year's theme, "Prioritizing the Local Church." Three workshop time slots allowed the attendees to receive supplemental information and instruction. Starry Heinze, Linda Shumate, and Carol Roland treated the ladies to workshops specifically for them.

Each year our fellowship is greatly blessed by the host church. Red Rocks provided not only a delicious dinner Monday evening but also noon meals Tuesday and Wednesday. Several area churches and the International Baptist College and Seminary joined the meeting, helping with music by providing either specials or by being part of a joint Wednesday-night choir. Twenty-four exhibitors also made the meeting more enjoyable. These exhibitors expose our FBFI members to services that may assist them in their ministries—they also help pay for the conference!

Among the blessings of a "Western" meeting is getting to enjoy the fellowship of men and ladies who may not be able to travel to the East Coast. This year was no exception. Our yearly gathering is an important time of fellowship, instruction, and encouragement. Next year we'll be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Annual Fellowship to be held on June 15–17 at Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

## Pacific Rim Report

Fifteen years ago FBFI participated in a Congress of Fundamentalists in Tokyo. And just as it had done in the Caribbean several years earlier, the leadership of FBFI responded to calls from the Congress participants to help organize more frequent gatherings for the education and edification of national pastors and other leaders. Local leadership has always been the key to the success of FBFI. Although the Caribbean meetings have been held almost every year, the vast distances in the Pacific Rim have allowed fewer meetings to be held there, usually every other year and in various countries including the Philippines, Singapore, and Guam. It is common for two meetings to be held back-to-back in two different locations in the Philippines. On May 28–30, Dr. Bob Jones, Dr. David Innes, and Dr. John Vaughn travelled to Cebu,



Philippines, to speak in the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Asian Baptist Mission Conference at Bible Baptist Fellowship Church and to represent FBFI among the brethren they have come to know so well.

A second meeting was held at Bob Jones Memorial Bible College in conjunction with Gospel Light Baptist Church on June 4–6. Between these two meetings in the Philippines, Drs. Jones and Vaughn traveled to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) to meet with believers there. Discretion requires that reports of activities in restricted-access countries be kept to a minimum. Over the two weeks spent in the Pacific Rim, FBFI leaders from the US met with numerous national leaders. Dr. Rogelio Baladjay did, as always, a wonderful job of coordinating the details of the meeting in Cebu, with missions presentations, meals, music, and many blessings for the huge crowd that gathered at Bible Baptist. Likewise, Dr. Phil Kamibayashiyama and his team anticipated and managed every detail of the meeting at BJMBC. In fact, “Dr. K” had been in the US for several weeks, arriving home in Manila the day before the conference began, but his leadership was very much in evidence. Doug Bachorik continues to lead an impressive music ministry at BJMBC, one of the highlights of the meeting. This was the first conference and the largest gathering in the beautiful new facilities of Bob Jones Memorial Bible College.



The speakers spoke often of what a blessing it was to attend these meetings. The gospel is finding free course in the Pacific Rim, and leaders there are growing and taking charge of the planning and execution of FBFI activities that continue to be a source of help and blessing. They appreciate the prayers and support of their fellow FBFI friends in the US and abroad.





It is, in one sense, a very easy matter to get out of the place of trial; but then we get out of the place of blessing also.

—an unnamed author quoted by Arthur Pink

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

—Psalm 119:71

Jesus did not liken the kingdom of God to a diamond, but to a pearl. Of all precious stones, the pearl has the humblest origin. It begins with a wound and is created out of God's resources for healing the wound.

—David M. Atkinson

Where a man's wound is, that is where his genius [effectiveness] will be. That is exactly where he will give his major gift to the community.

—Robert Bly

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.

—Booker T. Washington

It is doubtful whether God can greatly use a man until He has deeply wounded him.

—A. W. Tozer

We cannot learn apart from pain.

—Aristotle

The school of affliction graduates rare scholars.

—Eleanor Doan

Wisdom comes by suffering.

—Aeschylus (525–456 BC)

Wisdom is oftentimes nearer when we stoop than when we soar.

—William Wordsworth

Broken leaders produce whole followers.

—Alan E. Nelson

Those who do not know how to weep with their whole heart don't know how to laugh either.

—Golda Meir

Borderland experiences (periods of doubt, difficulty and pain) may produce despair and blackness but will probably also offer the opportunity for enormous creativity.

—Dana Greene

When looking for a leader . . . we inquire how skillful he is. . . . We should be inquiring how poor in spirit . . . and meek he is.

—Thomas á Kempis

Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.

—E. H. Chapin

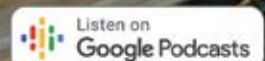
Pain is this grave but kindly teacher of immortal secrets, this conferrer of liberty.

—unknown British author

Compiled by Dr. David M. Atkinson, pastor emeritus, Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana, and itinerant preacher.

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lan-guage | noun 1.a. Communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols.

## ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

So I was watching a video in which the rock star Bono interviewed Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*. Don't ask me why I did this. And something in their talk got my hermeneutical goat.

Hermeneutical goats are hard to get; they're very expensive. But Peterson got mine. The old pastor, clearly in his twilight years (he is now deceased), reflected back on his life and—to be frank—slandered the Christian community of his childhood. He said that in their simple minds, there were no metaphors in the Bible; every last thing in it was literally true. My hermeneutical goat bleated loudly as he passed from me to Peterson.

Nobody—*nobody*—who speaks any human language could take every metaphor literally. That's because language is metaphorical all the way to its roots. It would be impossible to communicate without an intuitive understanding of metaphor. Even *metaphor* started as a metaphor. It meant something like "to carry together." The *-phor* comes from φέρω (*phero*), meaning "to carry," and it shows up in many English words, from "Christopher" ("Christ-bearer") to "semaphore" ("sign bearer"). A metaphor "carries" two things "together"; it transfers the name of one thing to another thing in order to point up a similarity between them.

"God is my rock." Via this metaphor the Bible transfers key qualities of rocks to God Himself: solidity, stability. Metaphors are rich precisely because they don't specify the points of similarity; there is room for your imagination. But no Christian or Jew in history has ever wondered, "Is God an igneous, sedimentary, or metamorphic rock?" Likewise, no believer has ever speculated as to the cubic volume of the saltwater bottle God uses to collect human tears. No one has ever asked what varnish was used on Jesus when He said, "I am the door."

I was just listening to Matthew 16 this morning, and even the poor, often dimwitted disciples knew the difference between literal and metaphorical uses of a word. Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." At first the twelve thought this (apparently new) metaphor had something to do with their failure to bring bread. They took it literally. But Jesus redirected them. In the passage, He doesn't actually explain the metaphor—He just tells them they got it wrong and then repeats Himself. And then they get it. He was comparing the Pharisees' *teaching* to leaven.

There are occasions like this, when Bible readers may at first miss a metaphorical reference. There are also times when it's not 100% clear whether the Bible is being literal or metaphorical. (I experienced this the other day in Revelation 2:20–23.) But to level the general charge that a group of believing Bible readers "doesn't understand metaphor" is to call them the dumbest people in history.

Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. is a Logos Pro at Faithlife and the recent author of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*. He blogs at [byfaithweunderstand.com](http://byfaithweunderstand.com).



This is not a popular topic. Yet the New Testament lays out necessary guidelines for maintaining both the internal health and the external integrity of the church as the body of Christ. Unfortunately, the very word “discipline” conjures up negative impressions. But discipline is first and primarily positive; only when the positive protocols are breached are the “negative” consequences of discipline required. And even the more negative aspects of discipline have an entirely positive aim. The goal is never mere punishment, but restoration, health, and holiness for the glory of God.

## “Ordinary” Church Discipline

Several passages address what might be termed “ordinary” church discipline—confrontation with the goal of restoration (Gal. 6:1–5; 2 Tim. 2:24–26). Depending on one’s response to these ordinary measures, extraordinary measures may be necessary, including even excommunication—but still always with the hope and goal of restoration.

Matthew 18 is sometimes called Jesus’ Ecclesiological Discourse because it anticipates the church (18:17) and addresses spiritual relationships within the kingdom. The passage maps out the potential full extent of discipline. Jesus includes the earthly procedure for addressing necessary disciplinary issues and assures heavenly ratification as those procedures are properly carried out (Matt. 18:13–20). The instruction lays out four successive levels for dealing with a sinning member of the community:

1. Private (v. 15)—“between thee and him alone”; if that fails, then,
2. Representative (v. 16)—“take with thee one or two more”; if that fails, then,
3. Ecclesiastical (v. 17)—“tell it unto the church”; if that fails, then,
4. Excommunicational (v. 17)—“let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

Remember who records this—Matthew, *the publican*! But that final verdict (v. 17) is not a call for unloving scorn or disdain. The Pharisees certainly reacted to Gentiles and tax collectors with scorn and disdain, but Jesus never did. Jesus treated publicans and Gentiles as sinners (cf. Matt. 5:46–47), but as sinners to whom He reached out (Matt. 9:10–11), whom He befriended for the sake of the kingdom (Matt. 11:19), and who were capable of still being won over (Matt. 10:3; 21:31–32). It simply means you start all over at square one and relate to this one as though he is an unbeliever who still needs the first movements of the grace of God in his heart.

That disciplinary context governs what follows in 18:18–20—a statement that is bookended by two indisputably clear

references to the same subject: dealing with a sinning brother (18:15–17 and 18:21–23, 35). The language of 18:18 echoes 16:19; the keys of the kingdom are the gospel message and its confession of Christ. In 16:19 the kingdom keys pertain to extending or withholding recognition of who has access to heaven based on his confession of Christ. In 18:18 the kingdom keys pertain to extending or withholding fellowship based on one’s response to his accountability to the community of God’s people. In both cases, the actions of the church on earth reflect the previous determination of heaven (not *vice versa*). It is on the basis of that gospel message and that confession of Christ that we may pronounce with authority who is and is not admitted into the kingdom of heaven, and who is or is not to be admitted into the fellowship of the church. The church, on the authority of Christ, retains the right to extend or withhold Christian recognition and fellowship in the case of sinning “brethren” based on how they respond to necessitated discipline. The NT letters, however, take the ramifications of discipline one step further.

## Extraordinary Church Discipline: Delivering to Satan

Two passages in particular address this component of extreme church discipline—1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Timothy 1:20 (cf. 2 Tim. 2:16–18). Since 1 Corinthians 5 furnishes the fullest discussion, that will be our base text supplemented with the Timothy passages.

First, who exactly is this blatantly immoral man sheltered by many within the Corinthian church? He is clearly a *professing* Christian. Paul’s repeated reference to the church that this man is “among you” (5:1, 2, 13) as well as their responsibility to “judge them that are within” assumes the man’s presence within the church. It seems equally apparent that only the man is a professing “brother”; the woman appears to have no connection to the church since she is not included in the discussion or the disciplinary recommendation.

But that raises an important point: is this man a *genuine* Christian? Some describe this passage as “the case of the sinning brother.” But Paul says no such thing. He is consistently and purposely vague about the spiritual condition of the offender. He refers to him generically (5:1) as “he/him that hath done this deed” (5:2, 3), “such an one” (5:5), and “that wicked person” (5:13). The stated goal “that the spirit *may be saved*” (5:5) assumes that nothing is certain. Paul’s accompanying instruction regarding separation specifies the church’s response to “any man that is *called* a brother” (5:11). In short, he is never identified outright as a “brother” because Paul’s whole point is that whether this man is a brother remains to be seen.

# An In-House Discussion

## Discipline in the Church for the Glory of God

Second, what exactly is Paul's instruction regarding this man? He is not ambiguous or undecided in his counsel. He spells out the necessary act of discipline five times: *expulsion*.

- He should "be taken away from among you" (5:2).
- He should be "deliver[ed] . . . unto Satan" (5:5).
- He should be "purge[d] out" (5:7).
- He should not be "associated" with you (5:9, 11).
- He should be "put away from among" you (5:13).

Third, who has the authority to take such an action? Clearly an apostle does (1 Tim. 1:20), but Paul authorizes the church to do so as well (1 Cor. 5:4–5).

Fourth, who are "candidates" for this extreme discipline of being "delivered unto to Satan"? They are identified as professing but unrepentantly sinning believers. This would be someone involved in open sin (e.g., sexual immorality, but not limited to this since Paul commands the church to deliver "such a one as this" to Satan, 1 Cor. 5:5), or someone within the church who has rejected (literally, pushed away from oneself) faith and a good conscience, resulting in blasphemous speech or behavior (1 Tim. 1:20), false and injurious doctrine (2 Tim. 2:17–18), and/or rejection of apostolic doctrine (2 Tim. 4:14–15).

Fifth, what is the optimal goal of delivering one to Satan? Severe as it sounds, the goal is not condemnation, but spiritual rehabilitation ("that the spirit may be saved," 1 Cor. 5:5). It involves (1) physical chastisement ("for the *destruction* of the flesh," 1 Cor. 5:5) up to and including death (at God's providential discretion, of course); (2) spiritual expurgation (for the destruction of the *flesh* that the *spirit* may be saved, 1 Cor. 5:5) centering on the destruction of the offender's carnal inclinations; and (3) spiritual discipline via stern punishment rather than instruction ("that they may learn not to blaspheme," 1 Tim. 1:20).

Sixth, what exactly is meant by "delivering" someone to Satan? Charles Hodge identifies two major interpretations "from the earliest times": (1) it's simply synonymous with excommunication; or (2) it includes an express and purposeful release of the offender to the power of Satan (for which Hodge offers several arguments).

On the first view, this is simply disfellowship or excommunication, thereby turning the disobedient one out of the church and solely into Satan's domain (Schreiner, *Paul*, 302). Gromacki takes this view but then adds, "This radical step of deliverance to Satan was an apostolic prerogative, not given to any church or to any other individual." That seems to imply that the post-apostolic church no longer has any authority to decide upon or to enforce excommunication or disfellowshipping. But surely its inclusion in the epistolary literature is paradigmatic and intended for the future

guidance of the church in similar situations. The view that "delivering to Satan" simply means excommunication or disfellowship does not seem to account adequately for the language.

On the second view, delivering one to Satan is a conscious, specific, deliberate, and express (i.e., verbalized) act in extreme, public, and unrepentant cases of blasphemy in life (immorality) or doctrine (active, public heterodoxy)—areas where public sin gravely threatens the moral purity (1 Cor. 5:6) or doctrinal purity (2 Tim. 2:17–18) of the church. That it involves expulsion is clear from the other terminology used ("take away," "purge," "do not keep company," "put away"), but the elevated language of "delivering to Satan" suggests something more.

Earlier in 1 Corinthians Paul solemnly warns that the collective church is God's holy temple and that God will defile those who defile that temple (3:16–17). Church discipline is a serious affair, particularly in extreme moral or doctrinal cases; even so, the ultimate aim of the action is remedial, not judgmental (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5–11). For success, however, it assumes a solidarity within the Christian community; there is no excuse for one assembly to ignore the duly exercised discipline of another assembly.

### A Prayer

What does this delivering to Satan "sound" like? Below is a prayer that solemnly seeks to address such a situation in a way that is as scripturally informed as possible. (Bracketed references are to 1 Corinthians unless otherwise noted.)

O Lord, by Your gracious calling You have translated us out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of Your beloved Son. We are Your cultivated field [3:9] from which You harvest glory to Yourself. You have indwelt us by Your Spirit, making us Your holy temple [3:16–17]. But defilement has entered Your temple [3:17a]—defilement over which Your indwelling Spirit grieves [3:16; Eph. 4:30], over which we your people mourn [5:2], over which even the watching world stumbles [5:1], and which defiles Your holy temple and therefore deserves Your destruction [3:17].

Father, we are gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [5:4], who, in just such a context as this, promised His presence wherever two or three gather in His name [Matt. 18:20], and who granted to His disciples the keys of the kingdom that we should, by His authority, proclaim both the remission and retention of sins already decided in heaven and revealed in Your Word [Matt. 18:18]. You are our witness, Lord, that we have

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## At a Glance

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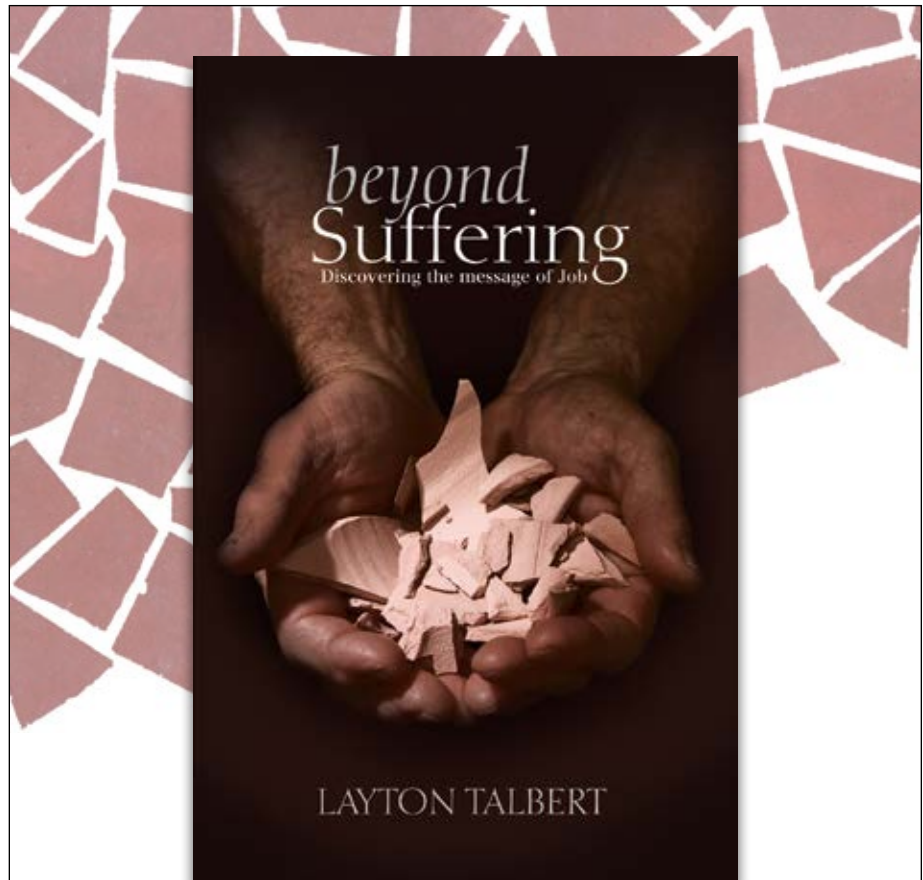
followed the injunctions of Your Word [Matt. 18:15–17] and earnestly sought to recover this one from sin and defilement. But he is resolute in the pursuit of what You Yourself condemn. Were he a worldling who made no claim to Christ and professed no attachment to Your church, we would have no authority or desire to judge in this matter [5:12a, 13a]. But you have commanded us to judge those that are within [5:12b], so that we have no choice but to obey You and to consider him a heathen [Matt. 18:17].

Therefore, by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ [5:4], who has given His sacred assurance that whatever Your people agree on earth will be done [Matt. 18:19], and who alone possesses the ultimate authority to give anyone into the hand of the wicked one [Job 1–2; Luke 22:31], we solemnly agree, by Your power and according to the charge of Your Word, to deliver this one over to Satan [5:5]. As we, in obedience, remove this wicked person from our midst [5:13], we ask You to remove him from the blessings and protections of attachment to the people of God, from the promises of assurance and provision in Your Word, from the benefits of any association with Christ's kingdom. Grant to Satan, Your enemy-slave, whatever degree of permission You please. Set this one loose in Satan's domain and give the wicked one as much leash as You see fit. Make him a prey to the powers of the kingdom of darkness, for the destruction of his flesh with its carnal appetites, its mind which is enmity against You and leads to death [Rom. 8:7], its will that is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be [Rom. 8:7].

O heart-knowing God [Acts 1:12; 15:8], You know it gives us all pain and no pleasure to take this action or pray this way. Our only pleasure resides in the hope "that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." So in wrath, remember mercy. But do whatever is necessary, both in this one, and in each of us, to purge and purify Your church. Grant Your people who hear these things to fear [Acts 5:11]. Grace us to detect and reject even the leaven of little sins that will work insidiously and

relentlessly to defile us [5:6]. Grace us to remember the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb, who bore Your righteous wrath in our place, that we may observe continually the feast of salvation to which You have called us, purging out the leaven of our old lives of sin and corruption from which You delivered us, pursuing a life of transparent genuineness and loyalty to our profession of faith in Christ [5:7–8].

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ISBN: 978-1-59166-620-2

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# The Priority of Provision under the Authority of the Local Church

## The Purpose of Provision

The singular purpose of Christian ministry is the delivery of the gospel. Whether through proclamation or education, the riches and glory of the gospel are to be shared with every man (Col. 1:26–28). Foundations Baptist Fellowship International (FBFI) endorses more than forty military chaplains to fulfill this singular purpose of ministry by taking the gospel to the men and women who wear the cloth of the nation.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the role and purpose of these men are often misunderstood. In the eyes of many ministerial colleagues, the vocational identity that chaplains have with a nonchurch institution is confusing. Even among members of FBFI, there are those who misunderstand the purpose and role of the military chaplains they endorse. Some even fail to acknowledge chaplains as ordained ministers of the gospel.

Nevertheless, chaplains are ordained clergy, clergy sent out to do the work of gospel ministry by local churches. Therefore, chaplains are obligated (as are their fellow ministers of the gospel) to meet the qualifications of a bishop.<sup>2</sup> However, these qualifications merely establish the chaplain as a candidate for gospel ministry; it is the faithful and honest execution of these qualifications that maintains the integrity of his ministry.

## The Priority of Provision

To understand how the military chaplain executes the office of a bishop within a military milieu, it is important to understand the term “provision.” “Provision” within the context of institutional ministry is a technical term. While the various military branches nuance the term with their own applications, they all operate under codified US law that defines “provision” as “religious services.” Legally, these religious services are delivered by chaplains who “conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member.”<sup>3</sup> Per the US government, then, chaplains are professional churchmen.

Therefore, provision is not social work; it is not counseling; it is not even the moral or ethical advisement chaplains deliver. Rather, provision is the delivery of doctrinally specific content, such as public worship, sacraments, rites, ordinances, Scripture study, and religious education.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, to the FBFI chaplain, it is the uncompromising commitment to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” FBFI chaplains take very seriously the *a priori* charge to “do the work of an evangelist” and to “make full proof of [their] ministry.” This priority of provision is what drives the FBFI chaplain; it is what compels him to service; it is what sets him apart to gospel ministry.

## The Policy of Provision

While the delivery of the gospel is fundamental, chaplains also are governed by federal policy. Currently, this federal policy is extremely favorable in that it protects both the chaplain and his rights under the Constitution. The formation of federal policy as it pertains to religious ministry begins with the Constitution, namely the Bill of Rights, which states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”<sup>5</sup> In several landmark decisions, federal courts have used the Prohibition Clause to determine that the military chaplaincy is a constitutional component of the armed services.<sup>6</sup>

It is up to the individual military branches to ensure that this constitutional liberty is guarded. Again, policy—in this case US law—helps them in doing so. Title 10 of the US Code legally delineates how services are to guard this religious liberty.<sup>7</sup> At minimum, the law requires chaplains to provide religious services to the soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coast guardsmen under their charge. The willful negligence of this provision is to violate US law. But the law does not define what these religious services (US Army and US Air Force) or divine services (US Navy) entail. It only states that services must be held when practicable and according to the manners and forms of the church from which the chaplain is sent. Determining what falls into the religious service category is at the discretion of the individual services that employ chaplains and the endorsing agencies that send chaplains into the services. Therefore, it is important to meld the policy of the respective armed service with the policy of the endorsing agency.

The US Army has determined that religious services include the provision of “essential elements of religion to include worship, religious rites, sacraments, and ordinances, holy days and observances, pastoral care and counseling, and religious education.”<sup>8</sup> The US Air Force defines provision as the delivery of “religious rites, rituals, sacraments, services, education, and faith formation programs.”<sup>9</sup> And the US Navy determines that provision occurs when chaplains participate in “faith group-specific content [that] includes, but is not limited to, public worship, sacraments, rites, ordinances, scripture study, religious education, faith group-specific counseling, the collection and distribution of gifts given or received as an act of faith or worship, and other religious activities.”<sup>10</sup>

Admittedly, this provides the military chaplain only with the method of provision. It ignores, thankfully, the content of the religious services being provided. Since USC 10 6031 stipulates that a chaplain is to “conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church

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# Salvation Regardless of Age

I marvel at the miracle of a person being saved, whether in youth or old age. Salvation is for people of all ages! I want to share with you two accounts of individuals who came to the Lord Jesus Christ recently.

The first one is about an elderly lady who was led to the Lord by Mrs. Susan Wielander, a pastor's wife in Marathon, Florida. I was so blessed by this lady's story that I had Mrs. Wielander write it down so I could share it with those who read our articles. Here is what she wrote.

At the exhortation of our brother in Christ, Michael, our church visited Key West Rehab Center one Sunday afternoon—about an hour south of us. He planned it, and off we went caravanning down to Key West. About twenty elderly people were gathered in the cafeteria waiting for our group. We all went around greeting the dear people, sang "Amazing Grace," and then the preaching began. We all stood still—taking in the message from God's Word. As soon as the pastor finished preaching, I walked straight across the room to an elegant, gentle, elderly woman who was sitting in her wheelchair. She hadn't necessarily stood out more than the others, and I didn't even know why I just crossed the room directly to her, but there I was. She and I hugged each other, and then I sat down and started speaking with her.

She told me she was ninety-seven, has five children, and several years after her first husband passed away (when she was only thirty-one), she married a wonderful man named Frank who loved her and her children. She had gone to church almost her whole life. I told her about how Christ came to this earth to die for our sins and that He rose again. I asked her if she had ever heard that before. She said softly yes, she had. I told her that we don't have to earn heaven, but that Jesus already paid for it with His precious blood—that His blood is the only thing that can wash away our sin. I asked her if she had ever heard that before. She thoughtfully replied, "Why, no, I haven't." Then I said, "Do you know, there is a door to your heart—and that right now, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart and is knocking? Have you ever heard that before?" She said again, very thoughtfully, "No, I haven't." I said, "He would like to come in and

live in your heart and wash away all your sins, and be your Father. He is still knocking at the door. Will you open the door of your heart to Him?" She gave a small smile and said, "Yes!" We each bowed our heads and she prayed on her own: "Jesus, will You please come into my heart and forgive me of my sins and save me?" We ended praying, and we sat looking at each other. Tears started rolling down her soft face, and she declared, "Imagine that! An old bag like me getting saved!" I assured her that she definitely was not an old bag but that she was a new creature! She is now one of my dearest friends and my sister in Christ. Our church continues to go down to the Rehab Center in Key West.

The second account is about an eleven-year-old boy who was recently saved in our meetings. This past January I held meetings in Lilburn, Georgia, where my son Todd is pastor of Berean Baptist Church. On Sunday morning when I finished preaching I began the invitation by asking that if anyone wanted to come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, to indicate that by raising their hand. A man on the main floor raised his hand, then a young man up in the balcony raised his hand and held it up for a long time. Then I stated that if they would come forward, there would be someone to show them from the Bible how to accept Christ as their Savior. The man who raised his hand came forward; as I looked up in the balcony, the boy was whispering to his mother. Apparently he wanted her to come with him, because I saw her nodding her head. As they started to come down from the balcony, he looked at me and raised his hand in the air again. It was almost as if he were saying, "I'm coming, wait for me!" It was a most touching scene; and he did accept Christ as his Savior. I called my son a month later and asked him about this boy who came forward. Todd told me that he and his family were still coming to church and that he was going to be baptized on Easter morning. What a blessing! One lady saved at the age of ninety-seven, one boy saved at the age of eleven. If you are not saved, the Lord Jesus will save you regardless of your age; please read Romans 10:9–13.

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of which he is a member," the endorsing agency is invited by the government to determine the content of its chaplain's provision.<sup>11</sup>

In relation to the government, FBFI serves as a Department of Defense-recognized religious organization that functions primarily to perform religious ministries to a nonmilitary lay constituency and has met the religious purposes test.<sup>12</sup> As such, FBFI possess the ecclesiastical authority to endorse and withdraw endorsement for religious ministry professionals serving under their authority.

FBFI, not the government, determines which religious ministry professionals will serve under the FBFI's authority. Since FBFI holds that religious ministry professionals perform religious and pastoral acts based on ecclesiastical rather than military credentials, it follows that the ultimate responsibility for the substantive nature of the chaplain's religious ministry rests with the chaplain's sending churches.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, FBFI policy states that the churches represented by chaplains should be fundamental Baptist churches that adhere to FBFI standards at all points and "each chaplain must be guided in his ministry not merely on an individual interpretation of Scripture, but by the theology and ecclesiology set forth in the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International Constitution and Statement of Faith."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the government lets FBFI determine the chaplains they will endorse; FBFI relies on churches to send those chaplains as well as determine what those chaplains believe; and those churches must be in agreement with statement of faith and standards of FBFI.

### The Power of Provision

In 1 Corinthians 9:14–23 the word "gospel" occurs nine times. Paul introduces this pericope with the statement, "The Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Paul goes on to detail the centrality of the gospel to his ministry. It is the proclamation of the gospel that is his sole purpose. It is the gospel that gives power to his ministry. It is the gospel that receives the glory. Likewise, military chaplains, specifically FBFI chaplains, find power in their ministry through preaching the gospel. Like Paul, FBFI chaplains cry, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" It is why FBFI endorses chaplains to enter the military. It is why chaplains voluntarily choose to don the cloth of the nation. Though FBFI chaplains serve a variety of military branches, each with a unique mission, function, and task, FBFI chaplains are united in the fundamental fact that the gospel empowers them as ordained ministers of the gospel to provide for the men and women who wear the uniforms of the United States of America.

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<sup>1</sup> An "endorsement" is a written statement signed by the designated endorsing official of an ecclesiastical endorsing organization certifying that an individual is in good standing with the faith group or denomination and, in the opinion of the endorsing official, is qualified to perform the full range of ministry, including all sacraments, rites, ordinances, rituals, and liturgies required by members of the faith group. Ecclesiastical endorsement is a condition of employment. An individual must obtain and maintain a full and active ecclesiastical endorsement to be employed as a chaplain.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9.

<sup>3</sup> 10 USC 6031.

<sup>4</sup> SECNAVINST 1730.1E: *Religious Ministry within the Department of the Navy*.

<sup>5</sup> US Constitution. Amend. I.

<sup>6</sup> For example, in the otherwise notorious landmark case *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), in which the Supreme Court struck down prayer in public school, the court also ruled that "since government has deprived such persons of the opportunity to practice their faith at places of their choice . . . government may . . . provide substitutes where it requires such persons to be." This argument was furthered in *Katcoff v. Marsh* (1986), where the Second District Court maintained that the government's "ultimate objective of the chaplaincy may be secular in the sense that it seeks to maintain the efficiency of the Army by improving the morale of our military personnel, its immediate purpose is to promote religion by making it available, albeit on a voluntary basis, to our armed forces." In other words, the chaplaincy has an immediate purpose of aiding the government in providing a safeguard against the violation of the Prohibition Clause, so it provides chaplains in order for service members to voluntarily choose to freely exercise their religion.

<sup>7</sup> For the US Army, Title 10 states, "Each chaplain shall, when practicable, hold appropriate religious services at least once on each Sunday for the command to which he is assigned" (USC 10 3547). The US Air Force is codified in USC 10 8547 and states the same thing. USC 10 6031 is perhaps the most descriptive in that it stipulates to the US Navy that "an officer in the Chaplain Corps may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member" and that "the commanders of vessels and naval activities to which chaplains are attached shall cause divine service to be performed on Sunday, whenever the weather and other circumstances allow it to be done; and it is earnestly recommended to all officers, seamen, and others in the naval service diligently to attend at every performance of the worship of Almighty God."

<sup>8</sup> AR 165-1: *Army Chaplain Corps Activities*.

<sup>9</sup> AFI 52-101: *Chaplain Planning and Organizing*.

<sup>10</sup> SECNAVINST 1730.1E.

<sup>11</sup> This is where it becomes challenging, especially for independent Baptists who have been historically nondenominational. What federally recognized body can determine the manner and forms of chaplains who are members of and sent out of local, autonomous, Baptist churches? FBFI has stepped in to fulfill this role. Because FBFI is not a denomination, it is important to understand FBFI policy as it relates to the government, the chaplain, and to local churches.

<sup>12</sup> DODI 1304.28: *Guidance for the Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Departments*.

<sup>13</sup> FBFI Chaplains Manual.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



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