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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



THE FUNDAMENTALS: The Bible



THE FUNDAMENTALS: The Bible



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Our sincere thanks to Dr. David Shumate for coordinating this issue of **FrontLine** magazine.

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O How I Love Your Law

God's people have always loved His Word. Clement of Rome, who ministered just after the apostles, instructed his readers, "Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit." Augustine is famously quoted as calling the Holy Scriptures "our letters from home." Charles Spurgeon affirmed, "Within the Scripture there is a balm for every wound, a salve for every sore." To this we, God's people today, could all add our personal confirmation.

Occasionally one hears conservative Christians accused of making an idol out of the Bible ("bibliolatry"). To this slander I would simply reply, "Read Psalm 119!" From beginning to end the psalmist seeks, finds, and rejoices in God through His Holy Word. For example, in verses 97–104 he declares his ardent love and his profound loyalty to the Scriptures.

97. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.
98. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.
99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.
100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.
101. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.
102. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.
103. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

Verses 98–100 proclaim that the Word is better than every source of human wisdom, whether it be the shrewdness of one's adversaries (v. 98), the insight of one's teachers (v. 99), or the discernment of the experienced (v. 100). Verses 101–104 show the Scripture's value for practical living. When we keep God's Word, it keeps us from going the wrong way (v. 101). We experience His sayings as sweet and delightful to our souls (v. 103). And as we understand His precepts, we reject every untrue path (v. 104).

But notice especially verse 102: "From your decisions I have not turned aside, for You Yourself have taught me" (author's translation). To truly learn

from God's Word is to be taught by God Himself. The implication is plain: you cannot learn from God without learning from His personal communication, and you cannot submit to God without submitting to His personal instruction.

To love God is to love His Word.

This truth is exactly what is at stake in the many theological battles through the centuries over bibliology (the doctrine of the Bible). Against the heretic Marcion, the church maintained that all the Scriptures, the Old Testament as well as the New, are the Word of God. In the time of the Reformation, believers maintained that the Scriptures and not the institutional church are the final authority on matters of faith and practice, and they maintained the privilege of all believers to hear the Bible speak to them in their own language. Baptists suffered persecution for their conviction that their churches should be conducted according to the dictates of the Scriptures rather than those of the state. During the battles of the last century, fundamentalists stood for the complete inspiration and reliability of the Scriptures against the attacks of critical scholarship and liberal theology.

Today there are still conflicts surrounding God's Word, from mockery by unbelievers, to the mistranslations by cults, to the undermining of language itself by postmodernism, to claims of new revelation or inspiration, to the denial of the Scripture's sufficiency for life and godliness.

To understand and to stand against these continuing challenges, all Bible-believers must be grounded in the doctrine of the Scriptures. This issue of *FrontLine* does not pretend to cover all the issues (or any of them in depth), but it does outline some of the main areas of our understanding of the Scriptures. These include the Bible's production as the words of God through His supernatural control over the human writers ("inspiration"), its preservation through time and dissemination to us through copies and translations, its scope (the "canon"), its fundamental understandability ("perspicuity"), its complete reliability ("infallibility" and "inerrancy"), and its adequacy for our salvation and growth in godliness today ("sufficiency").

It is our fervent hope that God's people will have our love kindled afresh for the Word and that we will all strive to make it our "meditation all the day."

—David Shumate

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I just received the July/August edition of *FrontLine* yesterday and want to let you [Dr. Gordon Dickson] know that I really appreciate your articles and for coordinating this issue.

I read your introductory article late last night and "The Valley of Trouble" early this morning. As I continued to read through the magazine I also came across "Lessons from the Thorn." I found them all to be very instructive and helpful.

I have also read a few other articles and also found them to be very helpful.

I have been an FBFI member for a number of years and found this issue to be one of the most practical issues of *FrontLine*. I'm sure it speaks to many of us in helpful ways.

Thanks for your dedicated work.

Claude Paxton
Elida, OH

One of the sections of *FrontLine* that I always enjoy reading is *Straight Cuts*. In my own Bible reading, occasionally I'll come across something that I, as a non-theologian, am puzzled by, and I think, "That would be a good topic for *Straight Cuts*." So today I'm finally getting around to sending you a list of suggested passages. Thanks for considering these!

Steve Skaggs
Greenville, SC

I've recently thumbed through the July/August 2019 issue of *FrontLine* and wanted to make a few suggestions for improvement. The content is top-notch, so keep on doing what you do best: addressing the important issues in Fundamentalism.

The full-color glossy pages are exactly what I imagine a magazine should be. The images of the authors and descriptions of their backgrounds are interesting. The ads are pleasing to look at too. But I'd like to suggest some slight improvements in the layout. Be forewarned that I have no professional experience as a layout designer but, being a visually oriented person, I'd just like to see less dense text on each page and more images, pulled-out quotes, etc. I find myself reading "Israel My Glory" from cover to cover because the layout, as well as the text, are aesthetically comfortable to view. But I have a difficult time doing the same with *FrontLine*. Especially difficult is the "Sound Words" section, which I almost never read.

Please don't take this as a criticism but as a possible recommendation for improvement. Maybe I have a hard time sinking my eyes into the text of the articles because I'm just not scholarly enough. So it

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Gene Krehl's heart was burdened for the people of Mexico. He founded the Mexico Missions Special Support Fund, the focus of which is to provide scholarship assistance to Mexican men called to be pastors. Nine men who have received these funds have already graduated to serve the Lord. The Mission desires to honor Gene's memory by carrying on the work of the fund and Gene's vision to bring the gospel to the people of Mexico. Gene passed away May 9.



In February 2019, **Dr. Michael Privett** (michaelprivett.com) accepted the unanimous call to pastor Summit View Baptist Church (summitviewbaptistchurch.com) in Greenville, South Carolina. Then, on July 1, 2019, Michael began to serve as associate director of Vision2020Asia (vision2020Asia.org) while still shepherding the church. The plan is for him to become executive director of Vision2020Asia by January 2021. Michael still travels four-to-six times a year to Asia to minister in churches and train national church leaders.

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Is It Safe to Stand?

The Importance of the Inspiration and Inerrancy of the Bible

During operation Desert Storm, the 37th Airborne Engineer Battalion conducted the hazardous mission of clearing roads and neutralizing minefields to ensure the safety of advancing American combat forces. The US Air Force had dropped mines behind enemy lines to disrupt their infrastructure and inhibit their retreat. To drive through the desert was incredibly dangerous because, although most paths were safe, one landmine could have catastrophic consequences. One could never feel safe until there was the assurance that the area was completely cleared and that there were no hidden dangers lurking.

The same is true for the Bible: one cannot trust in its words with complete confidence unless there is the

assurance that every word is reliable and that there are no hidden errors lurking! An error is like a hidden landmine in its deceptiveness and destructiveness. Those who stand on error in doctrine will experience inevitable consequences. The questions, therefore, that must be addressed are: Is the Bible inerrant (free from all errors)? And, on what basis do we know?

The Importance of Inerrancy

As we honor the heritage of our fundamentalist roots, it is important to remember that the doctrine of inerrancy was at the center of the battle of that day. Of the ninety articles that were published in *The Fundamentals*, the first twenty-six articles (nearly 2/5 of its printed

pages) were dedicated to countering the attacks of Higher Criticism and to establishing the biblical doctrine of inerrancy and inspiration. These articles defended the authorship of the Pentateuch, Daniel, and Isaiah; the historicity of the early narratives in Genesis; and presented theological reasons as well as archeological evidence for the accuracy of Scripture. That our spiritual forefathers devoted such effort and resources to the doctrine of inerrancy testifies to their understanding of its supreme importance. They were acting like the 37th Airborne Engineer Battalion, clearing away the errors of distrust planted by liberal attacks on the Bible's trustworthiness.

The issue can be stated simply: "Can the Bible be trusted in every area, or is it a minefield of errors in which ultimately no ground can be trusted?" If Daniel did not write the Book of Daniel as the Bible claims (Dan. 12:4) and as Jesus confirmed (Mark 13:14), then what else did Daniel or Jesus say that should not be believed? And if what we can confirm in history is proved to be fiction, would it make sense to trust its pronouncements on that which is impossible to verify, such as unseen spiritual realities and the eternal destiny of men's souls?

The ultimate issue of inerrancy is authority. If the Scripture is not inerrant, then what basis do you use to determine what is true? Those who claim that the Bible contains the kernels of great truth in the imperfect chaff of human ideas strip the Bible of any vestige of authority external to man. Each person will give recognition to the words of Scripture only as those words conform to their religious sensitivities or human reasoning. To "lean . . . unto [our] own understanding" then would become an imperative in interpreting Scripture. The Bible ceases to be the ultimate standard that guides men perfectly into the way of truth and life but becomes merely the yes-man to one's own opinions and ideas.

An Example of Compromise

The decline of Fuller Theological Seminary provides a grim example of the doctrinal slide following the rejection of the doctrine of full inerrancy.¹ Adherents of the New Evangelicalism, in efforts to widen their influence, adopted a broader understanding of inerrancy. Billy Graham wanted *Christianity Today* to follow the view of Bernard Ramm, whose book *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* impugned the Bible's accuracy in scientific facts and opened the door for theistic evolution. The president of Fuller Theological Seminary, Edward J. Carnell, demonstrated this openness towards the possibility of biblical errors when in *The Case for Orthodox Theology* he presented the classic view of inerrancy as "only one orthodox option."² It was this battle over inerrancy that directly led to the exodus of the more conservative board members and faculty from Fuller in the summer of 1963. The assumption

that the Bible contains historical and scientific errors led to a questioning of the Bible's doctrinal and moral statements. Paul Jewett illustrates this in that after he changed his position on inerrancy, he began to teach that Paul made doctrinal errors in addressing the role of women.³ This attitude attacks the very nature of the Bible as a revelation of God's Word and ultimately leads to the complete denial of the faith. The president of Fuller in 2004 revealed the extent of that institution's demise by apologizing to the Mormon community for misrepresenting their beliefs and by encouraging Christians to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of Joseph Smith's birthday.⁴ The story of Fuller Theological Seminary, therefore, goes from rejecting the inerrancy of Scripture to the rejection of the exclusivity of Jesus Christ in salvation.

Harold Lindsell drew a moral conclusion at the time that the history of Fuller has proven true: "Whether it takes five or fifty years, any institution that departs from belief in an inerrant Scripture will likewise depart from other fundamentals of the faith and at last cease to be evangelical in the historical meaning of that term."⁵

The Basis of Authority and Assurance

The basis for the believer's doctrine on the Bible is the Bible and its teaching that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). This doctrine of inspiration should not be conceived as God "breathing into" the words or their authors as if the Bible contains an inward presence of God's Word. Inspiration means that the original autographs are the direct result of the mouth of God. B. B. Warfield concludes from this passage that a more emphatic assertion of divine production cannot be found.⁶

The Bible also reveals the process by which He gave us His words. The person of the Holy Spirit so moved upon the holy men of God that what they spoke and wrote was exactly what God intended (2 Pet. 1:21).⁷ The Scripture, therefore, treats the words of the biblical authors as the very words of God so that the New Testament can say "God said" when quoting from any portion of the Old Testament (Matt. 19:4–5 from Gen. 2:24; Acts 4:25 from Ps. 2:1–2). By the Holy Spirit, the prophets were just the instruments of the Lord's voice (Matt. 1:22; Acts 1:16; 2 Sam. 23:2).

Because God's Word is the means by which He reveals and represents Himself to mankind, the necessary consequence of inspiration is that the nature of Scripture reflects the character of God. God, therefore, has exalted His Word in accordance with His name (Ps. 138:2) so that all that is true of God is true of His words as well. God is true (Rom. 3:4; Rev. 3:7) and cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:17–18); His Word, therefore, is truth (John 17:17). Because God is righteous (Ps. 7:9), His statements are righteous (Pss. 33:4; 119:144).

The ultimate issue of inerrancy is authority. If the Scripture is not inerrant, then what basis do you use to determine what is true?

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How the Word of God Has

When I trusted Christ at the age of twenty-three, the Bible became precious to me. The more I read and heard the Bible, the more evident it became that I was reading and hearing God's Word. Of course, my experience was in no way unique. As Gregg Allison writes, "The church has historically acknowledged that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God himself."¹ Even the newest believer has an innate confidence in the Scriptures by virtue of the new birth and the witness of the Spirit. We know the Bible is God's Word. However, at some point believers must wonder how God's Word came to us. The testimony of Scripture and the verdict of history are that this happened through the initial divine inspiration and the subsequent providential preservation and translation of the inspired text.

Inspiration: The Origin of the Word

God's people have always believed in inspiration, that the Scriptures are "God breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16), meaning that, although God used human authors, their writings are God's Word as much as if He had spoken them with His own voice. Peter teaches that God had set apart the authors for the task, calling them "holy men of God" and stating that the Holy Spirit so moved them ("carried them along") that their statements were not of their own devising but from God (2 Pet. 1:21).

Although God uniquely inspired each Scripture at the time of its writing, the quality and benefits of inspiration extend through time. This is true even though the original physical writings have long since been destroyed or lost. Through copies and translations, God's Word has been providentially preserved and disseminated so that millions, if not billions, of people have been able to hear or read it for themselves.

Preservation: God's Inspired Word through Time

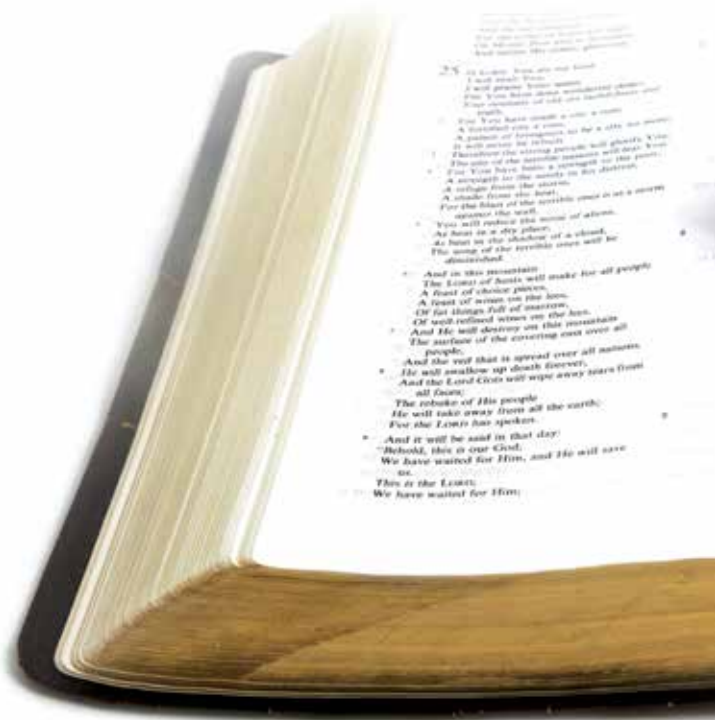
Preservation is the teaching that God, in His providence has caused His Word to continue through history. His Word stands forever in heaven (Ps. 119:89); however, preservation deals with the continuation of the Word in written form upon the earth.

The Scriptural Testimony of Preservation. Scripture testifies to its own preservation. There are passages that directly or indirectly teach preservation, although there are debates about some of them as to whether they are talking about the preservation of God's written Word or something else, such as its authority or reliability.² Beyond these, passages, however, preservation is presumed throughout the Scripture. To cite one of a multitude of Old Testament examples, the psalmist, writing centuries after Moses first wrote the Pentateuch, was able to declare, "Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning

all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:128). He could not have written this without the assurance that he had access to God's precepts. This same dynamic is in operation throughout Psalm 119 and in many other places in the Old Testament.

Fifteen hundred years after the Pentateuch was written, and a thousand years after David's psalms, Jesus Christ could pray the Father to sanctify the disciples through His Word (John 17:17). He had such confidence in the Scriptures that had come down to Him that He would quote them repeatedly in His teaching (Matt. 22:31–32; 26:54; Luke 4:17–21; 24:27; John 7:38; 13:18) and in His contests with diabolic (Matt. 4:1–11) and human opponents (Luke 20:17). In so doing, He put His divine approval on the conviction of His followers and His foes alike that "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35)—that is, that it is of absolute and unquestionable authority. The New Testament authors repeatedly quoted the Scripture of their day without doubting its authenticity. (A list of citations is unnecessary. Simply pick up your Bible and start reading in Matthew!)

The Providential Nature of Preservation. Why do we say that the preservation of the Scriptures is "providential"? "Providence" refers to the ultimate control of God over everything that happens to produce the results that He wants. His providence extends to and employs, among other things, the decisions and activities of people and the events of history. For example, by God's providence Ruth "happened" to glean in the fields of Boaz, the kinsman of her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:3), lead-



Been Passed Down to Us



ing ultimately to the birth of king David. The Lord further providentially preserved David's dynasty through the quick thinking of princess Jehoshabeath when she hid Joash from being killed by Athaliah (2 Chron. 22:11). These providential events are different from direct divine intervention, such as when God multiplied the flour and the oil for Elijah and the widow (1 Kings 17:10–16) or when He destroyed the army of Assyria before the gates of Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35).

The Scripture teaches that the prophets (2 Sam. 23:2), the apostles (John 14:26), and the human authors of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:20–21) were inspired by the direct act of God's Spirit, so that their words were infallibly His words. (See 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 3:15–16.) Once He had given His Word by inspiration, God intended that His people copy it for their use and that of others. (See, for example, Deut. 6:9 and 17:18.) It is through these many generations of copies that God has preserved His Word. However, for all the scriptural support for the fact of preservation, there is none for the idea of either an ongoing or periodic miracle to render copyists or translators infallible. To hold to such a miracle as a matter of dogma is to commit the error of adding to Scripture and teaching for God's commandments human theories and traditions.

The Historical Record of Preservation. History amply bears out the fact that the Scriptures have been providentially preserved. By the end of the first century AD believers were mainly people who did not speak Hebrew. Therefore, the church read and studied the Old Testament in translation (as many Jews outside of Israel were already accustomed

to doing). On the other hand, generations and schools of Jewish scribes continued to copy the Hebrew Scriptures for use in the synagogues. We know from historical records that these scribes, although fallible, took great care to transmit the Hebrew text faithfully.

Their scribal care has been vindicated in the past century by archeological finds, most notably that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, of Old Testament manuscripts dating from around the time of Christ. Analysis of these writings shows remarkable, almost complete, agreement with the later standard Hebrew Bibles (dating at the earliest from the tenth century AD). The minor differences among these copies and even within the standard texts confirm that the process of copying was done without a perpetual miracle. Nevertheless, because of God's providential care, we can have confidence that they faithfully preserved the Old Testament used by Christ and the apostles.

The Lord, in His providence, has also preserved the New Testament. The New Testament books were first written largely to individuals and churches. Copies of these writings were quickly made by others so that those in different places could have the Scriptures. So many copies were made and were so geographically dispersed it would have been impossible for anyone to get control of all of them in order to successfully alter the biblical message.

In addition, so many copies of the New Testament texts have survived and been compiled that they may be readily compared with one another. There are still in existence over 5700 manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament, multiple times the number of manuscripts of any document from classical antiquity.³ Corroborating the Greek evidence are between 15,000 and 20,000 manuscripts of ancient translations and more than one million New Testament quotations in the writings of the church fathers.⁴

Among this great variety of documentary evidence there is remarkable agreement. Due to the large number of manuscripts, there are variants (differences in wording). As in the case of the Old Testament, these differences are an indication that the preservation of Scripture has been providential rather than miraculous. It also means that there is abundant evidence to determine which variants reflect the original writings and which are the result of mistakes by later copyists. It has been claimed that the large number of differences (some assert that there as many as 400,000) mean that we cannot be certain that we have Word of God today. However, such an argument is grossly misleading. It is vital to understand that a variant is any difference in wording however slight or unsupported by the copies. It could be a difference in spelling (such as the difference between "color" versus "colour" or "a" versus "an") or differences in word order, such as "Jesus

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The Canon of Scripture

How Do We Know Which Books Should Be in the Bible?

Peter tells us that “the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21), and Paul states that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). But neither Peter or Paul nor any other sacred writer tells us which books are included under the category of inspired Scripture that “is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Not every book that claims special revelation is worthy of being included in the Bible. When the people of God in both Old and New Testament times evaluated which books were divinely inspired and worthy of being accepted as Scripture, that process was known as canonization. The word “canon” refers to the rule, standard, or measure by which something is evaluated.

The Process of Canonization

The canonization of the Old Testament books involved four steps:

1. The divine direction to write the various books.
2. Israel’s recognition of these divinely inspired writings.
3. The preservation of such writings mainly by the Old Testament priests.
4. And the ultimate acceptance of the current 39 Old Testament books.

Likewise, three steps were involved in the canonization of New Testament books:

1. God’s direction to write the various books.
2. The recognition of inspiration, acceptance, use, copying, translation, and circulation of these books by the early Christians.
3. And the official recognition of our present twenty-seven books by church councils¹

It is extremely important to note that *canonicity is determined by God and only discovered by man*. This is much like an assayer attesting to the genuineness of a piece of gold or an art expert the genuineness of a painting. The assayer does not give the objects their value; rather, he simply recognizes their inherent value.

The Old Testament Canon

The evidences for the canonicity of the thirty-nine Old Testament books are

1. The claims of the books themselves.
2. The authoritative nature of their authors—prophets.
3. The consistency of the message between the various books.
4. The evidence of divine power (inspiration) in the books, including the fulfilled prophecies.
5. The immediate acceptance of and preservation of these books as God’s inspired Word by God’s people.
6. And the approval of and use of these books by Jesus and the apostles.²

By New Testament times the Jewish people used the same thirty-nine books of Scripture that we acknowledge today. Jesus clearly evidenced His acknowledgment of that canon in His statement in Matthew 23:35 that the leaders of Israel would be held accountable for the blood of all of the slain prophets from Abel to Zechariah—the latter prophet is the son of the priest Jehoiada who was killed by King Joash. He may not have been the last prophet slain by Israel, but he is the last prophet slain as described by the book at the end of the Hebrew canon—Second Chronicles. And of course Abel's death is described in the first OT book, Genesis.

Before examining the evidences for the canonicity of the twenty-seven NT books, we must determine why no other books were accepted—such as the OT Apocrypha (the fourteen books accepted by the Roman Catholic Church) and the Pseudepigrapha (false writings—false authorship). The Pseudepigrapha have never been accepted as canonical by the Jews or by the Christian Church. It is interesting to note that some of these writings, such as Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, and The Martyrdom of Isaiah are alluded to in the New Testament books of Jude (vv. 14–15 and 9) and Hebrews (11:37). In doing so, these New Testament authors do not show that they regard the Pseudepigrapha as inspired books, but only that they made some true statement—the same way that Paul referred to some Greek poets in his sermons and writings.

There are several major reasons that the church outside of Roman Catholicism has also rejected the Apocrypha as part of inspired Scripture: first is the lack of support for these books in the New Testament. Jesus never quoted from or even alluded to the Apocrypha, although He quoted from most of the Old Testament books and from all three divisions of the Old Testament canon. Likewise, no New Testament writer quotes from the Apocrypha.

The second reason for rejecting the Apocrypha as Scripture is the nature of the books and the circumstance of their writing. The authors never claim inspiration for their writings, and they contain contradictions with previous revelation, such as endorsements of lying, suicide, assassination, salvation by works, and prayers for the dead (e.g., 2 Macc. 12:42–46; 15:14; Tobit 12:9–12; Judith 9:10–13). These books were written between about 200 and 100 BC, after the completion of the Old Testament canon (approximately 400 BC). In this intertestamental period (400 BC till the coming of John the Baptist) there was an acknowledgment that the prophetic office had ceased.³

Finally, the early church never officially considered the Apocrypha to be canonical. It was not until the Council of Trent in 1546 that the Roman Catholic Church acknowledged the Apocrypha. Even Jerome's Vulgate did not contain the Apocrypha. Historically, Christians acknowledge that the Apocryphal books do not bear the marks of inspiration. Harrison concludes his discussion of this intertestamental literature with the statement that the "practical

absence of direct quotation" and the "exclusion of apocalyptic fantasies" in the New Testament "reveal a selectivity that is impressive and may safely be viewed as providential."⁴

The New Testament Canon

Three of the most important criteria for the acceptance of a New Testament book are

1. Its apostolic authority—that is, it was written by an apostle or by a close associate of an apostle.
2. Its "suitability for public reading" in the church assemblies.
3. And its acceptance by the majority of churches.⁵

I add a fourth—consistency of doctrine; that is, these books could not contradict previously acknowledged revelation.

It is important to note that most of the New Testament was acknowledged as inspired and authoritative as soon as it was written. (See 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; 2 Pet. 3:15–16; John 14:16, 26.) These acknowledged writings were expected to be circulated among the brethren (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:3). The earliest church fathers, known as "apostolic fathers," since they immediately followed upon the time of the apostles, quoted from twenty-three of the twenty-seven NT books, only failing to mention 1 Thessalonians (a book hardly ever questioned), 2 and 3 John, and Philemon. The latter three are likely omitted in discussion due to their brevity and their extremely personal nature. Justin Martyr, who wrote near the middle of the second century AD, mentions that Christians meeting on Sundays read from both the Old and New Testaments.⁶

There were also in the early church various lists ("canons") of accepted New Testament Books. The Muratorian Canon was drawn up around AD 170 in reaction to the heretic Marcion who, because of his extreme anti-Jewish bias, accepted only Luke and ten of Paul's epistles as inspired. That canon defended the canonicity of all twenty-seven New Testament books except Hebrews (since its authorship was uncertain), James, and one epistle of John. This document represented the opinion of the entire church, not merely of one man. Eusebius, the first church historian (AD 320), acknowledges all twenty-seven books but admits that five were spoken against by some ("antilegomena": James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude). Athanasius (AD 367) clearly and emphatically lists all twenty-seven books as canonical.

Likewise, ancient translations reflect the acceptance of the New Testament canon. The Old Syriac translation contained all New Testament books except 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation; the omission may be due to the fragmentation of the original document, since all these books are at the end of the New Testament. The Latin Vulgate translation contained all twenty-seven books.

The Council of Hippo in AD 393 and the Council of Carthage in AD 397 made official proclamations

It is important to note that most of the New Testament was acknowledged as inspired and authoritative as soon as it was written.

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Baptists and the Bible



Baptists have always had a love affair with the Word of God, primarily because of its Author's love for us. Our love for and prioritization of His Word come from His personal self-revelation in scriptural commands, stories, images, and songs. We see Him through His revelation of Himself in His Word. We cherish the Bible because we delight in our relationship with its Author.

Baptists have always held the Word in highest regard. The second London Confession of Faith (1689) is the earliest confession that treats the doctrine of Scripture first. Scripture must come first because everything we believe is found there. Baptists were clear in their placement of Scripture at the beginning of their document that it was supreme. It was their sole and final authority for faith and practice.

The great Protestant reformer Ulrich Zwingli records that it was child's play to debate Catholic priests when compared with his Anabaptist contemporaries because the latter constantly rebutted his arguments from Scripture, not from traditions or councils. For example, in the 1520s a famous dialogue occurred between Zwingli and the great Anabaptist martyr Balthasar Hubmaier over the nature of the church. This debate mirrored the argument that Augustine had with the Donatists in the 400s. Zwingli agreed with Augustine that in Christ's parable of the wheat and tares the field was the church in which both the wheat and the tares (the believers and the unbelievers) should be allowed to grow together until the time of the end. They viewed the church as being like the Old Testament nation of Israel, with both believers and unbelievers. Both the baptistic Donatists and the Anabaptist Hubmaier appealed to the text of Scripture and

not to tradition to refute such a notion. They asserted, based on the words of Christ in the Scriptures, that the field is the world rather than the church.

"Chapter and Verse, Please!"

The supremacy of Scripture was impressed on me early on by my former youth pastor in a very practical way. He would often say, "Chapter and verse, please!" Any statement about life or any answer to his questions had to have a scriptural text attached. My parents taught me to memorize Scripture. We did it together as a family. My Christian school taught me to memorize Scripture. My college and seminary training taught me to exposit Scripture. To say that Baptist leaders, Baptist parents, Baptist schools, and Baptist confessions of faith prioritize the importance of Scripture would be an understatement. Catechisms can be used to teach, but if for each statement a Scripture is not memorized in support, we should rightfully say, "Chapter and verse, please!"

But what do we mean by Scripture? The president of the seminary I attended used to say, "Before engaging in a discussion, always define your terms." By Scripture we mean the sixty-six books that were accepted by the early church. We do not include the Apocrypha or any other books in this category. Other books and writings can be helpful as they align themselves with Scripture, but they are not Scripture. They can shed light on what certain people of different generations believed, or stories they told, but they do not carry the mandate of Scripture. They may be beneficial, but they have no force to bind the believer's heart and will.

What do we believe about Scripture? We believe that “holy men of God” wrote as the Holy Spirit carried them along (2 Pet. 1:21). We believe that the Scriptures were inspired by God. The term translated “given by inspiration of God” in 2 Timothy 3:16 literally means “breathed out by God.” The Scriptures are His words just as if He had spoken them Himself. We believe that Scripture is both infallible and inerrant. This means that it is without fallacy when it comes to salvation and without error, when properly understood in its context, regarding every issue it touches, whether that is history, geography, science, or philosophy. It is not a history book, but when it records history, it is accurate. It’s not a philosophical treatise, but when it deals with philosophy it accurately describes what is true and best.

Inerrancy does not preclude poetic language, figures of speech, or even hyperbole at times as these were common methods of teaching in the ancient Near East. We believe in a literal and grammatical as well as historical means of understanding the Bible. It must be understood in its context and its day, but with authoritative claims and applications for our lives today.

We believe God has faithfully preserved His Word in over 5500 Greek manuscripts in the New Testament. God chose to preserve the New Testament in four major textual “family trees” spread out across 1400 years of copying. They all give independent evidence to the accuracy of our current Bibles. In fact, if we lost *every* Greek manuscript, we could rebuild our entire New Testament from the preserved sermons and Lectionary readings from the Early Church. These all give independent witness to the most amazing preservation of the Bible. Some of the earliest copies of the New Testament can now be arguably dated to within thirty-to-fifty years of when the author’s ink first dried on the parchment.

Evidence of Preservation

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls over a half century ago our textual evidence of an accurate preservation of the Old Testament jumped back over a thousand years. What scholars found was that the Old Testament text used by modern readers was the same as the one used at the time of Christ even though there had been about one-thousand-year gap between the oldest Hebrew manuscripts available in 1900 and the Dead Sea Scrolls. This importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence of the preservation of the Old Testament text cannot be overstated.

The textual evidence for the accurate transmission of the Bible dwarfs any other ancient book. I will give one example. Julius Caesar was arguably the most consequential Roman. He wrote *Gallie Wars* about his invasion of modern-day France. His book covers a ten-year period of an amazing conquest. He was almost always outnumbered, yet he won decisive victory after decisive victory over the Gauls. He created what eventually became the Roman Empire of Christ’s day. Nevertheless, we have only ten copies of *Gallie Wars*, not *one* of which was made within a thousand years of Caesar’s writing. The textual disagreement among these copies is approximately 50%.

In stark contrast, we have over 5500 New Testament manuscripts that cover 1400 years of copying, in four separate

manuscript traditions, with some documents as near as thirty-to-fifty years of the original. Within that entire tradition the agreement rate is 93%. Remember, to “disagree” could refer to a difference in spelling in one of the 5000 documents. Obviously, the one misspelled word in one manuscript is easy to spot. The disagreements that are genuinely debatable amount to less than one-and-one-half percent of the text. In other words, 98.5 percent of all words in the New Testament are not even debated. Of those debated most are whether to use an “a” or an “an” or “the” or not to use “the.” They are really of no consequence to the meaning of the text. Added to that is the fact is those words that do have a real consequence and a legitimate disagreement all find other texts in which the truth is taught with no textual question at all. In other words, no truth of any consequence is debated based on textual preservation.

No one ever burned Caesar’s writings, but they have burned Bibles. No one ever murdered people who possessed Caesar’s handiwork, but many people have died for owning a Bible. Nevertheless, we have more independent verifiable ancient witnesses to the New Testament’s authenticity than any other ancient text. That is a remarkable testimony to the preservation of God’s Word.

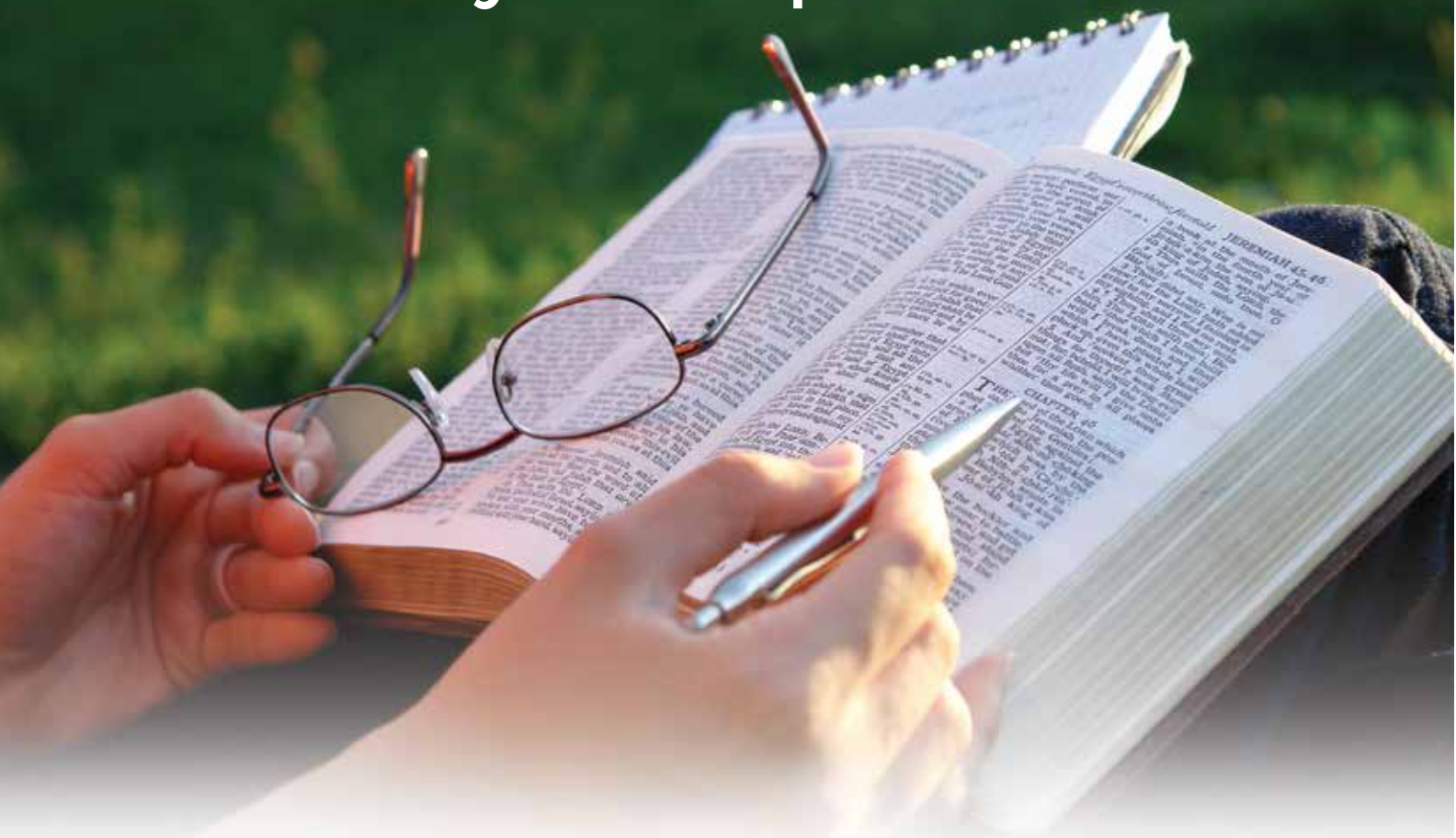
Finally, how do Baptists understand God’s Word? When we approach Scripture, we do so as “primitivists.” Primitivism does not mean that we must walk everywhere, deny modern conveniences, and chant in church. What it means is that we understand Scripture to teach that our model is the early or primitive church and its text for our faith and practice, not Old Testament Israel or later councils or creeds. Old Testament Israel and all that attached to her reveal Christ (Isa. 53) and provide patience and comfort for our learning and hope (Rom. 15:4), but the Old Testament is not our model for church governance, practice, or mission.

Likewise, church tradition, councils, and creeds can be beneficial to show how believers struggled with problems of interpretation and practical living, but they are not binding on the believer. The ability to bind the believer’s heart belongs *only* to the Bible. This is where our love of Scripture bears on our practical Christian living. We see our commands emblazoned in the Great Commission, not the Hebrew prophets. We see Spirit-empowered living as unique to the New Testament and its dispensation of the Spirit’s permanent presence in the believer. We see commands for Israel as for Israel and promises for the Church as for the Church. We see a different emphasis for the Church. This does not mean a different salvation, for that is always by faith alone, but it does mean a different mission. These practical faith-living issues flow out of our view of Scripture. Our view is derived from our passion for the Bible, and, our belief that He has communicated to man in a manner that can be understood using a literal, grammatical, and historical measuring rod for its pages.

Chaplain Colonel Mike Sproul is the former twenty-year senior pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona. He is currently the director of the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps and has been married for thirty-four years to the former Elma Phillips. The Sprouls have two married children.



The Clarity of Scripture



Is the message of the Bible clear? Can you understand what it says?

If the answer is yes (and it is), then why do you need pastors and teachers to assist your understanding? And if the Scripture communicates in a clear and comprehensible way, then why do sincere believers understand the Bible differently?

These questions pertain to a doctrine called “the perspicuity of Scripture.”

The Meaning of “Perspicuity”

To some, the meaning of perspicuity is obscure. This uncertainty is ironic, because the word means the opposite, namely, freedom from obscurity. It depicts something that is clear and recognizable, not hidden.

Properly understood, perspicuity describes all sixty-six books of the Bible because we believe that Scripture reveals what God wants us to know, and we also believe that it does so in a way we can understand.

The perspicuity (or clarity) of Scripture permits any person to understand the words, statements, and message of the Bible. Such accessibility to divine revelation is possible

because God has given us His words in the form of human language. As such, the Bible is neither cryptic nor elusive (Deut. 30:14; Rom. 10:8).

This quality counteracts the notion that we must rely on an elite class of people to interpret the Bible for us. Neither the Catholic Church, the Watchtower Society, some Jewish rabbis, some prestigious scholars, nor any other exclusive group of people fills this role.

Some Evidence for Perspicuity

When Moses spoke to the nation of Israel, he spoke directly to the people, not to the priests alone (Deut. 6:4 and others). This phenomenon recurs throughout the Old Testament. The public ministry of Jesus continued this tradition in the Gospels, and the men whom He trained did the same in Acts, speaking directly to the people.

The writers of the New Testament letters frequently addressed their message to entire congregations, not to pastors alone (for example, Col. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; Rev. 2–3). This approach corresponded with the practice of public Scripture reading, which presupposed that people would understand what they heard (Neh. 8:8; 1 Tim. 4:13).

Perhaps most fascinating of all is that both the Old and New Testaments assume that even children can understand the Bible (Deut. 6:6; Eph. 6:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:14–15).

Some Spiritual Dynamics of Perspicuity

Despite these observations, perspicuity does not guarantee that we will always recognize and appreciate the significance of everything Scripture tells us.

For this reason, the Holy Spirit provides conviction to nonbelievers, divinely persuading them to believe the truth of the gospel (John 16:8). He then provides believers with illumination. This divine function enables them to recognize the significance of what Scripture teaches and to welcome its truth into their lives (1 Cor. 2:11, 15; 1 John 2:20).

Even so, perspicuity and illumination do not guarantee that every believer will always understand the Bible accurately and respond to it properly. None of us reach correct interpretations and make appropriate applications every time. In fact, we often disagree with the interpretations of other believers.

Some Objections to Perspicuity

Those who wish to discredit the perspicuity of Scripture may highlight this inconsistency, just as the Catholic Church criticized doctrinal disagreements between the Reformers. Such critics may wish to relegate the interpretation of Scripture to religious or academic elites. This proposal fails to recognize, however, that such persons are not infallible.

On numerous occasions, Christ corrected wrong interpretations of Jewish rabbis (Matt. 12:3–6; Luke 11:42, John 3:10; 8:39–44; etc.). What's more, James, a devout pastor in Jerusalem, affirmed that even the best Bible teachers say wrong things sometimes (James 3:1–2).

Those who wish to discredit the perspicuity of Scripture may also suggest that Scripture is unclear and therefore useless. Such a perspective is misleading and carries no more weight than a high-school student claiming that calculus is no good because he cannot understand it after a few halfhearted attempts. He fails to recognize that the fault may be with him.

Individual Challenges to Perspicuity

Ultimately, we do not fail to understand Scripture because it is unclear or because we are deprived of the ability to do so. We fail due to personal shortcomings that obscure our view. These shortcomings include the following:

1. General indifference (e.g., Luke 24:25).
2. Sinful tendencies (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:14).
3. Personal biases (e.g., Luke 7:3–5).
4. Cultural misconceptions (e.g., Acts 15:5).
5. Ingrained traditions (e.g., Mark 7:13).
6. An incomplete perspective (e.g., Acts 18:26).
7. A lazy approach (e.g., Titus 1:10–14).
8. Basic illiteracy (e.g., 2 Pet. 3:16b).

Having recognized these potential weaknesses on our part, we must also recognize that perspicuity does more than create an opportunity to understand what God has said, and illumination does more than empower believers to benefit from this opportunity. They also bring with them a responsibility.

A Believer's Responsibility Towards Perspicuity

Perspicuity and illumination confer upon every believer the responsibility to know what God has said, to interpret His words accurately, and to respond accordingly (Ps. 119:56; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; Rev. 1:3). This obligation should motivate us to overcome the shortcomings listed above.

Therefore we should take a humble yet hopeful approach to the Bible. We should read and study what it says in a God-dependent way, asking God to guide us into proper understanding (Ps. 119:18). We should also pray this way for one another (Eph. 1:16–18).

On one hand, we should refuse to rely on the teaching and interpretation of others. Consider how Jesus rebuked people for misunderstanding the teaching of Scripture (Matt. 11:16–19; cf. 11:7–15; 13:14–15). He did not exonerate them on the grounds that rabbis had misled them, though lead teachers receive greater scrutiny (cf. James 3:1), and false teachers (such as many of the first-century Jewish scribes) received stronger and more repeated excoriation from Christ for their wrong interpretations. Even so, He considered proper interpretation to be the responsibility of the people themselves.

On the other hand, as we insist on personal responsibility, we should abstain from the rugged individualism of our age (Rom. 12:3; 1 Pet. 4:10). Just as total reliance on the interpretation of others leads to needless ignorance, so independent study alone leads to ignorance as well (2 Pet. 3:16).

No matter how much we pray for understanding and no matter how rigorously we study by ourselves, we will still be wrong about something along the way. For this reason, we should study the Bible in tandem with the resources God has given us.

A Comprehensive Approach to Perspicuity

These resources include the teaching ministry of your church. Just as trained men accompanied the public reading of Scripture with careful explanations (Neh. 8:7–8), so well-trained, hard-working pastors offer tremendous insight to the church (1 Tim. 4:13; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:15).

God gives such men to churches for this reason (Eph. 4:11–15; cf. Acts 13:1; 2 Tim. 2:24–26; 4:2). He also gives teaching abilities to other believers (both men and women alike, e.g., Acts 18:26), while still other believers may also enhance your understanding in other ways (Rom. 12:4; Eph. 4:16; Heb. 5:12).

God blesses believers with a Christian community, both local and at large, that invigorates our understanding of the Bible. This is one way that we enjoy fellowship together as saints and children of God.

As such, the church (both pastors and non-pastors) serves neither as an authority that dictates proper interpretation nor as an organization that undermines personal responsibility.

In addition to the teaching ministry of your church, you may also benefit from other valuable Bible study resources, which include the following:

- Trustworthy translations of the Bible into your language.
- Standard Greek and Hebrew Bible dictionaries.
- Reputable Bible commentaries.

Some may question the use of commentaries, claiming that the perspicuity of Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit are all they need. This claim is more arrogant than responsible and fails to recognize that multiple well-studied counselors are helpful, not harmful (Prov. 11:14; 24:6).

Using resources does not imply that Scripture is unclear nor does it negate your responsibility to understand the Bible for yourself. Instead, this integrated approach enables you to better overcome your ingrained shortcomings and thereby enhance your ability to recognize what Scripture clearly says.

Believers should respond to godly teachers (whether in person, in print, or by some other venue) with receptive hearts, but they should not do so blindly. They should respond by studying the Bible for themselves to affirm what they have heard (Acts 17:11). This is an honorable approach.

Perspicuity Is Not Always “Easy”

This comprehensive approach does more than recognize a person’s individual shortcomings and seek to overcome them. It also accepts that some passages and concepts in Scripture are more difficult to grasp than others. That *Scripture is understandable* does not mean that it is always *easy to understand*.

To be sure, some Scripture is so immediately clear that nonbelievers may understand the gospel (2 Tim. 3:15). Yet even this level of understanding may require some guidance from another godly person. To the Ethiopian dignitary, Philip said, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” The man answered, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:30–31).

Other Scripture, however, is especially hard to understand, even for mature and experienced believers. That’s how the apostle Peter described some of the Scripture that Paul had written (2 Pet. 3:16a). Without some biblical teaching from outside sources, we may easily distort what Scripture says in such cases (2 Pet. 3:16b).

The difficulty of certain passages and doctrines of Scripture does not mean that they are impossible to understand. Instead,

they require especially prayerful and rigorous study—study which should include the assistance of godly, well-trained teachers in the church.

Final Thoughts

We believe that Scripture reveals clearly what God wants us to know and that it does so in a way that we can understand. Furthermore, He assists us—through illumination—in recognizing and accepting what we learn.

To interpret Scripture clearly, we must overcome certain weaknesses of our own. We do this through praying humbly, studying diligently, and listening carefully to the well-trained perspectives of godly people in the church, both locally and at large, in person and in print.

By this means, we may benefit from the clarity of Scripture and fulfill our personal responsibility before God to know Him, to live as He desires, and to share our understanding with others.

Thomas Overmiller shepherds Faith Baptist Church in Corona, New York (StudyGodsWord.com). He blogs and podcasts at ShepherdThoughts.com.



Resources for Further Reading

Feinberg, John S. *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018 (especially chapters 15–16).

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Overwhelmed by Life's Challenges

Where Do I Turn
for Help?

Amy slumped down into her chair. “Exhausted already,” she thought, and it was only 7:30 in the morning. It had been another stress-packed weekend—two sick and cranky children, a dirty house, laundry piling up and no help, again, from her husband. Did he really have to change the oil in the car and mow the grass now? Couldn’t he see she was worn out and needed help inside with the children? If all this wasn’t enough, they had had another blow-up over the finances. They could barely make ends meet, and when they talked money, tempers seemed to flare as each blamed the other for “senseless” spending.

In spite of the children’s lingering sniffles she had ushered them off to school. She needed some down time.

As Amy moved slowly to the bedroom, she passed the living-room mirror. A quick glance stopped her in her tracks. “I look terrible!” she groaned. Upon further examination she was sure she’d gained ten pounds. “When in the world did this happen?” she asked herself. “Maybe this is why John shows no interest in being intimate with me.”

Amy felt her despair deepen as she plopped onto the bed, tears beginning to stream down her cheeks. She felt herself drifting into what was becoming a far-too-frequent pattern of depression. “Will my life ever improve? It all seems so hopeless. I don’t know where to turn for help! Maybe the doctor could call in a prescription for some kind of medicine for me.”

John’s day hadn’t started much better. He was angry. He was sure that Amy had sent him off to his factory job with one of her sarcastic jabs: “Now you make sure you have a good day.” “Yeh, right.” He was sure she meant, “I hope your day is as miserable as mine is going to be.” John couldn’t remember the last time he had seen his wife happy—or kind, for that matter. She was always complaining about the housework, the kids, and his inability to adequately provide for their needs, basically making his life miserable. “What does she want out of me? I work fifty hours a week and we’ve only been late on a few payments.”

He had learned a couple of weeks ago that his company was going to be scaling back in a few months and some could lose their jobs. He was anxious about the possibilities, but he knew he couldn’t discuss this with his wife; she’d only make things worse by lashing out at him.

John reacted to the pressures he felt at home by losing himself in mindless projects around the house so he could distance himself from Amy. He felt that was the only way he could find some peace. They had even missed church the last few weeks, reasoning that they needed to have some extra time, some space to unwind on the weekends. It didn’t seem to be working.

As John drove into the parking lot at work he mused, “Maybe our marriage of seven years is coming to an end?” Desperate for some relief, he wondered whether a marriage counselor might be able to help them.

Parking the car, John shuffled off across the parking lot for another long day of work with no delusions that his lot in life was going to improve any time soon.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? The names may need to be changed and the details may need to be adjusted a bit, but most of us find ourselves somewhere in a story of life. And at times we might wonder, “Where can I turn for help?”

Living in a Broken World

The fact is we live life in a broken world, a world in which every aspect of our lives is impacted by sin—our own and that of others. It’s a life that is fraught with suffering, suffering that is brought about by the actions of others or by the consequences of our own choices and actions, and, yes, by a loving God who seeks to grow us through these various trials in our lives.

Marital strife, financial concerns, physical issues, family circumstances, addictive behaviors, unreasonable demands, unexpected successes and blessings—the list of challenges people face as they experience daily life is endless. And living in the midst of this multitude of pressures causes individuals to respond in anger, fear, anxiousness, despair, a puffed-up assessment of one’s own abilities, and countless other negative responses as they attempt to navigate through life in a broken world.

The questions then become, “Where do we turn for answers? How do we respond to what is going on in a manner that is pleasing to God? How do we successfully cope with all of the challenges we face in life?”

The secular world promises all sorts of solutions and answers. Experts abound, ranging from our friends and neighbors who have read the latest self-help book, to TV personalities and radio talk-show hosts who abound with opinions and are more than happy to share them with whoever will listen, from secular counselors of every ilk with a myriad of credentials, theories, and techniques, to the biomedical field that offers the most recent miracle drug that will cure whatever ails you.

The truth is we live in a psychologized world. We have been led to believe that these are the experts when it comes to dealing with mankind’s deepest problems. These are the people who have the answers for navigating through life in a more successful manner, leading to the happiness we all desire and deserve. After all, these people have been educated, trained in the sciences and art of addressing life’s maladies. These are the educators in our institutions of higher education. These are the advocates of truth.

The reality is that their “science” often isn’t really science at all. Rather, it is philosophical thoughts based upon unfounded presuppositions which usually discount the wisdom of Scripture, resulting in a “truth” riddled with error. The real problem is that their solutions to the issues of life have proven not to be as effective as promised, and, if they are honest about it, they acknowledge their failures.

When we face
the challenges
of life . . . the
real question
is where will
we turn for
answers?

Warnings from the Word

Their failure to provide lasting solutions should not be a surprise to us. Let’s consider a couple of the warnings given to us in the Word of God.

In Romans 12:2 Paul cautions us,

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The implication in this verse is clear: we are prone to let the twisted thinking of the secular world influence how we look at life, how we understand what is happening, how we see ourselves in the midst of life’s challenges, and how we are to respond. Paul warns us—in fact he commands us—not to let this happen. He could just as accurately have said, “Stop being conformed to the thinking of this world.” What’s the alternative? As Paul directs, it’s the renewal of our mind. In other words, it is the filling of our minds with the truth of God found in His Word so that as life happens we can have an accurate view of what is going on, an accurate view of who we are, and an understanding of what God has provided for us so we can respond in a manner pleasing to Him. As our minds are renewed with God’s truth, He helps us understand His will and takes His truth and transforms us into His likeness, glorifying Himself in the process.

We see a similar warning in Paul’s letter to the Colossians:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (2:8).

Can Paul’s instruction be any clearer? Again, the secular world promises all sorts of solutions and all sorts of answers from their so-called experts. Yet most of what they offer is void of Christ.

“And not after Christ” provides us with the alternative to the world’s “philosophy and vain [empty] deceit.” We are to turn to Christ for answers to the dilemmas of life we face. That means we are to turn to the Bible, God’s authoritative Word. Does this mean the Bible addresses challenges such as marital strife, financial concerns, physical issues, family circumstances, addictive behaviors, unreasonable demands, unexpected successes and blessings, and so on? The answer to this question is a resounding YES! In part this is what is referred to when we talk about “the sufficiency of Scripture.” The reader might ask, “How do we know the Scriptures are sufficient when addressing the issues of life we face?” Well, let’s turn to the Bible itself and see what God has to say about His own Word.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Traditionally there are four classic passages, two in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament, that testify to the sufficiency of Scripture: Psalm 19:7–11, Psalm 119, 2 Peter 1:3–4, and 2 Timothy 3:16. Let’s look at the two passages on the sufficiency of Scripture from the New Testament.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

Here the Bible informs us that Christ's divine power has provided everything believers need for life and godliness. This passage asserts that all believers need for spiritual vitality (life) and godly living is attainable through our knowledge of Him (Christ). Clearly, the source of that spiritual power and growth, then, is an intimate "full knowledge" of Him. And that knowledge of Him is attainable through His sacred Word, the Bible, and the illuminating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Christ is the one who has called us to this life of godliness by His own glory and goodness. He is the one who attracts people enslaved by sin by His own moral excellence and the total impact of His glorious Person. Through these—that is, Christ's "glory and goodness"—He has given believers His very great and precious promises. These promises enable Christians to participate in the divine nature. Because they are "partakers" of God's nature, Christians can share in His moral victory over sin in this life and share in His glorious victory over death in eternal life. Because of the promise of the new birth (1 Pet. 1:3), the promise of God's protecting power (1 Pet. 1:5), and the promise of God's enabling power (2 Pet. 1:3), believers can participate in the divine nature, that is, become more like Christ. In addition they can escape the corruption, or moral decay, in the world caused by evil desires.

Let's expand on these marvelous truths by looking at our second New Testament passage.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

In verse 15 Paul has just noted that the Scriptures are able to make one wise with regard to salvation. Now Paul emphasizes the crucial role of God's inscripturated revelation. Paul reminds us that all Scripture is God-breathed ("inspired"), that is, God's words were given through men superintended by the Holy Spirit so that their writings are without error. In other words, they are from a source like none other: they are from God Himself!

Paul goes on to assert the usefulness of the Word. First of all it is profitable for "doctrine." Doctrine refers to teaching what is true. If you want to know what is true, go to God's Word, not the opinion of man. Secondly, the Bible is useful for "reproof" (or rebuking). God loves us so much that He doesn't leave us as we are but gives us His Word to help us realize what is wrong in our lives. Having exposed what is wrong, He continues by showing us how to rectify those wrongs. That is what is referred to as "correction." Finally, His Word is profitable for "instruction in righteousness." It teaches us how to do what is right.

What does all of this mean for us? Let's review. God warns us not to conform our thinking to that of the world. He commands us not to be taken captive by the empty philosophies of man. On the other hand, He tells us to allow ourselves

to be changed by filling our minds with the Word of God. Regarding His Word, He tells us it has been given to us by the Creator Himself and that it is useful for knowing what is true, for revealing where we err in our thinking and behaviors, how we should think and respond, and how to go about changing so that we glorify God and please Him. Wow! What more could we ask for? He has given us all things that pertain to godliness, how to have life, and how to live life in a righteous manner.

The Question of Authority

All of this really culminates with one question, and that is the question of authority. Who will be the authority in your life? Will it be the secular world that God warns us against, or will it be your Creator, God Himself; the One who loves you and has your best interest at heart? Are you willing to work at discerning His will and being submissive to it? We cannot be a people without integrity, doubled minded, split by two opinions. We are called to be single minded, grounded in God's truth. This requires intimacy with God, a close fellowship with Him and those who are like minded. Will you be a person of integrity?

This all may seem overwhelming. You may be thinking, "This is all well and good, but I still don't know where to begin to get help." Well, God has gifted you with a spiritual shepherd in the form of your pastor. Why not visit with him and ask for some godly counsel? God has also given you a church family to support you. You might seek out a mature saint in your church, one who knows the Bible well and has demonstrated the ability to apply it in wisdom. Or you might seek help from a certified Biblical counselor. You can find one by going to the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors website. These are brothers and sisters who have been trained to help others bring God's Word to bear on their lives.

When we are facing the challenges of life, just as Amy and John were, the real question is, where will we turn for answers? Where will we turn for direction in how to understand what we are experiencing? Where will we turn for direction as to how we should respond to what is going on? How will we learn not only what needs to change and what change looks like but also how to actually grow and change? God loves us so much that He did not leave these questions unanswered. Rather He offers you Himself. Will you accept His offer?

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28–30).

Before his call to the ministry, Dr. James J. Juvinall worked in the financial services industry. He holds an MDiv from Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary and a DMin in Biblical Counseling from Westminster Theological Seminary. He has ministered both in the pastorate and in theological education, having filled the role of chair of Biblical Counseling at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis and at Northland International University's Graduate School. While at Central, Jim was also the director of their Biblical Counseling Center, director of Student Affairs, and chair of their Strategic Planning Council. Jim retired in 2014 and relocated to Wausau, Wisconsin, where he serves as an elder at Wausau Bible Church.



2019

October 14-15, 2019

Central Regional Fellowship
Harvest Hills Baptist Church
9713 North County Line Road
Yukon, OK 73099
Host: Dr. Larry Karsies

November 18-20, 2019

Northern California Pastors Retreat
Wolf Mountain Camp
16555 Jericho Road
Grass Valley, CA 95949
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2020

February 3-4, 2020

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship
Westside Baptist Church
6260 West 4th Street
Greeley, CO 80634

February 10-11, 2020

Winter Board Meeting
Bible Baptist Church
2724 Margaret Wallace Road
Matthews, NC 28105

March 2-4, 2020

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Morningside Baptist Church
1115 Pelham Road
Greenville, SC 29615

March 9-10, 2020

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Galilee Baptist Church
11517 SE 208th Street
Kent, WA 98031

March 9-10, 2020

Northern California Regional Fellowship
Folsom Baptist Church
335 E East Bidwell Street
Folsom, CA 95630

June 15-17, 2020

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Colonial Hills Baptist Church
8140 Union Chapel Road
Indianapolis, IN 46240

July 27-29, 2020

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Immanuel Baptist Church
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Palmer, AK 99645
907.745.0610

2021

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Berean Baptist Church
1405 Hewatt Road
Lilburn, GA 30047

March 8-9, 2021

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Westgate Baptist Church
Tigard, OR

2022

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

Reclaiming the Lord's Day for the Lord

Author's Note: *This article was first published in FrontLine in 1998. The need for considering its subject was important then. But it is acute now. All things considered, a case can be made that recovering the intentional, scriptural use of the Lord's Day is the single greatest need in the life of the evangelical American church. Its proper use would reorient Christians to a right relationship to the Lord. It would recalibrate their values. It would reconstruct a platform for revival. Scriptural worship on the Lord's Day is our best path toward once again experiencing God's favor and God's blessings—not because we merit them but because, in the spirit and example of Isaiah 58:13–14, we are intentionally, systematically nurturing delight in Him alone as the strong, irrepressible pulse for the rhythm of the rest of the week. What hope is there that Christians will resist the world and delight in the things of God supremely the other six days of their busy, distracting week, if they cannot be persuaded to set aside their business, games, and personal pursuits in order to delight in Him supremely upon the one day especially designed for doing so?*

The tradition of setting aside the first day of the week for sacred things is a precious, precious heritage. I'm discovering, however, that the biblical teaching underlying this tradition needs to be recovered. We are in serious danger of losing this liberty entirely, and I fear that this loss is largely due to our own failure to maintain firm convictions about its biblical basis. This column is a plea for the recovery of the Lord's Day for the Lord.

Four Theses

Bible-believing people differ among themselves over the question of whether the first day of the week is to be observed as a Christian sabbath. That controversy goes back as far as the early centuries of the Christian church and would divide us as well before we even got a good start at discovering the points on which we agree. In the interests of trying to establish some common biblical ground, I'd like to set aside the sabbath question and ask whether most of us might be able to concur with the following four theses.

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

Thesis One: *Christians must have a day in the week when they can assemble themselves for instruction, prayer, the breaking of the bread, and fellowship (Acts 2:42). Traditionally this day has been the first day of the week, our Sunday. Its value was put quaintly by the old Puritans when they called it "the soul's market day."*

Thesis Two: *The New Testament sets the precedent for this traditional use of the first day of the week by distinguishing it from the other six days in at least four ways.*

- 1. By Event:** the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Because of this uniquely redemptive event, Psalm 118:21–24 encourages all believers to give themselves to an elevated joy, a joy surpassing that of all other days, on the day on which it occurred.

I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Inside

- Bring . . . the Books—Key books for the pastor's study 5
- Straight Cuts—An exegetical study 6
- Windows—Themed sermon illustrations 7

Predicting that *the stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner*, the Psalm goes on to state that *this is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it*. Peter says that this prophecy was fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10–11). Therefore the day *which the LORD hath made* and in which we *rejoice* and are *glad* to a special degree, is the day of the Lord's resurrection. That day is identified by all four Gospels as having been the first day of the week.

There is a liberty accorded to believers that contrasts sharply with the detailed instructions given to Israel about its observance of the Sabbath. Unfortunately, this absence of legislation seems to some to support objections against any suggestion that believers ought to abstain from secular employment or casual amusements on this day.

2. **By Example:** the practice of the early church. *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them* (Acts 20:7). The preceding verse states that Paul spent seven days in Troas. He could, therefore, have assembled the believers on the Sabbath or on any of the other days of the week. But it was upon the first day, the day immediately after the Sabbath, that he met with them to break bread and to preach to them.
3. **Exhortation:** the command to give on this day. *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come* (1 Cor. 16:2). This passage is written on the assumption that the Corinthian church was already meeting on the first day of the week. They evidently needed only to be instructed to be intentionally systematic about their financial giving on that day.
4. **By Designation:** it is the "Lord's day." *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day* (Rev. 1:10). The expression *Lord's day* should not be confused with the eschatological *day of the Lord* (used five times in the NT; see Acts 2:20 for the first use). It is also important to note that the word *Lord's* is not *kuriou*, the customary genitive noun for referring to something which is the Lord's, but *kuriakos*,

a possessive adjective referring to an object which *belongs to the Lord*. A striking example of the way in which this word elevates its object above other similar objects is in 1 Corinthians 11:20, where it is used for *the Lord's supper* (i.e., the supper *belonging to the Lord*). In the context Paul is arguing that this ordinance of eating and drinking is not the same as ordinary eating and drinking; it is the eating and drinking of a supper which belongs, in a unique way, to the Lord. He has just taught that all of our eating and drinking should be to God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). But eating and drinking to God's glory at His table is different. It is elevated above ordinary eating and drinking to His glory.

Similarly, there are seven days to a week. They all belong to Him. We live to His glory upon each of them. But there is a day which belongs, in a unique way, to Him alone. What day is that? Although the Scripture itself nowhere states that *Lord's day* refers to the first day of the week, it is confirmed by several early Christian writings (including the *Didache*) produced a short time after this in the same area of Asia Minor. A Greek lexicon or a good exegetical commentary will supply these sources. It is on the basis of this historical usage that the expression in Revelation 1:10 has been consistently understood for nearly two thousand years now to be a reference to the first day of the week. If anyone were to argue that it is not, the burden of proof would be upon him to demonstrate that that was the case.

Thesis Three: *Entertainment, sports, and industry are relentlessly eroding the traditional Christian use of the Lord's Day. This is not helpful to delighting in Him—nor to preparing His people for living unto Him during the six days to follow.*

Thesis Four: *Christians and their churches are going to suffer spiritually if they fail to restore the Lord's Day to its elevated New Testament status. This is because the right use of the Lord's Day is not peripheral but central to the spiritual life of our churches. An attack on the Lord's Day is a thrust to the very heart of New Testament Christianity since it is from our assembling on the first day of the week that all of our evangelism and edification throughout the week radiates.*

Seven Common Objections

Even though the New Testament elevates the first day of the week in the four ways explained above, it stops short of actually regulating every aspect of our use of it. There is a liberty accorded to believers that contrasts sharply with the detailed instructions given to Israel about its observance of the Sabbath. Unfortunately, this absence of legislation seems to some to support objections against any suggestion that believers ought to abstain from secular employment or casual

amusements on this day. I'd like to attempt to respond to seven of the most common of those objections.

Objection 1: "Romans 14:5–6, Galatians 4:9–11, and Colossians 2:16–17 teach that God does not intend that there be any difference between the days of the week for a New Testament believer."

Answer: This objection simply fails to take into account the New Testament's own elevation of the first day of the week in the four ways listed above (under Thesis Two). One cannot take those four principles (and their passages) into account without it dawning on him pretty quickly that he's not at liberty to interpret Romans 14, Galatians 4, and Colossians 2 in a way that contradicts those other New Testament considerations. On the other hand, it creates harmony rather than contradiction to interpret Romans, Galatians, and Colossians as addressing the first-century debates between Jewish and Gentile believers about whether it was necessary to continue observing Mosaic holy days and Sabbaths. According to Romans, Galatians, and Colossians, the answer is *no*. But if you ask whether this means that now therefore all the days are exactly the same to God, the answer must take into account Psalm 118:21–24 (as interpreted by Acts 4:10–11), Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, and Revelation 1:10. When you do, the answer is that there is still a day that is unlike the others. It is uniquely the Lord's.

Objection 2: "But the Lord taught that it is lawful to work and to do good on the Sabbath; therefore, I can work or even play on Sunday."

Answer: It is true that works of necessity may be done on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:12; Luke 13:15; 14:5; i.e., public protection, health care, the "ox in the ditch," etc.). It is certainly legitimate to transfer the application of such passages to the Lord's Day. Yet even in such cases a believer must weigh very carefully the extent to which these necessary things are encroaching upon that which is even more necessary (Job 23:12). In a similar case of being *cumbered with much serving* the Lord set the precedent by commending Mary for having *chosen that good part* (Luke 10:42). As for playing games on Sunday, Spurgeon once addressed the question by stating, "I believe that Sunday should be spent in recreation. You are dreadfully shocked, and well you may be. But what do I mean by 'recreation'? It means creating us new. Oh, that everybody who talks about spending Sunday in recreation would come to be recreated, regenerated, renewed, refreshed, revived, and made to rejoice in God" (*The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXVII, 474).

Objection 3: "I have no choice; I *have* to work on Sunday."

Answer: That statement needs to be examined very carefully. Why does a man *have* to work on the Lord's Day? If he replies that his company requires it, then a

more correct statement would be, "I have to work on Sunday if I want to work for such-and-such a company." It then becomes apparent that no one is coercing him against his will to work on the Lord's Day but that he has made a decision to do so because he values a certain place of employment. The question is, which does he value more—his place of employment or his place with the Lord's people in the Lord's house?

Objection 4: "My employer requires only that I work every other Sunday."

Answer: Most believers would not agree to work three out of four Sundays. But many will work two out of four. Why? Because they are presuming that they can do so without spiritual injury. They have estimated how much preaching, fellowship, and service they need to stay spiritually healthy and have decided that two out of four days a month will be adequate. But from Creation God established a seven-day rhythm to life. By His design both the OT Sabbath and the NT first day of the week cycle back around every seven days. This implies His estimation of the frequency of our need of rest and spiritual recuperation.

What alternative would anyone who disagrees with reclaiming the Lord's Day propose? If not on the Lord's Day, when should we gather for instruction, service, and worship? What other day's observance is encouraged in the New Testament as is that of the first day of the week? If Christians become careless about this day, about whether they are available for divine service, about what they do in the afternoon between their times in the Lord's house, about whether they work or play or worship on the first day of the week, what will be the ramifications for the body of Christ?

Objection 5: "I won't be able to pay my bills if I don't work on Sunday."

Answer: Millions of people, saved and unsaved alike, pay their bills without working on Sundays. The Lord has already promised to provide our every material need and surely will not fail to do so because we want to be in His house on His day.

Objection 6: “This position is legalistic. It puts believers back under the Law. We’re supposed to live by the principles of grace.”

Answer: This position is not based upon the Law. There is no specific New Testament mandate about strict Lord’s Day observance as there is in the Old Testament regarding the Sabbath. Although we are admonished not to forsake *the assembling of ourselves together* (Heb. 10:25), there is no New Testament list of legal and illegal Lord’s Day activities. Instead, we are given just enough biblical information to indicate what the spirit but not the letter of our observance ought to be. For instance, when you make your decisions about what you do on the Lord’s Day, do you reflect the psalmist’s spirit when he wrote, *A day in thy courts is better than a thousand* (Ps. 84:10)? What are the practical applications of a spirit like that towards the opportunities to be in the Lord’s house? What decisions about the Lord’s Day would someone with that spirit make? Or to use another example, what choices would you make about what you do with the Lord’s Day if you applied the spirit of Romans 12:2: *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God?* By this approach God tests rather than coerces our decisions about this issue.

Actually, it is a new form of legalism to insist on possessing the letter of a New Testament law before being willing to adopt a personal conviction about an issue. A New Testament Christian who really understands grace is eager to discover the slightest biblical hint of what pleases the Lord and is prepared to live sacrificially in order to give Him that pleasure. If Sunday is your best day for business or pleasure, then there is just that much more opportunity for you to make a greater sacrifice and prove that your greatest love and loyalty is to the Lord.

Objection 7: “I still don’t feel compelled to have a conviction about the Lord’s Day.”

Answer: But reflect upon the fact that the world does. Its conviction is that you ought to work on Sunday. In fact, lost people feel so strongly about this that they are prepared to take away your job, even though you are productive, faithful, honest, and hardworking, for no other reason than that you won’t work on Sunday. Can the intensity and universality of the world’s feeling be accidental? Ephesians 2:2 states that *the course of this world* (literally, *the contemporary age of this cosmos*) is according to the prince of the power of the air. Do you think that your adversary has any conviction about where he wants you to be (and where he does not want you to be!) on the Lord’s Day? Who’s going to win the battle for your spiritual welfare and that of your family and

church when, as a Christian without a conviction, you encounter relentless pressure from a fiercely committed world system dominated by the Devil?

Concluding Questions

This brief column cannot begin to answer the many questions that might be raised by someone who remains unconvinced about the necessity of keeping the Lord’s Day holy. I do trust, however, that it will provoke some serious reflection upon what we are doing on the first day of the week, and whether it is truly strengthening the cause of Christ. A pattern prayer for any of us in this regard is Paul’s for the Philippians: *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God* (Phil. 1:9–11).

In conclusion, I would like to propose some questions for any questioner. What alternative would anyone who disagrees with reclaiming the Lord’s Day propose? If not on the Lord’s Day, when should we gather for instruction, service, and worship? What other day’s observance is encouraged in the New Testament as is that of the first day of the week? If Christians become careless about this day, about whether they are available for divine service, about what they do in the afternoon between their times in the Lord’s house, about whether they work or play or worship on the first day of the week, what will be the ramifications for the body of Christ?

Even if we did not have the scriptural considerations set forth in the New Testament, would we not still do best, even from a purely practical standpoint, to admonish and encourage our people to set this day apart for the things of the Lord? What can possibly be gained for the cause of Christ if we fail to reclaim the Lord’s Day? What might be the Lord’s response if we entered into the spirit of Isaiah 58:13–14?

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. ☞☞



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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.

Bring . . . the Books

J. C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*

Parenting is not for the faint of heart. It is hard work and requires much patience, persistence, and perseverance. No parent enters the life of parenting knowing all there is to know. This is why it is important to study the Scriptures and to read good books by godly men and women on this crucial subject.

One such book is by J. C. Ryle, the noted nineteenth-century evangelical Anglican pastor and author. Ryle, who had four children, was known as a devout man of God; he wrote many books on biblical subjects, including perhaps his most well-known book, *Holiness*. One of his lesser-known writings is a small work called *The Duty of Parents*. It can be found as a Kindle edition, paperback, or free document online (wholesomewords.org/etexts/ryle/ryleduties.pdf). Though it takes only about an hour to read, its brevity does not limit its profitability.

The book has no chapter divisions but consists of a series of seventeen statements for parents to consider, each as an application of the book's theme verse, Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Ryle's seventeen statements are all biblical in their roots, practical in their nature, and beneficial for all parents to read.

Embedded in the book is notion that there are biblical examples of good parents whose children do not follow the ways of God—yet there are also examples of ungodly parents whose children turn to God in humility. As parents, we wish there were some kind of magic formula for ensuring godliness in our children. However, God has not given us such a formula, perhaps as a means of keeping us utterly dependent upon Him rather than on some earthly formula. Yet Ryle points out that Proverbs 22:6 provides both a directive for parents to follow as well as a promise for God to fulfill.

The subject matter which Ryle touches on in his statements is wide. He mentions things like the need for obedience, the need for prayer and the Word of God in our children, the dangers of letting our children have their own way, and the need for God's grace through the Spirit of God. No parent can bring up godly children simply by will power or by skills of persuasion. If that were possible, there would be no need of Christ, no need of the gospel, and no need of the Spirit.

Here are a few choice examples of Ryle's advice to parents.

A true Christian must be no slave to fashion, if he would train his child for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to teach them and instruct them in certain ways, merely because it is usual; to allow them to read books of a questionable sort, merely because everybody else reads them; to let


them form habits of a doubtful tendency, merely because they are the habits of the day. He must train with an eye to his children's souls. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called singular and strange. What if it is? The time is short,—the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his children for heaven, rather than for earth,—for God, rather than for man,—he is the parent that will be called wise at last.

Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. No school will make such deep marks on character as home. The best of schoolmasters will not imprint on their minds as much as they will pick up at your fireside. Imitation is a far stronger principle with children than memory. What they see has a much stronger effect on their minds than what they are told.

Without the blessing of the Lord, your best endeavors will do no good. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and except He touch the hearts of your children by His Spirit, you will weary yourself to no purpose. Water, therefore, the seed you sow on their minds with unceasing prayer.

These are but a sampling of the kind of blessed truth God allowed Ryle to impart. What was true in the nineteenth century is true in the twenty-first century. God's desire for Christian parents today is no different than it was then. It is our responsibility to bring up our children in the way they should go, which is the way of God as expressed and revealed in His Word.

Having two teenage children of my own, I know the challenges and burdens of being a parent. Reading this book a few times now has encouraged me that God can do great things in the lives of my children, but He desires to use me to shepherd their hearts towards Him. It has challenged me to not give up, but to trust Him to do the work.

If you are a parent, teaching a parenting class, or are discipling individual families, then this is a book that should be on your list of resources to point both parent and child to Christ. No parent is perfect, but a book like this can point our hearts and minds as parents to God, to His Word, and to His desires for us in the all-important task of raising our children in the ways and will of God. 

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

Taigen Joos is senior pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire.

Philippians 1:18 reads, "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

In this verse Paul's rejoicing creates questions. Does Paul really rejoice when Christ is preached in pretense? If so, who is preaching, and what are they preaching? How can Paul rejoice in what appears to be evil? These questions require the reader to dig deeper into the meaning of this somewhat confusing verse. Digging deeper enables the reader to gain biblical clarity and spiritual blessing.

As always, context is important in understanding God's Word. Here, Paul is in a Roman prison for the gospel's sake. His movement is restricted, and his ability to proclaim Christ is limited. Apparently, other preachers have taken advantage of Paul's circumstances to actively proclaim the gospel of Christ. Paul makes it clear that they sometimes do so with impure motives.

Who are these proclaimers? What is their motive for preaching Christ? Bible teachers differ in their answers to these questions. A few teachers believe the proclaimers are unbelieving Judaizers, proclaiming a distorted version of the gospel. J. B. Lightfoot writes, "These antagonists can be none other than the Judaizing party." He continues, "They preach Christ indeed, but their motives are not single. Their real object is to gain adherents to the law" (*Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 88). Galatians 1:6–9, however, makes it very unlikely that Paul would commend such preaching. Instead, he would likely expose and condemn the false proclaimers.

Most Bible teachers believe that these preachers were genuine believers who proclaimed a clear gospel message with impure motives. Apparently, jealousy also existed in Paul's day among God's people. Perhaps the local preachers resented Paul's popularity. They saw Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to proclaim Christ, grow their personal following, and increase Paul's suffering. It was their opportunity to "stick it to Paul." R. P. Martin writes that Paul's statement "has to do exclusively with the motives of the rival groups within the church, not with the content of their preaching" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 73). R.C.H. Lenski says, "They thought they were vexing Paul. Imagining him to be actuated by motives and thoughts like their own, they supposed that any special success on their part would make him envious of them, would make him chafe in his confinement which prevented him from competing as fully with them as he otherwise might"

(*The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatian, Ephesians and Philippians*, 732).

Was Paul really rejoicing, even though he knew their motives were impure? Perhaps the best response to this question is that Paul was rejoicing *in spite of* their impure motives. He did not approve of their motives, but he did rejoice that the gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed. "Since they were preaching the truth, they were delighting Paul instead of discouraging him. He could not applaud their motives—God would have to attend to those—but he could and did rejoice that the gospel was going forth" (John Phillips, *Exploring Ephesians & Philippians*, 54).

Paul was all about Christ. He did not desire a personal following. In 1 Corinthians 1:13–15 he writes, "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name." In contrast to the motives of others, Paul was not about Paul. He was about Jesus Christ. He was not jealous of others. Homer Kent Jr. observes, "As long as the antagonism was only personal, Paul could rejoice that the greater purpose of disseminating the gospel was being served. Even when some of the preaching was actually a pretext . . . utilized to camouflage attacks on Paul, the apostle took the magnanimous view that affronts to himself could be ignored, provided that the truth of the gospel of Christ was proclaimed. He rejoiced in this and intended to maintain this wholesome magnanimity, which rose above all personal feelings" (*Philippians*, 112). William Hendriksen agrees: "What really matters to him is not what they are doing to *him* but what they are doing for *the gospel*" (*Exposition of Philippians*, 73).

What appears on the surface to be an ethical enigma turns out in the end to be a spiritual challenge and blessing. Here is a man, a preacher of the gospel, who is so focused on Christ that even when others seek to hurt or offend him, he rises above their pettiness and magnifies the Lord Jesus Christ. "This state of mind indicated his supreme regard for Christ—that he preferred Him above everything—that he could bear to be an object of malevolence and jealousy, if so his Master was exalted—and that, provided Christ was preached, he cared not for tarnished fame or heavier affliction" (John Eadie, *Philippians*, 43). What others meant to harm Paul exposed his heart for the Savior. In verse 21 he writes, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Truly, Paul was all about Christ. What about you? ☞

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

David Pennington, PhD, lives in the Charlotte, North Carolina, area. He is the founder and president of Penn Coaching & Consulting, a Leadership and Business Coaching Company, and serves on the Executive Board of FBFi. His great joy is mentoring and developing Christian leaders.

Windows

A Conversation Regarding Gospel Associations

In the fall of 2000 I had just begun ministry at Antigonish Baptist Church in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, when a pastor from a nondenominational work about thirty minutes outside of town dropped in to see me. He quickly indicated that we had the same basic doctrinal commitments, the same evangelical heritage, and the same heroes in reference to church history. Then almost as quickly he added, “I think our primary difference is that I wouldn’t practice the Bob Jones way of separation.”

I had never met or even heard of this man before, and I’m still not sure what he knew of my educational background. I did graduate from Maranatha Baptist Bible College with a BA in Bible in 1991 and from Bob Jones University with an MA in Theology in 1993.

Despite my Bob Jones education I had never heard of “the Bob Jones way of separation.” When I asked my guest for clarification, he quickly replied, “You know, that second-degree stuff.” Though I had heard discussions about the label “second-degree separation,” I wasn’t clear what this man’s reference point was, so I asked him if he could explain that further. He indicated that he was a graduate of the Billy Graham School of Evangelism and that he had high regard for the ministry of Dr. Graham. He was pretty sure that, if Dr. Graham came to Antigonish under the sponsorship of the Roman Catholic Church, he likely wouldn’t formally participate in such a crusade because the region was so Catholic—but the fact that Dr. Graham had partnered with Catholic leadership in other crusades would not prevent this pastor from supporting and promoting his ministry.

A Little Context

Before continuing to relate our ongoing interaction that day, it might be helpful to pause and be reminded of what was already well-documented and what my guest and I both knew of the partnerships Billy Graham had formed with non-evangelicals by this point. I’ve recently been rereading Iain Murray’s *Evangelicalism Divided* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000) in which he cites several of these noteworthy events. In 1957 in New York, Dr. Graham accepted sponsorship from the Protestant Council of the City of New York; in the words of Notre Dame history professor George Marsden, Graham’s action meant “cooperation with a group that was predominantly non-evangelical and even included out-and-out modernists.” Murray’s footnote to this source adds that “several newspapers reported Graham to say of those who would come forward, ‘We’ll send them to their own churches—Roman Catholic, Protestant or Jewish.

. . . The rest is up to God.”

Before Dr. Graham’s crusade on the campus of Notre Dame in 1977 he had already stated, “I feel I belong to all the churches. I am equally at home in Anglican or Baptist or a Brethren assembly or a Roman Catholic church.

. . . Today we have almost 100 per cent Catholic support in this country. . . . And the bishops, archbishops, and the Pope are our friends” (Murray, 68–69). Murray’s second chapter is titled “Billy Graham: Catalyst for Change.” Those changes include the March 1994 publication of the twenty-five-page document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*. Murray interacts with the ECT document and its dangers at length in chapter 8 (“Rome and New Division”).

Back to the Conversation

On that fall day in 2000 my guest and I were well aware of these dynamics. When he suggested that our practice in this area would be a significant difference between us, I briefly answered from my own personal perspective by pointing to one Bible text and relating one story from my own previous ministry.

The passage was Galatians 2. The apostle Paul explains early on the circumstances that prompted him to write this epistle: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (1:6). He was alarmed that individuals who had professed faith in the gospel were deserting the very Lord they claimed had saved them, and implies that they had done so by espousing a different belief system—“another gospel.”

But, Paul is quick to clarify, that does not mean that there are truly multiple gospels from which people can pick and choose: “Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7). This other gospel he mentions in 1:6 is actually not the gospel of Christ at all. This would be more apparent if we were Greek readers, because the word “another” in verse six is the Greek term *heteros*, which often emphasizes another of a different kind. The word “another” in verse seven is *allos*, the more common expression used to describe different objects of the same kind. The new belief system that at least some of the Galatians were espousing was a gospel of another kind, which in reality was not a gospel at all but was a perversion of the one and only true gospel.

When we move into Galatians 2 it is shocking

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

Charles Spurgeon

to find Paul asserting that the actions of Peter and Barnabas were themselves a threat to this one and only true gospel. In Antioch (2:11) Peter had initially eaten with the uncircumcised Gentile believers and treated them as Christian brothers on equal standing with himself. Then under pressure from those visiting from Jerusalem, who mixed faith in Christ with performance of the Law, Peter broke off this fellowship with the Gentile believers, and by doing so he was communicating that their lack of circumcision (at least), and perhaps also their lack of adherence to other matters such as Jewish dietary prescriptions, implied that they did not have the same status as the true people of God (2:12). Peter's actions were confusing, even misdirecting others such as Barnabas (2:13). Paul goes on to make it very clear that this was not just a matter of who was socializing with whom. This was a situation in which their actions on what some might call a social plane had far deeper ramifications. In 2:14 he charges them with conduct that was not upright "according to the truth of the gospel."

"Religious" associations can distort, confuse, and obscure the gospel message. Paul wasn't addressing having your neighbor over for supper. Paul was addressing occasions of what could be called "Christian fellowship." Your associations can proclaim what you believe to be the boundaries of Christian fellowship and can signal what you believe to be acceptable doctrinal positions and philosophies of ministry. Ramifications of this truth extend beyond our current discussion, but at a minimum associations that obscure the gospel message must be broken off and not entered into. The fact that Paul withstood Peter to the face (2:11) "before them all" (2:14), and then wrote about it in the Epistle to the Galatians, indicates that some error is so dangerous there is a place for public exposure and confrontation.

I then related to my guest a personal ministry story. In the late 1990s I was teaching a group of laymen the history of fundamentalism. One evening I was tracing a series of stages in Billy Graham's partnerships with non-evangelicals, as found primarily in Dr. Ernest Pickering's *The Tragedy of Compromise* (Bob Jones University Press, 1994). In the middle of my presentation a man I didn't know well raised his hand and asked if he could say something. I feared that he had come to Christ through a Billy Graham Crusade and that he was about to take me to task in front of the class for a negative critique of Dr. Graham's ministry. Though apprehensive, I gave him the opportunity to speak. He related that in the midst of a troubled life, troubled marriage, and troubled home life with young children, he had watched a Billy Graham Crusade on television. His heart was stirred with a message that was entirely new to him, one that he thought gave him some hope. Scrolling across the screen was a number to call for spiritual help. He was desperate enough to call the number. A voice on the other end asked, "How can I help you?" He responded, "Please


tell me where in my town I can hear the message I just heard tonight." The phone attendant asked if he attended a church in his area. He explained that his church attendance was hit-and-miss, but mentioned his local Catholic church. The attendant immediately replied that he could hear the message there. He was shocked at this answer and responded by saying, "I've attended there all my life and never heard what I heard tonight." The attendant replied that now that he knew what to look for he could go back and hear the message he needed. He hung up the phone and despaired that if truth that could help even really existed he was likely never to find it. By the time he related this testimony he had come to Christ, but I later learned that in the intervening years his wife had committed suicide (a young son found his mom in a field with a shotgun), and the scars of this tragedy had long-term consequences.

Only the Lord knows all of the dynamics that contributed to this awful tragedy, and I am certainly not pinning it all on the compromise of one man and his supporters. I have no doubt that God has used the preaching ministry of Dr. Billy Graham to save many. At the same time, it is apparent that compromised associations can distort, confuse, and obscure the gospel message and do much damage in the process. The Scripture exhorts us to much vigilance in gospel associations no matter how that vigilance may be disparaged or misconstrued.

A Final Appeal

Summarizing objections to the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* accord, Murray wrote that the supporters of the document "have recognized one another as fellow Christians without any agreement on the way in which anyone becomes a Christian. The New Testament presents a gospel which is to be believed *in order to* salvation, and it requires those who would teach that gospel to others be clear and definite about its message" (227). That clarity regarding the gospel must be maintained not only in word spoken but in associations maintained and denied.

In chapter 9 ("The Silent Participant"), Murray observes, "The explanation often given by evangelicals for the lack of confrontation with error is that a harsh militancy has done more harm than good. . . . Dr. Billy Graham has often blamed 'fundamentalists' for this fault. But the fact that what the New Testament says on love has been ignored is no reason why its injunctions against error should not be obeyed. . . . A biblical contending against error is fully consistent with love, indeed it is love for the souls of men which requires it" (260).

May honor for Christ and His gospel and love for the souls of men keep us from associations that compromise that gospel! 

Tom Fuller pastors Faith Baptist Church in Easley, South Carolina.



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Learning to Love and Live the Bible

Almost twenty years ago, Faith Baptist Church of Taylors, South Carolina, was burdened to develop a graded, uniformed children's club focused on helping children and young teens to learn to love and live the Bible. Believing that these two principles would prepare them to be genuine Bible-believers in adulthood, a dedicated team spent years on the task, writing over 10,000 pages of curriculum for what would become FrontLine Clubs. Recently, a fresh revision has been completed. Churches who use this curriculum attest to the effectiveness of this material in promoting a love for the Bible and a desire to live by its precepts. Moreover, the dedicated development team found their own desire to love and live the Bible exponentially increased.

How wonderful it would be if all Bible-believing churches focused on and labored to instill these two principles into the lives of their members. Of course, most do just that in one way or another. Even churches that would not self-identify as "Bible-believing" have some affinity for the Bible. I well remember the small country Methodist churches that I grew up attending. They all looked the same inside if not outside: hard pews separated by a center aisle; a slightly raised platform surrounded by a wooden railing we called "the altar"; at least two tall-backed wooden chairs behind a modest wooden pulpit. Of course, there were variations: the more prosperous churches might have stained glass windows on the side walls; there might be a rope hanging down in the front foyer, which some fortunate boy might be allowed to pull at 11 AM sharp on Sunday, ringing the bell to call the neighborhood to worship.

But there was one feature for which there was no variation—no exception. On a modest table in front of the pulpit, inscribed with the words, "This Do in Remembrance of Me," there was a very large open Bible. The print was also very large, and these Bibles had pictures of scenes from Bible stories placed throughout their pages. When it was my assignment

to sweep the floors and straighten the hymnals on Saturday, I loved to look at those pictures and recall the stories my grandmother had taught me. I learned to love those beautiful Bibles. Living the Bible was another matter entirely.

Somehow I got the impression that a Christian was someone who obeyed the Bible sufficiently to earn his way to heaven. I learned the standard response of the unsaved churchgoer when asked if I read the Bible: "Well, not like I should." I came to believe that if I did not shape up and change my behavior, I would never make it to heaven. The Bible made me feel guilty and hopeless. Tragically, I was like so many others on that same path. I did not really know what the Bible was, or where it came from, and why it was given to us. Learning to love it and live it never entered my mind.

Two Powerful Truths

Thank the Lord, at age twenty-five I met a friend who made God's simple plan of salvation truly simple. He taught me two things: first, he showed me the plan of salvation from the Bible; then he showed me what the Bible said about itself:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

And

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Armed with those two simple but powerful truths—one a fact and one a command—I quickly launched into a lifelong pursuit of learning to love and live the Bible. Huge volumes have been written about the doctrine of bibliology. Scholars have invested their lives into every detail. It has truthfully been said that “every question that can possibly be asked about the Bible has been asked and answered many times over.” Far too often we “miss the forest for the trees,” or in some cases, we miss the trees for the leaves! We have church members who have become specialists in the minutia of the textual controversy. Others struggle to unravel the threads of endless debates over Calvinism and Arminianism. Worse, we have well-trained preachers and Bible scholars who seem to have dedicated themselves to topics that often leave their listeners scratching their heads. Sadly, too few of them focus on helping others to learn to love and live the Bible. Worse, some of them seem to think such a pursuit is only for children but apparently not for themselves.

A Simple Question, a Simple Answer

One simple question must be asked and answered in every church in every generation. It must be asked and answered repeatedly. Every Bible-believing church must ensure that anyone who enters its doors knows or is learning the simple answer to this question: “What is the Bible?” The simple answer is found in the Bible itself. The Bible is the Word of God. It is not just a book about God; it is a book from God. It is literally the voice of God. It is how God speaks to us, corporately and individually. Of course, the creation is God’s message to all mankind, and from testimonies and personal witnessing, the world can learn about Jesus. But God gave us the Bible as His own revelation. It reveals who He is and what He wants us to know. This truth is the refutation to the charge that Bible-believers can and do become “bibliolators,” a charge made by even by some professing Christians.

Admittedly, we hold to the view that the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible is foundational to Christianity. Because it is inspired—breathed out by God—it is infallible, because He is infallible. He cannot speak error. His word is Truth. An article of this length could easily be presented offering only the Bible references (not the actual verses) that establish this claim. Having published numerous articles in *FrontLine* on this topic and having presented countless sermons in regional, national, and international meetings describing and defending this truth, FBFI offers a large archive to further develop this foundational truth. After long labor and prayerful editing, the leadership of FBFI produced a compact statement on the Scriptures and placed it in our Constitution:

We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone as verbally, plenary inspired of

God, without error in the original writings and the sole authority of faith and practice, providentially preserved as God’s eternal Word (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 1 Pet. 1:23[b]–25. We believe in a dispensational understanding of the Bible based on the progressive unfolding of the divine mysteries from God, which result in distinguishable stewardships of God’s truth (Heb. 1:1–3; Eph. 1:10; 1 Cor. 10:32).

Because we believe this, we are confident in using our Bibles to preach and teach to the end of helping believers learn to love and live the Bible. The Bible has been called “God’s love letter.” A love letter is a tool through which two individuals who love each other can share their love even though they are separated by time and distance. Learning to love and live the Bible is the practical approach in learning to love and live for the Lord. In its pages we learn about Him—about who He is, what He is like, what He has done for us, and what He wants to do for us. We learn about what He wants for us and from us. We learn about how sin broke the intimate relationship He intended for mankind, and the great plan He devised to redeem us to Himself. Dear reader, if you would learn to love and live for God, you should learn to love and live the Bible.

At the moment of salvation, new life begins when the living Spirit of God animates the spirit of man, dead in sin. Imagine reading a book with the author nearby to explain every word and thought as you read. Imagine that the Author of the Bible, living in you, was ready to explain, illuminate, and then empower you to obey everything you were reading. Imagine not just knowing about God, but actually knowing God! Imagine that God was thinking of you when His Spirit wrote the verse that captured your imagination as you read. Imagine that God is speaking directly to you as you read His Word. Experience it once, and you will know that that experience is not just your imagination, it is reality. It is truth—simple truth. I am so thankful that the Lord poured out His love to me with patience and persistence until I realized that simple truth: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Years ago, a renowned preacher was scheduled to deliver the closing address of a Bible conference. Thousands were in attendance and waited through long proceedings and brilliant sermons until, at last, the great man of God stepped into the pulpit. It was late, and the listeners were exhausted. He quietly surveyed the vast sea of faces yearning through tired eyes for the profound truth he would deliver, then wisely and gently said, “Jesus loves me. This I know . . . for the Bible tells me so.” Then he offered a brief prayer and returned to his seat. Oh, that we could rest in what that preacher knew—that we could learn to love and live the Bible.

Former FBFI president John C. Vaughn holds a Doctor of Pastoral Theology from Bob Jones University. An ACPE-certified chaplain, he is also an FBFI-endorsed chaplain and the chairman-elect of the International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers (ICECE). He is the founder of *FrontLine* Clubs, International, a ministry of the John C. Vaughn Evangelistic Association, Inc. He can be reached at www.johncvaughn.com.





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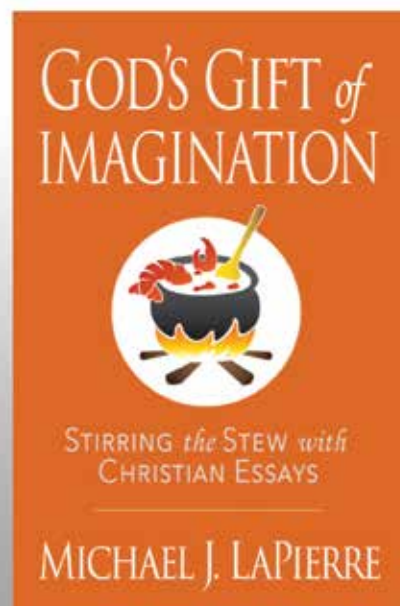
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Michael J. LaPierre is a former business executive who specializes in Christian leadership training and development.

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Mail Bag (Continued from page 5)

could be my own deficiencies that make the dense layout unappealing to me. But on the other hand, I have no problem reading dense material in book form if I'm interested in the content. I guess I just expect a magazine to be more visually appealing.

Also, if possible, it would be really great to see reviews of current books. Perhaps that would be more of an undertaking than possible, but I think it could make *FrontLine* a much more sought-after resource along the entire spectrum of Fundamentalism.

Additionally, I'd like to see Dispensationalism-related articles in every issue. Perhaps FBFI is trying to ride a line between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. But when a strong position is not taken one way or the other, the result is usually a deficient lukewarmness. Personally, I believe Dispensationalism is true, and, as Charles Ryrie points out, that there is a distinction between Israel and the church, that there should be a consistent and regular use of

a literal hermeneutic, and that the purpose of God is for His glory and not for the salvation of mankind. I find myself interested in material that will reinforce my Dispensational understanding of the Scriptures.

Taking no action will not cause me [to] forgo my subscription, because your content is helpful. But if the intended audience includes less scholarly people like me and, perhaps, younger generations of Fundamentalist preachers, then I hope some of my recommendations will be helpful.

David Rogol
Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church of
Holden, MA

Editor's Note: *We are not trying to ride a line between dispensationalism and covenant theology. We are openly dispensational and include it in our FBFI doctrinal statement. All of our articles are written from a dispensational perspective. We have actually produced entire issues of FrontLine on the subject and will have an issue coming soon on hermeneutics, which will also deal with the subject.*

The Widow's Border

He will establish the border of the widow (Prov. 15:25).

"Mom, come live with us. God has already trained us to live together, so we know we can do it." My son spoke from his heart. My husband was dying of cancer; my son and wife had lived with us a few years earlier. I had just found out that my husband's retirement check would stop when the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, would take my husband to heaven. I knew of the many verses in the Bible that tell of God's special care for the widow. I also knew it would not be long before Pete would slip off into his eternal home. There was one verse in particular I had studied years before when my dad died and left mom a widow. The Lord reminded me of this. I looked up the verse in my journal of Bible studies.

As always, God's Word encouraged my heart. It was difficult to watch my once strong, independent man lose some of that strength and be dependent on me, my family, and friends. So many of the studies I had done and continued to do kept me going when many plans had to be made. My study on Proverbs 15:25—"He will establish the border of the widow"—reminded me that the Lord would establish my border when I became a widow.

Some of the meanings of "establish" are "to station, fix, or to erect." One definition of "border" is "boundary." As I furthered my study on the meanings of these words I was reminded that

God will place me where I am to be.

God will fix and provide me with all I need.

God will encourage and direct me in His ways.

God will give clearly marked limits as to what I should do with my life.

This helped with my decision to sell the house and leave my church and friends to move in with my son and his family. God miraculously worked out all the details quickly so Pete was able to move with me there for three precious months before the Lord called him home. God gave me a new verse to study: "He relieveth the fatherless and widow" (Ps. 146:9). To relieve is to restore, lift up, and encompass. I knew that God would restore me to begin anew. That would come in due time, but what about the waves of loneliness that I knew, from watching Mom, would come over me? The best thing

He promised with this verse is that He will encompass me, enclose, go completely around and envelope me.

He will hug me!

So I submitted to the desire of my husband, son and wife, and my Lord. God placed me where I needed to be. He provided my every need. As I sought Him daily by prayer and Bible study, He continued to encourage me and direct my steps. Through the grieving process I knew I was connected to a life-giving cord that lifted me up time and again. And what about the hugs? So many times I was aware of His love visits and basked in His enveloping presence.

I thought my border, my boundary, was fixed, but God had other plans. That boundary was going to be moved. This time through many different ways He began to tug on my heart to move two thousand miles away to a place I had never been. There was nothing there I knew, only one family. He had plans for me of which I knew nothing about. I had never been alone, on my own, never lived away from the eastern part of the USA. This was a new stretch of faith as to whether I really believed His promises to care for, provide, direct my steps, and comfort me with His encompassing presence that I would need in times of loneliness. Did I trust Him to be my all-in-all as I always said He was? Would He prove to me the truth of what I would often say, that it was in Him that I lived, moved, and had my being? I sold almost everything, packed up my car, and moved.

I lived in the West for two years, learning to depend on Him. God, true to His promise, took care of me over and above what I could ever ask or think. In my first tiny place I met a Christian lady who knocked on my door one night and handed me a very large Hershey's dark chocolate candy bar. She said, "God told me to give this to you." Well, He must have, because unknown to her that was exactly what my hubby would give me on special occasions. I knew the Lord was showing me, "Martha, I know not only your needs but also your likes." In the last twelve years I have experienced the wonder of God's providential amazing care. His presence has never left me, and in His presence there is fullness of joy. Someday I will live with Him in the border of heaven for all eternity.

Martha Mazzaferro now lives in Greenville, South Carolina. Her thirty-year Saturday-night ministry is intercessory prayer for over fifty-five churches from across the country (Luke 2:37).



Regional Report

Alaska FBFI Regional Fellowship

The 2019 Alaska FBFI Regional Fellowship was hosted by Pastor Charlie England and the people of Maranatha Baptist Church in Anchorage. Even though Alaska is 2.5 times bigger than Texas (sorry, Texas), Christian leaders from around the state attended the gathering, some traveling hundreds of miles in order to participate.

Pastor Earl Barnett was honored during this year's meeting for faithfully serving as the Alaska FBFI regional coordinator for over twenty-five years. Pastor Bruce Hamilton was appointed as the new regional coordinator.

The preaching was exceptional as Drs. Larry Oats and Dave Saxon, both faculty members at Maranatha Baptist Seminary, served as keynote speakers. Their emphasis

was on the local church and Baptist church polity. FBFI Endorser Joe Willis also brought challenging messages during the conference.

The good folks of Maranatha Baptist Church were wonderful hosts as the food and fellowship they provided made for a wonderful time of encouragement for all who were present. Many are already looking forward to next year's fellowship, which will be held July 27–29, 2020, at Immanuel Baptist Church in Palmer, Alaska, with Pastor Ben Burch hosting. If you have never been to Alaska or desire to return for a visit, plan your vacation around next year's fellowship! We hope to see you there!



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How the Word of God Has Been Passed Down to Us

Continued from page 9

Christ” versus “Christ Jesus.” Such variants have no effect on meaning and in many cases are impossible to translate.

In addition to these “meaningless” variants, many variants are not viable, that is, they could not possibly be correct. Such readings include readings that must be mistakes (much like the typo, “I drove my cat to work today” instead of “I drove my car to work today”) or variants that are supported only by one or two late manuscripts against the overwhelming weight of the manuscript evidence. It has been estimated that only around one percent of the New Testament has variants that are both meaningful and viable.⁵ Even in these places, God in His providence has not allowed Christian doctrine to be affected.⁶

Translation: Making God’s Word Available

As we have noted, one of the main reasons for copying God’s Word was to make it available to others. However, over the course of history, most people have not understood the languages in which the Scripture was written. It is likely that only a minority of the people reading this article can read Greek and Hebrew, and only a small minority of that group are so conversant in those languages that they do not need to read the Bible in their own tongue. Even before the time of Christ, translations of the Old Testament were made, and the New Testament frequently quotes from the Greek Version (called the Septuagint or “LXX”), treating it as the Word of God. This use of the Septuagint by the New Testament writers was a major part of the defense given by the King James translators for their work.⁷ They affirm that “the very meanest [least elegant or precise] translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession [i.e., Protestants], (for we have seen none of theirs [i.e., Catholics] of the whole Bible as yet) containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God.”⁸

The conviction that faithful translations are God’s Word has motivated His people over the centuries to devote, and even sacrifice, their lives to render that Word into languages that more people can understand. It is also confirmed by the myriads of lives transformed by those translations.

Like scribes, translators do not have the promise of infallibility from God, who in His wisdom has determined to preserve and spread His Word through providence and not through miracle. Two translators or sets of translators may differ as to which copies to follow at a given place (textual choices) or how best to render what they see there (translation choices). This should not shock us any more than we are shocked by two different commentators or two different preachers disagreeing about how a verse should be interpreted or applied. We do not believe in infallible translators any more than we believe in infallible preachers. The King James translators affirmed this:

No cause therefore why the word translated should be denied to be the word, or forbidden to be current, notwithstanding that some imperfections and blemishes may be noted in the setting forth of it. For whatever was perfect under the Sun, where Apostles or Apostolic

men, that is, men endued with an extraordinary measure of God’s spirit [i.e., inspired], and privileged with the privilege of infallibility, had not their hand?⁹

The faith of the church historically and the testimony of believers individually is vindicated by both Scripture and history. The faithful translations of the Bible that we love and study, whether in English or Spanish or Mandarin, are the Word of God and can make us wise and provide what we need for eternal life and godly living.

Dr. David Shumate lives in Phoenix, Arizona, and serves as the General Director of MGM International (formerly Mexican Gospel Mission). He holds a law degree from Harvard (1986) and received his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Bob Jones University Seminary. He and his wife, Linda, have six children.



¹ *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Zondervan: 2011), 79. With the rise of liberalism and apostasy there are many who use the name “Christian” who deny this essential doctrine of the Faith, as they deny other fundamentals. However, this is against the scriptural as well as historical evidence.

² Among the most widely acknowledged of these passages are Psalm 119:152, Isaiah 40:8, and Matthew 5:17–18.

³ For an update on the number of extant manuscripts of various ancient documents see “The Bibliographical Test Updated,” Creation Research Institute, Oct. 1, 2013 (<https://www.equip.org/articles/the-bibliographical-test-updated/>, accessed June 18, 2019).

⁴ J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Modern Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 77–82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶ Some have asserted that certain readings adopted by many modern versions lead to false doctrine. However, a careful look at these claims reveal that they depend on biased interpretations of the texts in question. For example, Luke 2:33 (KJV) says that upon hearing the prophecies of Simeon and Anna, “Joseph and his mother” were amazed. Some manuscripts and versions read, “his father and mother.” It has been asserted that this translation is heretical because it denies the virgin birth of Christ. However, this analysis is simplistic. Joseph was Jesus’ father by adoption. Mary herself calls Joseph Jesus’ father (Luke 2:48). Unless Joseph was Jesus’ adopted father, Jesus would have had no right to sit on the throne of David, since the right of kingship passed from father to son. Note how the angel refers to Joseph as “son of David” (Matt. 1:20). None of this is to say which variant is correct, only to point out that neither variant affects doctrine. Joseph was Jesus’ father, not biologically, but legally.

⁷ “The Translators to the Reader,” <http://www.ccel.org/bible/kjv/preface/pref9.htm> (accessed June 6, 2019).

⁸ *Ibid.* In the context of this statement, it would be wrong to say that they claimed that any translation whatsoever, regardless of how inaccurate, is still God’s Word, since they were referring to translations then in existence as opposed to any possible translation. However, it is fair to say that they affirm the principle that faithful translations, whether in one language or many, and regardless of the differences between them, are still God’s Word.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Is It Safe to Stand?

Continued from page 7

Because God is eternal (Deut. 33:27), His Word is forever settled in heaven (Ps. 119:89; 1 Pet. 1:25).

The Bible's proof of inspiration is in its profitability (2 Tim. 3:15–16).⁸ The confirmation is in the divine power of the Word that leads men to salvation (Rom. 1:16), transforms broken lives into expressions of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3–4), and effectually works in those who believe (1 Thess. 2:13). The words themselves testify to their divine origin when they expose and convict our inward motives (Heb. 4:12) and then restore our souls (Ps. 119:76). We repeat the firm conviction of the apostles in divine Word of God: "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

To doubt the inerrancy of Scripture is to doubt the teaching of Scripture about Scripture itself⁹ and will always lead to an uncertainty in the veracity and power of God's Word. Satan knows that you will not stand where you don't trust or proclaim with authority what you cannot be assured of. Rather than being a minefield, the Scripture is a haven of truth in a wasteland of error. We must be careful to obey and teach every clear teaching of this inspired Book because a determined unbelief and disobedience will invariably lead toward a redefinition of God's Word in its infallibility and authority. Let us stand on the inerrancy of Scripture based on its inspiration by God, because, as that great children's song tells us, "the Bible tells me so!"

Dr. Benjamin Heffernan is the pastor of Bethel Community Baptist Church in Fort Scott, Kansas. He received his PhD in Theology from Bob Jones University in 2017. He and his wife, Elizabeth, have seven children.



(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 120–21.

⁶ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 133.

⁷ Some expressions reflect the perspective of mankind (i.e., the sun "rising," Ps. 50:1) or figures of speech (i.e., "the four corners of the earth," Isa. 11:12) without intending absolute scientific literalism.

⁸ James Orr, "Holy Scripture and Modern Negations," *The Fundamentals* (1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books: 2003), 1:109–10.

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 100.



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¹ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

² Ibid., 190.

³ Ibid., 281.

⁴ <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/seminary-president-apologizes-mormons>, accessed June 20, 2019.

⁵ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*

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Everybody knows there are “dead words” in the KJV—words we know we don’t know. We can look up these words. But the key concept in all my work on my beloved KJV is “false friends”—words we don’t know we don’t know. We can’t look up these words, because we don’t know we don’t know them. “False friends” aren’t the KJV translators’ fault, and they aren’t our fault—language simply changes over time.

But one thing I’ve realized as I’ve worked on this concept is that readers differ in skill. Some false friends will trip up nearly everyone; some won’t. I’ve always understood Jesus’ words about the lilies of the field, for example: “they toil not, neither do they **spin**” (Matt. 6:28 KJV). But the pastor’s wife at a large church told me it was only recently, when reading a contemporary translation, that she finally understood it: “I’ve known that verse [in the KJV] since I was a child. I knew ‘toil’ meant ‘work,’ and truthfully I knew about spinning [thread], but somehow it was forever in my . . . mind that these were dancing lilies, spinning beautifully in the water. Over the last few years I have done a daily Bible reading by listening to the One Year Audio Bible, which uses the New Living Translation. Well, imagine my shock when I heard that they ‘don’t make their clothing’! Haha! I couldn’t believe that as an adult I never caught this!”

It’s not so much that we don’t have that sense of the word “spin”—we do. We just don’t really have that *thing*: spinning thread is rare in our culture. So was “spin” really a false friend? I still say yes—for *this pastor’s wife*. She never thought to look it up; she thought she knew what it meant.

Now, most contemporary translations say precisely the same thing the KJV does here, including not just the more “literal” ESV and NASB but the more “dynamic” NIV. In the judgment of those translators, most of their audience would understand the word “spin.” But the NLT gave an interpretive translation; and the CSB “added” a word that isn’t in the Greek to clarify what kind of spinning Jesus meant: “They don’t labor or spin **thread**.” I just can’t get upset about these “interpretive” translations—because they help me understand too. Checking multiple translations is good for all readers.

Dr. Mark Ward is an academic editor at Lexham Press. His most recent book is *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



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Layton Talbert

Our Ancient Foe:

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. . . . And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. (Revelation 12:3, 7–8)

The word “wonder” is the Greek word for a “sign,” signaling that this passage is symbolic—truth via imagery. Symbols are designed to illustrate abstract ideas and to magnify specific characteristics of whatever is being symbolized. But behind every symbol in Scripture stands a very literal reality.

That image is not how Satan actually looks (I don’t *think*), but it does magnify his character as fierce, powerful, and deadly.

“Still Our Ancient Foe”: Satan’s History

He’s older than man. And yet he’s a creature, not a god. What’s his story? The details of his rebellion and fall are only hinted at indirectly, in passages such as Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28—passages that appear to be addressed to human kings, and yet they include descriptions that most interpreters believe transcend merely human rulers and apply to the being behind those human rulers who empowers them. These passages describe a creature of unparalleled beauty, wisdom, and privilege who became so infatuated with his own glory that he aspired to be independent of God and equal to God.

Some have speculated that when God created this spectacular world in all of its pristine newness, Satan expected it would be given to him as his domain to rule over; instead God created this new “race of upstart creatures” (as Milton puts it), rival beings—fragile, material, weak, naked little bipeds—to inherit all this and to rule over it! And Satan was incensed and revolted, determined to spoil whatever he couldn’t have. Of course, there’s no way to prove or disprove that explanation.

Where the record God has given us is quite clear, however, begins in Genesis 3—with his infiltration of the pristine and sinless creation,

To drive out . . . the puny inhabitants; or, if not drive,
Seduce them to our part, that their God
May prove their foe, and with repenting hand
Abolish his own works.

Having deceived and seduced the woman and ruined man and wrecked the world that God created, he has remained at war with God ever since. How do you war against an omnipotent adversary? You vent your inveterate hatred and

hostility on anything and everything that belongs to Him, or delights Him, or bears His image. Only one creature in the universe is described as bearing the image of God—that’s you.

If you have a self-identified enemy that has sworn to do all it can to destroy you, you’re a fool not to make yourself aware of the character and the strategies of that enemy. The surest way to help your enemy achieve his goal is to remain ignorant of that enemy and pretend it’s not that serious or that it will never impact you. So what else can we know about our ancient foe?

“Doth Seek to Work Us Woe”: Satan’s Character

In ancient, historical, biblical contexts, names are significant. Names mean something. God’s names reveal aspects of His being and highlight dimensions of His character. The names and titles and descriptions of Satan are significant in the same way. What are some of them, and what do they reveal about him?

The Book of Revelation gives a variety of titles and descriptions. He is depicted as a huge devouring dragon (12:2ff.; 20:2); the ancient serpent (12:9; 20:2), connecting him back to the events in the Garden of Eden; the Devil (20:2 et al.), meaning the “Slanderer” who invariably defames God’s character to man; Satan (20:2 et al.), meaning “Adversary,” “Nemesis,” “Enemy,” “Foe”; the Deceiver of the whole world (12:10); the Accuser of the saints (12:10); and Apollyon (9:11), meaning “the Destroyer.”

The rest of the NT further describes him as the tempter (Matt. 4:3), the evil one (Matt. 6:13), the wicked one (Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:19), and a roaring lion, constantly stalking prey to kill (1 Pet. 5:8). In John 8:44 Jesus reveals that he was a murderer from the beginning; he abandoned truth long ago and, as a result, there is no truth in him. When he lies, he is speaking his native tongue because he is a liar by nature; he is the ultimate pathological liar, and deception is his native habitat. In fact, he’s not just a liar; he’s the father of lying—he invented it. One of the most stunning scriptural statements about him is that he actually *masquerades* as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14); error is not always immediately obvious, or apparently evil, because it’s often camouflaged in the guise of what seems good or even noble.

Perhaps most alarmingly, the NT labels him as the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), and the ruler of this world (John 14:30). How does that work? How do we correlate God’s sovereignty with these expressions of Satan’s domain?

Knowing the Enemy

“His Craft and Power Are Great”: Satan’s Influence

Satan is God’s arch-nemesis, but not God’s opposite. God has no opposite. There is no evil parallel or counterpart to God. Throughout Scripture Satan is never depicted as fighting God, only other angels. He may be Michael’s or Gabriel’s opposite, *maybe* even their superior in terms of his original angelic rank and power. But he is infinitely inferior to God. He’s a *creature*.

It would be a serious mistake to think of him as able to read your thoughts (he’s not omniscient) or as actually being everywhere as God is (he’s not omnipresent). Satan is ubiquitous—helped by the fact that he is an angelic spirit who also has a host of demons on his side. But he is not a force; he is a person—created, supernatural, powerful, utterly and irredeemably depraved. He is always hostile to God, God’s people, and God’s purposes.

But Scripture constantly reminds us that he is infinitely inferior and subordinate to God. *He can do nothing without permission*. He has zero independent, discretionary power (see Job 1–2). He may “[go] to and fro in the earth, and . . . [walk] up and down in it” (Job 1:7), but God uses exactly the same terms to describe the ceaseless patrol of his angels “to and fro through the earth” (Zech. 1:10; 6:7). In fact, the “eyes of the LORD . . . run [same expression, same verb] to and fro through the whole earth” watching over His people (Zech. 4:10; 2 Chron. 16:9). And while Satan walks the world in search of prey (1 Pet. 5:8), the Lord God walks amid the camp of His people to deliver them from their enemies (Deut. 23:14).

So, yes, he is the head of the demonic “principalities and powers,” the rulers of the darkness of this world that Paul says we wrestle against (Eph. 6). He is the little god of this present evil age, and the ruler over fallen humanity in its united opposition to God. But all this influence is exercised within the strict parameters of God’s invisible fence; that’s not a boundary he just doesn’t want to cross—that’s a boundary he can’t cross.

“Lo, His Doom Is Sure”: Satan’s Destiny

So what should characterize your feelings about your ancient foe? Pity? Respect? Fear? How about unmixed hatred, absolute distrust, and utter disdain? Why would we want to give this enemy one moment’s gratification by listening to his lies or tentatively exploring his suggestions?

Through Christ we “have overcome [conquered] the wicked one” (1 John 2:13–14) because he that is in us is

greater is he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Christ came in the flesh in order to undo the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8), and through His death broke the power of the Devil (Heb. 2:14). Satan is powerful, but he is resistible (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). We overcome him by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:10). He may receive God’s permission to sift us like wheat—but that’s the point; he has to *receive permission* for that, and if he receives it, that permission is accompanied with the intercessory prayer of Christ (Luke 22:31). We are going to judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3); I don’t know exactly all that that means or includes, but I suspect it at least includes voicing our consent with Christ when He condemns and consigns Satan to the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10—one of those passages I like to read out loud and clear so Satan can hear, just to remind him where all this is going, and just to remind him that I know).

Paul encourages believers with the promise that “the God of peace shall bruise [crush] Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20)—not just under Christ’s feet, but under *your* feet. What does that mean? Again, I don’t know exactly, but it sounds like I’ll have a part in Christ’s defeating and humiliation of this adversary that blinded me for my first fifteen years and has dogged my heels ever since. And so will you.

The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure
For, lo, his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.

That Word is Christ. In the face of all Satan’s lies, all the doubts he raises, all his temptations and accusations, Christ is our mighty fortress against our ancient foe.

Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of Theology and Biblical Exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

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The Canon of Scripture

Continued from page 11

limiting the New Testament canon to the twenty-seven books. Some very popular church literature of significant value, yet not apostolical in nature, was never accepted as inspired Scripture—such as *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Epistle of Clement*, and *The Epistle of Barnabas*.

By the time that the church councils made official pronouncements concerning the canonical books, the canon was already fixed by practical usage of the various books in the churches. It is important to recognize that “*these councils did not create the canon, but recognized and ratified that which was in common use*, settling the canon for a thousand years. It was not until the Reformation that questions of canonicity were revisited.”⁷ The work done by the reformers was not to form the canon, but “to replace an authoritative church with an authoritative Bible.”⁸ Later confessions of faith, such as the Westminster Confession of 1643, helped to clarify the proper position concerning the canon.

Conclusion

The issue of the New Testament canon is very important, for there is a plethora of extraneous literature of New Testament pseudepigrapha. Such literature included false gospels (such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas, works of heretical Gnostics); the false Acts of Paul, of John, of Andrew, of Peter, etc.; false epistles (some claiming to be the missing epistles mentioned by Paul in his books to

the Corinthians); and false apocalypses. The child of God need not become bewildered, for God has clearly breathed out His written Word (inspiration) and has guided His people through the ages to discern that inspired Word and to preserve it. The reader may be confident that the sixty-six books contained in the Scriptures are indeed the only inspired Word of God available.

Dr. Keith Gephart has been the senior pastor of four churches. He taught at the San Francisco Baptist Theological Seminary for ten years and at International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona, for fourteen years. Currently he is pastor emeritus at Berean Baptist Church in San Tan Valley, Arizona.



¹ See Paul W. Downey, chapter 2 of *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*; ed. James B. Williams (Ambassador Emerald International, 1999), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ See R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 31

⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵ Downey, 48.

⁶ Harrison, 102.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56, emphasis in the original.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

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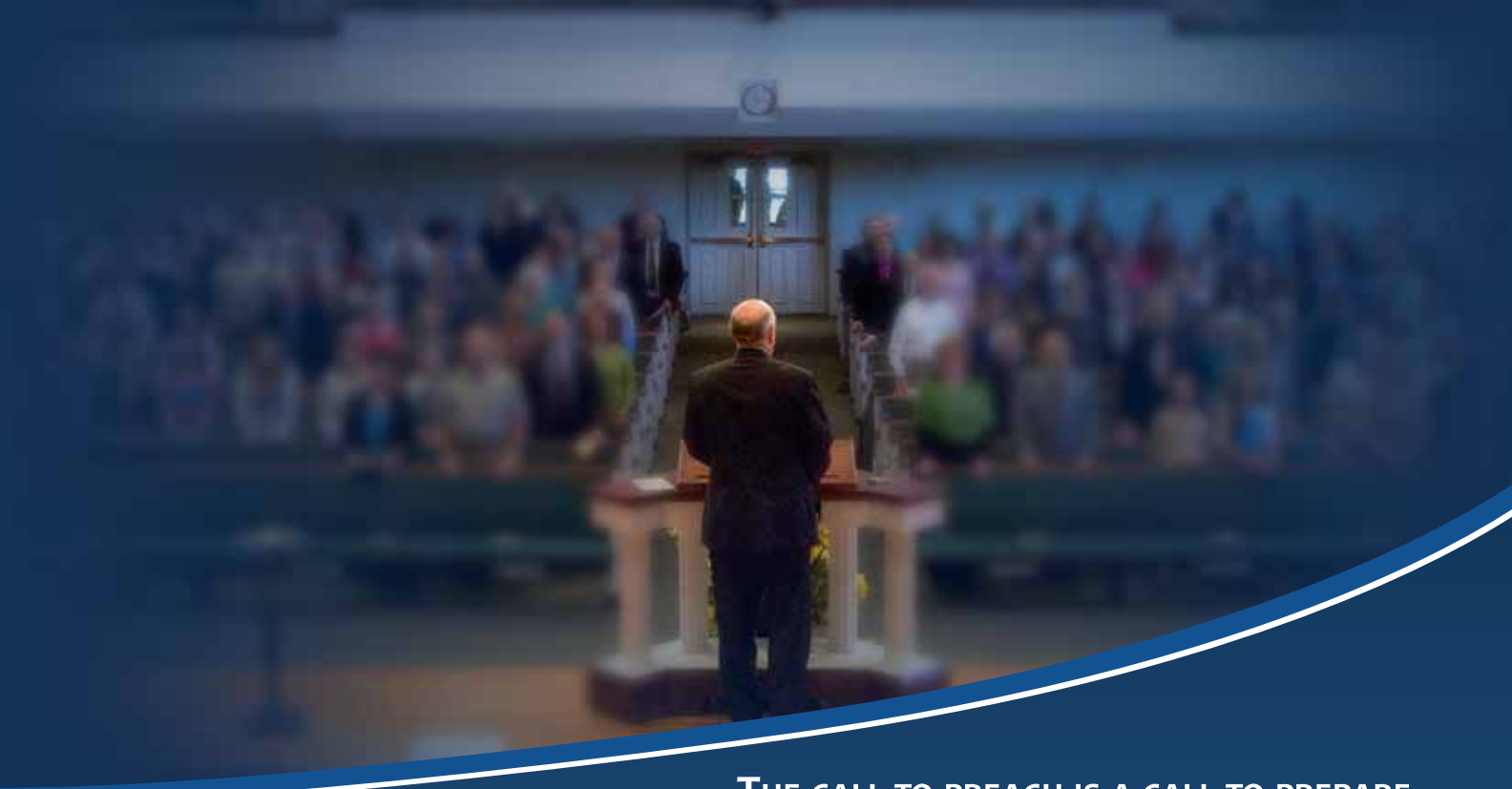
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Saying Goodbye

Here we are in the middle of our third move in twenty-seven months. The stress and uncertainty of moving are hard enough without adding all the emotional drama of saying goodbye. This time our move was unexpected and on short notice. The busyness of wrapping up responsibilities at Fort Drum and prepping for the move while still organizing our move on the other end has proven to be a challenge. We always try to leave a place with a sense of feeling that we have done our best, and we want to end on a positive note. The reality of leaving friends who have become our family over the last fourteen months won't really hit until all our belongings have been loaded and there is a minute to breathe. The verse the Lord gave me as we were coming into the military was Proverbs 27:10c: "Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off." Saying goodbye has changed over the years; it's not easy for any member of the family, but it helps us recount our blessings.

When I was eight, saying goodbye was harder because it was a more definite end of a relationship unless both parties were committed to calling and writing letters. When my dad was in Vietnam, he and my mom wrote letters and made phone calls. It seemed, though, that my mom was never at the right place at the right time to talk to my dad, so she had to settle for just letters. Today, thanks to the Internet and social media, military families have the benefit of staying in touch with those who have been an important part of their lives at that duty station.

The military person and sometimes the spouse are usually "farewelled" by the unit and/or the unit ministry team (UMT). The first time Gary and I were "farewelled" was pretty tough, but I was given some great advice: "The next place may bring your next best friend." After twenty years in the military, we've had the privilege of being stationed with families more than once, have gotten to introduce good friends from different assignments to each other as they got stationed together, and have made great friends along the way.

Children in military families often have a harder time. I grew up in a military family, and my first significant move was when I was just eight years old. My family moved from Minnesota to Illinois, leaving many family and friends behind. A special keepsake is the book my classmates bought and signed. My family moved again when I was twelve and again when I was fourteen. The last move was the hardest on me because I was a teenager. I understand and feel for my own children who have had to move three times in their high-school years. Based on my experience, it seems to be harder on guys to make new friends than on girls. Teenagers miss their friends from school, the neighborhood, and youth group. If they move to a home where they are the oldest in the neighborhood (which often is the case for most chaplain families) or move to a place where their youth group is not as strong as the one they just left, the move proves even more difficult. Driver's licenses, state educational requirements, and job searches are also causes for concern to a teenager.

Saying "goodbye" means grieving and rejoicing—grieving over the loss of a relationship or fellowship where we've shared experiences. Spouses support each other through deployment and adverse conditions by babysitting, setting up play dates, preparing meals, making hospital visits, sharing community activities, and taking part in Bible studies. We learn to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Just today at the commissary I said goodbye to workers with whom I have built relationships during both our tours here at Fort Drum. Speaking to our neighbors and other spouses here whom I've ministered to or with is important. Saying goodbye helps me recount the blessing that those people have been to me. We came into the lives of some families when they were going through some hard things and have seen them grow in the Lord; others we knew before and walked through trials with them. Others have encouraged us and been prayer warriors. Some are friends we could just "be ourselves" with, which is so important for a senior officer on a small post.

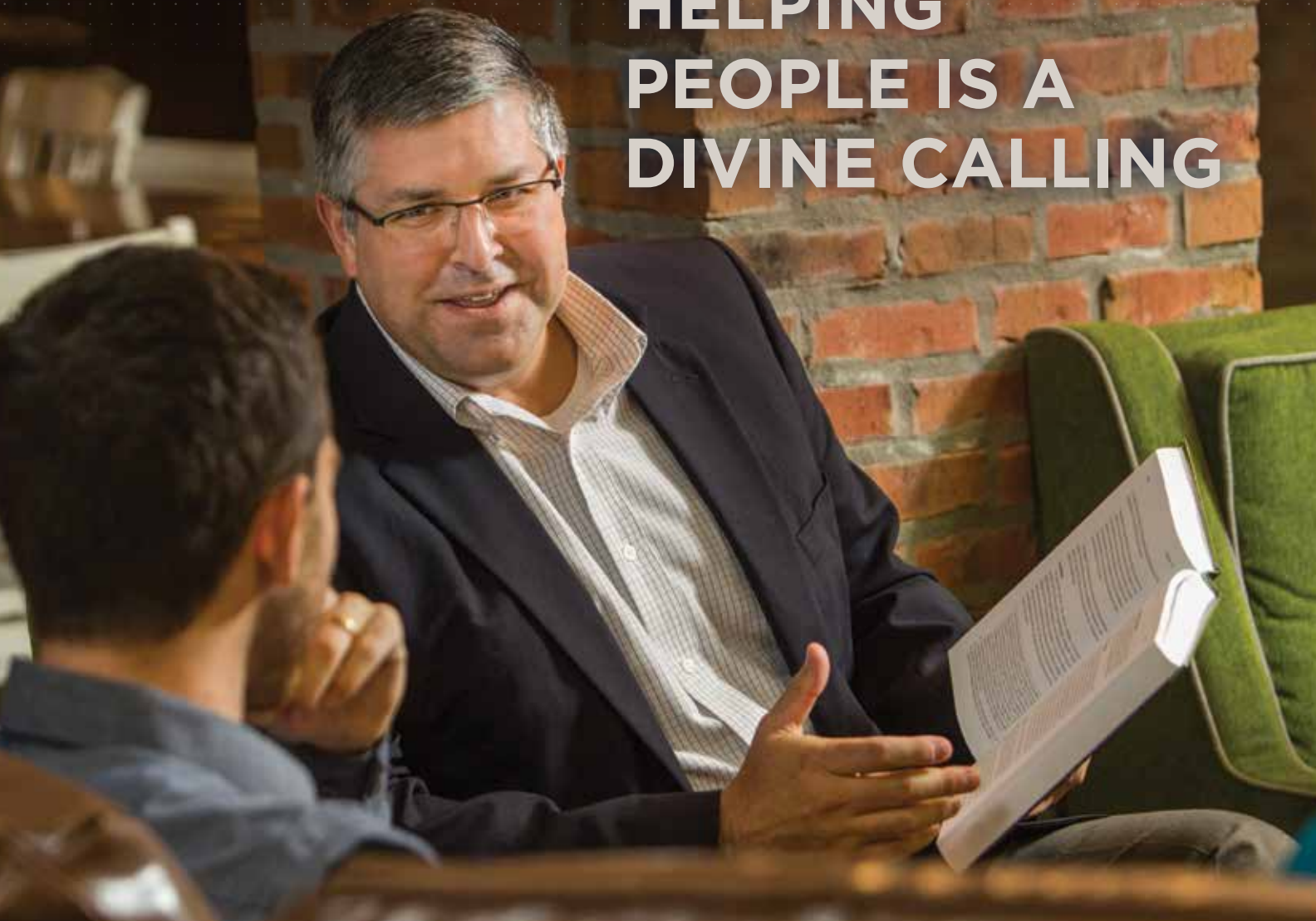
As we move from Fort Drum to Fort Hood, my plan is to unpack and get settled, meet people, make friends, and learn my responsibilities as a senior-chaplain spouse. I choose to be a part of Gary's ministry. It is a team effort. The more involved I am, the more ministry opportunities God gives us. We have only a short time to make an impact on others. We may be there for only two years, but Gary may have two commanders within those two years because they may have arrived a year before we got there. There have been two Commanding Generals and two Garrison Commanders here at Drum in the fourteen months that we have been here.

I love the opportunities God has given us as we've served Him in the Army over the last twenty years. God's will for us comes by way of military orders. So as we are packing up all the mementos that were given to us by different units, we recount the wonderful friends and memories that we have made along our crazy military journey. Military people know when you communicate care and are real or when you are just a bunch of hot air. Our philosophy has always been . . . ministry of presence.

Carissa grew up in an Air Force family. She and her husband, Chaplain Gary Fisher, have four grown children and one still at home. Carissa and Gary are currently moving to Fort Hood where Gary will become the III Corps Command Chaplain.



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The Lord Who Keeps His Promises

In Genesis 21:1 we read, “And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.” In this chapter we find that whenever God gives a promise He will marvelously perform it! Abraham and Sarah were an unusual couple: unusual in that they had a baby in their old age. We read in verse 2, “For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.” How old were they? Verse 5 says, “And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.” How old was Sarah when she delivered this baby boy? Genesis 17:17 states, “Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” The power of God was about to be displayed in this couple’s lives, for from a human perspective, this was an impossibility. Genesis 18:11 says, “Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.” Sarah and Abraham were ready for the rocking chair; little did they realize that between those rocking chairs, the Lord would place a high chair!

As we look upon this wonderful event in the lives of this elderly couple, I want us to first observe the promise of God given to them. Three times God said He would keep His word. Notice Genesis 21:1: “And the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.” Observe verse 2, which reads, “For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.” God had promised Abraham and Sarah a baby, and He did exactly what He had promised. We read in Ezekiel 12:25, “For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass.” The promises of God are never broken! Second Corinthians 1:20 declares, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” God is so faithful! Hebrews 11:11 says, “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a

child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.” Also, the Scriptures say of Abraham in Romans 4:20–21, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.” Whatever God promises, He will perform! We all need to have this profound truth deeply embedded in our lives.

Second, I want us to observe the power of God in the promise He had given. The Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 18:14, “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” Was it impossible for Sarah to have a baby at age ninety? In the sight of men, yes. But not in the sight of God! Jeremiah 32:17 states, “There is nothing too hard for thee.” We read in Luke 1:37, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” The promises of God are always backed by the power of God. Against all odds, Sarah conceived and delivered a son; and they named him Isaac. Do you know what the name Isaac means? Genesis 21:6 says, “And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.” “Isaac” means “laughter.” Every time Sarah looked at Isaac, she was reminded of God’s promise to give her a son and was filled with delight.

Genesis 21:8 says of Isaac, “And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.” What a celebration that feast must have been, as Abraham was no doubt overcome with joy at the goodness of God.

The same can be true in the lives of God’s people today. Whenever we believe the promises of God given to us in His Word and believe His power to fulfill those promises, we too can be as exuberant as Abraham and Sarah. Oh, what a great God we serve! We can echo what the psalmist said in Psalm 107:31: “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC, 29684 or via e-mail at evangjsivn@aol.com.

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