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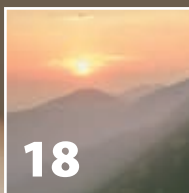
FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

The Authority and Sufficiency of the Bible



The Authority and Sufficiency of the Bible



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Our sincere thanks to Pastor Don Johnson and Dr. Ken Rathbun for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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In this issue the theme before us is the sufficiency of Scripture. Does the Bible really contain everything necessary for believers to navigate the challenges inherent in being human? People have wrestled through this issue since Christianity began. The New Testament contains the history of those who advocated adding or blending additional beliefs and practices outside the prescribed message of the Apostles as inscribed in the inspired Word of God (circumcision is one such example—cf. Acts 15; Gal. 2).

The last 170 years or so have evidenced many more examples of those who, by their expressed words or by their actions, questioned the Bible's sufficiency. Often these attacks against the Scriptures' sufficiency stemmed from people outside of or who have left the faith. Charles Darwin's religious progression (or departure) from Christianity bears this out. His 1859 book *Origin of Species* gave the Western world a non-supernatural explanation of the origin of the world, life, and the cosmos. It directly countered the Bible's explanation of God's direct act of creation. In essence, Darwin's view stated that the Scriptures are inadequate to provide humanity with an understanding of who we are, how we got here, and where we are going. Evolution, according to Darwin, provided the answers that were lacking in the Bible.

What is particularly distressing is the influence Darwin's worldview has had on those who identify as Christian. Professed believers sought (largely unsuccessfully—both to evolutionists and to biblical inerrantists) to adopt evolution to fit Christianity or Christianity to fit evolution. This example, among others, still permeates Christianity today, even among some (or many?) who identify as evangelical.

This issue's authors directly, boldly, and clearly proclaim the Scriptures' sufficiency—also why that sufficiency is so vital. How can a Bible that lacks essential and necessary knowledge and wisdom for our lives help us make sense of the world we live in? Further, and how can it be trusted to provide us an understanding of the depth of our sin and our need of a Savior?

Dr. Jim Berg writes both to those who are in full-time ministry, and to "disciplers" everywhere ("Are We Sufficiently Ministering the Sufficient Word?"). He reveals a great need for Christians to apply fearlessly 2 Timothy 3:16–17 to every aspect of sin imag-

inable. Several of these applications will make many uncomfortable, but they will test our own belief in the sufficiency of Scripture.

Both the articles of Pastor Brent Niedergall ("Does Sufficiency Rule Out Creeds?") and Dr. Jeff Straub ("The Sufficiency of Scripture—A Historical Perspective") take a historical look at this doctrine. Though confessions and creeds are not authoritative, they do demonstrate that sufficiency is not a recent construction. However, it is one that is perpetually in need of defense against many attacks today. Sometimes they can come from very surprising sources inside Christianity.

From another (or *different*) historical perspective, the sufficiency of Scripture can also conflict with those who did much to highlight its importance. That seems like a contradiction, but historical theology is often messier than many realize. Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin are heroes from the Reformation. They (along with Martin Bucer) are the focus of an article that I contributed. People were not always consistent in applying Scripture's sufficiency in every situation.

The sufficiency of Scripture conflicts with current culture. Pastor Cameron Pollack provides several helpful applications. Primarily, he focuses our attention on what the sufficiency of the Bible says to us today in relation to our culture. We are to follow the Savior in living out the crucial role as expressed in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18–20.

Wally Morris provides a delightful and thought-provoking examination of Psalm 19. He contrasts the limitations of natural revelation with the perfection of special revelation in establishing the essential nature of the Bible's sufficiency. His stirring application is one we all should hold dear.

Don Johnson examines various failures within Christianity to maintain consistently the sufficiency of Scripture. His biblically based critique along with his three examples exposes the fact that challenges to sufficiency are much more common and dangerous than many Christians realize.

The sufficiency of the Bible encompasses more than can be explored in this issue. However, what is here should help serious believers think cautiously and discern carefully the importance of this fragile doctrine.

—Ken Rathbun



"UNDERSTANDING OUR TIMES"

1 CHRONICLES 12:32

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As I look back, FBFI's *FrontLine* magazine has been a literary source of reference and encouragement through the years. I have appreciated their timely articles and sound doctrinal teaching.

*Pastor Rich Eckelbarger
Croswell, Michigan*

I'm sorry to inform you I cannot continue my subscription to *FrontLine*. I love the magazine and news. This year's (2020) issues on the Fundamentals were exceptional. However, I can't keep up with the reading and still have several issues still not read. This will have to be an off year for me.

*Ruth E. Shelpman
Avon Park, Florida*

In February 2021 **Rich Eckelbarger** announced his retirement effective this coming October. As pastor of Community Baptist Church of Croswell, Michigan, he followed on the heels of a great and much-loved man, Pastor Milton Endean. In looking to the future, he and his wife, Claudia, plan to move to Greenville, South Carolina, to be near family. Community Baptist has a rich heritage and is looking for a pastor to continue that heritage.



David Pennington (PhD, BJU, Old Testament Interpretation) has moved from Charlotte, North Carolina, to the rural coast of Maine to help revitalize Downeast



Baptist Church. Rather than moving toward retirement, Dave has chosen to use the next five to six years to develop the church for its next pastor. He has also used his thirty-plus years of experience to develop a Pastoral Leadership Roadmap that helps pastors realign their lives and ministries so that they can joyfully serve God and others, without having to work fifty-to-eighty hours per week.

Rick and Carolyn Searls

served as missionaries in the southern part of Palawan, Philippines. Today Rick serves as the Southern Palawan ministries representative. He began as a jungle pilot, but his burden for souls led him into church planting. The church they helped establish became indigenous and has established fourteen other churches, a Bible school, a radio ministry, a Christian academy, and much more. Carolyn's new book, *The Crash of the Dragonfly*, shows the miraculous work God did and is doing to build His church.



Gloria Kissinger went to be with the Lord on March 3, 2021. Gloria was a diligent supporter of her husband, Phil, in his Army career, as president of Associated Gospel Churches, as general director of Armed Forces Baptist Missions, and in various other military ministries, including being FBFI's first endorser.



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Are We Sufficiently Ministering the Sufficient Word?



Sufficient for What?

Those ministering the Word today, both from the pulpit and over the kitchen table with individuals, face the question, “Has God given us everything we need to help people with the challenges of living, or do we need secular psychological theories to truly minister effectively?”

Several years ago I had the opportunity to be the chief writer for an interdisciplinary committee formulating a philosophy of biblical counseling for Bob Jones University. We defined the sufficiency of Scripture in the following way.

Bob Jones University embraces the Bible’s teaching that the Scriptures are inspired by God and therefore infallible, inerrant, and authoritative on every subject they address.

BJU believes that the Bible is comprehensively [though not exhaustively] *sufficient*—that is, the Scriptures include all that God deemed *essential*—to understand man’s design and purpose; man’s inherent nature; man’s fundamental estrangement from God; the divine plan for reconciliation with God; the divine standard for human thought, emotion and behavior; the divine remedy for human problems; and divine counsel for how men and women can flourish even in adversity, through a maturing personal relationship with God.¹

While most reading this article will concur with the above, we must all ask ourselves a more pointed question.

Are We Sufficiently Using the Sufficient Scriptures?

Someone has said, “The fact that the Scriptures are sufficient does not mean that the counselor [or pastor] is competent.”² Consider this key passage of Scripture regarding its sufficiency.

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).

Probably, most preaching in our pulpits focuses primarily upon using the Scriptures to teach God’s people *doctrine* (what is right) and *reproof* (what is wrong), but it may be deficient in teaching God’s people *correction* (how to make the wrong right) and *instruction in righteousness* (how to keep it right). Let me give you several examples.

Do We Sufficiently Use the Scriptures to Address Failures in Male Leadership in the Home? We preach the correct *doctrine* about the duties of husbands from Ephesians 5:25–33 and Colossians 3:19, which require them to foster the spiritual growth of their wives and not be bitter against them. We *reprove* behavior that deviates from biblical standards.

But do we use the Word from our pulpits and in private conversations for *correction*? Often our preaching does not illustrate what truth looks like when it is applied. Do we, by pulpit illustration of biblical precepts and private application, teach failing husbands, whose consciences are dulled by repeated sin, how to see their faults? Do we show them how to biblically confess their sins to God, their spouses, and families? Do we teach them to address not only the issues of conflict in their relationships, the outward “wars and fightings” of James 4:1, but also the inordinate desires for respect, unquestioned obedience, autonomy, control, etc., “that war in [their] members”?

Do we teach them the repentance component of *correction*? “Correction” means, as much as possible, to help them put things back to where they were before they sinned against their families. Do we show them what it means to repent—to turn away from the sin so obvious to others and how to turn in faith and obedience to the biblical standard with God’s help? Do we teach them steps of reconciliation to repair relationships they damaged by their demanding and self-centered ways? Do we teach them the patience of rebuilding trust with their wives who have lost all hope that their husbands would ever change and who are afraid to hope again because their husbands may revert to their old hurtful ways? Do we teach them how to get back under their own authorities at church, work, and to the governing rulers in their lives? Do we teach them how to address the pride that has driven their

What does
“equipping the
saints” mean if it
does not mean
teaching them how
to make biblical
change themselves
and help them help
others make biblical
change toward
Christlikeness?

self-centered desires and demands? Do we teach them how a believer develops the humility of Christ, who was willing to sacrifice Himself for the betterment of others? Rarely will men make lasting change without someone exposing these issues and then skillfully leading them to make biblical *correction* to restore what was lost. *Correction*, however, is only clearing the rubble from Ground Zero—the site of the devastation.

We must also give them *instruction in righteousness*. “Instruction” is *paideia*—training “that gets the job done.”³ They must be equipped with a biblical plan for walking in righteous ways. They must be prepared for facing their temptations to be harsh and demanding or to escape responsibilities by burying themselves in their own interests. They must be taught how to cultivate a vibrant relationship with God as they

open their Bibles every day. They must be taught how to meditate upon the Scriptures to be “transformed by the renewing of [their] mind[s]” so that “works of the flesh” are replaced with “fruit of the Spirit.” Vices must be confessed and forsaken before virtues—the marks of Christlikeness—will begin to flourish. They must be taught to become men whom their wives and families can truly respect, who can become hope-givers in their homes, and who can deal with problems and pressures biblically. In short, training in right living involves walking these men through the sanctification process in order to transform their desires, emotions, thought process, and choices. All of this—and more—is included in *instruction in righteousness*. And like any form of parenting, this takes much time and commitment on the part of both the disciple-maker and the disciple, with the awareness that the process can be sabotaged by the lack of follow-through of either party.

Do We Sufficiently Use the Scriptures to Address other Problems Our People Face? Is the Bible *sufficient* to actually address the heartaches and motivations of a young woman who is depressed because of her abortion, or do we just use the Bible to show her that abortion is murder, but God forgives people who sin (doctrine and reproof)? Do we know how to help her respond biblically while sitting in a Mother’s Day service? Are we even aware that women in our congregations have a hard time with this day because of barrenness, miscarriages, or abortions?

Is the Bible *sufficient* to actually address the root heart issues of a homosexual who has just come to Christ, or do we merely use the Scriptures to declare that heterosexual sex within marriage is the only biblically moral position, and use the Bible to condemn any other behavior outside that standard? Do we actually believe—and prove by our practice—that the Scripture is enough to help him become “thoroughly furnished unto all good works”?

Continued on page 28

Does Sufficiency Rule Out Creeds?

Should we be worried that a disconcerting segment of evangelical Christians would agree to irrefragable heresy?

Irrefragable is a fancy word for “indisputable.” And it is indisputable that Christians answered with heretical responses in a recent survey. The 2020 *State of Theology* survey from Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research found that nearly a third of American evangelicals queried denied the deity of Christ. This was out of a sample of nearly six hundred self-identified evangelicals. Recall that denial of Christological doctrine is the cornerstone of liberalism. In the same survey, almost two-thirds of the same population agreed with the statement “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.”¹ Concurring with that statement, as two-thirds of those American evangelicals did, is to heretical Arianism what reciting the shahada is to Islam. Should we be worried? Are a third of evangelical Christians really liberals? And are two-thirds of evangelical Christians really card-carrying arianists? Not necessarily. More likely, many of those surveyed are theologically ignorant and not necessarily naysaying heretics who deny the

vital truths of orthodox Christianity. Still, we have good reason for concern.

It is troubling that many Christians are weak in their theological knowledge. We’re supposed to be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). We’re supposed to be able to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). It is concerning that many lack the ability to express themselves in theologically orthodox terms. If you think your church is the exception—and if you’re brave enough—you can administer the same survey to your congregation through the official survey webpage. But, if we’re being honest with one another, we know many of our churches are weak on theology.

How can this be? We have unparalleled access to the Bible in print and digital forms and to Bible-based teaching and preaching. And we make such a big deal about how Scripture is sufficient. We would agree with theologian John Frame that “Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life.”² And Christians in America have Scripture. Where then is the disconnect? Why does such rampant theological ignorance pervade?

Many Reasons

There are many reasons, but for one, God has not given us a book of theological maxims. It is propositional truth, but it is presented as *unsystematic* theology. Otherwise, there would be no need for *systematic* theology. Christians don’t know the “rules” of orthodoxy—the theological propositions of Scripture. But there is a simple way to teach them these rules. In fact, your church probably already has its own expression of such rules, found in your church’s doctrinal statement. These are confessions of faith. But they are often of such a length to make widespread memorization impractical. While it might be a profitable exercise to teach through your church’s doctrinal statement, memorizing the thing is probably asking too much. The theological propositions

must be concise. And, thankfully, there are simple summations of orthodoxy. We call them the creeds. And I am suggesting that understanding and memorizing a creed can be a useful tool to combat theological ignorance. We should consider the value of using creeds to strengthen the church's handle on good theology. But before proceeding, we should define what a creed is and reconcile how sufficient Scripture can coexist with the human tradition of a creed.

You can trace the derivation of the word creed to the first word (*credo*, "I believe") of the Latin version of the Apostles' Creed, dating from the third or fourth century AD. The historic creeds were created to serve as personal confessions of faith. They state what Christians believe. Theologian Robert Duncan Culver claims these creeds "demonstrate there is a common, consensual core of beliefs among all Christians, always and everywhere."³ Christians drafted creeds to state Christian belief and to combat error. They made distinctions to assert their theology. As Episcopal priest Robert Farrar Capon wrote, "If you don't distinguish, you can't theologize."⁴ We would disagree with many of his distinctions, but we can agree that we need to distinguish. The Creeds clarify theology by distinguishing between what is true and what is false.

But Why a Creed?

This brings us to the logical question: If we have all the divine words we need, what use would we have for a human expression of those divine words? Someone might say, "If God wanted us to have a creed, He would have given us a creed in the Bible." And the simple answer is that God has given us all the divine words necessary to formulate our doctrinal understanding. You already probably know you won't find the word "Trinity" in Scripture, but neither will you find "incarnation" or "immutable" or "premillennialism." Our theology comes from logical Bible interpretation. We could raise the same question against preaching. If the Bible is sufficient, who needs a sermon? The Bible has all the necessary divine words for us to do theology. The Bible has all the necessary divine words for our sermons. And so long as a creed declares orthodox theology, it deserves consideration as a teaching tool for church use. It has all the divine words we need to form our doctrine. There are other doctrines of bibliology to consider, such as authority, inerrancy, and inspiration. We know that what we would claim about the Bible we would not claim for the creeds. Scripture alone is authoritative. The creeds are potentially errant and unquestionably uninspired. But so long as we understand their humble role, they deserve our consideration as a means of encapsulating the "sound words" Paul exhorted Timothy to follow (2 Tim. 1:13).

So which creed should we use? There is the already mentioned Apostles' Creed. It is a short expression of Christian doctrine—so short that we might do better to select a fuller and slightly more robust statement. The Nicene Creed offers a compelling option. It was actually the product of the church council convened to settle the Arian controversy that so many

We should consider the value of using creeds to strengthen the church's handle on good theology.

Christians from the Lifeway survey demonstrated is still not a settled matter. Here it is. Can your average church member talk like this? Probably not. But would your members be edified if they understood these words and committed them to memory? I think so.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of Light, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost.⁵

These words are a rich and carefully formulated expression of theological content that Christians should know. They summarize the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. They summarize the gospel message. A Christian who learns these words and their meaning will level up in his theological knowledge and in his ability to express himself in theologically orthodox terms. Perhaps the church could even benefit from a new creed. We could use a new creed written in today's language that states our orthodox stance against contemporary threats facing orthodoxy.

God's Word is sufficient. It contains all the divine words we need. It has all the divine words we need to "earnestly contend for the faith." And a creed might be just what we need to instill the content of those divine words into the minds and hearts of our people. By learning a creed you can state core theological truths in a concise expression. Pastors would do their congregations a service by teaching through a creed such as the Nicene Creed and showing from Scripture why we believe these statements. Memorization is a reasonable goal. And the church will be better equipped with a more robust understanding of orthodox Christian belief and will, hopefully, be able to better express that belief in orthodox terms.

Brent Niedergall is associate pastor at Victory Baptist Church in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada.



¹ www.TheStateOfTheology.com

² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship: Volume 4* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010), 220.

³ Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Fearn, Mentor), 808.

⁴ Robert Farrar Capon, *Hunting the Divine Fox* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 75.

⁵ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: Volume 1: The History of Creeds* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 28–29. While the Nicene Creed exists in three forms, the original form is quoted here sans the anathema against the Arians.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

A Historical Perspective

Baptists as an identifiable group emerged out of the post-Reformation English religious world to become champions of the Bible as the “all-sufficient rule of faith and practice.” This can be seen in the multitude of Baptist confessional statements written since our earliest days.

The First and Second London Confessions and the Philadelphia Baptist Confession

The First London Baptist Confession, 1646, declared in Article VIII that

the rule of this knowledge, faith, and obedience, concerning the worship of God, in which is contained the whole duty of man, is (not men’s laws, or unwritten traditions, but) only the word of God contained [viz., written] in the holy Scriptures; *in which is plainly recorded whatsoever is needful for us to know, believe, and practice*; which are the only rule of holiness and obedience for all saints, at all times, in all places to be observed.

In 1689 later London Baptists released the Second London Baptist Confession, moving the statement on the sufficiency of the Scripture to the first article: “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” In this declaration, the Baptists who drafted their statement were following other believers who had a large presence in England, the Presbyterians, who, meeting in the mid-1640s at the Westminster Assembly, affirmed, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Many evangelical Christians in the immediate aftermath of the

Reformation expressed their commitment unequivocally to the *sufficiency of Scripture*.

Closer to our time and our place in Baptist history, American Baptists affirmed the sufficiency of Scripture in the Philadelphia Baptist Confession, 1742, using the exact wording of the Second London Confession from fifty-three years earlier in their first article. The New Hampshire Baptist Confession, 1833, stated “the Holy Bible . . . shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.” Each of the above confessions in its own way and for its own purposes declares unambiguously that the Bible and the Bible alone is sufficient for the Church in general and for believers in particular to address all important issues of this life and the next. This in a nutshell is the doctrine of “the sufficiency of Scriptures.”

In setting forth their belief in this truth, Baptists were standing shoulder to shoulder with early Protestant Reformers who rejected human interpreters of God’s will. This doctrine emerged as one of the great doctrines of the Reformation—*sola scriptura*¹—which was emphasized by all the Reformers, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin and others—as a bulwark of truth against the errors of Roman Catholicism, tradition, and the pope. Under Roman Catholic teaching, when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* (“from the chair”), what he says is infallible and the voice of God to be obeyed under threat of eternal damnation even if the pope’s words contradict clear Scripture texts. Martin Luther, rejecting popes and councils who often disagreed with each other, affirmed this great doctrine at the Diet of Worms in 1521. When standing before a stack of his books and under pressure to recant of his errors in those books from the Roman Church under penalty of excommunication (at that time, to be removed from the Church was to be consigned to hell), Luther declared,

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.”² Baptists need not agree with everything Luther wrote or said to appreciate his stand on this issue.

John Calvin commenting on 2 Timothy 4:1–4 declared that “all our wisdom is contained in the Scriptures, and neither ought we to learn, nor teachers to draw their instructions, from any other source; so he who, neglecting the assistance of the living voice, shall satisfy himself with the silent Scripture, will find how grievous an evil it is to disregard that way of learning which has been enjoined by *God* and *Christ*.”³

Scripture Plus Tradition Plus the Magisterium

The Roman Catholic Church still has this three-legged stool upon which their theology rests—“Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium.” In their view they divide Scripture sufficiency between “formal” and “material.” Formally, the Scriptures are sufficient, but materially,

all the bricks necessary to build doctrine is [sic] there in Scripture. However, . . . since the meaning of Scripture is not always clear and . . . sometimes a doctrine is implied rather than explicit, other things besides Scripture have been handed to us from the apostles: things like Sacred Tradition (which is the mortar that holds the bricks together in the right order and position) and the magisterium or teaching authority of the Church (which is the trowel in the hand of the Master Builder).⁴

Other religious groups since the Reformation have denied the sufficiency of Scripture in different ways. Mormonism affirms secret angelic revelation from the angel Moroni and living prophets. The followers of Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah’s Witnesses) and the followers of Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science) exalt uninspired human texts over the Bible to know the will of God for human living and believing. Of course, Protestant liberals, who came to reject a supernatural Bible, as a matter of collateral belief did not hold that the Scriptures were sufficient for Christian living. Men such as Harry Emerson Fosdick and William Newton Clarke, both Baptist liberals of note at the beginning of the twentieth century, wanted to retain affection for some things said in the Bible but insisted on rejecting outdated ideas such as the miraculous.⁵

But historic conservative Protestants and orthodox Baptists still emphatically affirm that the Scriptures are sufficient in and of themselves, plus nothing and minus nothing. Christians need nothing else. In affirming this, Baptists recognize what the apostle Paul taught in 1 Timothy for Christian belief and practice: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable [ὠφέλιμος—useful, beneficial, *sufficient*] for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man [or woman] of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The great English Baptist pastor, called by some “the last of the Puritans,” affirmed this doctrine to the end. Speaking

at his final Pastors’ College Conference in 1891, Charles Haddon Spurgeon declared, “The Scriptures in their own sphere are like God in the universe—all-sufficient. In them is revealed all the light and power the mind of man can need in spiritual things. We hear of other motive power beyond that which lies in the Scriptures, but we believe such a force to be a pretentious nothing.”⁶

Today’s Challenges

This doctrine is defended and challenged today. Last year, conservative evangelical John MacArthur devoted his pastors’ conference (“Truth Matters Conference”) to the Scriptures’ sufficiency because much of contemporary evangelicalism seems to have moved away from this important belief. Chief among those who practically speaking deny the Scriptures’ sufficiency are the Pentecostals, who look for extrabiblical revelation to guide believers in their daily lives. Though many deny that they reject the sufficiency of the Scriptures in principle, in practice they insist that God “speaks” directly to believers, offering guidance for decisions large and small. Also, the Southern Baptists at the 2019 annual meeting adopted Resolution 9 on Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, causing some among their more conservative supporters to suggest that by adopting elements of this Marxist ideology, they were in practice moving away from the sufficiency of Scriptures.

There is no greater doctrine for the orthodox Christian to affirm today than the sufficiency of the Scriptures. If the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety needs something to supplement it for eternal life and Christian living, then what might that something be? Was Paul speaking in hyperbole when he declared that *all* Scripture is profitable to thoroughly furnish believers? We cannot stress too loudly the importance of the great doctrine. In doing so, we stand on the shoulders of others, Baptists especially, in affirming the Word of God as our greatest guide today. *Soli Deo gloria!*

Jeff Straub taught Historical Theology for sixteen years. He speaks in local churches and travels internationally to teach. Jeff currently lives in Minnesota.



¹Technically, *sola scriptura* entails more than the Bible’s sufficiency, but sufficiency is integral to what the Reformers emphasized in this *sola*.

²Quoted in Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985–93), 1:460.

³John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*.

⁴“Material versus Formal Sufficiency of Scripture,” available online at <https://www.catholicfidelity.com/apologetics-topics/sola-scriptura/material-vs-formal-sufficiency-of-scripture-by-mark-shea/>. Accessed Dec. 5, 2020. This is how Romanism can hold to such extrabiblical doctrines as Mary’s immaculate conception, the pope’s infallibility, and purgatory.

⁵Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1925) and Clarke, *The Use of Scripture in Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907).

⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *The Greatest Fight in the World*, Pastor’s College Conference Address, 1891 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1892), 11.

Sufficiency and the Reformers' Defense of Infant Baptism

Editor's Note: Our theme in this issue, the sufficiency of Scripture, finds direct application in this traditional Baptist distinctive, the baptism of believers alone. The Reformers, for all the benefits their stand against the Roman hierarchy bestowed on Christendom, failed to achieve consistency with their own noted notion of sola scriptura. Their failure here remains a point of contention in the Christian church and an unfortunate weakening of the Christian message. Dr. Rathbun's article illustrates how the Reformers missed their own mark—sola scriptura, or the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. (Adapted from an article first published in Faith Pulpit, April–June 2011. Edited and republished here with permission.)

Sola gracia. Sola fide. Sola scriptura. These affirmations are held to be the guiding principles of the Reformers. However, one of my professors in graduate school, a Catholic scholar of the Reformation, openly questioned the Reformers' commitment to the last of these principles: *sola scriptura*. At the time I quickly dismissed his query, considering the source of the objection. But later, as I studied the Reformation at another university, I began to rethink his idea, especially regarding infant baptism. I concluded it was important to revisit the sixteenth-century baptismal controversy to gain better understanding how the Reformers justified infant baptism.

Baptists see the Reformers' defense of infant baptism as a concession to a historical practice over the Word of God. Is that a correct assessment? Did the Reformers violate their own guiding principles in defending the practice?

The issue of infant baptism affected many other areas of doctrine in the Reformation, including the use of church discipline, the concern for the purity of the lives of church members, and especially the practice of allowing the unsaved into the membership of the Reformers' churches. All these issues in the Reformation have left tangible results in the contemporary church scene and deserve further investigation.

This article will briefly explore how the Reformers defended infant baptism. The three major recognized Reformers are Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. We will study a lesser-known Reformer, Martin Bucer, who also was prominent in the controversy regarding infant baptism.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Beyond question, Martin Luther truly believed in justification by faith alone for salvation. That theme appears even in his baptismal writings. However, at the same time he also made statements that seemed contradictory. Luther's *Small Catechism* (1529) stated that when the Word is added to the water, forgiveness of sin takes place in baptism: "It effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and

grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare."¹

Writing against the Anabaptists regarding the matter of faith and baptism, Luther strenuously denied that faith needed to be present to baptize. He even turned the argument around and stated that the "rebaptizers" could never know for sure if anyone really had faith.² Luther left open the question of whether infants could have faith in some mysterious way: "There are Scripture passages that tell us that children may and can believe, though they do not speak or understand. . . . I grant that we do not understand how they do believe, or how faith is created. But that is not the point here."³

Luther clearly appealed to tradition to justify infant baptism: "Since our baptizing has been thus from the beginning of Christianity and the custom has been to baptize children, and since no one can prove with good reasons that they do not have faith, we should not make changes and build on such weak arguments."⁴ Some scholars consider such statements as an overreaction against the Anabaptists.⁵ If so (and not all agree⁶), then Luther was clearly willing to go to almost any length to validate infant baptism. However, his appeals to the Bible in the context of the faith of infants are dubious, and his reliance on arguments from silence is weak.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

Zwingli is especially significant because in his city of Zurich several famous Anabaptists first took their stand (and later met their deaths) for practicing believer's baptism. Many contend that these Anabaptists were only applying the principles of Scripture that Zwingli had taught them.⁷

Zwingli was clear in his writings that baptism did not forgive sin.⁸ He wrote: "Christ himself did not connect salvation with baptism: it [salvation] is always by faith alone."⁹ However, he also wrote that baptism was not connected to faith either: "Hence it follows that water-baptism was given even when there was no faith, and it was received even by those who did not believe."¹⁰ Thus to Zwingli baptism was proper for infants. This position was a step further than other Reformers had been willing to take to justify infant baptism.¹¹

Zwingli also brought the issue of election into the discussion of infant baptism. He said, like Luther, that since people cannot identify which children are the elect, church leaders must not drive children of Christians from the church. Also, if the church may baptize only those who have faith, then the church will baptize no one, since no one can know for certain about another's personal faith.¹² In supporting infant baptism Zwingli said that children belong to God; therefore, the church is to baptize them. He emphasized the now-familiar stance

that baptism replaces Old Testament circumcision. This last point came about because of Zwingli's understanding of the covenant basis of the sacrament of baptism.¹³

Martin Bucer (1491–1551)

Martin Bucer was a Reformer in Strasbourg, Germany (though the city is now located in France), for about twenty-five years. He interacted personally with all the three major Reformers. He was a Zwinglian who attempted to bring about a doctrinal agreement with the Lutherans in the Lord's Supper controversy. He mentored John Calvin in Strasbourg during the latter's three-year exile from Geneva in the late 1530s. In 1547 the Catholic armies defeated the Protestants, forcing Bucer into exile. He moved to England to teach at Cambridge University, where he made attempts to influence the Anglican Reformation.

Bucer is perhaps the leading defender of infant baptism during the Reformation. According to David Wright, Bucer was "probably the most dedicated, and certainly the most prolific, champion of paedobaptism among the leading Reformers."¹⁴ He supported his doctrine on the grounds of church tradition, near universal consensus and practice, and the agreement among the Church Fathers as to the legitimacy of this practice.

Much of his interest in infant baptism arose because Strasbourg, where he labored, harbored so many "sectarians," with whom Bucer engaged in both verbal and written debates. I use the word "sectarians" simply to describe those who were not Catholic or Protestant in the Reformation. The sectarians are a theologically diverse group, and not all of them advocated the sole authority of Scripture or believer's baptism. The main issue that united them was opposition to a state-controlled church as the Reformers advocated. A subgroup of the sectarians is the Anabaptists or the so-called "rebaptizers." Because Bucer dealt so much with the Anabaptists in Strasbourg, other Reformers looked to him for guidance in combating them.

Ironically, Bucer's defense of infant baptism included reliance on the church tradition against which he and the Reformers protested.¹⁵ He also depended on testimony from the Church Fathers who claimed the church received the command to baptize infants orally from Christ and the apostles.¹⁶ He followed the other Reformers saying that infant baptism was not prohibited by Scripture, it could be proven compatible with Scripture, and it did not require the faith of infants.¹⁷

Earlier in Bucer's thinking, baptism only joined an infant to the church. He had asserted no automatic efficacy in baptism.



Efficacy depended on one's faith. Since infants could not have faith, baptism marked them out for future faith: "The Lord will grant them [infants] the Spirit and faith when he sees fit, but our washing them with water will not for one moment grant them faith of God's Spirit as some important persons affirm, no less ill-advisedly than irreligiously."¹⁸

In the early 1530s Bucer made a major shift in his theological position. He never repudiated infant baptism; rather, he found new ways to justify its practice. However, this change further obscured the Reformed understanding of justification by faith alone.

We confess and teach that holy baptism . . . is in the case of adults and of young children truly a baptism of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, whereby those who are baptised have all their sins washed away, are buried into the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, are incorporated into him and put on him for the death of their sins, for a new and godly life and the blessed resurrection, and through him become children and heirs of God.¹⁹

The significance of baptism's joining one to the church became lost. Baptism now conveyed, imparted, or automatically gave benefits to the recipient. One writer called this a tendency toward "sacramental manipulation."²⁰ This shift in Bucer's thinking strengthened his defense of infant baptism.

The doctrine of infant baptism left the Reformers, and Bucer in particular, with a perplexing question: “How would true faith be recognized in actual believers in the life of the church?” Another religious practice became necessary. Bucer’s answer was the rite of confirmation, and he became known as the “father of evangelical confirmation.”²¹ Needless to say, the Scripture gives no basis for this rite; it came about because believer’s baptism lost its New Testament significance.

John Calvin (1509–64)

Calvin arrived on the scene almost a generation after the Reformation began. He identified baptism very closely with circumcision.²² He asserted infants could even be regenerated, though he did not explain how.

But how, they [rebaptizers] ask, are infants regenerated, when not possessing a knowledge of either good or evil? We answer, that the work of God, though beyond the reach of our capacity, is not therefore null. Moreover, infants who are to be saved (and that some are saved at this age is certain) must, without question, be previously regenerated by the Lord. . . . But to silence this class of objectors, God gave, in the case of John the Baptist, whom he sanctified from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15), a proof of what he might do in others. They gain nothing by the quibble to which they here resort, viz., that this was only once done, and, therefore, it does not forthwith follow that the Lord always acts thus with infants. That is not the mode in which we reason. Our only object is to show, that they unjustly and malignantly confine the power of God within limits, within which it cannot be confined.²³

Calvin contended that infants (presumably the elect) could be saved from birth in some unexplained way, and the infant examples of John the Baptist and Christ were of paramount importance to him. Of Christ, Calvin wrote, “If in Christ we have a perfect pattern of all the grace, which God bestows on all his children, in this instance we have a proof that the age of infancy is not incapable of receiving sanctification.”²⁴

Apart from the fact that Calvin compared Christ’s perfect example positively with fallen humanity, it appears from these last two statements that Calvin allowed for the possibility of salvation apart from faith. At least he made no mention of personal faith. Giving more weight to this claim, he continued,

We confess, indeed, that the word of the Lord is the only seed of spiritual regeneration; but we deny the inference that, therefore, the power of God cannot regenerate infants. This is as possible and easy for him as it is wondrous and incomprehensible to us. It were [sic] dangerous to deny that the Lord is able to furnish them with the knowledge of himself in any way he pleases.²⁵

The fact that Calvin neglected to include faith in this discussion is disturbing, especially in the context of infants. To Calvin, baptism joined an infant to the church and provided the infant the benefit of receiving exhortation by older believers to embrace God and serve Him.²⁶

Calvin tried to address the question whether faith should precede baptism. He allowed for the possibility of faith in infants, but he could not explain how. It was certainly not the kind of faith adults have, Calvin maintained, but he stated he

“would rather leave the question undecided.”²⁷ He held that infants can have faith in some way: “Let them [rebaptizers] tell me where the danger lies if they [infants] are said now to receive some part of that grace, of which they are to have the full measure shortly after.”²⁸ These statements indicate that Calvin thought salvation could come apart from personal faith in the case of infants. The late Reformed scholar David F. Wright, interestingly commented, “But some sage heads reckon that the small dose of religion administered indiscriminately in infant baptism has effectively inoculated generations against catching real Christianity in later life.”²⁹ I think this issue is a serious one that affects Reformed churches to this day.

As to the issue of whether there is anything automatically conveyed in baptism, Calvin seemed to leave that door open: “In fine, the objection [that repentance and faith precede baptism] is easily disposed of by the fact, that children are baptised for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Spirit.”³⁰ This statement seems precariously close to a sacramental view of baptism.

Conclusion

To Baptists, believer’s baptism is essential because we take seriously (and literally) the biblical precedence of baptism in the Book of Acts: faith precedes baptism. Romans 10:17 is also clear: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” In addition, the Baptist doctrine of the church demands a regenerate church membership, with baptism a requisite rite for entrance into membership. To baptize infants before faith can exist creates confusion concerning those who are “in the church” and “out of the church.” Are baptized infants “in” or “out”? Must they undergo baptism again once they come to faith? Confusion in the ranks of church membership is the inevitable result. The Bible makes no provisions for these matters, forcing the Reformers to justify their practice from sources outside the Bible.

The Reformers championed *sola scriptura* in the battles with the Roman church in many important battles, not least of which is the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. When refuting the Sectarians, however, especially over infant baptism, the Reformers made statements that seem out of place with their guiding principles. The objections of the Sectarians to infant baptism forced the Reformers to clarify and to assess how to defend the practice, and they did not always do so consistently with their previously stated ideology.

The challenge to *sola scriptura* presented by the doctrine of infant baptism undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. When men must resort to tradition and logic as the foundation of their doctrine, rather than to Scripture alone, they shake the foundation of their own belief system, even though they may well have never intended such a result. The blind spot of the Reformers on infant baptism covered a canker that ate away at the very foundation of their faith.

For further research about infant baptism, see:

John H. Armstrong, *Understanding Four Views on Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007, as part of the Counterpoint Series).

David F. Wright, ed., *Baptism: Three Views* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009).

From the Reformed perspective, see:

Bryan Holstrom, *Infant Baptism and the Silence of the New Testament* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2008).

Lewis Bevens Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003; originally published by Yale University Press, 1940).

Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2003).

Douglas Wilson, *To A Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism's Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996).

For a Baptist perspective see:

Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006).

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¹⁰ Zwingli, 135.

¹¹ As Zwingli himself admitted, 130.

¹² Zwingli, "Questions Concerning the Sacrament of Baptism," 1530, in W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; in the US, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92.

¹³ Stephens, 93. See also Rainbow, 198–200, for discussion of the significance of Zwingli's linking circumcision to baptism, though he was not the first theologian to do so.

¹⁴ David F. Wright, "Infant Baptism and the Christian Community in Bucer," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*, ed. David F. Wright (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 95.

¹⁵ See further discussion in Ken Rathbun, "Shortcomings of the Reformation: Unity versus Purity in the Ecclesiology and Praxis of Martin Bucer" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, 2006), 220, available from the author.

¹⁶ Martin Bucer, "An Explanation of the Mystery of Baptism," from the *Commentary on Romans* (first published at Strasbourg in 1536) following the exposition of Romans 6:1–11 in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. David F. Wright, vol. 14, *The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics* (Appleford, Abingdon, Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 304. Needless to say, no evidence exists for such a claim. Appeals to undocumented oral tradition are weak.

¹⁷ Rathbun, "Shortcomings of the Reformation," 222–24.

¹⁸ Martin Bucer, *Ephesians Commentary*, 1527, in David F. Wright, "Infant Baptism and the Christian Community in Bucer," 97. He formed his position on the basis of Genesis 17:7.

¹⁹ Martin Bucer, "A Brief Summary of Christian Doctrine," 1548, in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, trans. and ed. David F. Wright, 85.

²⁰ See Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*, 132–59.

²¹ See Amy Nelson Burnett, "Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation," *Menonite Quarterly Review* 68, no. 1 (January 1994), 95. For agreement with this statement, see David F. Wright, "Infant Baptism and the Christian Community in Bucer," 102.

²² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint, 1995), Book IV, Chapter 16, "Paedobaptism. Its Accordance with the Institution of Christ, and the Nature of the Sign," section 3, page 530. Henceforth: IV.16.3. See also *ibid.*, 531, 532, and especially 534. Calvin was not impressed with the "furious madmen" who saw differences between circumcision and baptism, *ibid.*, 535.

²³ Calvin, IV.16.17, 541.

²⁴ Calvin, IV.16.18, 541.

²⁵ Calvin, IV.16.18, 541, 542.

²⁶ Calvin, IV.16.9, 535. Presumably this belief occurs at some later time.

²⁷ Calvin, IV.16.19, 542.

²⁸ Calvin, IV.16.19, 542. Calvin's reference of Moses, just a few words before this quote, helps to link it to circumcision.

²⁹ David F. Wright, in "Infant Baptism and the Christian Community in Bucer," 105.

³⁰ Calvin, IV.16. 20, 543.

¹ Theodore G. Tappert, trans., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000, c1959), 348, 349.

² "Concerning Rebaptism," 1528, *Luther's Works*, vol. 40 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1964), 240, 241; henceforth LW.

³ LW, vol. 40, 242, 243.

⁴ LW, vol. 40, 241.

⁵ See discussion by Jonathan H. Rainbow, "'Confessor Baptism': The Baptismal Doctrine of the Early Anabaptists," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 195, 196.

⁶ See Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 203, 204, where he clearly questions Luther's commitment to *sola scriptura*.

⁷ For example, see William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 14, 62.

⁸ Zwingli, "Of Baptism," translated and edited by Rev. G. W. Bromiley, in Zwingli and Bullinger, vol. 24, *Library of Christian Classics*, eds., John Baillie, John T. McNeil, and Henry P. van Dusen (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1953), 131. Note that this work dates from May 1525.

⁹ Zwingli, 134.

In the World, Of the Word

"Doing Church" in Modern Culture

Jesus prayed for His disciples, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:15–16). Or we could put it simply, Christians are to be in the world but not of it. Yet that simple distinction becomes a much more complicated in real life. How does a church remain tethered to the Word of God while also relating to the culture that surrounds it?

It is impossible to answer this question in a few short paragraphs, but many churches in America offer vastly different answers. We need to know what our people may be hearing and how to respond. We also need to evaluate ourselves critically, seeking to be more biblical in our own approach.

Cultural Integration

Reformed churches (churches that trace their theological roots to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation) tend to be more open to cultural integration. Many Protestant, Reformed theologians emphasize the similarities and continuity between the Old Testament and the New, often to the extent of equating the nation of Israel with the New Testament church. Many Reformed churches today still emphasize this continuity to one degree or another, and sometimes this theology leads them to apply Old Testament texts to New Testament missions and evangelism in unhealthy ways. The Exodus from Egypt is a good example. Some take this event as an indication that churches today should actively participate in God's redemption of creation by transforming our communities ("missional" theology).¹ Ever-expanding community renewal projects take precedence over the gospel. Church leaders focus on networking with a diversity of religious organizations, not just Christian churches. Even now a church-planting network is developing in Phoenix, Arizona, guided by the impulse of this kind of missional theology.²

To be clear, I am not saying all Reformed churches adopt this thinking. Historic Reformed theology has borne many good fruits (such as elevating the authority of Scripture and emphasizing salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone to the glory of God). However, when we consider the modern Reformed landscape, we need to recognize that cultural redemption is a major driver in the thinking of many

churches (perhaps the one next door to you). We would be naïve to ignore its impact on American Christianity.

We make the fatal misstep of being in the world *and* of it when we strive to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" without living as "an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9). The church's holiness fuels its witness. Or, as they say, "To make a difference you have to be different."

Conversely, the church is *not* called to redeem people or cultures. Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer of mankind.³ "To redeem" means "to purchase," and the only way sinners can be bought out of slavery to sin is by the precious blood of Christ. Scripture consistently portrays redemption *in salvation* as an act solely reserved for God. He has not nominated any "co-redeemers," though He has made us ambassadors to tell the good news (2 Cor. 5:17–20).

Legalism vs. Antinomianism

Another way to be in the world *and* of is to neglect scriptural commands (imperatives). To their credit, some leaders have noted this blind spot within the modern church. As Kevin DeYoung puts it,

Among conservative Christians there is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are truly gospel-centered we won't talk about rules or imperatives or moral exertion. We are so eager not to confuse indicatives (what God has done) and imperatives (what we should do) that we get leery of letting biblical commands lead uncomfortably to the conviction of sin. We're scared of words like diligence, effort, and duty. Pastors don't know how to preach the good news in their sermons and still strongly exhort churchgoers to cleanse themselves from every defilement of body and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). We know legalism (salvation by law keeping) and antinomianism (salvation without the need for law keeping) are both wrong, but antinomianism feels like a much safer danger.⁴

Granted, most of us have come from a fundamentalist background where we received heavy doses of commands. Indeed, accusations (founded or unfounded) of "legalism" never seemed far away. To quote DeYoung again, "Believers get nervous that their friends will call them legalistic, prudish,



narrow-minded, old fashioned, holier-than-thou—or worst of all, a fundamentalist.”⁵ When we read comments like this, it does no use to take it personally and get offended. We ought to pause and take a look in the mirror. How did fundamentalism come to be viewed this way?

Certainly in some corners of fundamentalism the accusation of legalism (salvation by law keeping, cf. Galatians) sticks. I would like to think most of us would reject such teaching. I would suggest fundamental churches in our circles are tempted more by *externalism* than legalism. We may not believe salvation is obtained by law-keeping, but we may be tempted to narrow our focus on the commands to *merely* the externals, and not always biblical externals.⁶ We should give appropriate emphasis to *biblical* commands that focus not only on external actions, but on attitudes, character, thought patterns, and desires of the heart. If we are boldly preaching the commands of Scripture, we need never be ashamed. They are inseparable from and grow directly out of the truths of Scripture.⁷ As we preach and teach the truths (indicatives) of Scripture, we provide the only right and necessary foundation for calls to personal holiness. For this reason, we desperately need to get the truth of Scripture *and* its commands right.

Certain truths and commands in Scripture receive greater weight and priority than others. They also apply differently to God’s people, depending on their context in biblical history. Some who seek to “redeem the culture” place priority on God’s command to subdue and have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28) at the expense of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). It is not so much a matter of if you follow commands—the question is, “Which command takes priority?”

Without a doubt, the Great Commission is Jesus Christ’s final command to us *in this last age*. When our Lord ascended on high, He did not repeat the Dominion Mandate from Genesis 1:28. He said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15–16). Of course, the historic Christian impulse to work hard and steward God’s good creation is good and right. We do not have the space to discuss the full implications of this truth, except to say we have not discarded the Dominion Mandate. Instead, God has *superseded* it with a greater priority—the gospel.

The culture around us is changing at breakneck pace. But the fields are white unto harvest. The need for relational evangelism is at an all-time high. This kind of Great Commission work demands great time and sacrifice of us and our people. When we open our homes to our neighbors, we sacrifice personal comfort for eternal fruit. When we change our schedules and routines to seek the lost, we imitate our good Shepherd, who left the ninety-nine to seek out the one. If we truly believe we are called to make disciples, then let’s “make hay while the sun is still shining.”⁸ Let’s be holy witnesses.

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¹ See chapter six by Christopher J. H. Wright, “Reading the Old Testament Missionally,” in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, Michael W. Goheen and John R. Franke, eds., The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 107–23.

² You can learn more firsthand by visiting www.missionaltraining.org and studying the works of Michael W. Goheen, professor of Missional Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary.

³ I found it encouraging that Carlton Wynne, former professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, emphasizes this same point when discussing the errant theology of cultural redemption. When a conservative theologian from a different tradition agrees, it adds weight to our argument. These comments were made in a Biblical Theology for Ministry (DMin course) in July of 2020.

⁴ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

⁷ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Reformed Hermeneutics,” accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.monergism.com/legacy/mt/mp3/reformed-hermeneutics-audio-richard-b-gaffin-jr>.

⁸ Pastor Tim Potter of Grace Church in Mentor, Ohio, made this comment regarding relational evangelism at the 2019 Arch National Pastors’ Fellowship in Bradenton, Florida.

Is Nature Enough?

When I went to college, I didn't want to take the same science courses that I had taken in high school (biology and chemistry), so I took botany and geology. The beauty and complexity of flowers and plants and the colorful structure of rocks are impressive. When I was twelve years old my parents gave me a telescope (which still works) for Christmas. A few years ago, my daughter and son-in-law gave me a nice reflector telescope for Christmas. Although the planets are interesting to look at, my favorite is the moon. The universe God made is truly beautiful. The heavens consistently declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). But is observing what God created all a person needs in order to know Him?

A surprising number of Christians believe that as long as a person "follows the light he has," that person will eventually go to heaven and avoid eternal punishment. Part of the motivation for this belief is that many Christians are uncomfortable saying that someone who has never seen a Bible nor heard of Jesus Christ nor even had the opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ will go to an eternal hell when he dies. They believe that, since God is fair, He will not condemn

someone to hell who never heard the gospel. So they believe that since God has revealed some truths about Himself in nature, if a person responds in some positive way to what he sees in nature, then God will accept him into heaven. It is true that creation reveals some important truths about God, but is nature enough?

Natural Revelation

The Lord chose to reveal some truths about Himself in what He created, and theologians refer to this revelation as "natural revelation." Psalm 19:1–6 and Romans 1:18–21 describe this type of revelation, which has several characteristics. Natural revelation is *universal* and *extensive*, available to everyone everywhere. Psalm 19 mentions "the heavens" (v. 1) and "through all the earth" and "to the end of the world" (v. 4). Natural revelation is *continuous*, available every day. Psalm 19 mentions "day unto day" and "night unto night" (v. 2). Natural revelation is *nonverbal*. Psalm 19:3 tells us that this revelation does not use speech, words, or voice, yet it still speaks powerfully (vv. 1–2) to those who will listen.

Romans 1:19–20 explicitly states that God made some truths (“invisible things”) about Himself “manifest” and “clearly seen” and that these truths are “understood by the things that are made.” Verse 20 mentions two specific truths about God: His “eternal power” (omnipotence) and “Godhead,” or divine nature (deity).

Yet despite these important characteristics, natural revelation is *limited*. Although natural revelation displays some truths about God, it does not reveal many *essential* truths about God or ourselves. For example, natural revelation does not tell us about God’s wrath, sin, salvation, God’s love, why this world has so much suffering, or how to know God. Natural revelation cannot help people with their anger, bitterness, jealousy, or lying. Even a casual look at natural revelation indicates that something is wrong (death, destructive events) but does not tell us specifically why the world and people have these problems.

Another limitation of natural revelation is our tendency to misunderstand and misinterpret what God has revealed in nature. The theory of evolution is an example. Secular scientists study nature to understand this world as it exists today but also to determine the origin and development of life. Since they begin their study with assumptions that ignore the existence of God, their conclusions misinterpret and misunderstand what they see and therefore produce inaccurate scientific theories.

Natural revelation also does not teach morality. For example, in nature the strong prey on the weak, might makes right, and stealing is often simply a way to survive. Someone looking at these characteristics of the animal world might conclude that these characteristics are normal and should also apply to people. Natural revelation is limited because, although nature reveals some type of supreme, powerful being who made the world, nature does not tell us how many supreme beings exist. Because of these limitations, people need more than what they see in nature to understand the meaning and purpose of life.

Special Revelation

Special revelation is the term theologians use to describe what God has revealed in the Bible. Psalm 19:7–14, 2 Timothy 3:16–17, and 1 Peter 1:23 are a few passages that describe special revelation. In contrast to natural revelation, special revelation uses specific words to tell people what God wants them to know. These exact and understandable words from God compensate for the limitations of natural revelation. The Bible contains information that people cannot find in nature—information people will never know unless they see it and read it in a Bible. The specific words of special revelation focus on people, events, and concepts which only words can accurately describe.

Special revelation is specifically and uniquely given by God (inspired, “breathed out”) for people to use (“profitable”) for four needs of our life: teaching (“doctrine”), pointing out error (“reproof”), correcting or restoring to what is true and right (“correction”), and teaching how to live righteously (“instruction in righteousness” [2 Tim. 3:16]). The immediate goal and purpose of special revelation is to prepare and

help the believer himself and his life to properly reflect Jesus Christ while accomplishing God’s will for his life (2 Tim. 3:17).

With poetic symmetry Psalm 19:7–11 beautifully express some of the fundamental qualities and benefits of special revelation. These verses use six different words to refer to God’s Word (“law,” “testimony,” “statutes,” “commandment,” “fear,”¹ and “judgments”) and six different words to describe God’s Word (“perfect,” “sure,” “right,” “pure,” “clean,” and “true”). The verses list four personal benefits of God’s Word and the object of that benefit (converting/restoring the soul; making wise the simple; rejoicing the heart; enlightening the eyes). Then verse 9 begins a list of several characteristics of God’s Word (enduring forever; completely righteous; more desirable than gold; sweeter than honey; giving warning; and, if a person obeys God’s Word, reward). Natural revelation does not offer these benefits or qualities.

Psalm 19:12–14 describes the proper attitude and conclusion from understanding what natural revelation is “declaring” and what special revelation is specifically offering. People are not capable by themselves to see and understand their more obvious “errors” and are often unaware of hidden problems. Once God’s Word reveals what we need to know, we ask for God’s help to confront these sin problems and only then can a person be upright and innocent. The psalm ends with complete dependence on the Lord for “the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart” to be “acceptable”² to God.

These principles of natural revelation and special revelation have several practical consequences. Although inadequate by itself for all we need in life, natural revelation is significant, and the Lord calls many Christians to scientific study of His creation to help us understand His creation and the ingenuity of the Creator. A career in the sciences is a noble calling for the one who knows Christ as Savior.

An important practical consequence of the necessity and sufficiency of the Bible is that people need the Bible. Therefore, Bible translation, printing, and distribution are essential, and kingdom work needs believers willing to give the gospel to people all over the world. We sometimes don’t appreciate the slow, meticulous work required to translate the Bible into new languages and dialects. Yet people must have a Bible in their own language to know the truth and be set free.

People who have the Bible in their own language have a responsibility to read, understand, and apply it to their lives, to reach another generation who will give the gospel to people in their time and who will continue the transgenerational reach of the gospel until Jesus Christ returns.

Wally Morris has pastored Charity Baptist Church, Huntington, Indiana, for the past twenty-four years. He earned his BA in Political Science from the University of Georgia and his MDiv and DMin from Bob Jones University.



¹“Fear” can also refer to the general “fear of the LORD,” such as in Proverbs 1:7. Since the context concerns God’s Word, perhaps this reference to fear also refers to God’s Word.

²The Hebrew text of this verse places the phrase “be acceptable” at the beginning of the verse for emphasis.

2021

June 14–16, 2021

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

July 26–28, 2021

Alaska Regional Fellowship
Hamilton Acres Baptist Church
138 Farewell Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99701
907.456.5995

September 14, 2021

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

October 4–5, 2021

Central Regional Fellowship
Bethel Community Baptist Church
1397 155th Street
Fort Scott, KS 66701

October 16, 2021

New England Regional Fellowship
(Meeting with the New England
Foundations Conference)
Heritage Baptist Church
186 Dover Point Road
Dover, NH 03820
603.749.0762

2022

March 14–17, 2022

South Regional Fellowship
The Wilds Christian Camp
1000 Wilds Ridge Road
Brevard, NC 28712-7273

April 4–6, 2022

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Grace Baptist Church
2731 Matson Road
Victoria, BC V9B 4M5
CANADA

2023

March 6–8, 2023

South Regional Fellowship
Keystone Baptist Church
15 Keystone Lane
Berryville, VA 22611

April 23–24, 2023

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Monroe Baptist Church
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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

The Overlooked Ministry of Letters

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.
Proverbs 13:20

It's been observed that in the eighteenth century, the English art of letter-writing came to perfection. Letter writing was "a form of literary culture, and the writer was generally aware . . . that his letter might be read aloud, reread, or passed on to others" (D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, 245).

In this milieu, the letters of respected pastors often amounted to considerably more than casual correspondence. They were sometimes seasoned advice that might run to many pages in response to practical or theological questions posed by family, friends, church members, or even previously unknown friendly inquirers. Some of these pastors became renowned and published for their letters, just as poets for their verse, or hymnwriters for their texts and tunes. John Newton, for instance, was most valued by other evangelicals not chiefly for his preaching but for his spiritual letter-writing. In fact, his autobiography was originally a series of fourteen letters, written at the request of a friend, Thomas Haweis.

You've undoubtedly seen biographies of preachers and missionaries from this period whose titles read, *The Life and Letters of* . . . But one with whom you may not be familiar is Thomas Scott. Scott was an unsaved Church of England minister whose conversion in the 1770s was due in part to John Newton's friendship and correspondence. Scott succeeded Newton in Olney in 1781, after Newton had taken the ministry at St. Mary

Woolnoth in London.

Thomas Scott was best known in his day as the writer of an extensive, practical commentary on the entire Bible. Though seldom consulted today, it was much valued by earnest evangelicals for some time. Scott's son, John, published his father's life under the title *The Life, Letters, and Papers of the Late Rev. Thomas Scott, D.D.* It preserves scores of letters, ranging across subjects as interesting and varied as the Christian's devotional habits, living a hurried life, Christian graces, *Pilgrim's Progress*, William Carey, John Wesley, George Whitefield, public schools, a preacher's involvement in politics, worldliness, the devices of the Devil, the French Revolution, and so on. This last year I've so profited from reading these; it occurred to me that it might be of some encouragement and counsel to feature samples of them in this column.

I'll begin with a portion of a letter written to a brother-in-law. He had evidently inquired about taking up our cross. It struck me as particularly relevant to men in the ministry, especially at this time of such confusion and discouragement.

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

What It Means to "Take Up Our Cross"

July 4, 1781

Dear Brother,

You have asked me some questions which I cannot now fully answer; but a hint I will drop. To *take up our cross* I apprehend means this; simply to follow the Lord in the path of duty, and patiently and cheerfully to bear everything which in that path we meet with; whether it be reproach, contempt, worldly loss, poverty, hatred, persecution, temptation: not to be diverted from the path of duty by any of these things; but when adherence to known duty requires it, and God by his word and providence calls for it, to be willing to part with friends, substance, char-

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acter, ease, life itself; assured that the Lord is able to compensate all losses and to make amends for every trial. It is called the *cross* because that *death of the cross* which Jesus our pattern, as well as ransom suffered, was then accounted the very sum and substance of what could be endured in this world, and if a man was willing to carry a cross and be nailed to it for Christ's sake, as Christ carried his, he then assuredly would flinch from no other suffering.

I found this next letter to be reassuring about an approach to preaching Scripture that faithfully insists upon all that God has said, but is then content to live with certain unanswered questions.

In this milieu, the letters of respected pastors often amounted to considerably more than casual correspondence. They were sometimes seasoned advice that might run to many pages in response to practical or theological questions posed by family, friends, church members, or even previously unknown friendly inquirers.

Satisfied to Know No More Than What Is Written

To the Rev. Dr. Ryland

June 27, 1797

Dear Sir,

I feel myself more and more to be very ignorant, and liable to err where I thought myself most sure; I am thoroughly satisfied that the Bible is the word of God; my desire and aim are to understand, explain and apply it to practical purposes. . . . Self-wisdom seems to me as dangerous as self-righteousness. Mysteries could never have been known if not revealed, and can be understood no further than revealed. I am afraid of attempting to be wise above what is written, or of *intruding into things not seen, vainly puffed up with a fleshy mind.*

I hear my Saviour say, *Except ye receive the kingdom of God as a little child ye shall not enter therein*, and his apostle add to the speculating Corinthians, *If any man among you seem to be wise, let him become a fool that he may be wise: for the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain: and, he taketh the wise in their own craftiness: Be not wise in your own conceits.*

These things render me more cautious than I used to be. . . . When I am disposed to ask a question to which the scriptures have not given an answer, I seem to hear Christ say to me, *What is that*

to thee? Follow thou me.

The silence of scripture is instructive, and teaches us that the subject concerning which nothing is said is not suited to our present condition. As I tell my children when they ask an improper question, *You are not capable of understanding that matter at present; you may be so in due time.*

I cannot but think that many of the modern American divines have greatly lost sight of these scriptures and are very deficient in that kind of modesty and humility which relates to consciousness of incompetency to know the deep things of God. They seem little to feel as David did when he said, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high I cannot attain unto it*, or as Paul did when his discussions on the divine decrees terminated in the exclamation, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!*

Over a period of seventeen years Scott carried on an extensive correspondence with an unnamed friend in Scotland. On one occasion the friend asked about educating Christian children in public schools.

Public Education

May 12, 1798

Dear Sir,

I am very averse to public schools: and I never sent any one of my children to school in my life, because I thought the danger to their morals and religious principles vastly more than compensated all the advantages to be derived. When parents are really pious, and can possibly do it, they had better give their children an education at home, defective as to learning, than run the risk of sending them to situations where their very advantages are unspeakably dangerous, and where the boldest sinner will commonly be the example, and give the tone to the manners of all the boys; and where they will be almost sure to corrupt one another, whatever pains the master may bestow.

Scott evidently had at least a measure of spiritual success in educating his children at home. All three of his sons followed him into the ministry. A related subject on which I found his thoughts to be valuable concerns the question of the believer's relationship to lawful, worldly comforts.

Living Above the World

To his brother's wife

March 10, 1778

Dear Sister,

I received your last kind letter, and, wonderful to tell, am already set down to answer it. . . .

The world and all that it contains . . . has also another bad property. All things in it are unsatisfying. They may refresh but they cannot fill the capacities of an immortal soul nor quiet those restless hankerings after something more and something better which all anxiously seek to gratify, except those few who have found the one thing needful.

How the world sinks in the esteem of that man who hath set his affections on things above and laid up his treasure in heaven and with full purpose of heart is daily following it; and like Enoch, Noah and Abraham walketh with God as one friend doth with another. This is the most desirable thing on earth, as it enables us, while we live in it, to live above the world, to manage its affairs and enjoy its comforts the same as others do, without having our happiness depending on or exposed to the uncertainty of things here below.

In his memoir, Scott related an instance of his having made a deliberate decision to abandon a practice that many thought to be harmless.

In the early part of my life I had been exceedingly fond of cards. . . . At the time of which I am now writing I had lost all my relish for the diversion of cards and every other of a similar nature. I however occasionally joined in a game from an idea that too great preciseness might prejudice my neighbors, and I was then of opinion that there was no harm in the practice, though it seemed a frivolous way of spending time. . . .

My fetters were, however, broken effectually and at once about January 1778 in the following manner. Being on a visit to one of my parishioners at Ravenstone, I walked out after dinner to visit some of my poor people, when one of them said to me, *I have something which I wish to say to you but I am afraid you may be offended.* I answered that I could not promise, but I hoped I should not. She then said, *You know A. B., he has lately appeared attentive to religion, but last night he with C. D. and some others met to keep Christmas, and they played at cards, drank too much, and in the end quarrelled and raised a sort of riot. And when I remonstrated with him on his conduct, as inconsistent with his professed attention to religion, his answer was, "There is no harm in cards. Mr Scott plays at cards."*

This smote me to the heart. I saw that if I played at cards, however soberly and quietly, the people would be encouraged by my example to go further. And if St. Paul would eat no flesh while the world stood, rather than cause his weak brother to offend, it would be inexcusable in me to throw such a stumbling block in the way of my parishioners. So far from being offended at the hint thus given me, I felt very thankful to my faithful monitor and promised her that she should never have occasion to repeat the admonition. That very evening I related the whole matter to the

company, and declared my fixed resolution never to play at cards again.

Several of Scott's letters include counsel on the subject of prayer. I found his thoughts on what prayer is, and on Satan's efforts to obstruct our praying, to be helpful. I included his explanation of prayer in a church-wide letter regarding our beginning the new year with a day of prayer. You may have to read it several times in order to catch its genius.

Prayer

July 5, 1780

Dear Brother,

When you read your Bible, observe what wonderful things are spoken of, promised to, and affected by prayer. Without prayer we can do nothing: but faith and prayer, engaging an almighty arm on our side, do all things. And this is the reason why we are so much hindered, discouraged, and tempted in respect of prayer, and meet with so many excuses. It is Satan's business to keep us from prayer. If he can effect this, he holds us fast at his pleasure in his snare. If we *will* pray, he must lose us. And therefore, so long as ever, by reason of our corruptions and worldly-mindedness, he can keep us from praying, he will. . . .

I have much more to say upon this subject, but a hint must suffice at present. Prayer is this: to look into the Bible and see what God has promised: to look into our own hearts and ask ourselves what we want: and to look up to God to give us what *we* want and *he* has promised as the purchase of Christ's blood, expecting that though we are most unworthy, yet he will be as good as his word.

Pastoring

Scott was a charitable man who strove for unity even with those of other denominations with whom he did not entirely agree. He was also conscientious about his own persuasions. However, he was not always successful in persuading his people. The following brief extract on the difficulty of keeping a church together occurs in a letter to a niece.

All my experience, and observation, and study wholly fail to teach me how to keep together a congregation which is prejudiced against some part of that instruction which faithfulness renders it my duty to inculcate. It seems to me as hopeless as to give a farmer counsel on how he may use his fan, and yet not lessen the heap of corn and chaff on his barn floor.

This testimony is especially interesting in light of Scott's view of one particular aspect of John Newton's ministry at Olney preceding his. He relates his opinion of a mistake Newton made in pastoring.

It is a maxim with me, that INDULGED CHILDREN ALWAYS ARE A ROD BY WHICH GOD CORRECTS THEIR PARENTS. And this applies to ministers and their flocks, as well as to families: and many pious and even eminent ministers have so humored and indulged their people, as to render them captious, self-conceited, and ready to take offence at every faithful and needful reproof. Good Mr. Newton, than whom few stand higher on many grounds, had erred in this respect at Olney, that he could not preach a plain and practical sermon, without exciting inquiries throughout the town. . . .

By this and other concurring circumstances, though exemplary, meek and loving in the highest degree, he became an Eli at Olney; and really could not keep his station, having lost almost all his authority and influence.

He related in the same letter another mistake which he believed that Newton had made.

Good Mr. Newton used to say, and was admired for saying, *That it was enough to preach the truth; for, that being established, error would fall of itself.* Now, if truth were as congenial to the human heart as error, or more so, this might be the case. But who does not see that, if St. Paul had been so averse to all controversy, the false teachers of Galatia and Corinth would have wholly supplanted him, and ruined those flourishing churches? In consequence, Olney, when Mr. Newton left it, swarmed with antinomians. And, when I about a year after I became curate of the parish, most of the professors of the gospel joined the dissenters; and I had to attempt to raise a new congregation, in opposition to the antinomianism . . . which prevailed.

In 1819, just two years before his homegoing, Scott was asked by a society of ministers, "Is it a fact that faithful ministers, as they advance in life, frequently lose the esteem they had obtained, and decline in apparent usefulness? If so, what may be learned from it?" Scott's response runs to almost 1800 words, all valuable. But I found some to be especially sound and stabilizing.

June 21, 1819

Dear Brethren,

The question which you propose to discuss at your meeting is of great importance and difficulty and I do not feel myself competent to throw much light upon it. . . .

Ministers are too apt to yield to discouragement . . . and instead of being more fervent in prayer, and zealous in labor, and instant in

season and out of season, and considering what farther can be done, they become heartless, their hands hang down. They go on indeed with their ministrations, but there is less life and vigor in them, less pains taken privately, and more of a disposition to seek comfort and amusement in other studies and pursuits. This often exceedingly increases the evil, and gives their rivals every advantage against them. And this is still worse if they take it up as merely their trial and the appointment of God, and so quiet themselves in a heartless use of ordinary means, instead of being stirred up to extraordinary exertions and to inquiries.


For myself, I never had any popularity to lose till I came to this village, and then for several years I was so attended, and all I said or did was so favorably received that I used to say, *I hope God will give me wisdom and grace to adopt proper measures only, for I seem as if I might do what I pleased.*

But at length a meeting opened at Haddenham, as well as others in the neighboring villages, with some other changes which so altered the case, that my congregation was much reduced, and circumstances became discouraging.

And yet on a full review of the whole, I cannot ascribe it to any false step either previously or during the secession, though doubtless more simplicity, fervor in prayer, and zeal might have counteracted it.

Lately however things have taken a more favorable turn. Many have come forth from other places, and several have joined us as communicants, and though our congregations are much less than once they were, yet probably much more good has been done.

We ought not therefore to yield to discouragement, but to wait and hope and pray, and labor to endeavor to out-pray, out-preach and out-live those who are preferred to us. To expect also, and not to complain but be thankful, if others increase and we decrease. And to rejoice that Christ is preached to the ignorant and careless, though we be eclipsed. And to hold fast this maxim, that it is FAR BETTER TO DO A LITTLE GOOD THAN A GREAT DEAL OF MISCHIEF, and there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth though ten thousand continue impenitent. May God help us to be faithful unto death, and give us the crown of life, and numbers to be our joy and crown of rejoicing at last.

For those who might find themselves sparked to read more of Scott, the biography is relatively rare for buying, but is accessible for reading at Google Books. Even if you never look it up, perhaps this sample of his letters may encourage us about the helpful, ministering possibilities of even the e-mails that we write. 

Bring . . . the Books

The Pastor of Kilsyth, Islay Burns

I feel I am writing not a book review but a life review, for in *The Pastor of Kilsyth*, Islay Burns (1860; reprint, Banner of Truth, 2020) introduces us to the life of his father, William H. Burns,* a life that brings a special encouragement to faithful men in small ministries.

William H. Burns was born in 1779 into the late-eighteenth-century arena of theological compromise in the Church of Scotland. A generation of stalwarts, including John Wesley and John Newton, had gone home just as Burns was entering the ministry scene. Even while still in preparation for ministry, however, Burns was willing to embrace the scorn heaped upon those who refused the heterodoxy. After being licensed to preach in 1799 at the age of twenty, Burns took the pastorate of the old church of Dun. His parochial circle was three miles across and the population, seven hundred. Despite the obscurity of his ministry and the relative fruitlessness in his spiritually dull flock over twenty years of ministry, excerpts from Burns' journal in this season reveal a warm pastoral heart and great care in the daily duties of shepherding.

In 1821 Burns moved to the pastorate of Kilsyth. Though a larger parish with some souls spiritually alight, Kilsyth was also characterized by spiritual deadness, indulgence in drunkenness, and neglect of gathered worship. Burns nevertheless continued the personal (often in-home) shepherding routines he had established during his years at Dun. Yet after nineteen years of labor in Kilsyth, Burns had seen spiritual revival in only a smattering of his people, until 1839. That year revival permeated his parish through preaching and prayer meetings as large as twelve thousand people. The movement spread to Dundee, Perth, Aberdeen, and as far as the Highlands of Ross-shire.

In the midst of a modern church culture that celebrates big names, big conferences, and big titles, Islay Burns's portrait of his father brings to faithful pastors of small works a special encouragement. "Yes, we need the towering leaders of men like John Calvin and John Knox. However, the great work of the church is ultimately carried forward by those who receive little earthly reward and recognition" (viii). The story of Burns's life reminds us that God's providence often ordains great revival only after years of seemingly fruitless toil. But there is encouragement also for those of us whom God's providence may ordain that we *never* see great fruit this side of eternity, for we find in Burns a friend to walk beside in our discouraging seasons of ministry. During those first twenty years at Dun, Burns wrote, "Much discouragement in the work, but *nil desperandum* [do not despair]—must labor and pray more. Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity" (59). We see in Burns's life that *faithful* ministry in an obscure, fruitless, earthly place can be *faith-full*, having espied "great reward" laid up in heaven (Luke 6:23).

Although thirty-nine years of this work preceded the day of revival for his father, he does not paint those years as a necessary evil to be merely endured before the "real" ministry could begin. Rather he recounts the apparently mundane toil of those years in all of their glory—the privileged duty of the shepherd!

The simple annals of a country pastor's daily life are uniform and uneventful, and afford little scope for the biographer's pencil. Interesting and precious as any work done on earth in Heaven's eyes, it is the obscurest possible in the world's regard (43).

It was not by any grand *coup de main*, or by a series of fitful, brilliant charges, that he expected to produce great results; but by patient course of holy duty, continued on in faith and prayer from year to year. Thus his influence was rather felt than seen,—recognized in its slowly ripening results, rather than in the conspicuousness of the means (81).

Islay Burns's father viewed those thirty-nine years of faithful pastoral toil as actually laying the foundation for the revival of 1839. The volume includes a lecture given by his father in 1839, expounding the disciplines that the Spirit often uses to produce revival—prayer, preaching, pastoral visitation, and so forth. Yet the disciplines Burns lists are essentially the "mundane" pastoral activities that fill the biographical part of the volume.

For Burns, the apex of pastoral care was insistence on genuine, personal, living heart religion, as distinct from mere profession. Burns prayed this for his people, preached it from his pulpit, and inquired pointedly about it in the homes of his parish. And it seems that it was years of differentiating genuine life from mere profession that laid the foundation for his people's eventual realization that they were indeed outside of Christ.

In short, Burns saw faithful pastoral ministry, no matter how obscure or mundane, as the method by which God is sometimes pleased to bring revival. And therein lies the special encouragement for the discouraged shepherd today. No matter how small or obscure the work, the shepherd's devoted pastoral care of the souls of his flock is not in vain, for the Lord of the harvest chooses in his sovereignty whether to bless such faithful work with an outpouring of fruit in this life or else to wait and reward the shepherd in eternity. ☞

* Williams H. Burns was also father to William Chalmers Burns, celebrated missionary to China and comrade of J. Hudson Taylor.

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

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As the disciples descended the Mount of Transfiguration, they were perplexed about prophecy. They understood that Jesus was Israel’s Messiah, but His coming did not seem to align with Malachi’s promise, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (4:5–6). True, Elijah *had* appeared with Moses on the mountain, but he did not come in the way Malachi envisioned. Elijah came for only a few moments near the end of Jesus’ ministry before returning to heaven. According to Malachi, Elijah was supposed to come *before* the Christ—or so the religious leaders claimed. So, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” (Matt. 17:10).

An initial reading of Matthew 17:9–13 might lead to the conclusion that Malachi’s prophecy was *fulfilled* in the coming of John the Baptist. In that case, Malachi did not literally mean *Elijah*. After all, verse 13 observes that “the disciples understood that [Jesus] spake unto them of John the Baptist.” However, there are contextual reasons to maintain a literal interpretation of prophecy and to conclude that Jesus did not intend for the disciples to view John the Baptist as Malachi’s Elijah. Several passages fill out the picture.

- Luke 1:13–17, John would “go before [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elias.”
- John 1:19–25, John’s denial: “Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not.”
- Matthew 11:10, John is “he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”
- Matthew 11:14–15, “And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”
- Matthew 17:10–13, the disciples asked, “Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not. . . . Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.”

Although John the Baptist had “the spirit and power” of Elijah, he apparently did no miracles. Thus, “spirit and power” appears to convey his message of repentance coupled with divine revelation rather than a statement of personal identification. John’s own understanding of his role appears decisively in John 1:19, where he repeatedly and emphatically rejected the notion that he was Elijah. John’s protest shows that he was not literal-

ly Elijah; however, it does not rule out the possibility that Malachi’s prophecy should be interpreted figuratively. To warrant a literal interpretation, we must explore the other relevant texts.

Matthew 11:10 links John directly with both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 as “my messenger” who “shall prepare the way before me.” This corroborates John’s claim (John 1:23) that he was Isaiah’s and Malachi’s forerunner, but not Elijah. We will return to this observation later.

Matthew 11:14–15 raises questions, however, because it seems to call John “Elijah.” The short expressions “if ye will receive it” and “he that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (cf. Matt. 13:9, 43) indicate that Jesus’ audience was reticent to view Him as the Christ. In fact, most of His listeners would reject Him. Very few could “see” correctly. They heard John’s message and saw Jesus’ miracles, but they were not willing to accept the testimony of either. The apparently insurmountable obstacle of Malachi’s prophecy prevented the people’s acceptance of Jesus as the Christ.

In Matthew 14:1–12 Herod executed John. This means that when the disciples asked, “Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” John was long dead. Jesus might point backward to John as Elijah, but he could not point forward to him as such. Yet in Matthew 17, Jesus directly states, “Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.” Both verbs in this statement refer to the future—neither refers to a past event. Thus, Jesus asserts that from the vantage point of the Transfiguration, Elijah was still going to come *in the future*.

How can we reconcile these texts into a coherent representation of Jesus’ teaching? Malachi anticipated *both* a messenger forerunner (3:1) and a judgment forerunner (4:5). The scribes of Jesus’ day *assumed* (1) Malachi’s forerunners were identical and (2) the time periods were identical. This is the same mistake the Jews made concerning the first and second comings of Christ—treating these without differentiation. Like so many other OT prophecies, Malachi addresses both comings of Christ without indicating a distinction. Jesus crafted His statements in Matthew 11:14 and 17:12 to remove the excuse that many Jews were using to justify their unbelief—namely, Jesus cannot be the Christ because Elijah must come first. Malachi had not promised that Elijah would come before the Christ, but that Elijah would come before “the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” Knowing that His audience would not accept a multiple-comings theology, Jesus used a shadow-fulfillment argument (or metonymy) to remove the obstacle to faith. Jesus’ words say John the Baptist is a shadow, but Elijah will still come before the day of the Lord. ☞

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

Editor's Note: *This article was originally run in 2015.*

Believers for centuries have been challenged and encouraged by the gripping tale of Christian in John Bunyan's classic allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. One stop along his arduous journey is particularly instructive. Christian finds himself at the house of the Interpreter, where spiritual truths are explained through vivid illustrations.

In one room he sees a fire in a fireplace and a man pouring water on it. However, each time the water is poured on it, the fire burns with greater intensity. Christian is led to the back of the fireplace where he learns the cause of this phenomenon. Behind the fireplace, another man is pouring oil on the fire. The unceasing flow of oil ensures that the fire will never be extinguished. Interpreter explains to Christian that the one pouring the water illustrates Satan and his attempts to extinguish a believer's faith. Jesus Christ is pictured as the one behind the fire ensuring its survival, and the oil he is pouring illustrates the grace of God. Bunyan has captured through this simple illustration the powerful truth that grace is God's power made available to mankind. God's grace supplies the power necessary to turn a rebel to repentance, and His grace provides the power that enables believers to persevere along their pilgrimage of faith. It is interesting that Interpreter had one final lesson for Christian before they left the fireplace room. He tells Christian that the man pouring oil is hidden behind the fireplace to illustrate that people are often unaware of how God supplies them with His grace.¹

Although it is true that God sovereignly supplies His grace when and how He chooses, the Scriptures do give us a sense of how God communicates His grace to believers. The authors of the New Testament consistently connect three activities with the bestowal of God's grace: the Scriptures read or preached; prayer, private or corporate; and fellowship among believers. It is not surprising that these are the very activities that were pursued by the church just after its formation in Acts 2:42. Consider the following additional examples.

- Paul refers to the Scripture as the Word of God's grace in Acts 20:32.
- The writer of Hebrews encourages believers to approach the throne of God's grace to obtain grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).
- And Peter tells his readers that they have the opportunity to steward the manifold grace of God as they minister to one another (1 Pet. 4:10).

These Scripture passages and many others point believers to these three activities as vital lifelines that connect them to the strengthening grace of God.

Christians living out their faith over the centuries, some in very challenging circumstances, have found that the Bible has not misled them. They have added their voices to the witness of the Scriptures by testifying to the ministry of grace wrought by God through the Word, prayer, and fellowship.

Scripture

Consider the power of the Bible displayed in the following story told by Dr. James M. Gray. Dr. Gray was one of the leaders of early fundamentalism, a close associate of D. L. Moody, and an editor for the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Early in his career as a Bible teacher he was struck by the serene and substantive spiritual life of a close friend. Since Gray desired those same attributes in his life, he asked his companion the secret of his vibrant walk with Christ. "It all started through reading Ephesians," said the man. Even as a Bible teacher, Gray was surprised by this response. He had read Ephesians many times and had not experienced such a radical change. Noticing Gray's consternation, the man explained himself: "On one occasion, when I was on a short vacation, I took a pocket edition of Ephesians with me. Lying down one afternoon, I read all six chapters. My interest was so aroused that I read the entire epistle again. In fact, I did not finally lay it down until I had gone through it some fifteen times." He then said, "When I arose to go into the house, I was in possession of Ephesians; or better yet, it was in possession of me. I had the feeling that I had been lifted up to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus—a feeling that was new to me." The testimony of this friend and brother in Christ encouraged Gray to master the Scriptures for himself. He began to saturate his mind and heart with God's Word so that he could freely and effectively communicate it to others.² What Gray and his friend had experienced was the grace of God ministered through His Word. That grace equipped and strengthened them to live their lives in submission to Christ.

During the Vietnam War, many American officers were held as Prisoners of War in the dreadful Hoa Lò prison in Hanoi (dubbed by the Americans as "the Hanoi Hilton"). A number of those officers were Christians and relied on their faith during unimaginable hardship. Throughout the early days of their imprisonment, many of them would scribble down on scraps of paper any verses of Scripture that they could remember. Later on, as a propaganda stunt, the prisoners were given a Bible. Eugene McDaniel, a naval aviator, describes their reaction.

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

Charles Spurgeon

We immediately set out to get as much of it copied down as we could. First we took down the whole Gospel of Matthew, because it had favorites such as the Sermon on the Mount and the Christmas Story. And once we had it on paper, Ralph Gaither, who had a terrific photographic mind, memorized it all just in case we never got a copy of the Bible again. We finally had to post a reading list for the Bible, each man taking a certain time; some men had to get up at three A.M. to get their turn, but they never missed.³

They also formed a prayer club and spent many hours pouring their souls out to the Lord in prayer. Often Christians can be tempted to think that the spiritual tools God has provided them are insufficient to meet their daily challenges. However, these men found that they were fully equipped to face even the most challenging circumstances.

Prayer

Not only did the Word strengthen the men in Hanoi, but prayer also became a vital part of their lives. In, *My Utmost for His Highest* Oswald Chambers highlights the necessity of prayer by expounding 2 Corinthians 6. This passage serves as a reminder that strengthening grace must be continually appropriated in order to prepare for both routine and challenging circumstances. He exhorts his readers to draw on the grace of God through prayer.

The grace you had yesterday will not be sufficient for today. Grace is the overflowing favor of God, and you can always count on it being available to draw upon as needed. “In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses”—that is where our patience is tested. Are you failing to rely on the grace of God there? It is not a question of praying and asking God to help you—it is taking the grace of God *now*. We tend to make prayer the preparation for our service, yet it is never that in the Bible. Prayer is the practice of drawing on the grace of God. Don’t say, “I will endure this until I can get away and pray.” Pray *now*—draw on the grace of God in your moment of need. Prayer is the most normal and useful thing; it is not simply a reflex action of your devotion to God. We are very slow to learn to draw on God’s grace through prayer.⁴

Fellowship

Finally, believers ought to be drawing on the grace of God through fellowship with other believers. Dr. J. Vernon McGee helps identify the biblical meaning of fellowship, as opposed to what believers sometimes assume fellowship to be.

Years ago I was invited down to Huntington Beach about once a year to give a message at a Rotary Club luncheon. A Christian doctor was chairman of the program committee down there, and he would invite me to come at Christmas time or Easter time and give them the gospel—both barrels, which is what I always tried to do. Over the speaker’s table they had a slogan:

“Food, Fun, Fellowship.” Those three things belonged to the early church, and I didn’t feel that the Rotary Club should have bragged about having any one of the three. Well, the Christian idea of fellowship is not much different. When you hear an announcement of a church banquet, it is almost certain that you will be urged to come for food and fellowship. What do they mean by fellowship? They mean meeting around the table and talking to each other about everything under the sun except the one thing that would give them true fellowship, the person of Christ. *Koinonia* means that which believers can share of the things of Christ. There are three elements that must enter into it: spiritual communication, sympathetic cooperation, and sweet communion. (1) Spiritual communication is sharing the things of Christ. This would be sharing the great truths concerning Christ. (2) Sympathetic cooperation means working together for Christ. That is why, when Paul used the word “fellowship,” he could be talking about Bible reading or Bible study together or prayer or celebrating the Lord’s Supper or taking up an offering. Paul called all of these *koinonia*—fellowship. The result would be (3) sweet communion. It makes us partners with Christ. This is true *koinonia*. Paul wrote that this church was having fellowship with him. He had communicated to them the gospel. They had shared with Paul in a sympathetic cooperation. They had sent a gift to him and had ministered to his physical needs again and again. Then when they were together, they had sweet communion.⁵

He correctly identifies fellowship as the commonness that believers have in Christ. This commonness takes many forms but is most easily summarized as the vibrant life of the church. God intends for the Christian life to be lived out in a community with other believers. It is often through this closeness to other believers that we are encouraged, corrected, and built up in our faith.

Believers need God’s grace in order to live victoriously, and they can appropriate that grace through the Word, fellowship, and prayer. There may be some who are tempted to think that is too simple, but the reality is that is how God has intended for His people to be connected to His grace. This is the witness of Scripture, and it is the witness of believers throughout the centuries.

¹ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844), 111–12.

² *Sermon Illustrations*. http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible_study_of.htm (accessed October 30, 2014).

³ Eugene McDaniel, *Scars and Stripes* (Irvine, CA: Harvest House Publishers, 1975), 99–100.

⁴ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*. June 26 entry.

⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers). ☞

Contributed by Pastors Ben Smith and Martin Blanton of Vacaville Bible Church in Vacaville, California.

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Subtle Attacks on the Sufficiency of Scripture



Those of us who use labels such as “conservative” or “fundamentalist” or “separatist” to describe some aspect of our theological views might react to the subject of “the sufficiency of the Scriptures” with a remark like, “Of course!” and leave the discussion for something more interesting. Nevertheless, contemporary Christians often rely on authorities outside the Bible, with consequences in faith or practice that cause concern. We would do well to ask ourselves, “Do you rely on anything outside the Bible? Are you sure?”

The doctrine of sufficiency rises in history with the Reformation as the Reformers realized that the Church failed to trust the Scriptures alone. They found priests and popes citing traditions, ancient writings, and even papal decrees as authorities at least equal to (if not superior to) the Scriptures. The Reformation led to expressions such as this from the 1646 Westminster Catechism:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men [Gal. 1:8–9; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:15–17].”

“Bible Talk” and Extrabiblical Experience

In our world many voices speak authoritatively to us, often couching their language in biblical terms or even citing passages of Scripture. But close examination reveals that the real authority behind these voices is a manmade ideology. Because they use “Bible-talk” to cloak their assertions, we can find ourselves deceived if we aren’t cautious and discerning.

An example of a whole movement built on extrabiblical experience is the charismatic movement. Built out of the

religious enthusiasm of the early twentieth century, charismatic advocates, among other things, that God will speak through special gifts given to contemporary individuals. Some charismatics have even gone so far as to designate some of their leaders as apostles, granting them special authority in their circles, if not in Christendom at large.¹

We find the biblical definition of an apostle in Acts 1:21–22: “Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” The apostle Paul rightly claimed to be among this number as one “born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8), called by the Lord Jesus as an apostle because he, too, saw the resurrected Lord. Only these men speak with apostolic authority. The authority of the New Testament rests on their words, through their pens or the pens of their close associates given prophetic gifts.

Is it possible that genuine believers can miss this? Yes, countless numbers are deceived by false prophets, claiming authority beyond the Bible and leading to various kinds of wrong thinking and practice, carried along on the authority of emotional experience couched in “Bible-like” words.

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

We often take aim at the charismatics, so the average fundamentalist reader is unlikely to trip up here. However, other voices speak in our day, likewise demanding our attention, trying to shape our thinking. A current issue roiling the Southern Baptist Convention provides an example that has implications beyond the SBC to public life in general. The issue is “Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality” (CRT), a subject made obscure by its very title. At the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention, the SBC adopted Resolution 9 (“On

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Subtle Attacks on the Sufficiency of Scripture

Continued from page 22

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality”).² Those in favor of the resolution say that CRT is a tool that, “when used in conjunction with the Bible, can help to address societal problems such as racism.”³ With that description, CRT takes on a sudden new urgency as we recall terms such as “systemic racism” and remember the 2020 Summer of Discontent brought to us by Black Lives Matter and Antifa. These activists are also using CRT as a tool to assail civil society. How can Christians bring CRT into a Christian context and claim that CRT is a helpful “tool” for addressing social issues?

According to scholars from the Mid-America Theological Seminary (a Southern Baptist institution), Resolution 9 is an attack on the sufficiency of Scripture. Noting that CRT finds its roots in Marxism and that its Christian advocates insist that Christians must rely on CRT to properly formulate answers to social issues, Matthew Akers reminds us, “Since Scripture is the standard for both faith *and* practice (i.e., it is inerrant and sufficient), the Bible must be the ultimate standard by which Christians judge every philosophy and movement, including the philosophies that underpin CRT and Intersectionality.”⁴ CRT must take a back seat to Scripture, not the other way around. Is it any wonder that Christians get confused about solving racial inequity if they are looking to Marxist ideology for solutions rather than the Bible alone?

One last contemporary example is a slippery one. Andy Stanley is the popular pastor of North Point Community Church, a large church in Atlanta. A few years ago he excited criticism in the evangelical world after preaching a sermon called “The Bible Told Me So” (preached Aug. 28, 2016).⁵ Many criticized the sermon, including Michael Kruger, president of Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Kruger reported Stanley as saying, “Christianity made its greatest strides during the 282 years before the Bible even existed,” and “Christianity was not born on the back of the Bible says, the Bible says, the Bible says.”⁶ David Prince said that “Stanley argues that our faith is based on the resurrection and not the Bible.”⁷ In an interview with *Christianity Today*,⁸ Stanley’s explanation is that we need to evangelize people by introducing them to Jesus, not the Bible. He implies that they will “get the Bible” later.

One can read these critiques and Stanley’s responses and come away thinking, “It’s all just semantics; he means well.” Perhaps so, but there is a similar assertion in an otherwise useful book, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* by Nabeel Qureshi. In an appendix to the Kindle version of the book, Qureshi says,

Let’s look at this question another way. Before the New Testament was written, someone claimed to be a Christian because they believed in the resurrection of Jesus. They were still a Christian, even before they believed anything about the New Testament. The New Testament doesn’t determine whether or not you’re a Christian. It’s Jesus, and your beliefs about Jesus, that determine whether you’re a Christian.⁹

What is wrong with this statement? First, it misses clear biblical teaching about the methodology of Jesus and the apostles. Luke says, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Philip, meeting the eunuch, beginning with Isaiah 53, “preached unto him Jesus.” The Gospels and Epistles are replete with quotations and allusions to the Scriptures as the basis for their authority.

A worse problem, though, is that it undermines the sufficiency of the Scriptures by suggesting we can know Jesus *without* the Scriptures. What kind of Jesus can we know without the Scriptures? Who says the Jesus that Stanley or Qureshi preaches is the real Jesus? How would you know? You can know only by appealing to the Scriptures.

My point in using these examples is that the sufficiency of the Scriptures is a vital contemporary issue for every believer. We can easily lose our spiritual bearings unless our anchor holds to the Scriptures alone. We will follow the will-o-the-wisp of emotion, or some theory of popular culture, or the mystique of a popular preacher—and follow any one of them over the cliff of orthodoxy into grievous error.

May God grant us a deep commitment to the absolute authority of the Bible and the discernment to test everything by the Bible.

Don Johnson is the pastor of Grace Baptist Church of Victoria in British Columbia. He also serves as editor of the FBFI blog, *Proclaim & Defend* (www.proclaimanddefend.org).



¹ See, for example, the claims of C. Peter Wagner in his book *The Changing Church* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2004) and his book *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2010). Also see the report of Matt Recker at our blog, “C. J. Mahaney, SGM, Abuse and the Apostolic Gift,” published July 10, 2014, at <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2014/07/10/c-j-mahaney-sm-abuse-and-the-apostolic-gift/>. Also see the doctrinal statement of the Sovereign Grace Churches, published at <https://www.sovereigngrace.com/statement-of-faith>.

² The text of the resolution is here: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2308/resolution-9--on-critical-race-theory-and-intersectionality>.

³ Matthew R. Akers, “Understanding the Debate: An Examination of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Resolution 9 of the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention,” Vol. 1, Sufficiency of Scripture Series (Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 1, www.mabts.edu.

⁴ Akers, 6.

⁵ Originally at this link: <http://northpoint.org/messages/who-needs-god/the-bible-told-me-so/> but now not available.

⁶ <https://www.michaelkruger.com/is-the-bible-foundational-to-christianity-engaging-with-andy-stanley/>

⁷ <https://www.davidprince.com/2016/09/07/andy-stanleys-statements-bible-not-cutting-edge-theyre-old-liberalism/>

⁸ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/july-web-only/andy-stanley-stop-saying-bible-says.html>

⁹ Qureshi, Nabeel, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* (with Bonus Content), Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 316.

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Regional Reports

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

The FBFI Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship was hosted by Westside Baptist Church of Greeley, Colorado, on Tuesday morning, February 2. The attendance of over sixty included the volunteer hosts and hostesses of Westside Baptist, who welcomed and served pastors and their wives who coming Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska.

Three pastors were asked to bring messages on whatever the Lord had laid upon each of their hearts, the announced theme being, “From the Heart of a Seasoned Pastor to His Fellow Laborers.”

Jim Welch, pastor of Victory Baptist Church of Montrose, Colorado, challenged his hearers from 1 Peter 5:1–4 on “Peter As a Role Model for Pastoring.” Les Heinze, pastor of Red Rocks Baptist Church of Morrison, Colorado, exhorted us from 1 Timothy 4:11–16 on “Instructions for a Productive Ministry.” And Will Senn, pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church of Westminster, Colorado, encouraged from Isaiah 54:11–12, contrasting our “Earthly Problems and the Heavenly Perspective Needed.”

The meeting began at 8:30 AM and concluded with a catered lunch at 12:45 PM with uplifting singing and refreshing fellowship between and after the three sessions.



FBFI Winter Board Meeting

The Foundations Baptist Fellowship Winter Board Meeting (February 8–9) is not designed to deal with just the “business” of the organization. That certainly takes place. The various committees meet either before or during the two-day assembly. Since the last two Winter Board Meetings have been virtual, some of those committee meetings take place beforehand so that accurate reports are generated. In addition to the “business,” we also consider issues that affect our ministries—including that of the FBFI. This year, a major topic of concern is the potential intrusion of the government into churches. With that in mind, we had several presentations designed to build a biblical foundation for how pastors and churches should respond.

Gordon Dickson, the chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM on Monday, February 8. This was followed by reports from the various committees and officers. Mark Minnick blessed us with a great presentation dealing with revival: the indispensable need in our country is God’s work on the hearts of people. Tuesday, Nathan Mestler presented the results of a survey that had been done at last year’s Winter Board Meeting. The remaining presentations by David Shumate, Craig Hartman, Gordon Dickson, and Kevin Schaal sought to balance our responses to the pandemic and governmental mandates. That, along with a question-and-answer session, gave listeners much to think about.

Are We Sufficiently Ministering the Sufficient Word?

Continued from page 7

Every converted transvestite, every post-abortive woman, every rebellious, pot-smoking Christian teen, every despairing housewife, every substance abuser, and every angry, porn-addicted husband can be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” through the *sufficient* Scripture if we will know it well and use it in all four of its God-intended functions.

The question before us again is, “Are we truly sufficiently ministering the sufficient Scriptures?” Some might call these skills *biblical counseling*, but they are simply the skills of wise ministry. Every Bible institute, Christian university, and seminary must equip its students to minister at this level of application. Such instruction cannot be relegated to only the biblical counseling classes. Wherever the sufficient Word is taught, the minister-in-training must be sufficiently equipped through that Word to help people change and grow and to foster his own transformation into Christlikeness. Lastly, every ordination council should require the prospective candidate to clearly articulate the details of the process of sanctification, to give testimony of how God is using that process to help him overcome sin in his own life, and to require him to walk through case studies like those above in detail explaining how he intends to *sufficiently* minister the *sufficient* Scriptures.

Every member of the church—man, woman, teen, and child—must be taught these truths because the mission of the pastor-teacher is to “[perfect] . . . the saints, for the work of the ministry.” Isn’t biblical change into Christlikeness the

heart of “the work of the ministry”—laboring with them until Christ is formed in them? What does “equipping the saints” mean if it does not mean teaching them how to make biblical change themselves and help them help others make biblical change toward Christlikeness?

The Word must be proclaimed (doctrine and reproof), but it must also be applied (correction and instruction in righteousness). Without the latter our people may affirm our doctrinal statement but not believe that the Scriptures have answers for life’s real problems. In the meantime, the young people around us who see the rawness and complexity of life today become convinced that the church has no answers, and they look elsewhere for solutions. We must sufficiently minister the sufficient Scriptures if we are to “make full proof of [our] ministry” and effectively “feed the flock of God.”

Dr. Jim Berg is a professor of biblical counseling at BJU Seminary, author, speaker, and the executive director of Freedom That Lasts®, a local church-based ministry to those struggling with life-dominating sins and hurtful events of life. He and his wife, Pat, serve at Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina. Learn more at JimBerg.com and FreedomThatLasts.com.



¹ Bob Jones University, *Bob Jones University's Philosophy of Biblical Counseling* (Greenville, SC: BJU, 2016), 13. Available in full as a PDF at <https://www.bju.edu/about/biblical-counseling.pdf>.

² Author unknown.

³ Adams, Jay E., *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, 2010), 169.

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Robert Vincent

Sovereign Counsel: A Gospel-

NOTE: This guest column by Dr. Robert Vincent is the conclusion of a two-part series.

In the previous issue we explored God's counsel in two passages for how believers are to respond to civil government: Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. The two passages considered below continue that divine counsel at a time when Nero was still on the throne (AD 54–68).

Titus 3:1–7

Historical Context. Paul writes to Titus, who pastors on the island of Crete (1:5). Even among themselves the Cretans were considered lazy, corrupt, and deceitful (1:12), a benighted society long under the influence of the Devil, the father of lies (John 8:44). They are described as beastly and self-serving. If that was true of the population at large, what kind of governmental leaders must they have had?

Scriptural Context. Paul calls such people to a radically transformed life. Titus 2 is at the heart of this appeal to live now in such a way that no longer reflects their culture but instead displays the attractiveness of the gospel (2:1, 10). The saving grace of God teaches them how to do this—to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, living sensibly and godly in their sordid culture and keeping an eye on the world to come (2:11–15). Paul's first application, surprisingly, concerns their response to civil government (3:1–7).

Specific Commands. Paul echoes the very counsel he gave to the Romans a decade earlier: "Subject yourselves," he says (3:1). The word implies a struggle. The first word of counsel paves the way for the second: "obey." Paul urges them to develop a bias in their spirit that readies them to obey governmental authorities with respect (*peitharcheo*)—the same rare word that the apostles use in Acts 5:29 to describe their ultimate obedience to God. Finally, "be ready for every good (*agathos*) work." Anticipate ways to do what is truly beneficial. The divine counsel to the Cretans is consistent with the counsel to Israel in exile to seek the good of their new home in the providence of God, "and pray unto the LORD for it" (Jer. 29:7). Good deeds (cf. Titus 2:12–13) involve both what we refuse to do and what we choose to do (cf. 3:2). Such radical, counter-cultural conduct characterizes a life that adorns the gospel.

Reasoning. In 3:3–7 Paul explains at length the basis for his counsel. They were indeed an undeserving lot (3:3) for the kindness and love that God showed to them. Being humbly "sensible" of their former condition should shape their disposition and conduct toward unbelievers in authority and toward their unbelieving neighbors. Gospel transformation

involves recalling what we were before the gospel and remembering those over us in government yet need the gospel.

1 Timothy 2:1–6

Historical Context. Timothy pastors in the major metropolitan city of Ephesus in what is today modern Turkey. Ephesus was a regional center of idolatry and the foremost city in Asia Minor with a population estimated at nearly a quarter of a million. Paul had spent three years here (Acts 19), and Ephesus may have been the hub of his church-planting ministry in Asia. Paul later left Timothy here to lead (1:3).

Scriptural Context. Paul warned the church of Ephesus to expect the rise of false teachers (Acts 20:29–30). Paul's first letter to Timothy continued sounding this alarm and aimed to further disciple the believers how to conduct themselves in the living temple that God was building in this city (3:14–15). The mystery of godliness—the way that God Himself makes people godly through Christ—should become evident through the changed conduct of believers. Paul was especially intent on prioritizing public prayer ("first of all," 2:1).

Specific Commands. The overriding command in 2:1–7 is to pray multiple kinds of prayers for multiple people—for all men generally (unbelievers and believers), and specifically those in civil authority. The expressions "for kings, and for all that are in authority" indicates a recognition of various levels of government. "It is significant that Paul singled out for special mention a group of persons who might be the most easily hated by Christians" (Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 101–102). The kinds of prayers ("supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks") imply personal burden, interest, concern, and gratitude for the subjects of those prayers. God has appointed roles and tasks for those in government, and the prayers of God's people enable us to assist those leaders by praying God's purposes for their roles forward. Our praying furthers God's work in us as well—enabling us to be quiet, thankful, and peaceable internally at a time when we might be tempted to the opposite. Our praying also promotes the purpose for which God gave government—for the good of society; prayer is the chief means by which wickedness is overthrown. When government does well, all truly benefit.

Reasoning. Paul offers specific reasons for his direction in 2:3–5. Prayers of this kind are good and acceptable in God's sight (2:3) and in keeping with His desire for all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (2:4). Ultimately, Paul says, interceding for our leaders is in perfect harmony with Christ's role as the sole, saving Mediator between God and man. Christ gave Himself for all; surely we can pray for all that they might come to know Jesus as their Mediator too.

Adorned Response to Civil Government (Part 2)

Summary

To all Christians everywhere, in every continent, in all countries, in every era, God gives this consistent, clear counsel in these four passages. This is not the entirety of a gospel-adorning response to civil government, but a starting point. These passages provide a symmetry of counsel and guidance as to how to flesh out that counsel. Our response to civil government cannot omit or overlook these passages and the factors that link them together.

One Remarkable Decade. These four New Testament letters range from AD 54 (Romans) to AD 65 (1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter). Nero's reign spans the entirety of this period. Instead of retracting the counsel of Romans as Nero grows increasingly hostile to Christians, the Scriptures repeatedly double down on the original timeless counsel.

Two Chief Apostles. Peter and Paul, both of whom suffered greatly and repeatedly at the hands of both religious and civil officials, and both of whom God used to evangelize Jews and open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles, give a united apostolic understanding of the teaching of Christ.

Four Different Contexts. One passage is given to believers in a capital city fraught with emperor worship (Rome), one to believers on an island with corrupt local government (Titus), one to believers scattered and persecuted for their faith (1 Peter), and one to believers in a prestigious city overwhelmed with worldliness and idolatry (Ephesus). Scripture anticipates the varied circumstances believers might experience and speaks with one voice.

Four Complementary Rationales. In each case the reasoning transcends the historical context. The counsel is rooted in timeless doctrine, not current political circumstances. Our response to civil government must fit *what* is prescribed and *why* it is prescribed. In Romans, Paul roots his argument in theology—the very same God who authored the gospel ordained civil government, and civil officials are His ministers. Peter's counsel is Christologically driven, motivated by our need to imitate Christ, who brought us the gospel and whose life blamelessly exemplified it. Paul motivates us in Titus by reminding us of the transforming goodness of God to us, and in 1 Timothy of God's saving desire toward all men.

Foundational Applications

Acknowledge the Sovereignty of God over all (Pss. 22:28; 47:2, 7; 103:19, 22), the Kingship of Christ over the nations (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:18–23; Rev. 1:6), and know that they are fully aware that the kings of the earth are taking counsel against them (Ps. 2:1–2).

Remember our primary allegiance is to God (1 Pet. 2:15–16), and our primary responsibility is to yield to His counsel to us. He counsels authorities too (Rom. 13:2–4; 1 Pet. 2:14), and they will have to answer to Him, as we will.

Under God, we must remember the earthly example and mission of Christ, who cheerfully and voluntarily arranged Himself even under wicked human authorities (1 Pet. 2:19ff), even willingly giving up His rights for the sake of the gospel (Matt. 12:14–21). We need to arrange ourselves under the civil authorities He has ordained at multiple levels over us and to their ordinances (1 Pet. 2:13–14).

We also need to remember what we were before Christ found us and in His kindness and love opened our eyes (Titus 3:4–7). He is the answer for an ill-governed soul and an ill-governed society. Wicked rulers need Christ too.

Our primary temptation will be to sin with our spirit and with our tongue against those authorities when we differ with them or should they falsely judge us (Titus 3:2; 1 Pet. 2:22–23). To counter that temptation, we need to pray for them (1 Tim. 2:1), show honor and respect to them (Rom. 13:7), and seek opportunity to do good to others under their authority and to the authorities themselves (Titus 3:1; Rom. 13:3b; 1 Tim. 2:2–3; 1 Pet. 2:12).

God's people often have a hard task of submitting to leaders whose ambition is contrary to God. These pains intensify when wicked rulers oppress and persecute believers. Yet, in civil government's greatest overreaches, God embeds our greatest opportunities to be a light. Our submission to God in this matter may be the very means by which the light of truth comes to those who walk disobediently to God (1 Pet. 2:9–12).

Instead of murmuring, our praying for civil government need to include thankfulness (1 Tim. 2:1–2). No matter our situation, likely there are others in worse conditions than ourselves; and indeed, we are to remember them too (Heb. 13:3).

Among our scripturally defined means of doing good, we are to pay our taxes (Rom. 13:6–7). In our country we also have the advantage of stewarding our voice and voting to promote good and godliness through proper channels.

Dr. Robert Vincent is assistant pastor of Education & Outreach at Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

In and of the Word

Jim Tillotson

At the heart of all evangelism and discipleship is the Bible. To try to evangelize or disciple without using Scripture would be like trying to hit a baseball without a bat or trying to shoot a bullet without a gun. It just can't be done.

In 1983 *Newsweek* magazine stated,

The Bible has exerted an unrivaled influence on American culture, politics, and social life. Now historians are discovering that the Bible, perhaps more than the Constitution, is our founding document; the source of the powerful myth of the United States as a special, sacred nation, a people called by God to establish a model society, a beacon to the world.

Time magazine on March 22, 2007, stated, "Simply put, the Bible is the most influential book ever written."

On April 19, 2018, *GQ* magazine published a list of twenty-one books you don't have to read. Number 12 was the Bible. They stated,

The Holy Bible is rated very highly by all the people who supposedly live by it but who in actuality have not read it. Those who have read it know there are some good parts, but overall it is certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced. It is repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish and even at times ill-intentioned.

I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." I believe in *sola scriptura*, which states that the inerrant Scriptures are the sole source of written divine revelation, and they alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

People often ask me what my favorite Bible translation is, and my response is "a read one." Too many are passionate about their favorite Bible translation, but their life does not reflect their having spent time in the Word. If you don't read your Bible, you have no advantage over those who cannot read.

Second Timothy 3:15–17 reminds us that the Bible is beneficial—regardless of what the writers of *GQ* think—for several things.

First, it gives instruction on how someone can go to heaven when he dies. The Bible presented by human witnesses is God's plan for reaching people with the

gospel. The source of truth regarding eternal life is the Bible and only the Bible. All Scripture is God's inerrant Word.

Second, it teaches us doctrine, or what is right. The wisdom and guidance to do everything right is found in God's inerrant, authoritative, and completed Bible. There are lots of opinions, but only the Bible is always right. It is impossible to believe, understand, follow, and share what you do not even know. So many of us go through life as if we are putting something together that we bought from IKEA. We skip reading the directions because we think, "I've got this"—until we finish and wonder why IKEA sent us all those extra parts. In the same way too many skip reading God's Word until they have a problem—instead of reading God's Word to prevent a problem.

Third, it gives reproof in that it teaches us what is wrong. As the old-time preachers used to say, "Sin will keep you from this book, or this book will keep you from sin." Regular and careful study of Scripture exposes sin in a believer's life with the purpose of bringing correction, confession, and obedience. The Bible is the line by which every thought and act is to be measured.

Fourth, it provides correction, or "how to get right." The Greek word used here refers to the restoration of something to its original and proper condition. My dad always challenged me not to just point out what was wrong in my preaching but also how to fix it. Reproof without correction is discouraging and hopeless. Thankfully, God gives both.

And lastly, it gives instruction in righteousness, or how to stay right. I have had people tell me they don't read the Bible, but they pray all the time, as though that is a good thing. The problem with that is that the wrong person is doing all the talking.

Because there is so much at stake and because God's Word is so beneficial, are we spending time daily reading it? Do we know how to take a Bible and show someone how he can know for sure he is going to heaven? Are we obeying what the Bible clearly teaches? May we not just be hearers of the Word: may we also be doers of the Word.

Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June of 2015. He was the senior pastor of Meadowlands Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, for eighteen years. During his time in Canada he led Meadowlands Baptist in planting three new churches and helped begin a Christian school and a small Bible institute.

You Never Told Me

The first twenty-nine years of my life I wanted to know God. He saw my longing and continually brought across my path people who could have told me how to be saved but didn't.

I was baptized as an infant and educated in parochial schools. I asked so many questions that the priest who taught our Bible class began ignoring my raised hand. When I was five, neighbors took my family to church. I loved Sunday school, but we never went back, and my neighbors never offered to teach me more.

My mother regularly had coffee with another neighbor. Years later, when I discovered that the neighbor was a Baptist, I asked her if she had ever given my mom the gospel. She replied, "I'm sorry to say I never did." My mother died at age sixty-one without a Savior.

We moved to another city, where Christians lived behind us and across the street. They never told us how to be saved. I had a teenage girlfriend who knew Christ, but she never witnessed to me.

After high school, I became indifferent to religion and sank into the ways of the world. I lacked peace; discontentment set in whenever I did not get my own way. I longed for someone to love. Of course, I thought it was a man I needed, and I found him. My husband and I began a military life together and had a son. Restless and frustrated in my roles as wife and mother, I sat at my kitchen table and wrote letters to God, pouring out my troubles.

We shared a duplex with a Christian family. The closest I got to their church was babysitting while they attended services. I played tennis with a friend who talked about her Tuesday morning Bible study and her church, but never about her Lord. My husband's boss was a Christian. When he said he was donating money to missions in lieu of Christmas gifts, I thought that was a great idea. He and his wife were so busy with church activities that they never invited us to their home.

A neighbor girl was baptized as a church "bus kid." She played with our little boy but never invited him to come with her. My husband had relatives who were saved. When I asked later why they never told me about Jesus, they said they didn't think I would listen.

My sister accepted Christ. She couldn't explain what had happened to her, but she asked the Lord to put me near other Christians, and He did. We moved to a new state, where we lived next door to a Christian family. I even attended a Bible study at their house, so they assumed I already knew Christ and never witnessed to me.

No one, no one at all, gave me a gospel witness or even a tract, but the Lord kept drawing me to Himself. I found a Christian novel in the public library, and in it I "heard" the gospel for the first time—not clearly, but through the fictional

story of someone like me. Later, I picked up two books at the drugstore—one on prayer and another on marriage. Again I "heard" the veiled gospel.

I decided to find a Bible. The man who waited on me at the Christian bookstore recommended the Ryrie Study Bible. For two years I read and read that Bible with its helpful notes, trying to find out how to know God. The Holy Spirit directed me from Isaiah to Galatians to Ephesians to Hebrews, and gradually I began to understand my need for a Savior. One night during a time of illness in my family, overwhelmed by my circumstances and burdened by my sin, I knelt at our couch and cried out for salvation.

Though I still had a lot to learn, I knew I had peace with God. He had made me His child. I was cleansed by Jesus' blood, justified, covered with His righteousness, no longer under condemnation. My burden was lifted!

I was excited and sold out to the Lord. I would literally stop people to give them tracts and tell them they were going to hell. I would put tracts in "bad" magazines at the grocery store. I have calmed down a bit, or perhaps matured. I have not lost my zeal for the Lord, but I have allowed Him to harness it.

This gives me boldness with the gospel: I know there are people like me searching for salvation, and I know how to help them find it.

A two-year-old doesn't say, "I'm tired. I need a nap." Mothers see what their children need, take them by the hand, and lead them to bed. An unbeliever isn't likely to say, "Can you tell me how to be saved?" but there are signs of their need. Ask, and the Holy Spirit will guide you to hungry souls.

They are all around you. You work with them; they live in your neighborhood; their children play with yours. They are your mission field, so if you don't know how to give them the gospel, learn! At least give them a tract—the kind of gospel map I so much needed.

Be conscious of souls and generous with God's good news and He will use you to rescue a longing soul like me.

Ruth Bumgardner is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She is a member of Grace Baptist Church in Paxton, Illinois. The continuing prayer of her heart is to be used by God to share the gospel. She has developed a prayer notebook system that God has used in her life and in the lives of others (www.ruthbumgardner.com).



Deployed Yet Connected

Deployments are a normal part of military service. My US Navy chaplain deployments have given me amazing ministry opportunities. However, it is painful to leave the family behind. As my family and I experienced the heartache of separation, we also developed a deeper understanding of how God's grace sustains us through such times. While we still have much to learn, here are some observations that may help others who are separated.



Practical Ideas for Keeping in Touch

First, we wrote letters and exchanged them before I deployed. I still treasure the spiral-bound set of one hundred notecards that Diana gave me before my first deployment. Each card has a short note, perhaps an encouraging word, a Bible verse, or a special memory that we share. She also gave me another stack of cards to open on special days such as our anniversary, my birthday, or on days I needed a little extra encouragement.

While we exchanged many handwritten letters during deployment, it can take weeks for mail to arrive. Having a stash of letters ready ahead of time fortified us for those long delays.

Next, each of my children has a "Daddy Doll" with a full-length picture of me in uniform. When squeezed, each doll plays an audio recording that I made for that child. For me, Diana ordered a blanket with a colorful collage of family

photos. People would stop by my office with wide eyes commenting on how refreshing it was to see my happy family.

Finally, I maximized technology whenever possible. Each deployment is different. On my first deployment to Okinawa, I often had wi-fi. Being able to connect with family through video calls was a blessing, but it was a luxury I did not have on my following deployments. While deployed on USS NEW YORK (LPD 21), e-mail was all we had until we arrived at a port. Each evening Diana and I e-mailed our high and low points for the day. This fueled healthy conversations as we encouraged each other and rejoiced at how God was working in our lives.

How I Dealt with Our Separation

First, I spent as much of my discretionary time in intense Bible study. Whether it was a deployment or a shorter exercise, I chose a portion of Scripture that would be the focus of my studies. It did not mask the pain of separation, but God added joy as I grew closer to Him, and I eventually anticipated these long seasons of Bible study. Years later, my personal study in the Psalms, Proverbs, and the life of Paul continue to shape my thinking.

I often e-mailed Diana a nugget or two from my Sunday sermon preparation, and she would respond with what God was teaching her. It was always helpful to get Diana's perspective on a text before I preached. My sermons would have been better if I had asked for her insight more often!

Second, God sometimes provided Christian friends. I did not have to wait until Sunday to see my brothers and sisters in Christ; I was surrounded by my flock every day! I learned to invest in those relationships so we could build each other up.



However, on some exercises, I was the only believer. Without that needed fellowship, it was an opportunity to grow closer to the God who would never leave me while also being a light to those who needed Him.

How to Encourage Those Who Are Deployed

Letters from friends were always encouraging. I still remember the families and ministries who wrote to me on my first deployment five years ago! It does not matter how short the note is. It is encouraging to know that people are praying for you.

And as you write that letter, please do not forget the service-member's family! They may need encouragement even more. Whether you live near or far away from a deployed service-member's family, you can be a tremendous blessing. It takes time to build a network of trusted friends, yet military families move every few years. Simply dropping off some groceries, bringing a meal, watching the children for a couple hours, or sending a simple text or letter are blessings that will long be remembered.

Final Considerations

Those considering the military chaplaincy need to seriously weigh the sacrifice of separation. Although I have done my best to write in an uplifting tone, I do not intend to minimize the pain of separation. My spirit was not always Christ-honoring during a

deployment—even several months afterwards. Nothing can replace precious time lost with the family.

When I struggle, I think on what it must have been like for Jesus to be on this earth for over thirty years. He left perfect fellowship with the Father to endure the ultimate separation of the cross. Nothing that God calls us to do will ever compare to what our Savior did for us.

Also, these separations allow me to minister to US Marines and Sailors at their hour of greatest need. Our shared experiences make it easier for us to connect. Then I direct them to the only One strong enough to carry us through such times.

Chaplain Anthony Pelc is the command chaplain for the Marine Corps Engineer School in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He and Diana are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their fourth child.



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Wickedness Proceedeth from the Wicked

David uttered these words to King Saul, who was trying to kill him. In 1 Samuel 24:13 he stated, "As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee."

First, notice the characteristic of the wicked. The Scriptures say wickedness proceeds out of them, and the Lord Jesus said it originates from a man's heart: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). And again Christ said in Luke 11:39, "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." We read in Jeremiah 17:9-10, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

Second, notice the conduct of the wicked. The Bible says of Ahab in 1 Kings 21:25-26, "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel." Also, we read of Ahab in 1 Kings 16:30: "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him."

Throughout the Scriptures we see wickedness portrayed in many lives besides that of Ahab. Genesis 13:13 states, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly." Listen to the confession of Pharaoh in Exodus 9:27: "And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." In 2 Chronicles 24:7 we read, "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God." Esther declared boldly in Esther 7:6, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Yes, wickedness does indeed proceed from the wicked.

- Proverbs 4:17: "For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence."
- Jeremiah 8:6: "No man repented him of his wickedness."
- Hosea 10:13: "Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way."
- 1 John 5:19: "And the whole world lieth in wickedness."

This was true in the past, and wickedness runs rampant in our world today as well.

Since this is true, we must, thirdly, confront the wickedness of the wicked. In the biography of Mordecai Ham there is a powerful quote that I believe is appropriate for us to consider. The book is entitled *Fifty Years on the Battlefront with Christ*. Preaching to a large crowd, Ham said the following: "They accuse me of being shocking in my preaching because I take the hide off some folk. Actually, I have never troubled any of the Lord's people. It is only these old hard-knot sinners that can't stand me. They become so used to eating slop through the week and then hunting a 'nursing bottle' on Sunday morning that they can't stand strong meat of sound spiritual doctrine."

But Mordecai Ham isn't the only one who has preached hard against wickedness; there have been other men in the past, such as Sam Jones, Dr. Bob Jones Sr., Hyman Appleman, and others. They preached hard against wickedness and called sin by name! They preached against the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-22:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

This kind of preaching against wickedness is needed today as well.

Last of all, we must be full of compassion toward the wicked and their wicked ways. We know the Lord deeply loves them and wants them to come to Himself and be saved from their sins. We read in Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Ezekiel 33:11 says, "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Just as our Lord wants individuals to turn from their wickedness because He loves them, may we also have a deep compassion for the lost.

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