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RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD
The Hermeneutics of Biblical Fundamentalism

Rightly Dividing the Word

The Hermeneutics of Biblical Fundamentalism



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As many textbooks state, hermeneutics is the science and art of Bible interpretation. The desire to interpret the Bible correctly must be the focus of every preacher, parent, counselor, professor, and Sunday school teacher in all fundamental Baptist churches. But it must also be true of movements in general, and fundamentalism is no exception. Because books of sermons by many famous fundamentalist preachers from the past exist, we can see how successful they were at it. Because we believe in the existence of objective truth, hermeneutics must be a central concern for fundamentalists.

This issue contains articles focusing on hermeneutics, written by the faculty of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa. Long identified with fundamentalism, this institution seeks to train men and women for excellence in “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). These essays relate their subjects to our current day but also show connection to the multivolume series *The Fundamentals*, published over one hundred years ago. Included is a pertinent article urging expository preaching in our public ministry of the Word, based on our view of the Word’s authority (Dr. Daniel Brown). Combating our culture’s low view of truth (many today question even the possibility of truth), another essay brings attention to the destructive impact postmodernism has had in hermeneutics and how believers can respond (Dr. Doug Brown).

Other articles highlight the grammatical-historical method of interpretation and the “how-to” of sound biblical exegesis—that is, Bible-study methods used to help determine the intended meaning of Scripture as it was originally penned (Drs. Alan Cole and Keith Kobelia, respectively). Also examined is the correlation between the historic Baptist

Fundamentals and our historic Baptist distinctives with regard to hermeneutics (Dr. Paul Hartog).

We also examine the correlation between the historic *Baptist Fundamentals* and our historic Baptist distinctives with regard to hermeneutics (Dr. Paul Hartog). The application of sound hermeneutics for the sufficiency of the Word in the life of a believer is the subject of an exposition of Psalm 19 (Dr. Jeff Newman). And finally, the comparison of two major theological systems used by many fundamentalists over the years brings into focus the challenge of consistently striving to capture the heart of the message of the Word (Dr. Ken Rathbun).

Remember, because we now have podcasts, electronic storage systems, and web browsing, people in the future will be able to access with ease the preaching and teaching heard today in independent, fundamental Baptist churches. What will they think of us?

Further, what about our application of the Word to our current contexts? Consider: legitimate application can be done only when passages of God’s Word are interpreted accurately. As we were all told in school, “If you cannot interpret a biblical text, you cannot apply it.” When reading sermons preached by certain fundamentalists of a hundred years ago, historians (myself included) sometimes scratch our heads regarding their interpretations. What will others think of our efforts?

As Dr. Kobelia will remind us in his article, interpretation involves hard work. However, it is worth our best effort. Many fundamentalists of a century ago labored long in this process because of their commitment to the infallible, inerrant Word of God. That same motivation should drive us and our ministering of the Word today.

Ken Rathbun



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I've just been reading David Beale's book on Baptist history in England and America. Incredible. And I found out about your organization. I'd like to know more.

I graduated from [Bob Jones] Academy in 1963. But I worked for my PhD at the University of Alabama in counseling and statistics. So I have lots of secular humanist exposure as well. I'm a believer, but I'd like to know more about your organization.

Steve Green
Winton-Salem, NC

In not having any other chaplains around the Pacific Northwest, I want to offer my services to any of our pastors/churches in the Pacific Northwest who may be interested in getting a law enforcement, fire, or coroner chaplaincy up and running in their community. It would be nice to introduce this kind of ministry to others and to encourage and/or train others to do this kind of work if desired. This could be done on the phone, in person, or with the church, but I am only able to travel when the weather is nice as we live in the

Continued at right

Bob Whitmore serves part-time as Director of Operations for Pacific HELPS, a nonprofit organization ministering to the needs of people in the Pacific region through health care, education, life skills, pure water, and solar and renewable energy (pacifichelps.org). He and his wife, Polly, reside in Greenville, South Carolina, and are members of Faith Baptist Church (Taylors, South Carolina).



mountains of NE Washington and I do not drive over mountain passes until April or May. If interested, give me a call at (509) 935.8385.

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Preach the Word

"Preach the word." Paul's pastoral command rings with clarity in the heart and mind of everyone who aspires to fulfill the biblical duties of the pastor (2 Tim. 4:2). The world today rejects the authority of God's Word as well as its proclamation. The world and even many evangelicals see the Bible as outdated and inadequate as a guide for life. If we believe that the Scriptures are indeed inspired and the product of the breath of God, we must proclaim the Bible as the word of truth, the destiny-changing message, and the life-changing gospel that transforms a sinner into a child of God.

A First Commitment

Preaching the Word demands several basic commitments from those who desire to be faithful to this command. First, the command prescribes our message, namely that we restrict the content of preaching to "the word." Today we add the adjective "expository" to preaching to explain what should be obvious. The content of preaching must exclusively center on the written Word of God. Further, the preacher must preach "all the counsel [i.e., the whole counsel] of God" (Acts 20:27). "This Old and New Testament is one revelation of God—one Bible—one unerring rule of faith."¹ Tendencies of pastors toward preaching only the Pauline epistles or just the New Testament should be resisted in light of the breadth of Scripture's value. "All scripture (*graphē*) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16). Paul identifies

what he means by "Scripture" in 1 Timothy 5:18 by quoting from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This means the preacher who wants to faithfully preach "the word" should not ignore the 77% of the Bible that was written before Christ.²

The message must be proclaimed with accuracy. This means the preacher must understand the intent of the original author of Scripture and the context of a passage. Failure of the expositor to "rightly [divide] the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) means the sermon lacks the foundational intent of preaching, that is, to preach the Word. This explains why any good Bible college or seminary places the emphasis of the curriculum on Bible interpretation or hermeneutics. Bible interpretation means understanding the author's intended meaning, the culture in which a passage was written, the grammatical construction, the meaning of words and phrases, the figures of speech, and the context. I like the term "normal" interpretation, understanding that the text must mean today what it meant when it was written.

The message must be proclaimed with integrity. Too many sermons miss the target of the biblical text. Some use the text as a pretext by reading a verse or two and then springboarding into whatever topic the preacher has in mind. Others read a text and then proceed to build a "skyscraper sermon"—with one story built upon another. A few randomly selected verses by a preacher do not make an expository sermon, no matter how persuasive or passionate the presentation. Both

types of sermons find themselves preached in far too many pulpits. Some sermons target the audience instead of the text and become “felt need” sermons rather than an exposition of Scripture. The desire for practical application must never supersede the meaning of the text. Other sermons become so technical that the preacher loses the listener in the details of the exegesis (i.e., interpretation). Still other sermons might rightly interpret the text but the application wanders into a spiritualizing of meaning by taking the text in directions the Bible author never intended. These sermons might have biblical content, but they fail to rise to the level of expository preaching. They are about the Bible but not the Bible itself.

A Second Commitment

A second commitment prescribed by the command to “preach the word” is the method of proclaiming the truth, namely preaching. The term Paul used here to describe the act of preaching describes a “heralding” of the message. The herald historically stood in place of the king to tell the king’s message. The herald had a great accountability to precisely relay the king’s message but also great authority as the herald spoke in the place of the king. To disobey the word of the king’s herald was to disobey the king himself.

The preacher stands accountable to God for the accuracy of the message preached. Paul emphasizes accountability when after identifying the message to be preached as the inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16) and the value (or profit) of this message (vv. 16–17), he calls upon the Father and Son’s judgment of mankind (4:1) as a point of accountability. Paul makes this point: in light of this coming judgment, preacher, preach the Word (4:1–2). Preachers must communicate the truth, understanding that their preaching affects people’s eternal destinies when they stand before God in the day of judgment. Paul makes the point of accountability when he repeatedly cites the value of sound doctrine and castigates those with wrong doctrine (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:8, 13). Paul cautions those preachers who would build on his foundation (1 Cor. 3:9ff). Paul describes the judgment due preachers when their labors pass through the fire that tests their labors for Christ (1 Cor. 3:12–17). Undoubtedly the quality of their preaching will be a significant part of that judgment. James makes a similar

point when he warns against becoming a teacher because “we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). God will hold accountable those who preach and teach the Word.

The preacher as herald speaks with the authority of the One who sent him. The preacher represents the King of Glory and stands in His stead. A preacher’s authority rests not in the strength of his personality, the breadth of his education or experience, nor the dynamics of his delivery. Rather, the preacher’s authority comes from the fact that he speaks the words of God as God’s appointed representative.

The exciting truth of ministry is that God’s people respond to the Word when it is preached with accuracy, integrity and authority. The key to building a solid, Bible-believing church depends upon the faithful exposition of God’s Word. Once God’s people get a taste for the solid meat of the Scriptures, they will accept no less. Genuine spiritual growth must include a regular diet of God’s Word.

We live in a culture that increasingly denies the person of God, devalues the power of the gospel, diminishes the priority of the Word, and de-emphasizes the purpose of preaching. The broader evangelical church is losing its solid grip on the Bible. In a quest for cultural relevance the evangelical church strives for felt needs, gimmickry, social justice, worldly music, and emotionalism. Their self-centered, contentless worship is like “clouds without water” (Jude 12). The age in which we live needs more faithful preaching of God’s Word, not less.

If (or, Since) we believe the Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant Word of God, we must demonstrate that reality by faithfully proclaiming the Truth through our preaching. Let us preach the Word with accuracy, integrity, and authority.

Daniel Brown (DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary) pastored for twenty years, taught for seventeen years, and served as interim pastor at a number of churches. He and his wife, Mary Jo, have four daughters and eleven grandchildren. He teaches at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.



¹ Howard Crosby, “Preach the Word” in the original *The Fundamentals*, 170. Crosby, a Presbyterian teacher and pastor, wrote the original (and only) article on preaching in *The Fundamentals*.

² Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, 41.

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Biblical Hermeneutics and Postmodernism

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* Humpty Dumpty and Alice share this playful exchange:

'And only *one* for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!'

'I don't know what you mean by "glory";' Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'

'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument";' Alice objected.

'When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'

While Carroll wrote long before the rise of postmodernism, his fictional dialogue anticipated the hermeneutical chaos raised in postmodern thinking. We see Alice's confusion and Humpty Dumpty's disdain. Alice can't quite wrap her mind around what Humpty Dumpty is saying; meanwhile Humpty Dumpty appears to enjoy the confusion his semantic wordplay is causing. This is the same kind of confusion postmoderns champion. Carroll's fantasy has become reality. Postmodernism raises fundamental questions about the validity of communication. Questions such as, where does meaning originate? Who (or what) controls meaning? How do we know what truth is? Is truth objective and knowable? Is communication even possible?

The purpose of this article is to help believers better understand postmodernism and how postmodern thinking has

affected the interpretation of the Bible. After exploring the historical roots of postmodernism, we will discuss what postmodern hermeneutics looks like and how it has crept into Christianity. Finally, I will offer some guidance for how followers of Christ should respond to postmodernism.

The Rise of Postmodernism

In order to understand postmodernism, it is helpful to survey its historical background. Scholars basically divide Western thought into three basic eras: premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism. In the premodern worldview, there was a basic belief in God. The Bible was accepted as true and trustworthy and therefore authoritative. Truth was thought to exist "from above," as revealed by God. It was objective and knowable. In the area of hermeneutics there was a variety of approaches toward the Bible. Most premodern theologians, however, shared a common understanding that the meaning of the text could be uncovered and understood. There was confidence that God's authorial intent in Scripture could be discovered through the study of God's Word.

The Enlightenment marked the beginning of the modern era in Western thought. With the rise of reason in religion and philosophy, rationalism became the accepted authority. The supernaturalism of the Bible came under attack as theologians began to doubt the miraculous. The miracles of the Bible were accounted for or explained away through natural means. Truth was still thought to be objective and knowable, but instead of coming from God it was found in the material world. Truth was thought to be discovered primarily through rational and empirical means—the scientific method. Generally, modernists believed they could investigate and gather data objectively without bias. Hermeneutically, modernism asserted that the meaning of a text can be discovered primarily through historical reconstruction. Kevin

Vanhoozer affirms, “While modern historical critics may not view the authors of the Bible as inspired, the original meaning remains the object of interpretation for them as well.”¹ In relation to the Bible, this led to the historical critical method.² Historical criticism led to entrenched skepticism and anti-supernaturalism about the Bible’s historicity. Historical critics demanded that biblical miracles must be interpreted with the experience of today. In other words, since modernists did not see or experience miracles, they believed that miracles simply are not possible. Vanhoozer summarizes the similarity between the premodern and the modern eras: “The pursuit of premodernity and modernity alike shared a similar aim in interpretation: to recover the meaning of the text, understood in terms of the intention of the author. . . . In short, the author’s intention is the object of traditional interpretation, the longed-for ‘home of meaning’ where the author’s will, words, and world coincide.”³

Many believe that postmodernism, which arose in the second half of the twentieth century, is the logical outcome of modernism:⁴ “Postmodernism is a reaction (or perhaps more appropriately, a disillusioned response) to modernism’s failed promise of using human reason alone to better mankind and make the world a better place.”⁵ Postmodernism finds its roots in existential philosophy as expressed in especially the writings of Martin Heidegger. One of its defining goals is the disavowal of objective truth.⁶ For postmoderns, truth is not something to be found or discovered. This type of pursuit is impossible for a couple of reasons. First, truth cannot be discovered because every interpreter is laden with pre-understanding and biases that prevent him from seeing outside his own situation. Second, postmoderns reject the existence of universal metanarratives to explain the world—absolute truths do not exist in postmodern thinking.⁷ Instead, postmodernism sees truth as relative and subjective. Each interpreter creates his or her own truth. What is true for one may not be true for another. The ultimate authority is not found in God (premodernism), the world (modernism), but the individual. D. A. Carson states this well: “Postmodernism is an outlook that depends not a little on what are perceived to be the fundamental limitations on the power of interpretation: that is, since interpretation can never be more than *my* interpretation or *our* interpretation, no purely objective stance is possible.”⁸ Truth is merely how each individual perceives it.

The ramifications of postmodernism have been catastrophic not only in hermeneutics but across society. Morally, people have abandoned absolutes and opted for radical relativism. Right is now wrong and wrong is right. Culturally, society has plunged headlong into radical pluralism.⁹ It is no longer acceptable to hold exclusive beliefs. In fact, one is expected to approve others’ beliefs. Tolerance is now society’s greatest virtue. In relation to religion, postmodernism leads ultimately to universalism. Hermeneutically, it has led to the abandonment of truth and the absence of meaning. As an absolute, postmodernism espouses the untenable conundrum that no one can claim the truth. Carson asserts, “Philosophical pluralism has generated many approaches in support of one stance: namely, that any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is *necessarily* wrong.”¹⁰ Abdu Murray claims that the culture is now post-

truth.¹¹ The *Oxford Dictionary*, which selected “post-truth” as its 2016 word of the year, defines it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”¹² Murray explains that in post-truth thinking facts are subordinated to preferences.

The Hermeneutics of Postmodernism

The hermeneutics of postmodernism are very diverse and difficult to understand.¹³ Written communication has three components: the author, the text, and the reader. As already noted, premodern and modern interpreters tried to uncover the intention of the author as expressed in the text. What is consistent in postmodern approaches of interpretation is that the author no longer controls the meaning of the text. Authorial intention is irrelevant in postmodern interpretation. Further, the text itself does not control meaning. The text is devoid of meaning altogether. In postmodern thinking, the reader not only *controls* the meaning but actually *creates* it. The text is merely an opportunity to explore the reader’s own perspectives. Vanhoozer explains: “Postmodernity is the triumph of situatedness—in race, gender, class—over detached objectivity. . . . Postmoderns typically think of interpretation as a political act, a means of colonizing and capturing texts and whole fields of discourse.”¹⁴

The autonomy of the reader is seen in the field of post-structuralism, for example. Poststructuralists see a text as a web of signs with infinite possible meanings—a playground for playing semantic games. Language is open-ended and detached from historical references. Another common postmodern approach is reader-response, as promoted by Stanley Fish.¹⁵ Fish argues that since it is impossible to recover the authorial intent, interpretive communities should read texts for their own benefit. So interpretive communities should legitimately read their own meanings into texts. Perhaps the most radical school of thought within postmodernism is deconstruction. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, also known as the father of philosophic postmodernism, developed deconstruction to free the reader from philosophic restraints to find meaning.¹⁶ Following Friedrich Nietzsche, he attacked Western philosophy and especially traditional views on epistemology—the theory of knowledge and truth. In order to better grasp postmodernism, one must begin to wade into the quagmire of epistemology, metaphysics, and theories of truth.¹⁷ Adu-Gyamfi summarizes this well:

Postmodernism permits the reader unlimited freedom in reading, complete autonomy, the liberty or license to interpret the text without restraint. Once the text is empty of any objective content, it is open to any number of readings. So the postmodern reader, critical and creative, takes on an unprecedented significance by subjectively constructing meaning.¹⁸

Postmodernism and Christianity

Postmodern theology is very diverse and varied.¹⁹ Many of its forms are extensions of liberal theology within a postmodern worldview. What postmodern theologians

Continued on page 26

The Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic

Communication involves at least two parties in its process, the communicator who delivers the message and the recipient. Both individuals must follow some basic principles for communication to occur: the communicator must express the message clearly, and the recipient must understand the communicator's meaning in its context. If individuals follow these rules for communication, how much more significant is the practice of attempting to understand correctly what God has recorded for them in His Word? This attempt at accurate comprehension is the study of interpretation, also known as hermeneutics. Biblical fundamentalists should be committed to an accurate understanding of God's Word, and this understanding begins with accurate hermeneutics. The purpose of this article is to discuss the grammatical-historical hermeneutic (1) by distinguishing it from the allegorical hermeneutic, (2) by tracing the history of those two methods up to the Reformation, and (3) by explaining the basic principles of the grammatical-historical method.

Grammatical-Historical vs. Allegorical

Throughout the history of the church there have been primarily two competing schools of thought on the proper method of interpretation. One is the grammatical-historical or literal method and the other is the allegorical method. A literal method seeks to understand the words of the passage in their normal, natural, and customary meaning within the context. This method searches for the intended meaning of the biblical author. According to Rolland McCune, "In this method, interpretation consists in finding the meaning of words according to grammar, syntax, and cultural setting and in correlation with the rest of Scripture. In this normal or plain interpretation, the Bible is best allowed to speak for itself."¹ An allegorical method seeks to understand the words of the passage in a deeper more obscure way; it searches for the spiritual meaning that is beyond the intent of the author. According to Roy Zuck, "Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or a secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text."²

The following two passages demonstrate the difference between these two hermeneutical systems. In Genesis 2:10–14 Moses recorded that a river left the Garden of Eden and formed four rivers, which he named and then gave addi-

tional details concerning them. A literal interpretation is that Moses described a physical garden and rivers, but an allegorical interpretation is that the river of Eden signified goodness, Eden signified wisdom, and the four rivers signified four character qualities.³ In Leviticus 11:7–15, Moses prescribed the food laws for Israel in which he listed a number of animals that Israel could and could not eat. A literal interpretation is that Moses prescribed positive and negative food laws. Examples of animals that were not to be eaten were the swine (v. 7), the eagle (v. 13), and the raven (v. 15). An allegorical interpretation recognized this prohibition, but held that there was a "spiritual reference" as well. The "spiritual reference" to these birds of prey was that the Israelites should not unite with human thieves.⁴

History of the Two Methods

In the debate between these two interpretative systems, Origen (ca. 185–254) is a key figure in the history of the allegorical method. He recognized that the Bible often contained difficult or obscure passages and, therefore, sought for meaning on a secondary or lower level.⁵ He thought Scripture had three layers, similar to an individual's three-part existence of body, soul, and spirit. Each of these layers demonstrated the increased maturity of the believer.⁶ Although he recognized the literal, moral, and allegorical meanings of Scripture, Origen believed that the allegorical was the most prominent.⁷

The literal method also had its adherents during this period. Interpreters from the school of Antioch of Syria championed the literal method but also employed typology, in which one component in the Old Testament foreshadowed its greater reality in the New Testament.⁸ Augustine (354–430) contributed to the hermeneutical debate with his fourfold method of interpretation. This process grew into the following steps:

- the literal understanding,
- the rationale of the passage,
- the harmony between the Old and New Testaments, and
- the allegorical meaning.⁹

John Cassian (ca. 360–435) put this fourfold approach into poetry, which can be translated as follows:

The letter teaches events [i.e., what God and our ancestors did],
What you believe is [taught] by allegory,
The moral [teaching] is what you do,
Where you are heading is [taught] by analogy.¹⁰

During the Middle Ages both schools of thought had representatives. In line with the allegorical method, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), a prominent voice for the Roman Catholic Church, recognized meaning both in the words of Scripture but also in the objects of Scripture.¹¹ On the other hand, Hugh of St. Victor (1097–1141) accentuated the literal hermeneutic but also stressed that interpretation should agree with the view held by the church. This practice, he asserted, would safeguard the church from error. As the Middle Ages progressed, the influence of the church on the interpretative process increased to the point where the Catholic Church became the official authority on interpretation.¹²

The Reformation saw the rise of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–64) and their opposition to the allegorical method. Although Luther first used the method, he later rejected it, holding that the interpreter should seek the literal meaning in the passage and should understand words within their context. Luther also believed that the spirituality of the individual and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life played a role in interpretation. John Calvin also employed the grammatical-historical interpretation, in which he stressed searching for the author's meaning and understanding of words in their context. He believed that interpretations must correlate with all of Scripture, that the interpreter should be godly, and that the Holy Spirit had a role in interpretation. The Roman Catholic Church countered this emphasis by condemning any understanding that was not from the church and stated that such interpreters deserved legal punishment.¹³ Gregg Allison correctly states, "Thus, a major point of separation between Protestants and Catholics during the Reformation was the interpretation of Scripture."¹⁴ Authoritative meaning for the Reformers rested in the text, whereas for the Catholic Church meaning rested in the text and the church's proclamation about the text.

Basic Principles of a Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic

The grammatical-historical method comprises several aspects. In grammatical interpretation, the interpreter seeks to understand the meaning of the words, syntax, and grammar of a passage. Because the biblical languages are Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, interpreters stress the importance of knowing these languages. The text of Scripture is composed of words, which necessitates comprehending their meaning, but this meaning is in the intention of the original author and the surrounding context. Seeking the author's intent is a vital key to accurate understanding. This goal places a restraint on the interpreter in which he seeks to draw out ("exegete") the author's meaning instead of reading into the text ("eisegesis") his or her own meaning. The interpreter will also consider broader contexts such as the surrounding chapters, the book, or related passages to gain further understanding.

The historical setting of a passage also provides assistance in the interpretative process. In this feature, the reader seeks

to understand the text in its historical context or "life setting." Topics that the student considers are the individuals in the text, their theological understanding, their culture, their geography, and the surrounding nations that relate to the particular context. Kevin Bauder gives a key principle related to this process when he states, "Historical passages tell us what happened, but by themselves they do not tell us what ought to happen. On the other hand, teaching passages are designed to instruct us in what to do."¹⁵

Comparing Scripture with Scripture is another skill that is significant in biblical understanding. This practice is founded on the truth that the Bible does not contradict itself because it is inspired by an all-knowing (omniscient) God (2 Tim. 3:16–17) who never makes mistakes. In light of these truths, the Bible is without error (John 17:17) in the original manuscripts and therefore never contradicts itself. The interpreter seeks to compare Scripture with Scripture in order to avoid holding a view in one passage that contradicts the teaching in another passage. This practice of comparison is often expressed as, "The best commentary on Scripture is Scripture itself."

For example, one should not conclude from James 2:24 that salvation is by works when Ephesians 2:8–9 clearly denies that misunderstanding. The interpreter must reconcile the meaning of these two passages, which in this case is that salvation is by faith without works but works are a demonstration of faith. This principle of correlation presupposes that the interpreter knows Bible doctrine. Another factor in this discussion is that clearer passages shed light on difficult passages. Bauder points out, "The trick is determining which passages are clear and which passages are obscure. In view of this difficulty, I would like to restate a principle: a passage that can mean only one thing should be used to interpret a passage that could possibly mean several things."¹⁶ Another guideline is that passages that specifically address the issue carry greater weight in interpretation than those passages that merely refer to the issue.¹⁷

A common objection to a literal interpretation by those opposed to it is that since the Bible uses figurative language, the literal interpreter is not consistent. For example, when John the Baptist refers to Christ as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), no exegete thinks that John is saying that Christ is a four-footed animal. This argument against a literal interpretation demonstrates a misunderstanding of its method. When an author uses a figure of speech, he is drawing a colorful analogy between two objects or concepts; therefore, the reader must know the literal meaning of the objects or concepts and the analogy between them. In the example of John 1:29, one must have a literal understanding of Christ, a lamb, and the role of the lamb in the sacrificial system in order to grasp the analogy John is making. Zuck correctly states, "Figurative language then is not antithetical to literal interpretation; it is a part of it."¹⁸

Choices are significant, and this fact is no less true in interpretation. The ramifications of past choices still affect theology to the present era. The hermeneutical choices that interpreters make affect their understanding of God and His will for them and have ramifications for future generations. Biblical fundamentalists of today would be wise to avoid

Continued on page 34

The image shows a close-up of a hand holding a black magnifying glass. The lens of the magnifying glass is focused on the title 'The Task of Exegesis', which is written in a large, white, serif font. The background is a blurred image of a person in a blue suit and tie, suggesting a professional or academic setting.

The Task of Exegesis

One of the hallmarks of *The Fundamentals*¹ was its high view of Scripture. This emphasis resulted naturally from the historical challenges posed by modernism.² With its historical skepticism, Modernism questioned not only the authorship and dates of biblical books, but also denied the supernatural content that is recorded in those books. As a result, *The Fundamentals* sought to defend the accuracy and authority of the Bible from its detractors.

As one peruses the table of contents of *The Fundamentals*, one sees a number of articles that relate directly to a high view of Scripture and its authenticity. One finds articles refuting higher criticism (1:9; 1:55; 1:76) and critical views of the composition of biblical books (1:43; 1:241; 1:259; 1:288). One finds several articles defending inspiration (2:9; 2:44; 2:61; 2:80; 2:97; 2:112; 4:264) and the historical reliability of Scripture (1:293; 1:315). Furthermore, one finds articles that defend crucial doctrinal concepts that are derived from a high view of Scripture. It is clear that a high view of Scripture was shared and emphasized by the contributors and editors of *The Fundamentals*.

While the impact of a high view of Scripture is most clearly seen in *The Fundamentals* in relationship to belief, or doctrine, this belief should also have a profound impact upon one's practice and methodology. This includes one's method of Bible study.

The modest goal of this article is to highlight exegetical methodology. This goal will be accomplished (1) by establishing the logical correlation between a high view of Scripture and exegesis and (2) by briefly outlining a Scripture-centered methodology for biblical study. (As used here, "exegesis" refers to methodology that seeks to determine the original meaning of Scripture.)

A High View of Scripture and Exegetical Methodology

Exegetical methodology should be natural for those who hold to a high view of Scripture. After all, if God has spoken, His people should seek to understand what He has said. Since the Bible is God's communication to humanity, then

believers should devote time and study into determining the meaning of the text.

The Bible itself gives strong testimony to its divine origin, innate authority, complete trustworthiness, practical value, and transformative power. The quintessential text on the inspiration of the Bible, 2 Timothy 3:16–17, affirms these qualities: “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.”

First, this passage strongly affirms the divine origin of the Bible. The Scriptures are not merely the words of men (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21); they are “God-breathed.” Secondly, because the Bible is “God-breathed,” it carries the authority of God Himself. Thirdly, if the Bible is “God-breathed,” it is also completely true. Since the Bible is the Word of God and since God cannot lie (cf. Titus 1:2), His Word must be true (cf. John 17:17). Fourthly, the Bible is practical and beneficial. The Scriptures provide everything believers need for doctrine (negatively and positively) and practice (negatively and positively). It is sufficient for sound theology and practical Christian living. Finally, the Word of God is transformational; it is powerful (cf. Heb. 4:12). The purpose of the Bible is to bring the believer to maturity and consistent Christian conduct.

While more could be said, these thoughts from 2 Timothy 3:16–17 clearly affirm a high view of Scripture. It is this view of Scripture that undergirds the exegetical method. If the Bible is divine and carries divine authority, if it is completely true and accurate; if it is powerful and sufficient to transform the life of the believer, then the task of the preacher and teacher is to understand the Bible and communicate its message to a modern audience.

Sadly, those who hold to a high view of Scripture sometimes betray that belief through preaching and teaching that neglects sound exegesis of the biblical text. At times this may occur innocently through a lack of knowledge of the historical context of Scripture, the meaning of biblical terms, or the context in which biblical statements are found. More serious abuse of the biblical text occurs when words and phrases are taken out of context and twisted to fit the speaker’s agenda. While the speaker may be well meaning and sincere, ignoring the immediate context and making words say something other than their intended meaning undermines one’s belief in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. At times a high view of Scripture is betrayed through undue reliance upon rhetorical strategies and coercive appeals. While good illustrations and legitimate appeals are a part of good communication, they can unwittingly displace the power and authority of the Scriptures when they take precedence over the biblical text itself. The point is this: if the speaker is communicating biblical truth, it should be supported by sound exegesis without distortion or embellishment.

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Accuracy in handling the biblical text is a difficult and demanding task. However, the work of exegesis should never be bypassed because it is precisely the responsibility of the interpreter to accurately communicate the message of the Word of God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Exegesis should be embraced because it is the most effective way to proclaim God’s revealed truth and to impact lives with that truth.

An Overview of Exegetical Methodology

The Fundamentals only briefly addresses the issue of methods for biblical study (e.g., 4:268–271). Nevertheless, exegetical methodology is certainly consistent with the emphasis on the inspiration and authority of Scripture advocated in *The Fundamentals*. If the Bible is God’s authoritative communication to mankind, then the preacher’s sermon and the teacher’s lesson should accurately reflect that message. Consequently, in the remainder of this article, I will outline a brief methodology for exegesis.³

One of the most effective and simplest methods of Bible study is the time-tested inductive Bible study pattern: “observe, interpret, and apply.”⁴ This basic framework will be adapted below, highlighting specific steps within these three stages. In addition to “observe, interpret, and apply,” a final stage will be added: “refine.” This last stage is especially important for the preacher or teacher who will be presenting material in a more formal setting. Thus I will outline ten steps in exegetical method, grouped into these four stages. I believe that by following the process of inductive Bible study, the preacher or teacher can most consistently proclaim the intended message of Scripture and hold the Scriptures in highest esteem.

Stage One: Observe

Scripture-centered exegesis begins with the text itself. The interpreter should observe the details of the text and gain a working knowledge of its contents. Without a thorough knowledge of the text itself, how can the interpreter expect to explain God’s inspired message?

The first step in exegesis is to familiarize yourself with the text. This naturally begins with reading the text numerous times.

The interpreter should consult various versions and even translate the passage if possible.

A second important step in exegesis is to question the text. At this point, the interpreter employs questions—who, what, when, why, where, how, etc.—to observe the contours of the text. More specific issues to consider here include the boundaries, genre, and main theme of the passage, as well as any textual or interpretive difficulties found in the text.

The third exegetical step is to analyze the form of the text. In this step the interpreter should outline or diagram the text. The interpreter should use a method with which he is comfortable but that reveals the natural flow and

development of the text itself. This analysis may seem tedious but is well worth the effort because it helps the interpreter see the details of the text itself.

Stage Two: Interpret

After observing the details of the text, the exegete should move on to verify and validate these observations. This is where interpretation fits in. This stage traces out the significance of the observations that have been made to determine the original meaning of the passage. Again, the focus of this stage is on the text itself, since that is where God's message resides. The interpretation stage includes four additional steps.

The fourth step of exegesis is to investigate the details of the text. This is done by researching items such as the grammatical structures, key words, and significant biblical concepts. While interpreters vary in their abilities to engage in these studies, reliable resources are available for students of all skill levels to ensure accuracy in biblical interpretation.

A fifth exegetical step is to consider the broader context of the text. The interpreter must consider both the historical and the literary context of the passage. These contexts help identify what the words of Scripture would have communicated in their original setting. When these contexts are ignored, the interpreter runs the risk of misinterpreting and even misrepresenting the Word of God.

Sixth, the exegete should determine the biblical-theological contribution of the passage. Here the interpreter should identify other passages that relate directly to the present passage and note how the passage fits within the broad theological themes found in Scripture. This helps the interpreter see how the passage connects to God's overall communication to mankind revealed in the pages of Scripture.

The seventh step of exegesis is to verify one's conclusions about the text. It is at this point that the interpreter considers relevant secondary literature (commentaries, etc.) to test and, if necessary, modify his conclusions. While this may seem rather late in the process, this actually allows the interpreter to focus on the text itself and engage effectively in personal study of the Bible.

Stage Three: Apply

Moving to the application stage, the interpreter needs to avoid pitfalls of neglecting application, on one hand, and jumping to application prematurely, on the other. Good biblical study, teaching, and preaching begins with a thorough understanding of the text itself and then moves from the ancient context to the relevance of this material to the modern audience.

The eighth step of exegesis is to consider similarities and differences between the original context and the present context. While some points of similarity and difference are obvious, others need to be more carefully nuanced to identify general principles so that the interpreter can avoid invalid applications of God's Word.

Next, the ninth step of exegesis can be considered: make specific application from the text. Having identified broad similarities and differences between the biblical context and the modern, the interpreter can proceed to identify those principles

that are valid in both contexts. Good applications can only be built upon valid points of similarity between the biblical and present contexts.

Stage Four: Refine

After one has observed, interpreted, and applied the text, the work of exegesis is not completely finished. Now the conclusions from all of the previous steps need to be sifted and collated. *Thus, the tenth step of exegesis is to prepare the material for presentation.* This includes the more "homiletical" tasks of organizing the material, weeding out information where necessary, adding illustrations, etc. The goal of this step is to clearly communicate God's revealed message. Since the preacher or teacher is explaining God's revealed Word, the final presentation should be clear, convincing, interesting, and, above all, biblically accurate.

Conclusion

A high view of Scripture ought to be complemented with Bible study methods that focus on the biblical text itself and that seek to determine its original meaning. I have suggested that the stages "observe, interpret, apply, and refine" provide a helpful framework for organizing one's exegetical method in preparation for preaching and teaching. This methodology emphasizes the authority of the biblical text and relies upon the power of the Word of God to impact lives.

Careful exegesis is hard work, but it ought to be prized by those who esteem the biblical text. If the Bible is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative, then we should be concerned with its message. If it is powerful and transformative, then we should trust it to change lives. And if it is God's Word, then we should prioritize its original meaning and rely on it to transform modern audiences.

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¹ R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, eds., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 4 vols., reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1917).

² "Modernism" is often used as a synonym for theological liberalism. See "Glossary of Biblical Fundamentalism," *FrontLine* 29, no. 3 (May/June 2019), 5. Modernism is a specific departure from historic orthodoxy that arose in the late nineteenth century.

³ For more detailed treatments see Douglas K. Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002); Jason Shane DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017); and Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017).

⁴ See Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), originally published in 1952. More recently, see Richard Alan Fuhr Jr. and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 2016).

The Baptist Fundamentals (1920/1921) and Hermeneutics



In 1920 Curtis Lee Laws proposed that those who cling to and earnestly contend for “the great fundamentals” of the Christian faith be called “fundamentalists.”¹ For twenty-five years, Laws served as the editor of the *Watchman Examiner*, a Baptist publication. The most commonly cited list of the “fundamentals of the faith,” however, is the *Five Point Deliverance* (1901) used in the fundamentalist-modernist debates within the Presbyterian denomination.² Yet in June of 1920, conservatives within the Northern Baptist Convention hosted a “Pre-convention Conference on Fundamentals of Our Baptist Faith” in Buffalo, New York, that resulted in a volume entitled *Baptist Fundamentals* (Judson Press, 1920). The conservatives hosted a similar “pre-convention conference” the following year in Des Moines, Iowa, resulting in the publication of a second volume of *Baptist Fundamentals* (Union Gospel, 1921). Curtis Lee Laws edited the first volume and wrote the foreword for the second one.³

The initial volume clearly proclaimed the purpose of the preconvention meetings: “The design of the Conference is to furnish a forum open to all Baptists in the interests of the time-honored, historic fundamentals of our Baptist and New Testament faith” (vol. 1:3). According to the conveners, the conference was “called frankly and openly in the interest of the conservative interpretation of our historic position and principles” (vol. 1:6). Curtis Lee Laws’ introduction to the 1920 volume warned, “We view with increasing alarm the havoc which rationalism is working in our churches as evidenced by the drift upon the part of many of our ministers from the fundamentals of the faith.” Laws lamented, “Not only are we in danger of compromising our distinctive Baptist principles, we are also in danger of compromising our more fundamental Christian principles.”

Baptist Distinctives and Christian Fundamentals

The 1920 *Baptist Fundamentals* declared, “The fundamental principle of the Baptists, in common with many other evangelicals, has always been the gospel, which is the essence of all Scripture. They have through their whole history been out-and-out evangelicals” (vol. 1:15). In this context, “evangelical” pertained to the root meaning of the evangel or “gospel.” “But someone asks most fittingly, What is the gospel? The answer, which Baptists have always drawn from the New Testament, is perfectly plain. The gospel is the good news of the free forgiveness of sin and eternal life (beginning now and going on forever) through a vital union with the crucified and risen Christ, which brings men into union and communion with God” (vol. 1:15).

On the other hand, the authors claimed that being Baptist entailed a distinctive identity: “Our distinctive doctrines are being denied; our distinctive mission is being disparaged; our distinctive influence is being destroyed” (vol. 1:184). As Baptists, the authors

emphasized New Testament authority for their church order and practice.⁴ The phrase “the fundamentals of our New Testament faith” appears four times within the first volume of the *Baptist Fundamentals*. For example, Laws declared, “We believe that there rests upon us as Baptists an immediate and urgent duty to restate, reaffirm, and reemphasize the fundamentals of our New Testament faith” (vol. 1: “Introduction”). On a fifth occasion, the longer phrase “historic fundamentals of our Baptist and New Testament faith” appears (vol. 1:3).

Scriptural Authority and Progressive Revelation

According to both volumes, the Old Testament Scriptures were inspired by God (vol. 2:53). Jesus’ teaching always assumed “the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures” (vol. 2:75). Jesus believed in the value and power of the Old Testament (vol. 2:36–37). He affirmed the wonders and miracles of the Old Testament (vol. 2:43). “Jesus always treated the Hebrew Scriptures with great respect” (vol. 2:52) and gave them “unqualified endorsement” (vol. 2:38). Jesus and the apostles believed in “the divine authority of the Old Testament,” that it was “the word of God” spoken by the Holy Spirit (vol. 2:59).

Nevertheless, divine inspiration of the text and applicable authority for daily living, while complementary, are not equivalent. One can believe that a passage is divinely inspired and not believe that it is directly applicable today. One can believe that God Himself authorized the Mosaic prohibition against eating pork (Lev. 11:7) but later allowed the enjoyment of a ham sandwich (cf. Acts 10:9–16). In the explanation of the second volume, there may be different degrees of “value” in scriptural texts, although there are not different degrees of inspiration (vol. 2:58). While rooted in inspiration, the outworking of Scripture’s authority also engages a sound hermeneutic.

The *Baptist Fundamentals* spoke directly to the topic of progressive revelation. “A supreme revelation of the Father’s will was made in the life and teaching of the Son of God” (vol. 2:52). “He knew full well that this ancient revelation was given in many parts or fragments and in many styles, and that it did not attain finality; but He also knew that God spoke to the fathers through the prophets” (vol. 2:46). As a result, “Whatever is found in the pages of the Old Testament that has been made inoperative by the example or teaching of our Lord Jesus and His apostles, is no longer to be accepted as an authoritative guide to one’s conduct” (vol. 2:52). Whether or not one personally describes the continuity-discontinuity between the Testaments in this specific manner, the relationship between the two should be addressed by one’s hermeneutical approach.

The Two Testaments and Interpretation

The *Baptist Fundamentals* insisted, “Both Testaments belong together. They form one complete unit and they stand and fall together” (vol. 2:58). “The New Testament is in the Old contained and the Old Testament is in the New explained. The Old Testament is not perfect without the New and the New Testament is incomprehensible without the Old” (vol.

2:58). Both Testaments are divinely inspired revelations from God, and the authority of both is to be defended (vol. 2:74).

The *Baptist Fundamentals* affirmed, “That the purpose of the New Testament is to present Christ to us, we do not need to have demonstrated to us” (vol. 1:69). But what about the Old Testament’s relationship to our understanding of Christ? One author cited Christ’s instruction on the Road to Emmaus: “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Jesus “was conscious of being an authoritative interpreter of the Law and the Prophets” (vol. 2:36). He especially interpreted those Scriptures which foretold His impending death and subsequent resurrection (vol. 2:37). The apostles carried forward Jesus’ interpretation of the Old Testament. “Under the influence of the Holy Spirit these men have given us, in the Gospels and the Epistles, the interpretation of the Messianic element in the Old Testament, substantially as Jesus interpreted it to them in the period between His resurrection and His ascension” (vol. 2:53). Jesus and the apostles thus modeled how to interpret the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

New Testament Baptist Distinctives

Although both the Old and New Testaments share a divine origin, the authors of the *Baptist Fundamentals* prioritized the New Testament materials in their understanding of church order and practice. The first volume spoke of “the proper interpretation of New Testament ordinances” (vol. 1:184), including “the New Testament symbol of immersion” (vol. 1:25). The faith believers are to defend (Jude 3) is “a correlated system of New Testament doctrines, that is subject to neither addition, nor subtraction” (vol. 1:110). Doctrinal explanations and systematizations have developed in history, but the foundation of Christian belief found in the New Testament was a sufficient revelation. “There will and must be a fuller understanding and interpretation of many of its statements and doctrines, but the New Testament as we now have it is a sufficient guide for the individual and the world to God and to salvation” (vol. 2:69).

In the foreword to the second volume, Laws insisted that the “doctrine of soul liberty” guaranteed to individuals “the right to worship God as they pleased,” and he emphasized that “in the Christian economy no man or group of men could exercise authority over the conscience of the humblest man on earth.” The phrase “Christian economy,” of course, speaks to the divine administration under the *oikonomia* (“dispensation”) embodied in the church age.⁵ Because of their New Testament focus, the authors opposed both infant baptism (“the forced baptism of infants”) and the union of church and state (vol. 1:17). The state “must grant, not religious toleration, but complete religious liberty to all” (vol. 1:17). Based upon the “voluntary principle,” historic Baptists repudiated “all coercive power over the consciences and actions of men with reference to their religion” (vol. 1:29).

Interestingly, Laws himself had earlier written a pamphlet on religious liberty entitled *The Fiery Furnace and Soul Liberty* (Baltimore: First Baptist Church, 1904).⁶ This is historically fascinating, because the term “fundamentalism” has been applied sociologically to movements far beyond the historic

roots represented by Laws.⁷ For many today, “religious fundamentalism” signifies an attitude hostile to religious liberty.⁸ In this sociological understanding, a “fundamentalist” has become one who not only interprets a sacred text literally against the critical inroads of modernity, but who also attempts to use socio-political and even violent means to enforce personal beliefs upon society and culture at large. But this sociological understanding of “fundamentalism” stands in contrast to the views of the author who coined “fundamentalist.”⁹

Interpretation and Soul Liberty

Historic Baptists “clearly grasped the New Testament principle of the soul’s competency in religion” (vol. 1:32). Yet the *Baptist Fundamentals* castigated “theological revolutionaries” who “demand exemption from all restriction in the sacred name of Baptist ‘liberty’” (vol 2:76). The authors maintained, “No Christian, and no Baptist, has ‘liberty,’ to entertain a view of the Scriptures which is contrary to Christ” (vol. 2:76–77). The authors’ belief in “soul liberty,” therefore, did not stand in opposition to their support of confessions of faith. “Our Baptist fathers had a very clearly defined system of truth, and this was put forth in many noble confessions of faith. They knew no soul liberty which guaranteed to members of Baptist churches the right to believe what they pleased. To reject fundamental Baptist principles and practices while remaining a member of a Baptist Church and to use the doctrine of soul liberty in extenuation of such a course is to pervert the doctrine and to make it a menace to the Church of Christ” (vol. 2: “Foreword”).

How can such “soul liberty” be combined with an unrelenting emphasis upon fidelity to the core fundamentals and Baptist doctrinal distinctives? Baptist congregations are to be assemblies of individuals who *freely* and *voluntarily* covenant together. Therefore, the authors stood for “the right of private opinion and interpretation of the Scriptures” (vol. 2:65), but also the historic right of Baptist churches and fellowships to

covenant voluntarily around the fundamental doctrines and biblical interpretations embodied in their confessions of faith.

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¹ See Frederick Hale, “‘Fundamentalism’ and ‘Fundamentalist’ Semantically Considered: Their Lexical Origins, Early Polysemy, and Pejoration,” *In die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi* 47.1 (2013), Art. #672, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v47i1.672>.

² David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism since 1850* (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1986), 143–51.

³ For simplicity’s sake, quotations are referenced by the edited volume and page, without the contributor’s name. If the authors’ names are of interest, digital copies of both volumes are readily available: https://archive.org/stream/baptistfundament00amer/baptistfundament00amer_djvu.txt and https://archive.org/stream/baptistdoctrines00amer/baptistdoctrines00amer_djvu.txt.

⁴ See Kevin Bauder, *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order* (Schaumburg: Regular Baptist Press, 2012), 18–35.

⁵ The use of the term does not necessarily reflect a full “dispensationalist” system.

⁶ See Curtis W. Freeman, “Fundamentalism’s Noble Forebear: Curtis Lee Laws,” *Christian Ethics Today* 18 (1998). Available at: <http://pastarticles.christianethicstoday.com/cetart/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.dspArtPDF>.

⁷ See Matt Thompson, “The Origins of ‘Fundamentalism,’” *The Atlantic* (June 30, 2015). Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/06/the-origins-of-fundamentalism/397238/>.

⁸ R. Gilbert, “Back to Basics,” *Liberty Magazine*, vol. 95, no. 4 (July/August 2000), 29.


⁹ Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

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Sound Exegesis— Sound Living; Shaky Exegesis— Shaky Living

During the earthquake of modernism that shook and collapsed the orthodoxy of many churches and denominations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, another earthquake was also taking place off the shores of Christianity—the birth of modern secular psychology. This earthquake happened along similar fault lines as the earthquake of theological modernism. Its upheaval ultimately resulted in a tsunami—Christian integrationist psychology—that not only swept over many evangelical churches and parachurch organizations, but also swept into fundamentalism.

Most textbooks trace the birth of modern psychology to Germany and Wilhelm Wundt's 1879 establishing of the first scientific laboratory devoted to the study of the life of the mind. Historians credit William James with bringing the study of psychology to America, when as a Harvard professor he offered his first course in psychology and subsequently wrote a two-volume textbook on the topic published in 1890.¹

The tsunami created by this earthquake swept into the church in the mid-1900s. In their book *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century* published in 2000, William and Randy Petersen credit Clyde M.

Narramore's *The Psychology of Counseling* with giving "evangelicals permission to consult modern psychology and psychiatry alongside the Bible for answers to their problems. And [it] showed a way to integrate Christian belief with this professional field."² Narramore and a host of Christian leaders like him have churned out bestselling books and highly attended conferences built on the premise that the ideas of secular psychology must be integrated with the Scriptures in order to address sufficiently the complexities of modern life.³

The effects of this earthquake and its resultant tsunami, along with the subsequent aftershocks, so shifted the cultural and ecclesiastical topography that this new discipline has become in the eyes of many the expert interpreter in the study of the person. Consider two examples. First, whenever a major tragedy strikes and the media seeks to make sense out of it, where do they turn? They turn to the psychologists or any one of the varieties of their offspring (legitimate or illegitimate). Second, where have the authors of the majority of recent bestselling Christian books on problems in living received their education? Most received their formal training in psychology rather than in the Scriptures. In both examples, the Bible's sufficient interpretation of life has been muted in the marketplace of ideas.

How should fundamentalists today respond to the tsunami of Christian integrationist psychology and its influence? By knowing, teaching, and living the truth of the Word. Coupled to our unwavering commitment to the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Scriptures, we must faithfully hold to and demonstrate the sufficiency of the Scriptures for defining and directing the very things that secular and Christian integrationist psychology propose to define and direct: What is the origin and constitution of the person? How does life work? What gives life meaning and purpose? How do we aid and influence others to live in light of that purpose?⁴

This commitment to sufficiency logically flows from our loyalty to the hermeneutic championed in the other articles of this issue. We must express our dedicated ownership of this hermeneutic through accurate and precise exegesis (i.e., explanation or interpretation) and exposition of the Word in the pulpit, in the office, in the coffee shop, and in the living room. Finally, our sound exposition must then always include robust application that brings "together the richness of the Word of God with the intricacies of people's lives in such a way that God is glorified through producing disciples who live out the truth of the Word of God in the details of life."⁵

What follows here calls us to such commitments. Using a brief exposition and focused applications of Psalm 19, we will celebrate the sufficiency of the Scriptures and challenge ourselves with the responses that sufficiency calls us to make. We will conclude each section with a question that provokes us to consider our level of commitment to the sufficiency of the Word. Please take a moment now to read the psalm before moving ahead.

Vv. 1-6: The Universal-but-Limited Scope and Purpose of General Revelation

Psalm 19 opens with David's declaration that the heavens pour forth with the glory of God. He continues by proclaiming that neither moments nor epics of time, the barriers of

language, nor the limits of geography thwart the heavens from proclaiming God's glory, wisdom, and power.⁶

Next, David draws the reader's attention to the most visible of bodies in the heavens—the sun. First, he compares the sun to the joyful bridegroom who, after having prepared a home for his bride, proceeds through the village to bring his bride both to and from their wedding ceremony. David then likens the sun to a champion running his course with strength and joy—a warrior mustered to protect the city from attack.⁷ With these metaphors, David moves his readers both poetically and mentally from the universal-but-limited nature of general revelation to the life-giving, life-shaping revelation of God found in His Word.

Our only proper response to the glory of God revealed in the heavens—run to the Word of God, delight in it, study it, and strive to live it. God's glory in His creation should drive us to His Word to seek true life and sufficient direction to shape that life. We will give God's Word, rightly exegeted and accurately applied, the place of final authority in "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3), refusing to allow fallen people's interpretations of general revelation to cloud the light of God's Word in our lives.

Question to Provoke Reflection: Do the various interpretations of general revelation offered by fallen humanity seem to offer us necessary life-shaping explanations not provided in Scripture? Even worse, do these interpretations then lead us to marginalize our attention to God's Word? Note this: We should hold suspect any interpretation of general revelation whose inertia moves us away from, rather than toward, the Scriptures.⁸

Vv. 7-11: The Life-Giving, Life-Shaping Objectives of God's Word

God's Word progressively provides His peoples of all times with His faultless and complete instruction. This instruction brings life to the spiritually dead and turns back the wanderer. God has recorded His certain and trustworthy witness in His Word, moving His children from spiritual ignorance to spiritual maturity. His instruction reflects His righteousness and provokes joy of heart. God's Word sets forth His authoritative, morally pure, and benevolent decrees. These restore sight to the blind and constantly correct the drifting vision of His children. The flawless fear of the Lord endures without end. His upright, reliable judgments are fully and finally just.

Notice how David puts before his readers a logical progression of the effects of the Scriptures on believing people. God's Word gives life and calls the drifter home. With that life, the believer who learns and lives the Word moves from spiritual ignorance to a place of discernment. This path of discernment leads God's children to anchor not only their faith, but also their heart's rejoicing in the Lord. As the rising of the sun with its circuit across the sky directs people to the glory and power of God, this rising of the Word of God in believers' lives gives them His eyes to see and shapes within them His character.

These spiritually mature believers live with an upright fear of the Lord. They see God as involved in every detail of

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2020

February 10-11, 2020

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

March 2-4, 2020

South Regional Fellowship
Morningside Baptist Church
1115 Pelham Road
Greenville, SC 29615

March 9-10, 2020

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

March 9-10, 2020

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

June 15-17, 2020

100th Annual Fellowship
Colonial Hills Baptist Church
8140 Union Chapel Road
Indianapolis, IN 46240

July 27-29, 2020

Alaska Regional Fellowship
Immanuel Baptist Church
7540 E. Cottrell-Campus Road
Palmer, AK 99645
907.745-0610

September 15, 2020

NYC Regional Fellowship
Bethel Baptist Fellowship
2304 Voorhies Avenue
Brooklyn, NY
718.615.102

September 17, 2020

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

2021

March 1-3, 2021

South Regional Fellowship
Berean Baptist Church
1405 Hewatt Road
Lilburn, GA 30047

March 8-9, 2021

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Westgate Baptist Church
12930 SW Scholls Ferry Road
Tigard, OR 97223

2022

April 4-6, 2022

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Grace Baptist Church
2731 Matson Road
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CANADA

2023

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

New Year's Reading on the Book of Psalms

The new year is here, with a golden opportunity to read more and better in the months ahead. Maybe you were given money for books for Christmas. Wonderful! There's little that I enjoy more than helping other people spend money on good books!

I want to recommend the possibility of your working through three books on the Psalms from which I've learned this last year. I can't say, of course, that I've been persuaded of every point on which they argue. But I can say that I feel myself truly indebted to each author.

Psalms by the Day by Alec Motyer (Christian Focus Publications, 2016)

If there was just one new title on the Book of Psalms that I wish everyone could obtain, it would be this one. It is truly a mine of gold, but it happily requires the reader to do very little digging on his own.

The book is arranged for reading through the Psalter in just seventy-three days (Day 1: Psalms 1–2; Day 2: Psalms 3–7; Day 3: Psalms 8–10, and so on). Along the way, Motyer provides three components to elucidate and apply your reading. His subtitle introduces them as, *A working translation with analysis and explanatory notes, and a "Pause for Thought" based on the passage read.*

First, *a working translation*. For many readers, this will prove to be the single most enlightening benefit. Motyer explains in his introduction, *What I have set out to do in offering my own translation of the Psalms is to bring you as near as I can to the Hebrew of the original. Pause for a moment and think about that: to bring you as near as I*

can to the Hebrew of the original. Doesn't that sound great?

One of the most helpful ways in which Motyer does this is by following the order of the Hebrew text rather than (as most English translations) rearranging the original wording for the sake of a smooth English reading. Following the Hebrew order often displays emphases that our English translations forfeit. For a single example, compare the following:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters
(KJV: Ps. 23:1–2).

Yahweh is my shepherd: I will not lack.
In pastures of fresh grass he makes me lie.
Beside secure waters he guides me
(Motyer: Ps. 23:1–2).

The last clause of verse 1 states confidently, "I shall not want." Then our English texts begin the next two lines with their subject, "he" (the LORD). But actually, as Motyer displays, these two lines in the Hebrew text open with prepositional clauses. What's the difference?

The difference is that by opening with the prepositional clauses, the Hebrew text throws the accent toward what it is that the subject ("he") provides so that his sheep do not lack; "in pastures of fresh grass he makes me lie" and "beside secure waters he guides me" (my emphasis in order to highlight the psalmist's).

Second, Motyer provides *analysis and explanatory notes*. Throughout his translation Motyer inserts superscripted numbers beside words or phrases that he elucidates in side notes (not footnotes). These are refreshingly pithy in contrast to the insufferable lengths to which commentaries seem to trend today.

To give an example from the lines already quoted, notice the translation "secure waters" in the last line. "Secure" isn't a modifier that would generally occur to us as an appropriate or even desirable description of

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

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Straight Cuts—An exegetical study	6
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needed water. But Motyer clarifies briefly, “Lit. ‘waters of rest,’ but the word has a wide range: rest, home, security, quiet.” These kinds of short hints are scattered throughout Motyer’s work, repeatedly starting one’s mind running with its own satisfying applications.

Third, Motyer provides “Pause for Thought” sections at the conclusion of every day’s reading. These are brief (less than a page), warm, and devotional in nature—not trite and timeworn, but perceptive, fresh, and rooted rigorously in what the text actually says, rather than what merely sentimental minds might imagine that it does.

The result of Motyer’s confining himself to just these three components is a commentary of a little more than four hundred pages that is sufficiently satisfying without running on tediously. It makes for a just-right companion for those having no knowledge of Hebrew but wishing that they could penetrate a level or two deeper than their English text. I’ve been recommending it to folks in our church ever since it was published, and I’ve been gratified that they generally testify to their being regularly delighted with the surprising insights that they’re receiving.

***The Flow of the Psalms* by O. Palmer Robertson (P&R Publishing, 2015)**

Most Christians assume that the Psalter is something like a modern hymnbook, but minus the advantage of a good hymnbook’s topical arrangement (beginning, for instance, with anthems of Trinitarian praise and concluding with Christian living). The Psalms are assumed to be generally disconnected and detached, something like Solomon’s proverbs are from one another.

But for about thirty to forty years now, Psalms scholars have been exploring the possibility that the Book of Psalms may be proclaiming a demonstrable, overall message, and that in order to do so, its chapters have been almost as deliberately sequenced as those in a major prophet or a Pauline epistle.

For many years O. Palmer Robertson has attempted to discover whether there is such a structure to the Psalter. *The Flow of the Psalms* explains his conclusions to date on this project. Walter Kaiser calls it a *ground-breaking and innovative piece of research . . . that will open up new vistas of study and preaching*.

Robertson takes as his starting point the often overlooked fact that the Psalter is made up of five books (Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150), each of which concludes with a similar doxology (Psalm 41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48; 150). Within these books are recognizable clusters, bound into units by their subject matter (as the kingship psalms, 20–24, in Book 1), or authorship (for instance, the “Sons of Korah,” Psalms 42–49 in Book 2), or title (as “A song of degrees,” Psalms 120–34 in Book 5), or some other unifying element.

In Robertson’s understanding (and many others’ as well), Psalms 1 and 2 function in tandem as introduc-

tory to the entire Psalter. *Taken together, these two very brief psalms anticipate major themes that permeate all five books* (13). What are these permeating themes?

Psalms 1 divides the entire human race into just two categories of people. They are the righteous and the wicked, and in the end *they are judged on the basis of their response to God’s revealed Torah, the law, the teaching, the instruction of the Lord* (13). This is the first major theme, and throughout the Psalter the contrast between these two sets of people is highlighted in various ways. Their paths, their struggles with one another in this life, and their ultimate destinies are revealed graphically through the life experiences of the psalmists.

Psalms 2 introduces the second major theme of the Psalter as being *the person of God’s Messiah, his perpetual dynasty, and his permanent dwelling place. From a redemptive-historical perspective, the Lord’s covenant with David provides the essential framework for understanding the Psalms* (14). The LORD has declared that His anointed Son, who is also David’s ultimate “son,” will rule over the uttermost parts of the earth. Though this divine decree is stubbornly contested by one of the categories of people in Psalm 1 (the wicked) throughout every age of human history, the divinely decreed outcome is unshakably assured. Eventually, all the nations and all their peoples will serve Him. Thus the climactic praises with which each of the Psalter’s five books concludes:

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen (Ps. 41:13, ending Book 1).

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen (Psalm 72:18–19, ending Book 2).

Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen (Ps. 89:52, ending Book 3).

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD (Ps. 106:48, ending Book 4).

Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD (Ps. 150:6, ending Book 5 and the entire Psalter).

Robertson then suggests a one-word summarization for each of the five books of the Psalter. Each word is in relation to the struggle between the righteous and the wicked, especially as that conflict progresses through human history toward the divinely decreed victory for David’s ultimate Seed, the Messiah.

Book 1 is *Confrontation*, a word that reflects the opening framework of the two introductory psalms. Robertson postulates that *David the son of Jesse was the man chosen by God . . . the head of the line that would ultimately lead to the Royal Redeemer. As such, he must enter into mortal conflict with the many enemies of the Messianic kingdom* (53).

Book 2 in Robertson's understanding can be characterized by the word *Communication*. This is because many of the psalms in this collection address the *peoples, nations, foreigners or all mankind*. And these psalms manifest *a different attitude toward the nations and peoples of the world from the prevailing perspective in Book I* (85). Even though they continue to be enemies, the nations are told messages that they would be wise to hear and to apply (as introductory Psalm 2 exhorted, vv. 10–12).

Book 3 is a striking contrast, with its strong and repeated theme of *the defeat of God's people at the hands of invading international enemies* (122). So Robertson captures this book in the word *Devastation*.

Instead of anticipating the establishment of the Davidic dynasty that will come only through David's intense personal struggles (Book I), or presenting the rule of God and his Messiah as an accomplished fact, though constantly under attack (Book II), Book III of the Psalms raises the dark specter of international armies who devastate David's dynasty and the Lord's dwelling place at the temple in Jerusalem. This third book of the Psalter ends with the distressing circumstance in which the Lord's enemies have "mocked every step of your anointed one" (Ps. 89:51) (145–46).

Robertson's analysis of Book 4 resolves into the conclusion that it reflects a *matured perspective on Yahweh's lordship over all the peoples of the world* (164). For this reason he characterizes it with the word *Maturation*. His thought is that the intent of this Book (and Book 5) is to *redirect the hopes of the reader away from an earthly Davidic kingdom to the kingship of Yahweh* (147). *Greater trust must be placed in the eternal kingship of Yahweh, who will be true to his covenantal promise to David*.

Book III concluded with God's covenant people and their king suffering in the agonies of exile, with the dwelling place of Yahweh utterly devastated. Yet in a way that cannot be humanly explained, the nation's exile at the hands of international enemies has become the "proving ground" of the people's faith in the certainty that Yahweh will do it (148).

In his analysis of Book 4 Robertson most applies covenant theology's eschatological perspective. *From the perspective of Book IV, Yahweh's kingship is not to be regarded as yet to be realized at some time in the future. Instead, God must now be worshipped as King, not only among his people but also throughout the nations of the world* (156). Nonetheless, his exposing and explaining the kingship theme in this book is very helpful. All that a dispensational theologian needs to do is recalibrate the application of it to include a future, earthly fulfillment.

Book 5 is *Consummation*. It is the largest of the five and concludes, as already noted, with the magnificent Hallel psalms calling everything in heaven and upon earth to *praise the LORD*.

Nothing of similar deep analysis is available on the

central message and broad structure of the Psalter. For that reason alone, Robertson is a must-read for anyone grappling with those issues. Anyone who works with it will concur pretty quickly that it is immensely helpful at many points and in its explanations of many overlooked emphases in individual psalms. Once you read it, you'll almost certainly reach for it whenever you preach on any particular psalm.

Most Christians assume that the Psalter is something like a modern hymnbook.... The Psalms are assumed to be generally disconnected and detached, something like Solomon's proverbs are from one another.

But for about thirty to forty years now, Psalms scholars have been exploring the possibility that the Book of Psalms may be proclaiming a demonstrable, overall message, and that in order to do so, its chapters have been almost as deliberately sequenced as those in a major prophet or a Pauline epistle.

Singing the Songs of Jesus by Michael LeFebvre (Christian Focus, 2010)

I highly recommend this small book (160 pp). LeFebvre's (pronounced *luh-feb*) thesis is that the Book of Psalms is unique among the books of the Bible. It alone has been written to be both God's words to us and our words back to Him. *It is the only book of the Bible with God as the audience and God's people as the appointed speakers* (16).

But in addition, the Book of Psalms is a hymnbook. That means that in the Psalms we are not only informed of what to say to God, especially in worship, but also directed also to say these things to Him singingly, musically. Not that they are to be sung only. They are also to be prayed. But they must not be omitted from our singing. Which brings LeFebvre to suggest a place, perhaps the place, where the so-called "worship wars" are being fought at the wrong level. He appreciates that many of our traditional hymns and gospel songs are theologically rich and deservedly precious. But he asks whether it has been right for the churches to adopt them as *replacements for Psalm singing* (27).

LeFebvre himself has moved from membership in a Baptist church in Chicago (during which time he worked for Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles and aided hymnologist Al Smith in his research and writing of hymn histories) to now pastoring a small Reformed church that sings psalms exclusively. Yet he continues to hold great appreciation for the rich heritage of *beautiful songs written by gifted hymnwriters through the centuries* (28). But his concern is that *when extra-biblical songs are the diet of worship, and when they restrain our expectations so that the hymns God gave his church now seem "unfit," some kind of recovery operation is needed* (29).

What this means, then, is that when the Lord's people (whether OT, NT, or the present) sing the psalms, it is David, and (here is where LeFebvre extends his reasoning to make the point captured in his book's title) ultimately, David's Son who are leading their worship. When you sing the Psalms, you are actually singing the songs of Jesus, with Jesus as your songleader.

In order to prod his readers toward that recovery operation, LeFebvre argues that there are at least two characteristics of the Psalms that make them unique—and uniquely powerful—for modern Christian worship (32). The first is that they are the only songs a church sings which are divinely inspired. *Some modern hymnwriters may be better poets . . . some of the songs produced in recent centuries may be easier to understand and more aesthetically pleasing to sing, but they are not inspired and inerrant. He quotes the early-church pastor/theologian Athanasius, who warned against trying to recast or completely change their words. Their expressions [are] superior to those we construct . . . [for it is] the Spirit who speaks in the saints . . . [to] render assistance to us* (37).

The beautiful thing about the Psalms is that they are above suspicion. Even if we wonder what a Psalm means, we never need to wonder if it is true. We can pour our hearts into them as we sing, without having to fear whether we are professing error (41).

The second characteristic of the Psalms that LeFebvre argues is unique is that they were what he calls "king-led." He explains David's God-given authority in establishing not only the categories and arrangements of the temple musicians, but also the actual content of their singing (1 Chron. 25). Three times the Scripture says that all these things were, literally (Hebrew text), *by the hands*

of the king (or, according to the order of the king [KJV]; *under the direction of the king* [NASB].) So, LeFebvre points out, *the whole collection is rightly called "the Psalms of David," because they all speak "in the king's voice"* (42).

What this means, then, is that when the Lord's people (whether OT, NT, or the present) sing the psalms, it is David, and (here is where LeFebvre extends his reasoning to make the point captured in his book's title) ultimately, David's Son who are leading their worship. *When you sing the Psalms, you are actually singing the songs of Jesus, with Jesus as your songleader* (50).

No other praise song can do that. Fanny Crosby can offer us beautiful songs that edify our faith. William Cowper can give us words that help verbalize the awe that is in our hearts for the sacrifice of Christ. Such poets have made tremendous contributions to Christian devotion by their songs. But it is in the biblical psalms alone that Jesus himself, our priestly king, leads our song proclamations in the presence of the Father (51).

Whatever one's reaction to this proposal may be initially, the suggestion at least merits a moment's consideration. One constraining reason for doing so is that the writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 22:22 as saying something very similar to (or perhaps exactly) what LeFebvre is arguing: *I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee* (Heb. 2:12). Here is an unquestionably Messianic psalm (see vv. 1, 16, 18 and even 8). The author of Hebrews relies upon one of its statements to confirm that the Messiah and saved sinners are *brethren*. But Psalm 22:22 says something else as well, which the Hebrews author doesn't mention (as it isn't his chief point). The speaker in the psalm who calls us his *brethren* will also sing praise to God the Father *in the midst of the church*. We are directed to join Him in the singing of both this psalm and all other psalms (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

The singer, of course, is the Messiah, David's Son-King. And according to Psalm 22, it is prophesied that He will someday sing God's praises *in the midst of the church* among His *brethren*. This is LeFebvre's point: *When you sing the Psalms, you are actually singing the songs of Jesus, with Jesus as your songleader*.

In the remainder of his book LeFebvre explores the ramifications of this thesis for the whole debatable issue of which psalms are specifically Messianic. He argues that a case can be made that all of them are in some senses, even those classified as *penitential* (since Christ truly bore both our sins and their guilt). This leads to his understanding of the related topics of (1) a right use and singing of the imprecatory psalms, (2) journeying with the Psalter through troubles to the ultimate destination of praise, and (3) applying a more robust use of the psalms to the current controversy of contemporary worship.

Blessed will be the man who meditates in Psalms in 2020. These three titles will almost certainly pave your way to doing it more fruitfully. ☞

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. You can access his sermons at mountcalvarybaptist.org/pages/sermons/default.aspx.

Bring . . . the Books

William Carey: A Brother Born for Adversity

Few biographies capture the growth of a soul like *William Carey*, written by his great-grandson, S. Pearce Carey. William Carey (1761–1834), an English Baptist pastor of a small congregation in the small town of Moulton, England, grew to worldwide influence because of his burden for souls. This biography, written in anticipation of the one-hundredth anniversary of Carey's death, presents Carey's life and ministry with touching insights. The entirety of the book is rich. Wakeman Trust has kept this fine work, first published in 1923, in print. (All italics below represent Carey's original emphases.)

A singular value of the book is how the author captures Carey's process of ministry assessment in discouraging circumstances. Most know how difficult it was for Carey to get to the field of India at the age of thirty-three (he'd first hoped to go to Tahiti) and how fruitless the first years of ministry proved to be. But what is not as well-known is how Carey assessed his ministry, not only in the early years, but even as the Lord eventually began to prosper it beyond his imagination. Carey provides a helpful example of what it looks like to assess the work of God (or even the seeming lack of it) through a scriptural lens and to grow in faith during apparent spiritual famine.

Though elements of his situation were unique, Carey realized that God was testing his faith in the very same promises that his ministry brothers in England were being tested:

We are determined to hold on, though our discouragements be a thousand times greater. We have the same ground of hope as you in England—the promise, power and faithfulness of God (162).

He searched the Scripture for parallels to steady his soul and shape his reports home. He found an unlikely missionary companion in Joseph, recognizing that in Joseph's case God used great lengths of time to do His work. God's work continued unabated even during the "dark" years:

I would fain tell you of our successful labours, of souls converted by thousands. But it may be seven years, and seven added to these, before you hear of what you wish. Remember that when Joseph was sent to save millions, it was seven years before one was saved by his mission, and then they were saved by the millions (165).

Their empty hands remained opened to the Lord. Yet even the sustained contact with language teachers produced no tangible fruit. After five barren years, Carey assessed himself woefully:

I am almost grown callous, and am tempted to preach as if their hearts *were* invulnerable. But

this dishonours the grace and power of God, Who has promised to be with His ministers to the end; and it destroys all energy, and makes preaching stupidly formal. . . . If God uses me, none need despair (169).

Carey wondered if fruit would ever come on his watch. "If, like David, I am only to gather materials, and another to build the house, my joy shall not be less" (169).

Reviewing God's past leading comforted the team in present circumstances, reminding them that God's ways are best:

Experience has taught us that God's ways are best, and that our little plans are often frustrated in great mercy. . . . But now we see that the divine hand was in it, and we are convinced that this is the very place where we ought and are best advantaged to be. Therefore, dear friend, be sure that, even when you are most disturbed, disappointed and discouraged—whilst God leads, you can never go astray. Be strong in Him and in the power of His might (200–201).

Ultimately the fruit came, seemingly a hundredfold. Yet after twenty-five years, six hundred baptisms, and thousands of attenders, Carey knew that the work was still small in comparison to what could yet be done for India's spiritual transformation. The biographer presents how they continued to search the Scripture and church history for lessons:

The Serampore missionaries' manifestos, prospectuses and letters of this period all show that they were closely restudying the history of the Reformation, and that they were deeply impressed by the *length* of the struggle. They realised that its victory had cost centuries of witness and effort. They saw that if Rome's perverted form of Christianity yielded *only to long-sustained* pressure, even in the advanced West, India's ancient religions would never be overtaken, nor Islam's progress be retarded, without long-term measures.

For a faith-building and encouraging read, I couldn't recommend this work more highly. For me, it enlarged my view of God and changed my life. ☞

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

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

Isaiah 28 is, for the most part, standard fare for Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah pronounces judgment on God's people because they refuse to live by God's rules (vv. 1–4). The people respond by mocking the prophet (vv. 9–10). Then Isaiah warns that if they persist, they will certainly be destroyed (v. 22).

But after verse 22, we find seven verses that have puzzled interpreters for generations. Isaiah switches from an oracle of judgment to what seems to be a parable about how a skilled farmer sows (vv. 23–26) and reaps (vv. 27–29). What is the prophet doing in Isaiah 28:23–29?

Most commentators see these verses as a parable revealing how the Lord deals with His people. Just as a farmer breaks up hard soil and then reaps a bountiful harvest, so God treats His people harshly in order to make them fruitful later on.¹

The problem with this interpretation is that God is not the farmer in the passage. The farmer is presented as a person of skill who knows how to treat each crop differently. Why? That's where God enters the picture: "His God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him" (v. 26). During the harvest, the farmer's skill is seen again in the way he reaps and processes each crop differently. Why? Again, it's the Lord: "This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working" (v. 29). God is not the farmer; He's the teacher of the farmer.

With that in mind, it seems best not to see this as a parable at all. Isaiah is simply stating that skillful farmers get their skill from the Lord.

But why say that here? It seems that the best answer is that Isaiah is extending his rebuke of Jerusalem's leaders by arguing from the lesser to the greater. God teaches the farmer, and if a farmer can receive divine instruction, why can't the decision makers in Jerusalem? John N. Oswalt says it well: "God has taught the farmer the principles of threshing as well as those of plowing and planting. . . . If the Almighty God has given both physical and spiritual counsel, and if the farmer accepts the physical as a matter of course and finds life, what are Jerusalem's leaders doing scoffing at his spiritual counsel?"²


If this interpretation is correct, then these verses apply far beyond the compass of Isaiah 28. This passage turns out to be an instructive proof text for common grace. "Common grace" is a term used by theologians to refer to God's favor shown to all people through His general providence. Two common proof texts are Matthew 5:45 and Acts 14:16–17. Both of these passages teach that God blesses people everywhere with sunshine, rain, and the bountiful harvests they provide.

But Isaiah 28 takes common grace further. It teaches that common grace includes knowledge and skill. God in His grace teaches farmers how to farm. But He doesn't do it through Deuteronomy, Proverbs, or Romans. God evidently does it through the farmer's education, hard work, consultation with others, careful observations, and many other things. Fallen man prefers to take the credit for his accomplishments. But according to Isaiah 28, all these accomplishments are the result of divine grace.

This understanding is instructive for the Christian. Based on Isaiah 28, he knows that he can learn from all kinds of people. Secular-minded physicists, unbelieving historians, jaded investigative journalists—each of these can teach the believer important lessons. These unbelievers have worked hard to learn their craft, and they have achieved a level of proficiency that should not be ignored.

Nevertheless, the believer must always be on his guard. Not everything Isaiah's skilled farmer might say could be considered divine wisdom. If he mocked the prophetic word—as Jerusalem's leaders were doing—then his proficiency would be marbled with error. There are many things an Israelite farmer needed to know and practice that hard work alone could not uncover: giving a tithe every third year (for the poor), not plowing on the Sabbath, not reaping the corners of one's fields, and living each day in covenant with Jehovah. These, too, were important ingredients of Israelite agricultural wisdom.

For this reason, believers today must listen, read, and observe *critically*. They should not ignore the accomplishments or learning of unbelievers. But neither should they take these things in without a filter. They should view the work of others through the corrective lens of Scripture, discarding the things that are at odds with biblical revelation but learning from the things that align with biblical revelation.

The believer's goal in learning from unbelievers is not to follow the Lord part of the time and the world the rest of the time. Rather, the discerning Christian's goal is to receive the full richness of divine wisdom: "This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel" (Isa. 28:29). 

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

¹ Commentators disagree over the meaning of this "parable." The interpretation above is found in J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993), 235–36. A more severe interpretation that focuses on divine judgment is found in J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Kregel, 1992), 457–60.

² John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (Eerdmans, 1986), 524.

Recently I was approached on several occasions by different church members who in one way or another were struggling. A common element seemed to be what might be termed worry, anxiety, or panic attacks. God is concerned about how being afraid can negatively impact our lives. It has been said that no command is repeated more often in Scripture than “fear not.” God specifically commanded some pretty godly folks not to fear, including Abram (Gen. 15:1), Hagar (Gen. 21:17), Isaac (Gen. 26:24), Jacob (Gen. 46:3), Joshua (Josh. 8:1), Gideon (Judges 6:23), Daniel (Dan. 10:12, 19), Joseph (Matt. 1:20), Zacharias (Luke 1:13), Mary (Luke 1:30), Peter (Luke 5:10), Paul (Act 27:24), and John (Rev. 1:17).

So what is the Bible’s answer for fear and worry and panic attacks? Do we simply say, “Fear not,” and leave it at that? Or are there other areas of understanding and practice that can be woven into a life to strategically combat the temptation of overwhelming anxiety? Here are several considerations.

No Off Switch

It is important to realize that we cannot turn off our hearts. Thinking continues to happen. But we can learn to practice intentional thinking. We have God’s help in putting off anxiety-inducing thoughts and replacing them with God-honoring thoughts. When a family goes tent camping, it can be a lot of fun to build and maintain a campfire. Family members scatter to collect fuel for the fire. When they return, there are a variety of possibilities collected for sustaining the fire. There are all kinds of things, including pinecones, long grass, moss, leaves, pine logs, branches, wet logs, decayed wood, and even some hardwood such as oak.

Well, it can probably all burn in a way. None of these materials would cause an explosion. There is nothing particularly dangerous in the mix. But what a difference there is in the quality of the fire. If we want an effective fire to produce heat for cooking or to be sustained throughout the night, the quality of the fuel is key. Seasoned oak is a choice material for heat and endurance. So the point is not just to have a fire but to accomplish cooking and to sustain the fire for hours. Likewise, a believer can grow in understanding the fuels that are influencing his thinking. We are immersed in constant input from advertising, media, mail, e-mail, texts, billboards, magazines, newspapers and so much more. Our minds have no off switch. We are constantly being impacted and influenced. But the quality of the materials where we allow our minds to settle will have a huge impact on our thinking. Recognizing this is vital in overcoming worry.

Down Escalator

Sincere believers can develop anxiety if they don’t make spiritual progress as quickly as they think they should. The temptation is to think that making a decision will change my life. Although the lack of decision will change a life, progress is not made simply by a decision. The demonstration of faith is when a decision is followed by disciplined steps as a result of the decision. Each step is another decision that demonstrates faith. If there is no difficulty, faith is unnecessary—we can handle the situation without exercising faith. It is the ongoing struggle, not victory, which is the very essence of faith.

A helpful illustration is an escalator. The steps are consistently moving down, but the goal is to get up. We want to get up. We can be convinced God wants us to be up. We can take steps to get up, but the escalator keeps going down. If we focus on the goal (getting up) we can fear never making it. Despair can settle into our hearts, and we can give up. But the exercise of faith is not leaping to the end goal. Rather, the continual, one-step-at-a-time progress that we make as we keep fighting is the activity of faith. We can examine the height of the steps. We can study the movement of the steps. We can even measure the speed of the steps. But none of these learned and known facts equal progress. We need to step on the escalator and steadily take steps to progress. Two-steps at a time? Go for it. But it is not necessary. Like the tortoise and the hare, the steady step of faith at the point of temptation can bring us closer to the goal. It is easier to get discouraged and wish victory was quicker. But God is more concerned with our exercise of faith now than our ultimate overcoming. After all, only in heaven will we have arrived. In the meantime, we struggle on against the downward tendency of everything.

Practice

Perhaps another misunderstanding can be clarified. What is the role of knowledge in overcoming fear? In other words, once Scripture commands, “fear not,” we know we should not worry or panic. There is no lack of understanding that anxiety is less than God’s best for His child. Perhaps knowledge itself becomes in some way an impediment to progress.

My wife has taught private lessons to piano students for many years. Naturally she encourages each student to make progress. She will carefully explain concepts. There will be a demonstration on what progress will look like. Printed materials are suited to the

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

Charles Spurgeon

individual student. Guidance is given regarding obtaining an instrument for practicing outside of lesson times.

But there is the rub. Practice is essential. There has been a very clear difference between those who get better and those who lose interest. Every student pays a fee, invests time, buys materials, and owns a keyboard. But some practice and some don't. Those who practice make progress. Those who don't, lose heart. Each student has the same teacher. Every student receives personal attention. The difference is in the student. Some practice; some don't. Making progress in overcoming worry requires practice too. Knowledge alone is not enough. There will not be progress without Bible knowledge. But knowing the Scripture alone is insufficient. Put another way, the Bible is not magic. A Bible verse is not a good-luck charm. Facing a struggle, we cannot wave a magic wand of a Bible verse over our trial and announce "abracadabra," expecting that the struggle will instantly pass away. In fact, God ordained that very struggle as the opportunity to settle our hearts and minds on the specific words of God. Practicing that is no guarantee of instant termination of difficulty. Practicing that consistently is exercising the faith that demonstrates confidence in God. There is no substitute for practice. It is tedious, difficult, and demanding. Results are not guaranteed. But results are not the focus. Our motivation is to honor the God who is and who loves us so that others can see Him at work in us.

Drilling

For the believer, Jesus has given clear but perhaps uncomfortable instructions about worry. For example, in one passage, Jesus reasoned, "If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Luke 12:28). The context is all about placing our complete confidence in the promises of God despite appearances and apparent needs because we know that God is providing His perfect provision. Yet Jesus does not merely counsel, "Fear

not." Rather, He reasons with our thinking and points to the problem by describing us as "Ye of little faith." Who wants Jesus to describe them as "little faith" people? Jesus points their hearts to the unsettled nature of their thinking. It is as we allow the real and powerful problems and uncertainties to crowd into our conscious thinking that instead of resting on God's promises we become restless with life's problems. How much better to mentally back away from the seeds of worry and recognize the temptation is ultimately to not rest in God and His Word.

Imagine someone putting you in a chair, holding open your mouth and then drilling inside your mouth. Would that not be a clear basis for an extreme panic attack? But suppose that someone was actually a dentist? Further, what if you actually made an appointment for him to do this and even agreed to pay him for doing it? What could motivate anyone to endure this, even gratefully? Well, of course, we understand that it is a privilege to have the opportunity to have dental work done. Why? Because we know that dental decay left unremedied will worsen even to the point of losing a tooth, or teeth, or worse. And we know that a dentist has invested much in being trained to help us. We do not foolishly hope tooth pain will go away on its own. We may wish to avoid the dentist, but we choose to endure as needed. We want to avoid worse consequences. We trust the dentist. In a similar way, Jesus challenges us that the key to overcoming worry, fear, panic, anxiety is not in merely thinking, "Don't worry," but in choosing to settle our minds instead on the goodness of God and His care for His children. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

When faced with the worst of life's problems, we can wrestle our hearts and minds back to the place of resting in God's perfect plan. ☞

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Fundamentalism and the Hermeneutics of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism

Introduction

Fundamentalism has never embraced one uniform system of theology. My purpose here is to provide an overview and comparison of Covenant Theology (henceforth, CT) and Dispensational Theology (henceforth, DT) used by many fundamentalists throughout its history. While some fundamentalists today attempt to eschew any (rigid) theological system, in actuality everyone uses some type of grid (a set of suppositions) to interpret biblical passages. Often the difference between those who embrace established theological systems and those who do not is that the latter do not realize they are using such a grid and have not thought through the Bible in a systematic way. That practice can lead to perilous inconsistencies in interpretation.

In order to accomplish my purpose, I will provide a summary of each theological system—especially how it approaches hermeneutics. I will then make some important contrasts. Before delving into the particulars, I will examine both systems' historical importance to fundamentalism.

Historical Significance

Several Christian denominations have historical connections to fundamentalism. However, the denominational battles against liberalism and resultant separation from those organizations were fought primarily in the Baptist and Presbyterian circles. The boundaries are unclear governing which theological system suited those in each of the two denominations mentioned above. There were Presbyterians, or those with close connections to Presbyterianism, who were integral to promoting DT—James H. Brooks,¹ C. I. Scofield,² and Lewis Sperry Chafer,³ to name a few. Many Baptists identify with CT (often adhering to the Second London Baptist Confession of 1677/1688).

I understand separatism, typified by the following examples, as a key identifying characteristic of fundamentalism.⁴ The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (1932), a Baptist group who separated from the increasingly liberal Northern Baptist Convention, are generally adherents of DT. On the Presbyterian side several key leaders, staunch conservatives in the fight against liberalism in the 1920s,

never embraced the “fundamentalism” label but did practice separatism. John Gresham Machen, formerly of Princeton Seminary and one of the founders of Westminster Theological Seminary (1929) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1936), is an example. Worldwide, there are other Presbyterian associations, often small, that embrace both separatism and CT.⁵ A brief outline of these theological systems follows.

Details of Each System

Fundamentalists have often relied on scholars who, though conservative, do not openly identify with fundamentalism. Therefore, the primary sources I use are not reflective of fundamentalist writers.⁶ Both theological systems originated and developed outside the context of early twentieth-century fundamentalism, though DT less so. Renald Showers compares these systems side by side.⁷

In order to avoid confusion, I want to point out that some of the primary terminology in each system is also used by the other. Dispensational writers see covenants in the Bible,⁸ and covenant theologians use the term “dispensations,”⁹ often in similar ways that DT does.

Covenant Theology. Like all theologies, CT did not just suddenly drop out of the sky in its final form. It developed gradually over a period of time during¹⁰ and after the Reformation (though adherents find support in earlier periods of church history). The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) first encapsulated a form of CT on which many rely to express their understanding, though other key documents are valued as well.

CT understands the Bible to support a series of at least two covenants instituted by God, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. These covenants explain how God interacts with His people and the expectations He has for them. Many Covenant theologians see an additional covenant, developed later historically, called the Covenant of Redemption.¹¹

This third covenant that some CT writers accept is logically the first covenant in the series. The Covenant of Redemption states that God the Father contracted this agreement with God the Son to procure salvation for humanity by the Son's death on the cross. This happened in eternity past, since God knew Adam would fall into sin. Berkhof cites several passages as the biblical basis for this eternal decree of God¹² and the fact

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that it is an actual covenant.¹³ The Son becomes the guarantee or surety that the provisions of the covenant will be met, and He also is the “Head of the Covenant” as the last Adam, the representative of those He redeemed (the elect).¹⁴

The next covenant is the Covenant of Works, which God the Father contracted with Adam. The promise of eternal life is implied to Adam by the fact that God would punish disobedience with death.¹⁵ Christ’s relation to this covenant is through the parallel between Christ and Adam (Rom. 5:12–21).

The nature of this conditional covenant relationship includes Adam’s title as the head of the human race.¹⁶ He was designated so on a trial basis, in order to determine if he would obey God’s will. As such, he acted on behalf of all future descendants, so that through Adam’s failure, sin passed on to all humanity. Through God’s grace, in this covenant Adam had the promise which “enabled Adam to obtain eternal life for himself and for his descendants in the way of obedience.”¹⁷ But Christ did what Adam failed to do—to fulfill this covenant—and His righteousness is imputed to those who place their trust in Him.¹⁸

The third covenant is that of the Covenant of Grace, which governs humanity now. God the Father contracted this covenant, though Covenant theologians have not agreed with whom He made this covenant. Many have concluded God contracted this covenant with the elect in Christ.¹⁹ While this covenant includes salvation, it encompasses more than salvation and is unconditional in the sense that its promises are always fulfilled in the elect.²⁰ It is not conditioned upon faith, because “faith itself is a fruit of the covenant.”²¹

However, in this covenant corporately are included others who in some way are a part of it, but not recipients of its blessings. Berkhof said,

They [covenant theologians] were fully aware of the fact that, according to God’s special revelation in both the Old and the New Testament, the covenant as a historical phenomenon is perpetuated in successive generations and includes many in whom the covenant life is never realized. And whenever they desired to include this aspect of the covenant in their definition, they would say that it was established *with believers and their seed*.²²

Those last words designate the limitations of this covenant.²³

The covenant promises from God are many,²⁴ some physical blessings as well as spiritual. Some of the latter include justification, adoption, eternal life, as well as the benefits of the Spirit, and finally glorification.²⁵ Humanity’s response to God’s gracious offer is to affirm their belonging to God’s people, as well as trusting in Christ for salvation.²⁶

Other notable emphases of the covenant important to hermeneutics include its uniformity throughout all human history and dispensations (thus only one people of God), though its form of administration has changed over time. Berkhof identifies this principle through promises by God the Father to be God to His people (Gen. 17:7; Exod. 19:5; 2 Sam. 7:14; Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). The sacraments, different in form from one dispensation to another, have basically the same meaning.²⁷ Another characteristic of

the Covenant of Grace is how adherents can consider it both an unconditional and conditional covenant, depending on perspective.²⁸

There are many other important areas to emphasize in both the Covenant of Grace and within CT in general. Despite this, I will finish this section with the general observations that CT stresses a strong continuity between the Old and New Testaments, as well as the one people of God throughout the Scriptures. These characteristics do relate to CT’s hermeneutics and will become significant as we turn to DT.

Dispensationalism. John Nelson Darby, a Plymouth Brethren pastor,²⁹ popularized DT as a theological system in the nineteenth century (though advocates see elements or characteristics of the structure in earlier periods). DT was common in many Bible conferences in the United States during the latter part of the century. Further refinement and dissemination came in the twentieth century with the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible,³⁰ and the founding of the theological institutions known to be loyal to this perspective.

DT recognizes that God has had different stewardships for various people groups as revealed progressively in the Bible. That helps explain why believers today are no longer required to offer “animal sacrifices”. Those various stewardships in history they call “dispensations.” DT does not consider these stewardships as different ways of salvation. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in God’s revealed truth.³¹

Charles Ryrie theologically defined a dispensation as a “distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose,” finding biblical support for this usage (Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25).³² DT views God’s workings in the world as His dispensing of stewardships according to His will in accordance to the progressive nature of biblical history.³³

Therefore, the characteristics of individual dispensations include

1. A change in God’s governmental relationship with humanity, often with new features, though not always so.
2. A resultant change in humanity’s responsibility.
3. A corresponding revelation necessary to effect the change (which is new and is a stage in the progress of revelation through the Bible).³⁴

DT places the emphasis on the different stewardships, which God revealed in various times and to various people. Ryrie notes dispensations *by themselves* do not make DT a theological system since CT recognizes them, nor does arriving at a particular number of dispensations.³⁵ CT even

uses the word in much the same way DT does. Though DT has never agreed upon a required number of dispensations, the most common list is the following:³⁶

1. Innocence—from Adam to the Fall.
2. Conscience—from the Fall to the Flood.
3. Civil Government—from the Flood to the Tower of Babel.
4. Promise or Patriarchal Rule—from the call of Abraham to the Egyptian bondage.

**These systems’
hermeneutics
approach the
Bible from
different
perspectives.**

5. Mosaic Law—from the giving of the Law to the death of Christ.
6. Church Age or Age of Grace—from Acts 2 and the beginning of the Church to the Second Coming of Christ.
7. Kingdom Age—from the Second Coming of Christ to the Eternal State.

God entrusted individuals in each dispensation a stewardship. But every person in each dispensation had to trust in God's gracious provision for salvation as revealed to that point in biblical history.

DT extracts key hermeneutical principles from the following characteristics. Ryrie's essential elements of DT include:

1. *A consistent distinction between Israel and the church.*³⁷ When reading about the Israelites throughout Scripture, dispensationalists understand that God is dealing directly with the Nation of Israel physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The church is a New Testament entity birthed in Acts 2 made up of those from all nations of the world. Paul explains the coming of this new entity as a part of God's plan previously unrevealed (Eph. 2:11–3:12).
2. *A consistent literal interpretation of the Scriptures.*³⁸ Other theological systems, including CT, practice a literal hermeneutic. DT requires literalism even regarding the unfulfilled prophecies made to Israel. Several of those prophecies proclaim that God has a future restoration for Israel.³⁹ Thus, the church does not replace Israel in God's program. DT sees the situation this way: God's relationship with Israel was not dependent on Israel's actions but was based on who God is as recorded in the biblical covenants with Israel⁴⁰—the same basis on which He is related to Christ's church. Both relationships are based on His grace. Neither Israel nor the church deserves God's blessings, nor has either one lived up to God's standards.
3. *A consistent recognition of the ultimate purpose of God is His glory.*⁴¹ Ryrie makes the distinction that while God's purpose in history includes salvation, it is actually broader than that. Salvation brings humanity into a right relationship with God through the Savior, Jesus Christ. Through Christ this provision and plan brings glory to God. However, God advances His glory through His purposes for angels as well as the non-elect.⁴² In addition, God brings glory to Himself when He fulfills His covenant promises to Israel. As Doug Brown points out, "Any theological system that undermines the completion of God's program with Israel diminishes God's glory."⁴³

Contrasts

Both CT and DT are intricately tied to hermeneutics. Both systems view the Bible in a certain way that guides adherents in their understanding of biblical passages. Some examples follow.

DT recognizes that God has had different stewardships for various people groups as revealed progressively in the Bible.

CT understands the church as originating with Abraham, or even earlier, and continuing through God's entire program in the Scriptures. DT sees the church as a New Testament entity beginning in Acts 2. Thus, in DT there are two peoples of God highlighted in the Scriptures, but only one in CT.

A further implication with ascribing characteristics of the nature of Israel's national covenant community to the church are far-reaching. Through this, unregenerate people can be structurally included in the church, according to CT. DT does not observe this circumstance in the New Testament.

While CT recognizes distinctions in the Bible's history in how God administers His purpose, its adherents tend to see much more uniformity between God's plan in the Old and New Testaments. An example of this is their understanding that infant baptism replaces Old Testament circumcision.⁴⁴ The church now replaces Israel. CT reinterprets biblical passages and prophecies given to Israel.

The hermeneutical implications to this issue are significant. To DT, if the church replaces Israel, then the promises made to Israel are now inherited by the church. Hence, CT has to change those promises in some way since many of them involve returning to and living in the physical land. That interpretation goes beyond the literal not only as to the recipients but also in regard to the content. Dispensationalists wonder, "If God can permanently remove blessings that He promised someone, what good are His promises to me?" Such a possibility is difficult to comprehend.

DT questions CT's commitment to literal hermeneutics when the Abrahamic Covenant is reinterpreted into a Covenant of Grace. Further, DT questions the legitimacy of finding Covenants of Works⁴⁵ or Grace in the Bible.

Covenant theologians question statements by early Dispensationalists that seem to indicate more than one way of salvation.⁴⁶ They also cite Dispensationalism's failure to see the Bible as a unified whole.

DT sees more discontinuity between the Testaments. God has a clear plan for Israel which He will fulfill because of His promises, but He also has a plan for the church in the present time. God will eventually fulfill the prophecies made with Israel literally.

Conclusion

Efforts to harmonize these two systems have not been successful. These systems' hermeneutics approach the Bible from different perspectives. But throughout fundamentalism's history, there has been interaction between the two systems and even cooperation in the early days against the fight against liberal theology that reinterpreted God's Word to attack the foundations of the faith.

While some fundamentalists (and others as well) have eschewed developed theological systems, they do so to their own risk. Numerous churches have been led astray by inconsistent or incoherent interpretations of the Bible that have done

great harm to the cause of Christ. There may be no perfectly devised human system of theology. However, trying to formulate an understanding of God's whole purpose and plan in the Scriptures has kept many fundamentalists focused on the Word and knowledgeably able to contend for the Faith.



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¹ Brooks (1830–97) pastored Walnut Street Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri.

² Scofield (1843–1921) authored the famous Scofield Study Bible.

³ Chafer (1871–1952) served as the first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, an institution that has been historically a strong proponent of dispensationalism.

⁴ See my “What Are the Fundamental Doctrines of the Faith?” *FrontLine* (May/June 2019), 29, no. 3, 34; and Kevin Bauder, “How Fundamentalists Became Separatists,” 8–9, in the same issue of *FrontLine*.

⁵ The Free Presbyterian Church of North America (http://fpcna.org/fpcna_about.asp?localsection=history, accessed 22 May 2019) is an example, along with their training institution, Geneva Reformed Seminary in South Carolina.

⁶ In order to maintain a narrow focus for this brief study, I will mostly limit myself to just two authors who represent each system in its classic sense: Louis Berkhof (Covenant Theology) and Charles Ryrie (Dispensationalism).

⁷ *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990).

⁸ They recognize the “biblical” covenants such as the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants. See note 40.

⁹ For example, see Berkhof's section on “The Different Dispensations of the Covenant,” in his *Systemic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1938), 290–301.

¹⁰ Some would say after the Reformation, but I think a foundational document is Heinrich Bullinger's 1534 *De testament seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* [A Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God], which can be found in English in Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). I believe Zwingli's writings also contain significant foundational understandings that others built upon. See Peter DeJong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), 18, 23–24.

¹¹ The Westminster Confession of Faith contains no mention of the Covenant of Redemption. Some consider the idea behind this covenant as actually a part of the Covenant of Grace; see Berkhof's discussion, *Systemic Theology*, 265; see also 270–71.

¹² Eph. 1:4ff.; 3:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; James 2:5; and 1 Pet. 1:2, in *Systemic Theology*, 266.

¹³ John 5:30, 43; 6:38–40; 17:4–12; Rom. 5:12–21; and 1 Cor. 15:22, in *Systemic Theology*, 266.

¹⁴ Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 267–68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 213; cf. 216. For further explanation, see note 45. The pri-

mary passage for this covenant is Genesis 1–3; other supporting passages provided are Rom. 7:10; 10:5; Gal. 3:13 (213–14). Hos. 6:7 is also used in support (214–15).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 213–15.

¹⁹ This discussion is found in Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 272–76.

²⁰ Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 275–76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

²² *Ibid.*, 276, emphasis his.

²³ For further discussion on what way the unregenerate are in the Covenant of Grace, see Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 288–89.

²⁴ These are especially encapsulated in the “I will be a God to you, and to thy seed after thee,” in Gen. 17:7 and other passages; see Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 277. Berkhof also cites Jer. 31:33; 32:38–40; Ezek. 34:23–25, 30, 31; 36:25–28; 37:26, 27; 2 Cor. 6:16–18; and Heb. 8:10.

²⁵ Cited texts include Job 19:25–27; Pss. 16:11; 73:24–26; Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:33, 34; Ezek. 36:27; Dan. 12:2, 3; Gal. 4:5, 6; Titus 3:7; Heb. 11:7; James. 2:5; in Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 277.

²⁶ Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 277.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 279–80.

²⁸ See discussion, Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 280–81.

²⁹ Darby lived from 1800–82 in Great Britain.

³⁰ Charles Ryrie notes that Scofield followed closely the dispensational scheme outlined by Isaac Watts (1674–1748) rather than Darby in *Dispensationalism*, rev. and expanded (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995, 2007), 76–79.

³¹ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 122–40.

³² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 33. In Eph. 1:10 Ryrie notes a future period mentioned; in Eph. 3:2 he sees the present period; both of these examples, he states, are used in exactly the way a Dispensationalist understands a dispensation; and in Col. 1:25 he sees a past period implied in the text; *ibid.*, 31–32.

³³ This is a rough paraphrase of Ryrie's text, in, *Dispensationalism*, 34–35. In other words, DT does not presume OT saints knew more than the Bible reveals that they knew at that point in biblical history.

³⁴ The list nearly corresponds with Ryrie's text in *Dispensationalism*, 40. Ryrie only considers as “secondary” the well-known characterizations of a dispensation as a test, failure, and judgment. He mentions that a test corresponds to number 2 in the list above, but that a failure may not be a part of a dispensation at all (40–41).

³⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 45. Note his comment on premillennialism too, 46.

³⁶ Adapted from Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 58–65.

³⁷ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 46.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁹ These verses refer to Israel's gathering in the land in a lasting way with boundaries that have never yet been realized in a protected, reconciled relationship with God. Sometimes Gentiles are mentioned as well. A few such passage include Hos. 2:18–23; Joel 3:20–21; Amos 9:14–15; Mic. 2:12–13; 4:1–8; 7:20; Zeph. 3:11–20; and Zech. 14:1–4. This corresponds with other passages such as Rom. 9–11. God's rejection of Israel is described as temporary

Continued on page 29

share is a rejection of any kind of universal metanarratives, or absolute truths. Consequently, they resist systematic approaches to theology and the Bible. For postmodern theologians, theological systems exclude and marginalize to make things fit the system, and, therefore, repress ideas and other interpreters. Instead they use the Bible to affirm their own situation or cause.²⁰ Interpreting the Bible is about contextualizing it for their respective context.

Some evangelicals have also ventured into postmodernism in an attempt for relevancy. Here are a couple of examples. First, the Emergent Church movement sprang up rapidly in the mid-2000s with national figures such as Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, and Mark Driscoll. While emergent church leaders promised relevancy, the movement ultimately has proved to erode theological and moral foundations within Christianity.²¹ Second, and more substantial, is postconservative theology as represented by Stanley Grenz, Roger Olson, and Nancey Murphy. Osborne characterizes their approach as follows: "They believe the emphasis must shift from battles over the Bible, theological details and liberalism to a new constructive theology that is more open to innovation and movement. . . . Postconservatives have abandoned foundationalism and believe that the spiritual experience of the church community should take priority over propositional truth—a relational theology."²² They also take a much softer approach toward dialogue with nonconservatives.

Conclusion: A Call for Vigilance

Christians need to understand what postmodernism is and how it affects hermeneutics. Postmodernism undercuts the very possibility of interpreting and applying the Bible. Throughout church history, followers of Christ have believed that the Bible is God's Word—God's revealed truth about Himself and His works in written form. Postmodernism destroys the concept of objective truth and undermines the interpretive process. The church needs vigilance to promote a high view of Scripture and to handle the Word of God correctly.

Furthermore, believers need to understand postmodernism so that they are better equipped to reach people who are entrenched in a postmodern worldview. Postmodern thinking has greatly affected our culture. Relativism, skepticism, and pluralism are common. Christians need to know how to answer postmoderns' questions and provide a reasonable defense for their faith. The church needs vigilance to share and defend the faith.

Finally, the church needs vigilance to prepare the next generation to face the challenges of postmodernism. Equipping youth with a biblical worldview is essential if they are to avoid the moral and philosophical relativism in our culture. High school and college students are abandoning the church in alarming numbers. Pastors and parents need to equip youth for the postmodern world they will encounter.

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¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 47.

² See Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology: Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2001).

³ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 74.

⁴ Robert McQuilkin and Bradford Mullen, "The Impact of Postmodern Thinking on Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 69–71. Michael Adeyemi Adegbola, "Evangelical Critique of the Influence of Postmodern Worldview on Biblical Hermeneutics, Christian Theology and the Emerging Church Movement (ECM)," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 20 (2015): 67–69.

⁵ Yam Adu-Gyamfi, "Adverse Effects of Postmodernism on Interpretation of the Bible," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 20 (2015): 1. See Kevin Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. K. Vanhoozer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6–9.

⁶ Abdu Murray, *Saving Truth: Finding Meaning and Clarity in a Post-Truth World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 14.

⁷ Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 9–10.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 15th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 57.

⁹ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 13–54.

¹⁰ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 19.

¹¹ Murray, *Saving Truth*, 12–15.

¹² Amy B. Wang, "'Post-Truth' Named 2016 Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries," *Washington Post*, November 16, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/16/post-truth-named-2016-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries/?noredirect=on>.

¹³ These titles provide helpful summaries of postmodernism's hermeneutics: Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and expanded 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 465–520; and John S. Feinberg, *No One like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 95–109.

¹⁴ Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 92.

¹⁵ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 482.

¹⁷ See David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

¹⁸ Adu-Gyamfi, "Adverse Effects of Postmodernism," 7–8.

¹⁹ Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 19–20.

²⁰ Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 16.

²¹ See, for example, Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), and Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

²² Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 402.

Northern California Regional Fellowship

Dan Pelletier

Approximately twenty-five pastors and missionaries serving in Northern California met at Wolf Mountain Camps in Grass Valley, California, for a time of refreshment, encouragement, and challenge from the Word of God. The retreat was planned and promoted by Pastor Kris Solberg of First Baptist Church in Pinole and Pastor Javier Caballero of Grace Baptist Church in Yuba City. These two pastors were former members of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, during their seminary days at Bob Jones University. Their former pastor, Dr. Gary Reimers, who also teaches at Bob Jones Seminary, was the speaker for the retreat. The staff of Wolf Mountain, led by Director Jon Moore and Mike Wareing, did a fantastic job of preparing food and activities for our enjoyment. God blessed with beautiful weather, and the interaction between the pastors was joyous and sweet. Many of the pastors were part of the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International, and others were introduced to FBFI, enjoying copies of *FrontLine* magazine. Pastor Mike Rodgers of Faith Baptist Tabernacle in North Highlands challenged

the pastors to join in the Awake America campaign scheduled for February 3–4, 2020, at the California State Capitol to meet with legislators regarding upcoming bills and proposals that could have a negative effect on the churches in our state. They also learned about the 2020 FBFI Regional Fellowship, which is scheduled for March 9–10 at Faith Baptist Church of Folsom. God is working in the hearts of the pastors and the churches in Northern California. Please pray for God's continued hand of blessing on the ministries of these men who serve faithfully where the mission fields of the world are coming to us.



their lives and as the One who has provided His sufficient understanding of those details through His Word. Their fear of the Lord brings them to a wisdom that enlightens their eyes to live with faith in God and His interpretation of life as revealed in His Scriptures. Word-filled, Word-directed believers interpret and live life God's way because His Word has taught them His trustworthy and just judgments.

Our only proper response to the Word of God and the God of the Word is to delight in the Word. When the nation David led submitted to the sufficiency of their God and His Word, they feared and followed Him. When they believed Him to be insufficient, they turned their backs on Him and His Word and worshipped other gods—gods they hoped and believed would give them what they thought they needed and what they believed God was not providing for them. The same is true of believers today. When we fail to see God and His Word as sufficient, we fail to delight in Him and instead delight in someone or something else. When we do this, we then fail to allow God to define the need and direction for our lives and instead live for the panoply of desires that characterize the lives of unbelievers—desires that move us in the direction of confusion and hopelessness.⁹

Question to Provoke Reflection: Do we give ourselves to a careful exegesis and exposition of the Word whether in its public proclamation, in the back-and-forth of private conversations, or in our own lives lived as reflections of the character and work of God? The Spirit of God through the Word brings new life, shapes believers' interpretations of life (gives wisdom), and equips believers to live with the character of the Savior in every detail of life. As servant-ambassadors of the Lord, we must give ourselves to understanding the meaning of the Word and to relating that meaning to our lives and others', trusting the Spirit of God to work in all our hearts (2 Cor. 4:1–6).

Vv. 11–14: The Word-Driven, Life-Encompassing Definition of the Believers' Need and Reward before God

Moving forward from his call to delight in the Word, David links delight in the Word to the nature of God to protect and reward those who live with the enlightenment that only the Word can give. He declares, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: And in keeping of them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11).

The believer supremely needs the warning that the Word of God provides. Why? Because in the midst of the blessings and burdens of life, believers cannot discern the straying of their own hearts. David cries out to God for cleansing from the unknown sins that spring from his sinful heart. He also begs God to restrain him from willful rebellion that could

overtake and define his life. David desires maturity that leads to blameless living and is antithetical to enslaving rebellion.

After crying out to God for protection, David entreats the Lord to produce in him the promised reward of verse 11. David desires that the words flowing from his mouth and the thoughts ruminating in his heart would find pleasurable acceptance to his God.

David concludes the psalm in verse 14 with the declaration that he belongs to the Creator-God of the beginning of the psalm—the same God of the Word who in revealing Himself makes promises and keeps those promises in the same way He makes them. This God is David's strength. He is David's Redeemer.

Our response—we must allow the Word of God to define our central need: protection from sin—and define for us God's purpose and reward for living: meditations and words that delight God. We need our Redeemer God. We need His strength and stability. Failure to delight in God and His Word led the nation of Israel down the path of enslaving rebellion. In this rebellion, they failed to see the definition and direction God laid out for their lives and, as a result, created for themselves all sorts of false felt needs that they tragically believed would give direction to their lives.

As God's children in the church, we must delight in His all-sufficient Word. He has brought us into a right relationship with Himself by faith. He has defined the need and direction for our lives. He has provided for us all that we need to grow in spiritual maturity by giving us His Word and placing His Spirit within us. When we fail to delight in His Word, we heap to ourselves all types of pseudo-needs that distract us from living with faith in Him. When we delight in God's Word, He delights in the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts. When the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts bring delight to Him, we live in submission to His wonderful plan of conforming us to the image of His Son and find both Him and His Word sufficient to accomplish that plan in every detail of our lives.

Question to Provoke Reflection: When do God and His Word seem silent to us? Sometimes this silence signals God's desire

for us to wait with patient obedience for His work in our lives (Pss. 27, 37, 40, etc.). At other times the Scriptures seem silent to us when we have not wisely and accurately exegeted them, properly applied them to our present circumstances, and surrendered to God's purpose for our lives. He purposes to strengthen our faith and reward us with a greater ability to glorify Him by reflecting His character back to Him and to those around us. We must resist the temptation to fill the times of waiting in our lives with some other self-created need and self-defined reward. Otherwise, we will forsake His sufficient interpretation of life for one of the multiplied false interpretations that, in the end, never deliver what they promise.

**Such is the power
of the living truth
to impart life;
and herein lies
the difference
between the truth
which God has
revealed in His
Word, and truth
which may be
found elsewhere.**

Let us end our consideration of the sufficiency of the Scriptures with words from one of the original articles in *The Fundamentals*.

We go to this Book to find what is in our own hearts and minds. To one who reads it with ever so little spiritual intelligence, there comes a perception of the fact that this Book understands and knows all about him. It lays bare the deepest secrets of his heart, and brings to the surface of his consciousness, out of the unfathomable depths and unexplorable recesses of his own being, "thoughts and intents" whose existence was unsuspected. It reveals man to himself in a way difficult to describe, and absolutely peculiar to itself. It is a faithful mirror which reflects us exactly as we are. It detects our motives, discerns our needs; and having truthfully discovered to us our true selves, it counsels, reproves, exhorts, guides, refreshes, strengthens, and illuminates.

Such is the power of the living truth to impart life; and herein lies the difference between the truth which God has revealed in His Word, and truth which may be found elsewhere. For there is much truth which is not living truth. The multiplication table is truth; but it is not living truth. It has no quickening power. The theorems of geometry are truth; but they are not living truth. Never yet has any man been heard to testify that he had been the wretched and hopeless slave of sin, and had continued in spiritual darkness, fast bound in misery and vice until his eyes were opened by the great truth that two and two make four, or that three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; and that thereby his life had been transformed, his soul delivered from bondage, and his heart filled with joy and peace in believing.¹⁰

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¹Two examples of general psychology textbooks: Richard J. Gerrig, *Psychology and Life*, 20th ed. (Pearson, 2012); Saul Kassin, *Psychology*, 4th ed. (Prentice Hall, 2003).

Fundamentalism and the Hermeneutics of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism

Continued from page 25

(Isa. 54:6–8; Rom. 11:1ff).

⁴⁰For instance, the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–16ff; and others); the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:4–17; 1 Chron. 17:10–14); and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; and others—note it is very clear to whom God made these covenants).

⁴¹Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 48.

⁴²Ibid. The contrast is that all three covenants of CT concern the redemption of humanity. However, not all dispensationalists emphasize this to the degree that Ryrie did. For an excellent discussion on this on this topic, see Douglas Brown, "The Glory of God and Dispensationalism: Revisiting the *Sine Qua Non* of Dispensationalism," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 22, No. 1 (2018): 26–46.

⁴³Brown, "The Glory of God and Dispensationalism," 46.

²William J. Petersen and Randy Petersen, *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century* (Revell, 2000), 129–30. The Petersens recognize that others wrote on the topic of integration before Narramore, but assert that Narramore's work was the most influential.

³For more on the history of integration, as well as some brief discussion on the dangers and value of psychology for believers, consider reading (with all the customary caveats, as applies to all resources listed in these endnotes) David Powlison, "Critiquing Modern Integrationists," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, No. 3, Spring 1993 11 (1993).

⁴For the opportunity to give greater consideration to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture than is possible in this article, consider consulting Bob Kellemen and R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Jeff Forrey (Zondervan, 2014).

⁵Jeff Newman, "Discipleship in the Details," *Faith Pulpit*, October 2009, <https://www.faith.edu/2009/09/discipleship-in-the-details/>.

⁶Please note that the exposition here is brief and targeted. For further study consider starting with C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Crossway Books, 1993).

⁷For a more complete look at general revelation and counseling, consult Doug Bookman's chapter entitled "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling" in John F. MacArthur Jr., Wayne A. Mack, and Master's College Faculty, *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Nelson Reference & Electronic Pub., 1994).

⁸For more explanation and an example, consult this recording: Edward T. Welch, "Personality Tests," *Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation*, April 14, 2016, <https://www.ccef.org/podcast/personality-tests/>.

⁹For a brief but thought-provoking look at the Bible's teaching on human motivation, consider consulting Edward T. Welch, *Motives: Why Do I Do the Things I Do?* (P & R Publishing, 2003).

¹⁰Philip Mauro, "Chapter VII: Life in the Word," *The Fundamentals*, vol. 2, eds. R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, and others (Logos Bible Software, 2005—originally published by BIOLA, 1917), 189–190.

⁴⁴According to Silva, "The organic unity of God's people throughout the ages is a distinctive emphasis of covenant theology. This emphasis in turn has profound implications for our understanding of ecclesiology (including questions of church government, baptism, etc.), of the Christian's use of the Old Testament, and much more" (Walter Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 2007], 309).

⁴⁵"They who deny the covenant of works generally base their denial in part on the fact that there is no record of such a promise in the Bible. And it is perfectly true that Scripture contains no explicit promise of eternal life to Adam. But the threatened penalty clearly implies such a promise" (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216).

⁴⁶See the older Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1115, at John 1:17. However, confusing or misguided language about salvation has been used by CT authors too; see Oswald Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1939), 39; and Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, 614.

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

ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

I just proofed and/or revised Deuteronomy and Proverbs for a Bible translation project, the Lexham English Septuagint (LES). The translation was highly literal; it was originally done by a computer and then smoothed over by organic life forms—who were told not to do too much. The process ended up producing wording like this: “One who puts hand to hands wrongfully shall not go unpunished” (Prov. 11:21).

I saw this verse as I looked over LES page proofs, and I realized I didn’t know what it meant. I just couldn’t piece the wording together. My brain told me there was no meaning in it. And this experience gave me valuable insight into what it’s like to be ignorant of “Biblese,” the somewhat peculiar English sometimes generated by highly literal translation of the Bible.

I was helping translate a translation, but there were other translations I could check to help me. The New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), for example, is a tad more interpretive, as is Brenton’s nineteenth-century English translation. Both of them helped me understand. On Proverbs 11:21, NETS gives, “One who unjustly joins hands will not go unpunished.” And they even offer a note: “I.e., assists in the making of false pledges.” Now I get it. And now I can go back to the literal rendering and see what it’s driving at. “One who puts hand to hands wrongfully” makes better sense now.

Read the more interpretive translations and you suddenly understand not only the verse but the literal translation of the verse that previously was obscure or even opaque.

Indeed, put yourself in the shoes of someone who doesn’t know Biblese. The Bible probably sounds like this to him on a regular basis (if he even listens): “The one who loves instruction loves perception” (Prov. 12:1). Huh? That’s odd. Repeated reading of Biblese such as this can squeeze some meaning out of it, but it sure helps to have a more interpretive translation on hand too.

I was one of the last human life forms to touch the LES before it went out to the public. It was up to me to decide for Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and certain other portions of Scripture what the end reader would see. The LES is a scholarly tool, not a Bible for the church. But still, someone, somewhere, is going to read words (and punctuation marks, and footnotes) I chose. I prayed for my work and asked my church to pray. I was still dealing with words from God. I definitely leaned my work toward the literal, because that was my brief—but I couldn’t bear to let utterly opaque and meaningless English get through. I saw yet again the value of other translation approaches. Literal, formal translation provides one important and useful angle on the text; functional, interpretive translation provides another. Taken together, I get meaning. I achieve understanding.

Mark Ward, PhD, is an academic editor at Lexham Press, a division of Faithlife, makers of Logos Bible Software. His most recent book is *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



Layton Talbert

When the Son of Man Comes,

More than any other Gospel writer, Luke reveals why Jesus told certain parables. In 18:1 Luke explains exactly why Jesus told a story about a widow and a judge. The parable is designed to encourage us to be persistent in prayer—that we should keep praying and never give up praying.

What does the purpose statement of 18:1 imply? Why would we *need* to be encouraged to keep praying? Why might we become disheartened? We are tempted to give up praying when prayer doesn't seem to be doing any good because nothing seems to be happening; God does not seem to be answering or even hearing.

Have you ever felt like that? So *why should* we keep praying? That's the question Jesus answers—not just *that* we should keep praying, but *why*. What does the Lord say to motivate us to never give up on prayer? He tells a parable (Luke 18:1–8).

The Context

Why does Jesus tell *this* story right *here*? Back up to 17:20, when the Pharisees interrogated Jesus about *when the kingdom of God would come*. Jesus answered their question by describing what it would be like *in the day of the Son of Man* (17:24, 26) when the Son of Man would be revealed (17:30). In other words, the topic of discussion in the previous conversation is *the coming of the Son of Man*. Now, look how Jesus ends the parable He tells next: “Nevertheless *when the Son of man cometh*, shall he find faith on the earth?” (18:8). He ties this parable about prayer to the same topic—His return.

The Parable

Against that backdrop, let's look more closely at exactly what Jesus is teaching in Luke 18. After informing us of the story's theme and purpose (18:1), Luke records the story itself:

There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

What is Jesus' point? Many look at the widow for the message of the parable. *But that's not what Jesus does*. Jesus never directs our attention to the widow; He never mentions

the widow again. If we focus on the widow, we miss Jesus' whole point!

If we're going to interpret and apply Jesus' parable correctly, we need to do what Jesus says to do. What specific part of the story does Jesus draw attention to? He wants us to pay attention to the *judge*: “Hear what the unjust judge saith” (18:6). Listen to the words that come out of *his* mouth, Jesus says; they reveal something important about his character and what motivates him.

Why does Jesus call attention to that part of the parable? What does He do with that? In other words, *how does Jesus interpret and apply His own parable*? He explains (18:7).

And shall not God [in contrast to the judge] avenge his own elect [in contrast to a random widow with no relation to or claim on the judge], which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Can you hear the tension, almost the contradiction, between those lines? The urgent, ongoing requests of the elect obviously imply *delay*—or else they wouldn't have to keep crying out to him night and day. Delay is why we need to be exhorted to keep praying and not to lose heart. And yet, Jesus says, God is eager to be able to display swift vengeance on behalf of His chosen ones. Divine delay in answering our prayers (18:7) is juxtaposed with divine eagerness to answer our prayers swiftly when the time comes (18:8).

But that's not the end of Jesus' application of the parable. He ends with a searching question:

I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

The question is purposefully open-ended. The question is designed to leverage faith in His people. He tells this story so that we would keep on praying even in the face of discouraging delay. His final question raises the possibility that before He returns to make everything right, some will lose heart and just quit praying.

Jesus' final question also implies that the real failure this passage seeks to counter is not *merely* a failure to pray; that's only an external symptom of a deeper problem. It is a failure of *faith* that leads to a failure to pray. But a failure of faith in what?

The text reads literally, “Will he find *the* faith on the earth?” The definite article (“the”) functions here as a demonstrative

Will He Find Faith? (Luke 18:1–8)

pronoun—“Will he find *that kind of* faith on the earth?” With this story Jesus is leveraging the faith of His people in the character of God Himself. Will God’s people *believe in the character of God* enough to keep praying even in the face of delay and apparent inaction on God’s part?

Jesus taught this parable not to encourage us to be like the widow; that’s not who He draws our attention to in the story. Jesus taught this parable *to remind us that God is **not** like that unjust judge*. That’s why we should never lose heart. He wants to confirm our confidence in the character of God: His compassionate awareness of His elect (the emotional point of the parable) and His passionate commitment to justice on their behalf (the theological point of the parable), so that in spite of long delays where God does not seem to answer, we should never assume He doesn’t hear or doesn’t care and quit praying (the applicational point of the parable).

Points of Contact

Parables function by making a point of contact with reality. Usually that point of contact emphasizes a *similarity*. Sometimes a parable works by emphasizing a *dissimilarity*. And sometimes a parable does both.

This parable has three points of comparison between God and the unjust judge. (1) Like the unjust judge, God *is* a judge (i.e., He is in a position to do something about injustice). (2) Like the unjust judge *finally* does in the story, God *will* do justice. And (3) as with the unjust judge, there may be delay.

But even the points of comparison underscore the vast *differences* between God and this judge. (1) The unjust judge is, well, unjust; but God is flawlessly and unfailingly just. (2) The unjust judge doesn’t care about people, but God cares deeply, not only because He is righteous but also because we are His own elect. And (3) the unjust judge acts slowly and unwillingly and purely out of self-interest, but God is so eager to intervene that when the time comes to act He will execute justice *swiftly*.

God is not like an unjust judge who needs to be badgered into doing right or answering our cries. God is already deeply motivated, both by His own character and by His care for His own chosen ones. He’s not like a crooked, uncaring judge who has to be begged and cajoled to intervene. The parable is not about the widow, so it’s not about us and how hard we have to pray; it’s about the judge, so it’s about God and

how compassionate and righteous He really is (even when it doesn’t look like it).

Message and Application

Never give up praying, because God is just and eager and certain to vindicate His children swiftly, though not necessarily soon; that’s why we are urged to never give up praying.

The specific context is prayer for justice, intervention, vindication—especially in the face of delay while we await the Lord’s return—and it is in that circumstance that this passage carries the most weight. That may seem impractical or inapplicable to many of us. But are we not often frustrated when injustice and corruption and deceit seem to prevail with little or no consequence? Do we pray over these wrongs in faith that God *will* rectify them? Moreover, the earth today is full of places where these kinds of concerns and pleas *are* uppermost in the minds of God’s persecuted people.

This parable is not about believing in *prayer*, or the *power* of prayer, or the potency of persistence in prayer. This parable is about believing in *God* and the *character* of God. *That’s what gives prayer all its value and efficacy in the first place*. We need confidence in the *character* of our God.

Persistence in prayer is our calling but not our confidence. Christ grounds our confidence for prayer not in our persistence but in our God—not merely in His power (His ability to answer) but in His character (His willingness and determination and eagerness to answer).

The parable does encourage us to persevere in prayer but not because perseverance makes prayer powerful or irresistible to God. If you are His child, His chosen one, that alone makes prayer powerful and irresistible to God. Jesus throws all the weight of His teaching and application onto one side of the parable: how we view God, especially when He seems to us to be inactive or uncaring. Jesus assures us that’s *never* the case. Christ is urging us: “When it looks that way, it’s not. I can’t tell you how invested God is in His children, and how eager He is to intervene and side with them when that time comes, so that if and when He does delay it is always for just and loving reasons. And it is only temporary.” We can rest in that confidence, so that when the Son of Man comes he will find that praying faith in us.

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The Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic

Continued from page 11

the errors of past generations by meticulous application of the literal hermeneutic in their preaching and practice. Because of who God is and our desire to know Him deeply, the study of the Bible is a sacred trust. This study begins with hermeneutics.

Alan D. Cole (ThD, Central Baptist Theological Seminary) is a professor of Bible and Theology at Faith Baptist Bible College, where he also chairs the Bible-Theology Division. He has taught in Brazil and Peru and served as an interim pastor in southern Iowa. He and his wife, Nancy, have been married for twenty-nine years and have two grown sons.



¹ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 1:61.

² Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1991), 29.

³ Philo of Alexandria, *The Allegories of the Sacred Laws*, Book 1, 19 (Bohn's edition) as found in Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 163. Terry does not hold to this interpretation but cites it as an example of an allegorical approach.

⁴ *The Epistle of Barnabas*, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, rev. ed. (1885; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:143.

⁵ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 36.

⁶ Greg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 164. Allison is drawing from Origen, *First Principles*, 4.1.11 (from the Latin ed.), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, 10 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 4:359.

⁷ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 36.

⁸ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 165–67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 167–68.

¹⁰ John Cassian, “Cassian’s Conferences,” 14, chap. 8, in *Nicene- and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, 2nd ser., 14 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 11:437; as cited by Allison, *Historical Theology*, 169. See also Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 40. Robert Grant provides the following translation: “The letter shows us what God and our fathers did; The allegory shows where our faith is hid; The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life; The analogy shows us where we end our strife” (Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963], 119).

¹¹ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 43.

¹² Allison, *Historical Theology*, 169–72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 173–77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁵ Kevin Bauder, *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order* (Schaumburg: Regular Baptist Press, 2012), 13–14.

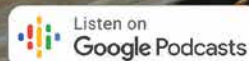
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 147.

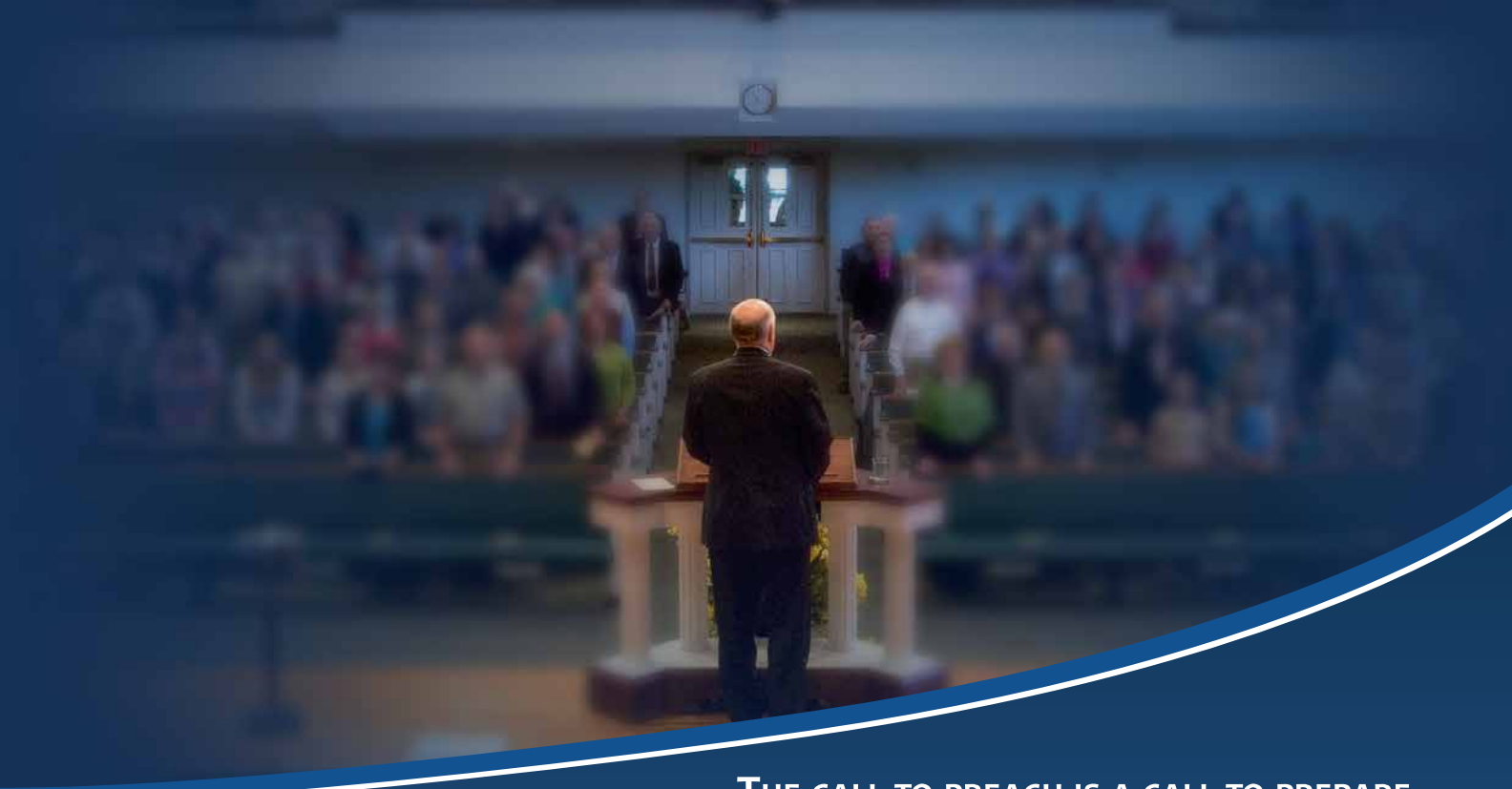
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Arlington Ladies



"The Arlington Ladies are a group of volunteers who attend funeral services at Arlington National Cemetery to ensure that no Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, or Coast Guardsman is buried alone. The Arlington Ladies began in 1948 within the Air Force. . . ."

Upon receiving word that my husband's next duty assignment was to be the Senior Army Chaplain at Arlington National Cemetery, I began researching ways I could become involved. I knew this was going to be a different assignment from any other we had been given. While this assignment was not even on our radar, so to speak, once we received orders, we began getting excited about it. While PCSing (moving) is not one of my favorite things to do, as with any other assignment, I realized this was yet again God's calling on our lives, and I knew we would make the most of it. Because we would not be close to family, as we had been in our previous assignment, I knew I would have more available time, so I wanted to check out some volunteer opportunities.

I first checked into the Arlington Ladies on a house-hunting trip we made up to Arlington, Virginia, in June 2019. The Arlington Ladies have an office across from the chaplain unit ministry team office area, and I was able to meet several of the ladies who were serving on that particular day.

Once we had officially made the move to Arlington (living one block outside the Army post connecting to the cemetery) and Mike had signed in to his new assignment, I began to make the connection with the head Army Arlington Lady, who would in turn be making the decision as to whether I would be accepted into their group. There were a couple of qualifications to be met—(1) a recommendation and (2) having some connection to the respective service (either as a current or former military member or as a spouse of a military member). Upon meeting those two criteria, I had my initial interview with the head Army Arlington Lady. After that, I received my packet of information and guidelines and set up two times to "shadow" an Arlington Lady at services. After completing those "shadowings," I was then placed on the substitute list.

There are two ladies assigned each day of the week, so sixty ladies are on the regular list. I will be placed on the regular list once a lady either moves away or decides she can no longer continue. Right now there are about ten of us on the sub list; I may be on the sub list for a year or more and can be called any time a lady needs someone to take her place for any reason. I have

been called and used quite often.

The mission of the Arlington Ladies is considered to be an official part of the funeral service, representing the military Chief of Staff. We have an escort, which is

also the driver, and we ride in the vehicle with the officiating chaplain. Upon arriving at the gravesite, we stand along the road at attention as the remains and family procession arrive. We then walk to the site where the service and military honors are given by the chaplain and the detail. Upon completion of the military honors, the Arlington Lady is then escorted to the next of kin in order to speak some heartfelt condolences and to present a handwritten card on special stationery on behalf of the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Army family, and from the Arlington Lady herself. After this is complete, the Arlington Lady is then escorted back to the car.

Any Arlington Lady will attest to the fact that we do not take this whole process lightly. I for one feel it is very important to speak brief words of encouragement to the next of kin as well as to let them know I am praying that they will know God's peace and comfort during their time of grief.

This role is so different from any other duty station or volunteer position I have been involved in, but I am so grateful for the opportunity to, in some small way, have an impact on the lives of those grieving from the loss of their service member. For however long we are up in the DC area, I will be able to remain an Arlington Lady. It is definitely an honor to serve.

Cheryl Weniger Shellman is the wife of Chaplain Mike Shellman, who is stationed at Arlington National Cemetery. Cheryl has a BS degree from Bob Jones University in Elementary Education and has taught school for over fifteen years. Cheryl is the mother of three daughters, all of which are married, and she has three grandsons and one granddaughter.



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Attitude Affects Outcome



Recently I had a meeting out West. I stayed in a bed-and-breakfast with a wonderful Christian couple who owned it. They had a daughter who was a senior in high school. One morning as I was coming downstairs for breakfast, their daughter was ready to walk out the door. I said to her, "Are you going to school?" She looked at me with a downcast expression and answered, "Yes, sadly." So I stopped her and said, "Now listen to me. Tomorrow, when you are ready to leave for school, I am going to say to you, 'Are you going to school?' I want you to put a smile on your face and say, 'Yes! cheerfully!'" So the next day she did exactly as I asked her to do. We had a good laugh, and I told her how our attitude can affect our outcome.

We examine people in the Word of God and observe that the same is true of them. I want us to first look at some individuals who had a negative attitude. In 2 Kings 7 the prophet Elisha prophesied that the Lord would give a great supply of food to the children of Israel. But the king's top counselor was full of disbelief and said in essence that it could not happen. We read this account in verses 1-2:

Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

This man's response was one of disbelief; he mocked the prophet of God by essentially stating, "If God made windows in heaven, then this thing might happen." Now take note of what happened to this man in 2 Kings 7:18-20:

And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria: And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with

thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

This man's attitude of disbelief cost him his life!

In the New Testament we read the account of a man whose attitude was one of doubt concerning the Lord's resurrection. We find in John 20 a disciple who doubted that Jesus arose from the dead; this disciple's name was Thomas. Verse 25 says, "The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Then when the Lord Jesus said to Thomas in verse 27, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing," Thomas's response in verse 28 was, "My Lord and my God." His doubt was taken away; however, the outcome of his attitude of doubt is that he is always referred to as "Doubting Thomas."

Now we will look at the positive outcome of one's attitude. We find in the Old Testament that David was a man with an attitude of courage in the Lord. When Goliath defied the armies of Israel, David said in 1 Samuel 17:45, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." We know the rest of the story—David killed Goliath because of his attitude of confidence and courage in the Lord.

Another example is that of Job. Job's attitude was one of total trust in the Lord. Here we find one of the wealthiest men in the East completely stripped of his wealth, family, and health. Yet he voiced in Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." The outcome of Job's trust in the Lord is that his life has blessed and encouraged God's people in every generation.

May our attitude be a positive one to bless others as did these men of God.

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

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