

March/April 2020 • \$3.95

FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



THE FUNDAMENTALS:
Salvation



The Fundamentals: Salvation



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Salvation through Christ: The Heart of the Faith

My mother is a modern-day “Mary of Bethany.” Until recently, when her health no longer allowed it, for decades she spent hours a day, every day, in the wee hours of the morning in the Word and prayer. She knows God and walks with Him. Her heart burns with love for God and the souls of men—especially Jews who don’t know Christ, but really for everybody she meets who does not know Him. She wants people to be saved!

For Mom the heart of the Faith is salvation through Christ. She is not a theologian, but her thinking is clear and spot-on theologically. If we are rightly aligned with the teaching of Scripture, that will be the heart of the Faith for all of us. Knowing what salvation is in its many dimensions, what Christ did to achieve it for us, the ongoing benefits of it, and our privilege to bear this message to all men are at the very core of biblical Christianity.

In this issue of *FrontLine*, one in a series on the fundamentals of the Faith, we have focused on the doctrine of salvation. Theologians call the doctrine of salvation “soteriology.” It is a term derived from the word in New Testament Greek translated “to save” or “to be saved.”

This issue begins with an important, orienting article by Layton Talbert (professor of Theology at Bob Jones University Seminary) that gives enlightening explanations of the many terms used to describe our salvation in Scripture and their relationship with each other. Pastor Kent Ramler (senior pastor of the People’s Baptist Church in Frederick, Maryland) then helps us understand the vital part repentance plays in trusting Christ for salvation in contrast to what is called “easy-believism.” Brian Hand (professor

of New Testament at Bob Jones University Seminary) follows by shining the light of truth on the error known as the prosperity gospel, a popular, false way of salvation taught in the United States and around the world.

Next, Dave Shumate (general director of MGM International [a mission to Hispanics in North, Central, and South America]) presents the significance and celebration of the believer’s salvation through the death of Christ as commemorated in the Lord’s Supper. Pastor Stephen Russell (senior pastor of Central Baptist Church in Dothan, Alabama) follows by opening the Word to us about the teaching of Scripture concerning salvation from eternal hell in contrast to annihilationism, an old error that has found new life through the writings of some influential evangelical writers. Pastor Mike Harding (senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Troy, Michigan) then explains the true doctrine of salvation in contrast to the gospel of social justice, a highly relevant topic due the growingly popular emphasis on social justice among Bible-believing pastors in America. Pastor Ken Casillas (pastor at Cleveland Park Bible Church and professor of Old Testament at Bob Jones University Seminary) climaxes this issue with an encouraging article on the effects of salvation for us, past, present, and future.

All who know Christ will bear the testimony, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.” His saving grace truly is amazing. May your understanding and gratitude for His great salvation be enriched as you read!

Steve Hankins



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The term “hermeneutics” is an English translation for the Greek word meaning “translation.” One could use it to say it is the hermeneutical explanation, exposition, expression, rendition, or translation of Scriptures or a word. I am NOT a scholar and definitely not one regarding original languages, textual transmission and so on. . . . So strictly from a neophyte’s perspective—left out of the *FrontLine* coverage of hermeneutics is Bible textual transmission and translation. Issues like Textus Receptus versus Westcott Hort’s translation history. In translating a word from its first encounter in manuscripts to later allegorizing that word’s meaning, isn’t that a hermeneutical issue that contributes to covenantal and dispensational differences? I wish *FrontLine* would go into why [there are] so many different versions of the Bible.

Wendy Brant
Zionsville, IN

Gospel Fellowship Association Missions (GFA)

of Greenville, South Carolina, is pleased to announce the launch of its new church staffing website on April 1, 2020. The goal of this Internet-based service is to assist like-minded churches and candidates in fulfilling the following pastoral staff positions: senior pastor, assistant pastor, youth pastor, music director/pastor, church planter, interim pastor, and pastoral intern. Dr. Bruce McAllister, GFA’s director of Ministry Relations, will oversee this effort. For more information go to <https://gfamissions.org/church-staffing/>.



Continue the conversation online at
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Our congratulations to **Dr. Bob Jones III** on his marriage to **Dr. Karen Rowe** of the BJU Division of English Language and Literature. A small, private ceremony was held in the rotunda of the Museum and Gallery building on March 7, 2020. The Art Gallery is very special to them as they serve on the Museum and Gallery board together.



Dr. George Heusinger went to be with the Lord on October 6, 2019, hours after his ninety-fourth birthday. In his early days, he and Marjorie (his wife of almost sixty-five years) ministered to three rural congregations each week, and George was fondly called the “circuit-riding preacher.” In 1959 he and his young family moved to Norfolk, Nebraska, and began Community Bible Church. George served on the boards of Gospel Fellowship Association and Bob Jones University and was a member of Foundations Baptist Fellowship International.

Arin Hess is transitioning out of the pastorate at Community Bible Church in Norfolk, Nebraska, where he has served for the last forty years. He began in 1979 as youth pastor under Dr. George Heusinger and became senior pastor in 2002. He also served as administrator of Park Avenue Christian School, minuteman and national board member of the American Association of Christian Schools, county chair for the Republican Party, and is a current FBFI board member. Arin and his wife, Anne Marie, will be moving to Lincoln, Nebraska, to be closer to family and to help in ministry there. Community Bible Church celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 2019. Gospel Fellowship Association is helping in the search for a pastor.





"So Great Salvation": Facets of Divine Deliverance

Perhaps no single scriptural term is more commonplace to the Christian and more mystifying to the unbeliever than this one: "salvation." What does it mean? Why is it necessary? And how does it happen?

The Narrative of Salvation

Salvation is not just a technical doctrine hammered out in creeds and confessions. It is the overarching story of Scripture, the divine drama. God is the actor, the script is the Bible, the stage is the earth that He Himself constructed long ago. The plot? God who created us—whom we have abandoned and avoided ever since Adam and Eve decided the Serpent's narrative was more likely than the Sovereign's—takes upon Himself to do what is necessary to rescue, redeem, and restore us to the glory, dominion, and fellowship for which He origi-

nally fashioned us. In short, He acts to save us from our sins and from our just sentence of eternal separation from the happiness of His presence. From the *Protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 22:21, Scripture relates the grand story of how God has acted in grace to save His wayward image-bearers.*

But in doing so, God acts under no necessity or obligation. His motive is love. His means is grace. His *modus operandi* is self-sacrifice. And His ultimate goal is to exhibit and share with His creatures the eternal experience of ultimate reality: His glory. As the apostle Paul puts it, God saves sinners "so that in the ages to come He might put on display, in the form of all the kindness He has shown toward us through Christ Jesus, His excessive wealth of grace" (Eph. 2:7, my translation).

The Need of Salvation

The story does not begin with salvation. The very concept of salvation assumes a backstory. Something happened that necessitates our rescue. What is our problem?

Augustine proposed a profoundly descriptive diagnosis for our fallen condition. And like any good doctor, he had a Latin name for it: *incurvitas in se*. We are “curved in on ourselves” and, consequently, twisted away from God. That is the natural posture of our souls: bent away from God and in on ourselves. Isaiah describes the result this way: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one [of us] to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him [Christ, the Lamb of God] the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

Salvation includes deliverance from hell and rescue from sin and its consequential separation from God. That destiny is necessitated not merely by acts we commit but by what we have become, by how sin has affected what we are and twisted our very posture towards God. The necessary end and goal of salvation involves a complete overhaul and rebuilding of our being; in short, it is a *restoration of the original divine image in man*.

Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) has both a negative and positive side. It encompasses both a *predicamental* dimension (salvation *from*) and a *restorational* dimension (salvation *to*). “**Salvation**” is the predicamental umbrella term; the essence of salvation is simply deliverance from danger. The need for and provision of deliverance implies a *mortal danger that requires rescue*. We are solemnly promised, as the consequence of our sinfulness described above, eternal death and separation from God. Escape is impossible; rescue is our only hope.

Atonement, though rare in the New Testament (Rom. 5:11), is the restorational umbrella term; the essence of atonement is reinstatement of a relationship and a destiny—and everything that has to happen to cause that restoration. The word literally originated from a combination of “at” + “one,” so the explanation of atonement as “at-one-ment” is both etymologically and lexically accurate. The need for and provision of atonement implies a *relational rift that requires remedy*. We are alienated from God, whom we have offended by virtue of our wicked works (Col. 1:21; note context). The word “atonement” has been adopted as a comprehensive theological term to express the whole transaction of Christ’s work on the cross.

The story of salvation is so unexpected and the process so multifaceted that God calls upon a host of terms and images to fill out the different dimensions of this redemptive drama. One brief article can furnish only a rough sketch in broad strokes.

The Nature of Salvation

In order to illustrate what being “saved” involves and is like, the New Testament employs a sizable soteriological glossary. Different words for the acts and effects of atonement carry the

reader into different contexts and institutions to illustrate the nature of this complex of transactions.

Redemption takes us into the ancient public marketplace, known as the agora (you can hear it in the basic verb for “redeem,” *agorazo*), and views salvation from a commercial perspective. Redemption signifies regaining ownership of something valued by the payment of a price. In Scripture it depicts salvation as God’s purchase (by blood—Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rev. 5:9), deliverance (from the bondage of sin and its wages—Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Titus 2:14), and consequent ownership of the believer (1 Cor. 6:20; Titus 2:14; Rev. 5:9). We are liberated but not autonomous; we have a new Master.

Reconciliation is a social term that emphasizes the relational perspective of salvation. Both by nature and by choice we are at enmity with the holy God who made us. At the core of being restored to the “at-one-ment” with God that Adam enjoyed before sin wrecked the relationship is an appeasement—a (re)conciliation—of God’s entirely just disposition of wrath and rejection of us because of our sin. What is required to bring about this reconciliation with the God whom we have wantonly disobeyed and offended? Propitiation.

Propitiation transports us into the sacred precincts of the temple and views salvation from the religious perspective of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Propitiation is the appeasement of divine wrath. Of all the words used to define and describe salvation, “propitiation” glitters with a peculiar glory. It is a unique term in the vocabulary of soteriology. With every other soteriological term, man is either the subject or object. We are adopted. We believe. We are born again. We are called. We are cleansed. We are converted. We are delivered. We are elected. We are forgiven. We are justified. We are predestined. We are reconciled. We are regenerated. We repent. We are sanctified. We are saved. But we are not propitiated; God is. We do not propitiate; God does.

Propitiation is the only soteriological action in which God is *both* the subject *and* the object. Propitiation underscores the fact that salvation requires something to happen *among the members of the Godhead*. “God requires propitiation by reason of His justice, and He provides it by reason of His mercy; what justice demanded, love provided” (Griffith-Thomas). The doctrine of propitiation is as much a demonstration of God’s love as it is a manifestation of God’s wrath.

In pagan contexts men must take the initiative, at their own expense, to propitiate the gods. Christianity is different. In fact, Christianity is unique. God takes the initiative in providing the propitiatory sacrifice *to Himself* for man (Rom. 3:25). But the Bible goes even further. Christ not only makes propitiation for our sins, He *is* the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). God takes the initiative in providing the necessary propitiatory sacrifice *of Himself, to Himself*, for man. In providing propitiation God “purposed to direct against His very own self in the person of His Son the full weight of the

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righteous wrath which [sinners] deserved” (Cranfield). God not only took the initiative to provide it; He bore the infinite expense of it in Himself. Propitiation is the one thing that had to happen to God in order to secure my reconciliation to God—and He not only provided it, He became it. Paul expressly links propitiation to justification (Rom. 3:25–26).

Justification carries us into the law court to portray the legal component of salvation. It is the objective, judicial act of God whereby He declares a justly accused individual righteous and in right standing with Him—a position in which all the righteous demands of the law have been met, all the just penalty of sin has been met, and all guilt has thus been removed (Rom. 3–5; Gal. 2). How can God do all this? Through imputation.

Imputation takes us into the world of banking and describes salvation from an *economic* perspective. “Imputation” is a financial term that draws on the facts of accounting. Contrary to some depictions, “imputation” is not a term of supposition or pretending; it is a term of fact (even if unseen) and of reality (even if intangible). No one treats a notice of a direct deposit as a financial “fiction”! The bank functions as though it has received that much money in your account even though no one showed up and counted out dollar bills into the teller’s hand. You operate on the reality that you have that amount of money at your disposal to spend. Romans 3–5 is the believer’s notice of what has been directly deposited and credited to his

account, because of his faith. What, exactly, has been credited to the believer’s account? Via imputation, the penalty for my sin and disobedience has been suffered in my behalf by Christ (Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24), and the perfect righteousness required to be accepted in God’s presence has been fulfilled by Christ in my behalf (Rom. 5:17–19; 10:3–4; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Summary

Salvation is the Bible’s story of God’s gracious rescue and restoration of fallen people, redeeming and reconciling them to Himself by means of propitiation and justification effected through the imputation of the vicarious perfect life and penal death of Christ in the place of guilty sinners when they place their faith and trust in His self-sacrificial work on their behalf.

These are just a few of the facets that flicker and flash in the light of the New Testament. There are so many more that it takes a Bible to expound them, a lifetime to appreciate them, and an eternity to glorify God for so great a salvation.

Dr. Layton Talbert teaches theology at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina, and blogs on Theology in 3D at seminary.bju.edu.



* Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Crossway, 1997), 25. *Protoevangelium* means the first preaching of the gospel.

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The Importance of Repentance for Salvation

Years ago I heard the story of a king who was interviewing people for the position of driver of his carriage. The first candidate asserted that he was good enough to drive the carriage within a foot of a cliff's edge along the mountain pass outside the city. Not to be outdone, the next candidate bragged that he could confidently drive the carriage within six inches of the cliff's edge without mishap. The third candidate shook his head and said that he would stay as far away from the edge as he possibly could. The story concludes with the king hiring the third candidate as his driver and teaches the wisdom of staying as far away from the edge as possible. However, in theological disputes, when one determines to stay as far away from the heretical edge of one position as possible, he often ends up falling off the heretical edge on the other side of the road. Theology is like a road with cliffs on both sides, and extremes on either edge threaten a person's orthodoxy.

Today, controversy swirls around the concept of "repentance" as presented in the New Testament. Some would argue that all one needs is faith to be saved and that repentance is not a part of the gospel. Such thinking has led to an error called "easy-believism," which often manifests itself in people who claim to be Christians because they prayed a prayer saying they believed in Jesus, but their lives evidence no conformity to the image of Christ. Others have overreacted to this error by insisting that a person can be saved only if he repents of his sins, accepts Christ as Lord, and immediately cleans up his life as a disciple of Christ. Much of the controversy centers on the verb "repent" or the noun "repentance" in the New Testament.¹ A careful study of the Greek words used in the New Testament give clarity about what repentance is and its role in a person's salvation.

The Meaning of Repentance

Greek words for repentance are relatively rare in Classical and Hellenistic Greek, the forms of the language in use before the books of the New Testament were written. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by first-cen-

tury Christians, used a few different words for "repentance" to translate the Hebrew word for "turn" or "conversion." By the second century AD, the New Testament Greek word for "repent" that we are focusing on in this article was used almost solely to describe a change of mind about something, a turning about, or conversion.²

The idea of repentance includes a change of mind regarding one's sins but also can involve a change of mind regarding God. Many verses (e.g., Acts 8:22; 2 Cor. 12:21) contain the aspect of repentance as rejecting sin. However, there is another element of repentance. Paul instructs the Ephesian elders that the gospel required all to have repentance toward God (Acts 20:21). Moreover, when Paul was preaching to the pagans in Athens, he called for repentance from their worship of idols and their misunderstanding of God (Acts 17:30; cf. Rev. 9:20). In other words, the Bible teaches that repentance is a change of mind about our sin and about God. To be a Christian in the first century one had to change his mind about his moral condition. He was a sinner. He had to change his mind about who the true God was. He had to change his mind to view Jesus Christ as God. He had to repent.

True repentance resulted in a permanent change of mind, and that change was evident. Matthew 27:3 records that Judas Iscariot repented when he saw what he had done in betraying Christ and then went out and hanged himself. The Greek word translated "repent" in this passage, while a less frequently used term than the main one, does communicate the idea of remorse or regret, but not of *true change*. In contrast, the true repentance of one sinner yields joy in heaven, which implies eternal ramifications as taught in Luke 15:7, 10. True repentance results in the gift of the Holy Spirit in one's life (Acts 2:38), whom Paul later explains is the "earnest" or down payment of our eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:14). It is true repentance that leads to life eternal (Acts 11:18)! And Paul, who wrote so much about grace, stressed that he obediently preached the gospel to all "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20; cf. Matt. 3:8).³

Repentance does not mean to clean up one's life or even to stop sinning. It is a changing of one's mind regarding his sin and the Savior that results in eternal and fruit-bearing transformation—a transformation effected by the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

The Importance of Repentance

True repentance is an important part of the gospel itself. When Luke records the Great Commission in Luke 24, Jesus commands "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Jesus also explained that His purpose for coming to this earth was to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). It appears that calling sinners to repentance and seeking and saving the lost are synonymous (Luke 19:10). In fact, when Jesus sent out His disciples, "they went out, and preached that men should repent" (Mark 6:12). Again, when Paul was explaining his gospel ministry to the Ephesian elders, he testified that his message was that of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Peter reiterates this point when he declares that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). In fact, if one does not repent, He *will* perish (Luke 13:3, 5).

Moreover, frequently the Bible declares that repentance results in essential elements of salvation. For instance, repentance was necessary for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 5:31; 8:22). It led to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25) and to life itself (Acts 11:18).

The Relationship between Repentance and Faith

Though the Bible several times lists repentance as the sole means of salvation, it also often clearly states that faith is the sole means of salvation. In one of the most famous passages regarding salvation, Paul declares that salvation comes "by grace . . . through faith" (Eph. 2:8). He tells the Philippian jailer that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 16:31; cf. John 3:16).

Yet there are times when repentance and faith are listed together as necessary for salvation. For example, when Jesus began preaching the gospel during His earthly ministry, He exhorted His listeners, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paul described his gospel message as preaching "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). The writer of Hebrews states that repentance and faith are foundational to our relationship with Christ (6:1).

Perhaps a good way to reconcile the biblical data is to consider the word "conversion." Acts 3:19 relates Peter's gospel message to the Jews in the temple: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." The word in the language of the New Testament for "converted" is a word that is also commonly translated "turn" in the New Testament.⁴ For example, in Acts 26:20, Paul explains that the gospel impelled him to teach that all men "should repent and turn to God." The same word for "turn" in this passage is the word for "converted" in the first passage. Just two verses earlier, Paul had explained that Jesus had appointed him to open the eyes of the Gentiles and to "turn them from

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in [Jesus]" (26:18). Interestingly, faith in this verse is also connected with conversion. Another passage where faith and conversion are linked is 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10. When the Bible speaks of conversion, faith and repentance are both connected with it. Like a coin with two sides, faith and repentance are two sides of the "conversion coin." One turns from sin while turning to God. True conversion involves both repentance and faith. At times one or the other may be highlighted, but both are necessary for conversion, or else neither is legitimate.

False conversion is the result when one or the other is absent. For instance, when Paul met twelve disciples in Ephesus, he was surprised that they had not received the Holy Spirit. They had repented during John's ministry and had even been baptized, but they had not been introduced to Jesus yet. Their repentance did not save without faith in Christ. Moreover, the opposite is also true. In John 8:30–31, John records that many Jews believed on Jesus and then He addressed them in the verses that follow. As one reads through the passage, it is evident that these Jews are not truly repentant. They had not truly changed their mind about their own sin and the person of Jesus. There was no humility; rather there was a growing agitation at the words of Jesus until they were ready to stone Him. Another example of faith that was not genuine is Simon the Sorcerer. He believed, but Peter makes it clear that he had not truly repented; therefore, he was still in the bond of iniquity and not saved (Acts 8:13, 22–23).

Repentance is the rejection of erroneous thinking about sin and God. Faith is the acceptance of God's truth, a whole-hearted trusting of it. The terms are not synonymous, and both are necessary for salvation. Jesus thought repentance was important enough to include in the Great Commission. He declared it to be the means of forgiveness, true knowledge, and life. A balanced biblical view teaches that salvation without true repentance is no true salvation at all.

Kent Ramler holds a PhD in New Testament Interpretation from Bob Jones University Seminary, where he taught for several years. He has served as the senior pastor of the People's Baptist Church in Frederick, Maryland, for the last ten years.



¹ The words focused on in this article are the verb *metanoeo* and the noun *metanoia*. Both contain the root word *nous*, which is the Greek word for "mind" or "way of thinking."

² Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. IV, *Metanoeo/metanoia in Hellenistic Jewish Literature*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 989–90.

³ In this context, the fruit of repentance would have included humility. Matthew 11:21 states that Tyre would have repented in sackcloth and ashes if its people had seen Jesus' miracles. These were visible signs of brokenness and humility. Such conditions prepare one to be a candidate for God's grace!

⁴ In fact, this word (*epistrepho*) is the Greek word most commonly used to translate the Hebrew word (*shuv*) in the OT, which meant "to turn." It was this Greek word that *metanoeo* would supplant in the early centuries of the Church as the more common word for converting.



NEW TESTAMENT

Salvation According to the Prosperity Gospel

Old falsehoods rarely die. They just lie dormant until someone repackages them more plausibly. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul warns his son in the faith, Timothy, repeatedly against false teachers. Apparently, the false teachers of the first century taught several errors concerning material prosperity. One of the more prominent errors in this regard has reappeared in the Church over the past century. It is the equating of material prosperity with godliness.

Not every error is a serious attack against Christian doctrine and practice; the weight of biblical evidence

and attention given to it in the New Testament determines the seriousness of an error. False doctrine that strikes at the doctrine of salvation rises to such a level of significance that it requires specific description and detailed denunciation. If Paul felt that the blending of material and spiritual concerns threatened the church in his day, believers have every reason to ask of any similar movement today, "What does this teach in regard to salvation?" In the case of the prosperity gospel, one finds that its message of salvation suffers serious defects that contort it into another gospel.

New Thought Philosophy

In the late 1800s a quasireligious philosophy known as New Thought philosophy arose in America.¹ Its advocates taught that the simple activity of human thinking had the power to create a connection with the divine. Because of this connection, positive and negative thoughts may produce a real, specific outcome. If a person believes something, he could make it happen by thinking that it could happen, by imagining it and willing it into existence. The concept of the “divine” within New Thought had no connection with the God of the Bible, however. The “divine” was a universal force or power that allegedly intersected with the divinity in each person. New Thought replaced a biblical perspective on God with an age-old man-centered worship borrowed from Eastern religions. New Thought philosophy influenced or directly spawned numerous cultic and New Age offshoots, such as Scientology, that persist today. Several unorthodox preachers of the era blended New Thought philosophy and Christianity—defending their syncretism on the basis of New Testament statements such as Matthew 21:21–22—“If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Proponents of the Christian New Thought philosophy felt that such passages justified a believe-it-and-achieve-it mentality in which God is bound to yield to the desires of His people. In the preaching of such leaders God effectively loses His sovereignty and becomes a servant who must meet every demand that His people make for success, health, and prosperity in the present time.

In recent decades, New Thought philosophy penetrated Christianity even further through the prosperity gospel.² Kenneth Hagin gave rise to the “Word-Faith” movement. His assertions concerning the believer’s ability to declare and achieve personal success were so strong that he claimed any believers who suffered from sickness, poverty, or any form of lack were directly responsible for their own suffering. The popular preachers Russell Conwell, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, T. D. Jakes, David Yonggi Cho, Creflo Dollar Jr., Frederick Price, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, and Joel Osteen have all promoted some form of the same troubled philosophy, though not to the same degree.

Advocates of the prosperity gospel share some of the same basic weaknesses in their proclamation of the biblical doctrine of salvation. First, their ministries avoid a sustained exposition of the Scriptures. In place of God’s Word, listeners hear a mix of the preacher’s personal opinions, entertaining witticisms, pagan philosophy, self-help speeches, and purportedly new revelations. Since the Scriptures themselves clearly testify that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), any gospel that lacks devotion to the Scriptures is inevitably an admixture of truth and error. By setting aside the primary God-

given tool for spiritual growth, such ministries demonstrate that they “[have] a form of godliness, but [deny] the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5). Nowhere in Scripture is genuine spiritual power measured by the size of the audience or the approval of men. At its heart the prosperity gospel exhibits the rise of a “new word” of uninspired, unorthodox preachers over against the written Word of God.

Second, the prosperity gospel’s imbalanced focus on success as defined by modern Western, capitalistic society squeezes out the true gospel almost entirely. The “gospel” that one hears from such preachers is a gospel of money, physical health, perfect family life, business success, and societal approval. But when one scans the New Testament (or the Old for that matter), one finds that the people of God often, even usually, experienced poverty, sickness, distress, persecution, ostracism, misunderstanding, and even death though directly involved in God-appointed work. One need only look at Job, Moses, Elijah, Micaiah, Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jesus to realize that the prosperity “gospel” preachers are preaching an entirely different gospel than the one found in Scripture. And the gospel of the prosperity preacher is a false gospel that encourages egocentrism and greed. These vices crowd out the true gospel just as surely as weeds overwhelm and choke useful produce in a garden. Jesus and His apostles warn that the message of prosperity evangelists is opposed to the gospel and ultimately destructive of it (Matt. 13:7, 22; 1 Tim. 6:9). Once the motivational speaker has positively affirmed his audience, there is no room left for the preaching of sin, repentance, and the righteous judgment of God upon disobedient people.³ In essence the prosperity gospel exhibits the rise of emotionalism and a humanistic sense of what people believe “should be” over against biblical thinking.

Third, the prosperity gospel replaces Christ with an anti-Christ center for the Christian life.⁴ The goal of the prosperity gospel is not the glory of God through the sanctifying work of the Spirit based on the atonement made by Christ on behalf of the believer. Instead, the goal of the Christian life is self-affirmation and the gospel *is* worldly, temporal gain.⁵ The leaders of such a movement cloak their greed and selfishness in a garb of spirituality through two primary claims. Many preachers of the prosperity gospel equate genuine Christianity with prosperity: if a person is not prosperous, he is not a genuine Christian. Since the leaders of the prosperity gospel movement are wealthy, they must be true believers. The prosper-

ity gospel also equates spiritual maturity with prosperity. If a person is not prosperous, he is a second-class, unfaithful Christian. Since the leaders of the prosperity gospel movement are fabulously rich, they must be especially spiritual. Since many of their followers are not wealthy, they have no right to question someone in authority whom God has so obviously blessed. False doctrine is insulated against critique by the newly proclaimed virtue of prosperity. In essence, the prosperity gospel replaces the objective aspect of salvation (the believer’s right stand-

**The prosperity
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goal of salvation,
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ing before God on the basis of faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross) with a subjective standard (the believer is saved and sanctified in direct proportion to his visible wealth and success).

“Nothing Happens unless We Speak”

Fourth, the prosperity gospel is a short step from occultism and pagan magic in which the spoken word of an individual will produce the effect that he desires. Folk religions, sorcerers, shamans and spiritists throughout the history of the world have sought to manipulate spiritual powers through incantations and magical pronouncements. Devils, spirits, and deities must respond to the words of command that the holy man, witch doctor, or priest speaks. Prosperity theology has sometimes been called “name-it-and-claim-it” theology. For example, Joel Osteen wrote, “If you are not sharing in His favor, you might want to watch your words. Here’s the key: If you don’t unleash your words in the right direction, if you don’t call in a favor, you will not experience those blessings. Nothing happens unless we speak.”⁶ This exaggeration of the power of human words taught by the Word-Faith movement bends God to the will of the individual believer: human desires manipulate true Deity by faith-speech. This theological claim contradicts the uniform testimony of Scripture concerning the sovereignty of God. And James 4:13–16 explicitly calls such pronouncements concerning human success “boasting” and “evil.” They do not represent biblical faith. They represent devilish independence from God. As John MacArthur warned, “The doctrine of prosperity [Word of Faith teachers] has nothing whatsoever to do with the true gospel of Jesus Christ. They are promoting crass superstition blended with false doctrines purloined from assorted Gnostic and metaphysical cults, cloaked in Christian terms and symbols. It is not authentic Christianity.”⁷

Fifth, the prosperity gospel represents an overstatement of the effects of salvation in the present. While it is true that in the *eternal* state the believer will never again experience suffering, poverty, or a lack of success in work (e.g., Rev. 21:3–4; 22:3), the Scriptures neither state nor imply that this freedom from the effects of the Curse will take place in the present age. In fact, in John 16:33, Jesus indicates exactly the opposite. While salvation does bring immediate and growing spiritual peace to the believer, tribulation remains. The prosperity gospel implies that if God *ever* intends any type of good, it will come to fruition now to the fullest extent.

The gospel of wealth has proven to be just as bad as the liberal social gospel that preceded it. The social gospel tried to produce good without God. The prosperity gospel stresses money as salvation, as proof of salvation, as the goal of sal-

Five common weaknesses shared by advocates of the prosperity gospel:

- 1** Their ministries avoid a sustained exposition of the Scriptures.
- 2** Their imbalanced focus on success as defined by modern Western, capitalistic society squeezes out the true gospel almost entirely.
- 3** They replace Christ with an anti-Christ center for the Christian life.
- 4** They are a short step from occultism and pagan magic in which the spoken word of an individual will produce the effect that he desires.
- 5** They present an overstatement of the effects of salvation in the present.

vation, and as evidence of God’s favor. Examining salvation according to the prosperity gospel, one finds that Paul’s warnings concerning false teachers ring true. Those who “corrupt the word of God” (2 Cor. 2:17) by peddling spirituality as a commodity, who “creep into houses, and lead captive” (2 Tim. 3:6) the people of God, who “[suppose] that gain is godliness” (1 Tim. 6:5), and who “desire to be rich” (1 Tim. 6:9) have swerved aside from the true gospel. And God’s attitude toward alternative gospels is unmistakably clear (Gal. 1:6–9). He opposes and condemns them, consigning the propagators thereof to eternal destruction.

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¹ Simon Coleman shows the origins of New Thought philosophy in the works of Phineas Quimby (*The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* [Cambridge: University Press, 2000], 43).

² Numerous writers trace the direct genealogical links between pagan New Thought philosophers and their Christian counterparts. For example, see Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

³ One classic example of this phenomenon appears in multiple interviews between Larry King and Joel Osteen, in which Osteen refused to affirm biblical doctrines of Christ, sin, salvation, and eternity. Given multiple opportunities to clarify his position, Osteen evaded every one of them and left the listener with a gospel of his own making. In some interviews, he never mentions Jesus. The interviews are available at numerous sites, including <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWnOIHVnqw> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVvVEDSZuZw>.

⁴ See the excellent critique made by David Jones and Russell Woodbridge in *Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 14–15.

⁵ As Russell Conwell famously said in his “Acres of Diamonds” speech (given thousands of times throughout America and widely available in print and audio form), “Why don’t you preach the gospel instead of preaching about man’s making money?” “Because to make money honestly is to preach the gospel” (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/rconwellacresofdiamonds.htm>, accessed 3 June 2019).

⁶ Joel Osteen, *It’s Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God’s Favor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 125. Similar claims and attitudes appear in Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: Faith Words, 2004) and *Become a Better You* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007).

⁷ John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013), 9.

Bread and Wine or Body and Blood?



Recently, evangelical pastor Francis Chan preached a message emphasizing the importance of the Lord's Supper in which he seemed to endorse the position that when believers partake of the bread and wine, they are partaking "in some real way" in Christ's literal body and blood.¹ This assertion even made the secular news, along with praise from Roman Catholics for Pastor Chan's apparent movement toward their position on Communion.²

Although conservative Evangelicals and biblical fundamentalists from various denominational backgrounds have some important differences over the Lord's Supper, most agree that Christ's literal, resurrected body is in heaven, not in the elements eaten during the Lord's Supper.³ This is in sharp contrast with the views of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, and others who hold that Christ's body and blood are physically in the elements and are physically consumed by the participants. This is not simply an esoteric debate about an unimportant matter; rather, it has important implications for our understanding of Christ and His gospel. Any attempt to make the observance of the Lord's Supper more meaningful must not obscure or confuse the truth about our Savior and our salvation.

Identification of the Literal Views

All the physical-presence views share the claim that when Christ said, "This is my body," during the Last Supper, He was speaking literally rather than metaphorically. For example, official Roman Catholic teaching is that during the mass when the priest speaks these words, the essence of the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. This change is called "transubstantiation" ("a change of substance or essence").

Consequently, Catholic teaching promotes the worship of the consecrated elements as the worship of the resurrected Savior Himself. It also affirms that in the mass, the sacrifice of Christ is "re-presented" (made present) "in an unbloody manner," and that the sacrifice confers grace upon the participants.⁴ The Eastern Orthodox Church, while not delving into the finer points of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, also believes that the bread and wine are in fact the body and blood of Christ.⁵

Luther, along with rest of the Reformers, rejected aspects of the Roman Catholic mass, including the idea that it is a propitiatory sacrifice and that by the priest's words the bread

and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ.

However, he retained a literal view of Christ's statement and argued that the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the elements, being "with, in, and under" them, and are truly consumed physically as spiritual nourishment to those who believe. This view has become known as "consubstantiation" ("with the substance or essence"), although the term is often disfavored by Lutheran theologians.⁶

As we will see, the literal views are untenable because they contradict both sound scriptural interpretation and sound theology.

Faulty Biblical Interpretation

When it said that theological conservatives take the Bible "literally," this is really shorthand for saying that we interpret the Bible normally, according to its context. Literal interpretation, therefore, does not preclude figures of speech, because they are part of normal communication. At the Last Supper the Lord used the words "this is my body" and "this is my blood." In context, it is not reasonable that this should have been intended literally, but rather, as a common figure of speech.

Both the Old and New Testament abound with figures of speech. Jesus used them often, including the use of the verb "to be" (as we have in the passages describing the Lord's Supper).⁷ Explaining the parable of the four types of soil, Christ said, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). Similarly, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, He explained, "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one" (Matt. 13:38). Notice that in both cases when He says "is," He means "represents" or "symbolizes." The same construction would have been the natural way for Him to explain the symbolism of the Lord's Supper.



Why It Matters

The Last Supper took place at the time of the Passover celebration and the associated feast of Unleavened

Bread. At the Old Testament inauguration of this festival, Moses emphasized its symbolic and memorial function by instructing the Israelites to explain to their children what it meant, calling it a “sign” (Exod. 13:8–9). In the context of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, it would have been natural for Christ to explain what the new ceremony symbolized just as Moses did for the old.

Not only does the general context favor a figurative interpretation of Christ’s words, but the specific circumstances demand it. Jesus was sitting in front of them when He spoke those words. They knew that they were eating bread and drinking wine, *not* His body and blood. To think otherwise would have involved a direct violation of the Law, since eating of blood of any type was explicitly and repeatedly forbidden (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:12–14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23).⁸

Finally, the Lord’s own words preclude the idea that he was speaking literally. After He distributed the elements, He still called the wine of the supper “this fruit of the vine” (Matt. 26:29). In the same way, Paul, when summing up the Communion states, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come,” three times calling the first element of the Supper “bread” (1 Cor. 11:26–28).⁹

Faulty Teaching about Christ

The literal view not only reflects faulty interpretation but also undermines essential Biblical teaching about the person of Christ. The literal view requires that Christ’s physical body be simultaneously in heaven and in many places on earth at the same time. Roman Catholic doctrine has the priest calling down the body and blood of Christ from heaven and then “re-presenting” them sacrificially.

While Luther rejected the Roman Catholic idea that the Communion is a sacrifice, he also held to the literal interpretation of the words “This is my body.” When challenged with how the resurrected body of Jesus could be both in heaven and in the Eucharist, he responded that, as God, Christ has the attribute of omnipresence (being everywhere present). Therefore, Luther held that when Christ became Man, this quality of His divine nature was communicated to His human nature, so that his body could be present in many places at once. The Bible is plain, however, that Christ possesses a true and complete human nature. That means, among other things, that His body was just like our bodies, except without sin (Rom. 1:3; Heb. 2:14; 4:15). At the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, the church rightly condemned the view that the human nature of Christ was in any way mixed with or changed by His divine nature. Therefore, although Christ is both divine and human, his divine nature remains completely and genuinely divine and His human nature completely and genuinely human.

Even after the resurrection, although Christ is glorified, He still has a physical body. This was the chief proof of His resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). After His ascension to heaven, Christ remains at the right hand of the Father, continually interceding for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 8:1) and waiting for the time of His Second Coming (Acts 1:11; 2:34–35; 3:21). None of these statements would make sense if Christ were already here physically.¹⁰ Furthermore, Paul teaches that although Christ dwells in us by His Spirit (Rom. 8:9), while we are in these bodies, we are absent from Him (2 Cor. 5:6).

Faulty Teaching about Salvation

The physical presence view also threatens the biblical understanding of salvation. First, by distorting the nature of Christ’s humanity, it undermines His role as the Savior of humanity. Only the fully human Messiah could justify us by living a perfect life and dying a substitutionary death for us (Gal. 4:4). Only the fully human High Priest can represent us before the Father, being “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). Only the fully human, resurrected Christ can be the firstfruits of them that have died in Him, guaranteeing our resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20–21) and bringing many brothers and sisters to glory (Heb. 2:10–11).

The belief in Christ’s bodily presence in the Lord’s Supper also undermines a clear understanding of the gospel of

salvation by grace through faith. Christ died once for all (Heb. 9:24–28), a fact verified by His cry of victory on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30) and by His sitting down at the Father’s right hand after His ascension (Heb. 1:3; 8:1). By His once-for-all sacrifice He completely sanctifies those who come to Him (Heb. 10:11–14).

To obtain the benefits of this sacrifice, we are not called to re-offer Him, but to *believe* in Him (John 6:29; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22). Christ taught that eternal life comes through believing in Him (John 6:47), concluding, “The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). As Strong puts it,

The Lord’s Supper, like Baptism, is the symbol of a previous state of grace. It has in itself no regenerating and no sanctifying power, but is the symbol by which the relation of the believer to Christ, his sanctifier, is vividly expressed and strongly confirmed.¹¹

For our participation in the Lord’s Supper to be profitable therefore, it must focus our attention, not to itself, but on Christ and His finished work on the cross. As the Lord commanded us, “This do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–25).

The True Value of the Lord’s Table

None of this is to say that the Lord’s Supper is unimportant or that it is empty symbolism. As a communal meal it expresses our genuine spiritual communion with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:16) and our salvation through His sacrifice on Calvary (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25). Participation in Communion must be undertaken reverently and with thorough self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28–30).

We should strive to deeply respect the Lord’s Supper and prevent it from becoming a mere ritual. In doing so, however, we must consider carefully the theological consequences of the positions that we take. Respect for the ordinance does not allow us to propose doctrines, such as the physical presence or the communication of grace through rituals, that are not taught in Scripture and that obscure the simplicity of the gospel. It would be a great tragedy if, from a desire to honor a beautiful and powerful symbol and confirmation, we undermined the reality that it symbolizes and confirms.

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This is not simply an esoteric debate about an unimportant matter; rather, it has important implications for our understanding of Christ and His gospel.

³ Theologians typically identify four views: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, spiritual-real, and memorial, although some group the last two together.

⁴ “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” Part 2, Section 2, Article 3.

⁵ See, for example, the Orthodox Church in America, “Thus, the bread of the eucharist is Christ’s flesh, and Christ’s flesh is the eucharistic bread. The two are brought together into one” (<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-eucharist>, accessed Feb. 19, 2020).

⁶ For a fuller explanation of the historical Lutheran position see *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church*, “The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord,” Ch. 7 “The Holy Supper,” <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-supper.php> (accessed Feb. 21, 2020).

⁷ For example:

“Ye are the salt of the earth. . . . Ye are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13–14).

“For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35).

“Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).

“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34.)

“I am that bread of life” (John 6:48).

“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5).

“I am the door of the sheep. . . . All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers” (John 10:7–8).

“I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11).

“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep” (John 10:26).

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1).

“I am the vine, ye are the branches” (John 15:5).

⁸ It seems inconceivable that Peter, who even after having received the Spirit, refused three times the direct command of the Lord in a vision to eat an unclean animal (Acts 11:7–10), would without as much as a murmur eat what he thought was human flesh and drink what he thought was human blood.

⁹ Thus, the literal view is forced to have Paul using the word “bread” figuratively in this passage.

¹⁰ Nor would any of the following make sense: (1) the fact that He spoke of going away to His Father; (2) the fact that He physically ascended into heaven; (3) the fact that He sent the Holy Spirit to represent Him; the fact that Stephen saw Him standing at the right hand of God, waiting to receive His spirit; and (4) the fact that He is coming again. All these teachings present the resurrected and ascended Lord’s physical presence as localized. To talk about His body being localized but also ubiquitous reflects philosophical speculation foreign to the Bible.

¹¹ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* (The Griffith and Rowland Press: 1910), The Open Library, <https://ia802706.us.archive.org/13/items/systematictheolo00stro/systematictheolo00stro.pdf> (accessed Feb. 24, 2020), 964.



Salvation from Nothingness

Is Annihilationism Taught in the Scriptures?

The term “annihilationism” seldom finds its way into your pastor’s Sunday message or small-group discussions at your church, but this concept could impact your next witnessing opportunity with a neighbor or coworker. Most believers picture heaven as a place of reward and eternal fellowship with God; in contrast, hell is a place of endless punishment and conscious suffering separated from God. Annihilationism advocates believe that unredeemed people will be judged for their sins and eternally separated from God, but at some point they will cease to exist. The effect of their punishment may be eternal, but their suffering will not be.

Variations on the Theme of Annihilationism

At the beginning of the twentieth century, renowned conservative theologian Benjamin B. Warfield identified several variations within annihilationism.¹ First, “pure mortalism” holds that human life is “bound up in the organism,” and at death a person simply ceases to exist. Essentially this is the philosophy of all who deny the existence of God and life after death. Warfield then described “conditional immortality,” a belief that humans are born with a conscious but mortal soul/spirit. Eternal life (immortality) is granted to those who place saving faith in God; all others are judged

in some manner for their sin and then cease to exist. Finally, “annihilationism proper” holds that all men are born with an immortal soul/spirit. Those who die unredeemed will be punished for their sins in a “second death,” where that soul/spirit is consumed and existence ends.

Annihilationism is referenced as early as the fourth century in theological writings, but the concept was subsequently refuted and condemned by two different church councils.² Early in the 1800s the doctrine reappeared in writings by several European theologians. At the same time in North America, annihilationism became the official position of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.³ In the 1980s the concept of annihilationism migrated into evangelical churches through the writings of Anglican theologian John R. W. Stott and Clark Pinnock, the chief apologist for Open Theism.⁴ Recent advocates for this position are Edward Fudge, a Church of Christ theologian, and Christopher M. Date.⁵

Common Arguments for Annihilationism

Advocates of annihilationism usually accept the inspiration and authority of Scripture. They believe that the concept of eternal conscious punishment in hell was strongly influenced by Greek philosophy and based upon incorrect

interpretation of Scripture. Advocates offer several arguments for this position.

1. The New Testament frequently speaks of *death*, *perishing*, and *destruction*, which imply the end of existence. It also mentions fire, the main purpose of which is to destroy rather than to cause pain. . . .
2. God's justice cannot demand infinite punishment for finite sin.
3. Several New Testament texts stress the final universal reign of God the Father and/or the Son (1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10, Phil. 2:10–11; Col. 1:20), and this is hard to reconcile with the continued existence of hell.⁶

A fourth argument observes that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and eternal conscious punishment is inconsistent with His infinite loving nature. Though He must punish sinners in some manner, God will mercifully bring that punishment to a close when sinners cease to exist after the Great White Throne judgment.⁷

Rev. William C. Procter, writing a century ago in *The Fundamentals*, answered the annihilationist theories primarily from Jesus' own words recorded in the Gospels.

The current objections to the orthodox doctrine of hell are made by those who allow their hearts to run away with their heads, and are founded more on sickly sentimentality than on sound scholarship. In considering the subject as professing Christians, the word of the Master Himself, ought surely to put an end to all controversy; and these are clear and unmistakable when taken in their plain and obvious meaning, without subjecting them to any forced interpretation.⁸

The New Testament contains two different Greek words, *gehenna* and *hades*, which are translated "hell."⁹ In his rebuttal, Procter explained passages where Jesus used both terms to warn men about eternal punishment.

While speaking to a multitude in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:29–30) and later speaking just to His disciples (Matt. 18:8–9; Mark 9:43–48), Jesus said that a disfigured body now is preferable to the entire body being cast intact into *gehenna*: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29). The account in Matthew 18:8 describes hell as "everlasting fire." Mark 9:44, 46, and 48 (quoting Isaiah 66:24) include additional detail: "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Jesus clearly employed hyperbolic language in these passages, but these intense words focus on horrors of hell that are beyond human comprehension. When Paul received a glimpse of heaven (2 Cor. 12:1–4), he described his experience as unspeakable—beyond description with human language. In a similar manner, but at the opposite end of the spectrum, Scripture uses analogies and figurative language to describe hell because the total reality is beyond our human understanding.

At the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 25:31–46), Jesus described His judgment of individuals who survive the Great Tribulation. Those who show kindness and protect God's people will enter the Millennial Kingdom. Those who do not show kindness will hear these words: "Depart

from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). This contrast between the righteous and unrighteous is summarized: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46). The same adjective, "eternal" (Greek, *aionios*), modifies "fire," "punishment," and "life." If eternal life is truly unending, then in this passage both eternal punishment and fire are also unending.¹⁰

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Bible scholars often discuss whether Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) is a parable or an actual event, but some facts from that account are clear. Self-righteous Pharisees were Jesus' target audience (Luke 16:14), and His concluding point was that they should hear Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:31). With that background in mind, Jesus described the condition of an unredeemed man immediately after death. The rich man did not sleep or rest quietly in his grave; he was consciously tormented in the flames of *hades* (Luke 16:23–24). He recognized the righteous beggar Lazarus, who was in a place of comfort, and he begged for a special messenger to warn his brothers so that they might not follow him to the place of torment (16:27–28). *Hades* is not the final destination of the unredeemed, the Lake of Fire is, but according to this account, it is certainly a destination to be avoided at all costs!

The Book of Revelation depicts eternal, conscious punishment in the Lake of Fire. When Jesus Christ returns to earth at the end of the Great Tribulation, He will defeat the assembled forces of the Antichrist and his false prophet (Rev. 19:17–20). These two humans who willingly serve Satan are "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20b). Satan is confined to the abyss during Jesus' millennial reign (Rev. 20:1–3), but when he is released, he leads one final rebellion against God (Rev. 20:7–9). God defeats this final uprising, and Satan is eternally consigned to the Lake of Fire: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). This verse clearly shows that the Beast and the False Prophet, both humans, will still be tormented in the Lake of Fire after a thousand-year interval. They will not cease to exist; their suffering extends "for ever and ever."

The Great White Throne

The Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11–15) presents the final picture of the unredeemed and their eternal destiny. The existing physical universe will disappear: "The earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them" (Rev. 20:11).¹¹ The unredeemed dead will stand individually before God, and everyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the same Lake of Fire: "And death and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15).

Scripture does not provide a detailed description of the new spiritual body that awaits believers at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42–54), but we will be transformed to dwell forever in the presence of our Savior (1 John 3:2). In a similar fash-

ion, Scripture does not record many aspects of the eternal existence of the unredeemed, but God has clearly prepared a separate place of eternal conscious suffering for those who do not trust the Savior.

Jude instructed believers how to act upon this truth of eternal conscious punishment for the lost. First, believers respond to the love of God and the mercy of the Lord Jesus with saving faith that leads to eternal life (Jude 21). Then we demonstrate compassion by sharing the gospel with others, leading them to saving faith (Jude 22). Those who do not respond to compassion must be motivated by warnings of eternal punishment—"And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire" (Jude 23).

Annihilationism appeals to the kinder, gentler side of humans, but it dulls the need for the gospel by reducing and limiting the horrors of hell. Today the broad spectrum of annihilation advocates includes both redeemed and unredeemed individuals. Our goal as fundamentalists should not be to win an argument concerning the nature of eternal punishment but to communicate our concern for lost souls. Our family, friends, and acquaintances must know that we do not want them to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire, because we serve the God who is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Steve Russell grew up in Tampa, Florida. He and Renee have been married for forty years; they have four married daughters and six grandchildren. His full-time ministry has spanned thirty-eight years, and he has been pastor of Central Baptist Church in Dothan, Alabama, since 1991.



¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Annihilationism," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1908) 1:183-86.

² R. A. Peterson, "Undying Worm, Unquenchable Fire," *Christianity Today*, 23 October 2000, 33.

³ Harry Buis, "Everlasting Punishment," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 4:956.

⁴ See David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988). Also see Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

⁵ See Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011). Also see Christopher M. Date, ed., *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). Additional examples can be found at www.rethinkinghell.com—a site strongly advocating annihilationism and conditional immortality.

⁶ Philip S Johnson, "Hell," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 542-44.

⁷ Along these lines Pinnock has written, "Furthermore, it [unending torment] would amount to inflicting infinite suffering upon those who have committed finite sins. It would go far beyond an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There would be a serious disproportion between sins committed in time and the suffering experienced forever. The fact that sin has been committed against an infinite God does not make the sin infinite. The chief point is that eternal torment serves no purpose and exhibits a vindictiveness out of keeping with the love of God revealed in the gospel" ("The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," 17-18, originally published in *Criswell Theological Review*, 4.2 [1990], 243-59, accessed 18 July 2019 at https://www.truthaccording-toscripture.com/documents/death/destruction-of-the-finally-impenitent.php#XTD_H-hKiM9).

⁸ William C. Procter, "What Christ Teaches Concerning Future Retribution," *The Fundamentals* (Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917, reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998) 3:54.

⁹ "[The] distinction is that Hades receives the ungodly only for the intervening period between death and resurrection, whereas Gehenna is their place of punishment in the last judgment; the judgment of the former is thus provisional but the torment of the latter eternal" (Joachim Jeremias, "Gehenna," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 1:657-58).

¹⁰ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 150.


¹¹ See also 2 Peter 3:10-12.

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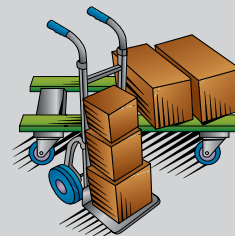
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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

Charles Bridges, "Neglect of Retirement"

From my earliest years in college, one of my favorite authors has been a relatively unknown Church of England minister, Charles Bridges (1794–1869). I was first introduced to him by listening to a cassette message by a Baptist minister named Albert Martin. Martin quoted from a book by Bridges entitled *The Christian Ministry*. The quotation was so warm and spiritually insightful that I found a way to scrape together enough to buy my own copy. It lies here beside me as I write. Of all books in my library, not just those on the ministry but those of any kind, *The Christian Ministry* is one of the books, perhaps the book, I've most often read from all these years. I'm sure that I've picked it up hundreds of times. I quote from it nearly any time I teach or preach about the life and work of a preacher.

Counting my commentaries on Proverbs just now, I discover that there are over twenty. Almost all were authored within the last century. But other than Derek Kidner, Bridges is the one to which I habitually turn first. And just this last fall my wife, Linda, and I finished reading his incomparable work on Psalm 119. If you haven't read it, you have a truly blessed experience to which you can look forward. My only counsels would be (1) read carefully Bridges' preface so that you understand what he's doing (furnishing a correct standard of Evangelical sincerity for the habitual scrutiny of his own heart), and (2) read slowly (I read just a page or two a morning, during my devotional time), and (3) do not skip right over the top of the hundreds of Scripture quotations he cites. Those quotations are often the conscience-convicting clinchers of what he explains and applies.

Bridges' subtitle for *The Christian Ministry* is *An Inquiry into the Causes of Its Inefficiency*. Some chapters suggest causes that are general (the withholding of Divine influence, the enmity of the natural heart, the power of Satan, and so on). And then there are the more specific chapters having to do with the minister's own character. He may lack entire devotedness of heart. He may be conformed to the world, cowed by the fear of man, or crippled by a spirit of covetousness. His family may be a great defect, diminishing his effectiveness. But Bridges also proposes a cause of ministerial inefficiency that is often overlooked—sometimes even disputed. It is what he calls "Neglect of Retirement"—by which he means the neglecting of shutting oneself up alone with God.

Due to its brevity, I've been able to include almost all of "Neglect of Retirement" below. Most of the footnotes I've been able to insert into the text itself for ease of reading, and I've exercised a slight liberty in smoothing out a sentence here and there. The nineteenth-century style may still slow you down, but that's not a disadvantage when it comes to something as spiritually challenging as what you're about to read. May the Lord bless it to our souls.

In the midst of the incessant, pressing, and active avocations of the Christian Ministry, how seasonable is the considerate advice of our gracious Master, *Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile* (Mark 6:31). The spirit of prayer cannot breathe freely in the atmosphere of constant and exciting employment. Not that we would seek retirement, like the contemplative monk, for the purposes of abstraction; but to recruit our spiritual energies for renewed exercises of self-denial and perseverance.

St. Paul's journey to Arabia immediately subsequent to his conversion (of which no mention is made in

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

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the inspired record of his ministerial travels) was probably not to exercise his ministry, but to receive further revelations. Secret prayer and meditation were doubtless the channels of Divine revelation to his soul; while the more accurate and undisturbed study of his own heart, and the calculations of the fearful cost before him, must have been a most profitable occupation for this interval of comparative privacy.

Rev. John William Fletcher [eighteenth-century Methodist theologian], when regret was expressed at his limited sphere upon his first entrance into the ministry, remarked with his characteristic piety—*If God does not call me to so much public duty, I have the more time for study, prayer and praise.*

Indeed, this appears to be the ordinary course of ministerial preparation: Moses in Midian (Exod. 2:15; 3:1), John the Baptist in the desert (Luke 1:80; 3:2), and Jesus in Nazareth (Matt. 2:23) were trained in retirement for their public work.

The spirit of [David] Brainerd's advice to a young candidate for the Ministry was in his own holy character.

The way to enjoy the Divine presence, and be fitted for distinguishing service for God, is to live a life of great devotion and constant self-dedication to him: observing the motives and dispositions of our own hearts, whence we may learn the corruptions that lodge there, and our constant need of help from God for the performance of the least duty: and, oh! dear sir, let me beseech you frequently to attend to the precious duties of secret fasting and prayer ("Letter IX", appended to his *Life*).

Pasquier Quesnel [seventeenth-century French reformer with the Catholic Church] observes,

How great is the difference between a preacher formed gradually by the hand of God in retirement, fasting, and prayer; and those ordained in haste, who have no other school but the world, no other masters but themselves, and no other preparation than human studies, interrupted by worldly conversations, diversions, etc. (*Commentary on Luke 3:2*).

The few amongst you, who are necessarily public men, deserve the sympathy and prayers of the church. If their habits of life were not very clearly appointed for them, their peculiar temptations (as we trust) sensibly felt, and their watchfulness and simplicity of faith habitually exercised; their own souls must suffer loss, whatever advantage might accrue to the church through their disinterested labors. Probably a strict adherence to Eliot's quaint but excellent rule to his young students is of great service to them. *I pray you look to it, that you be early birds*, meaning, we conclude,

not merely early risers, but early Christian students, and above all, early worshippers.

The cultivation of habits of retirement is of the highest moment. Popular engagements must not interfere with our own personal interests or ministerial store. An experienced pastor with a well-furnished mind and intellectual habits can afford to make sacrifices of time for the public cause which would cost a young minister the hazard of his permanent usefulness. He must at all events secure for himself time for Biblical attainments; or else his course of instruction will be inefficient for the grand purposes of his office. Dr. William Paley [English clergyman] wisely recommended retirement to the younger Clergy as the foundation of almost all good habits.

Learn to live alone. Half your faults originate from the want of this faculty. It is impatience of solitude which carries you continually from your parishes, your home, your duty, makes you foremost in every party of pleasure and place of diversion, dissipates your thoughts, distracts your studies, leads you into expense, keeps you in distress, or puts you out of humor with your profession (*Advice to the Younger Clergy of Carlisle*).

Indeed, the happiness of the Minister's life, and the effectiveness of his work, depend upon a judicious combination of retired habits with public or social exercises. But far more important is retirement for the minister's communion with his God. We fear that Luther's custom to give his three best hours of the day to this work, and Bradford studying on his knees, are more often alluded to than followed. Yet the diligent pastor will feel the importance, both to himself and to his people, of living in his study as well as in his parish; not only for the necessary digestion of the subject-matter of his ministrations, but most chiefly for the cultivation of a nearer and more habitual access to God.

Gilbert Burnet's [Church of England minister] advice on the subject was,

To give the studies of the clergy their full effect, a minister that is much in his study ought to employ a great part of his time in secret and fervent prayer for the direction and blessing of God in his labors, for the constant assistance of his Holy Spirit, and for a lively sense of Divine matters, so that he may feel the impressions of them grow deep and strong upon his thoughts. This, and this only, will make him go on with his work, without wearying, and be always rejoicing in it. This will make his expressions of these things to be happy and noble, when he can bring them out of the good treasure of his

heart, that is ever full and always warm with them (*Pastoral Care*).

How delightful is it to us, and how edifying to our people, to bring forth that Scripture as food to their souls, which the Spirit of God hath opened to our own hearts! Truths that are thus obtained and wrought out in prayer have a peculiar unction. *Waiting on the Lord* will never be an encouragement to indolence. In the habit of it, the weakest ministrations will be efficient—in the neglect of it the most powerful will be paralyzed.

Jean Baptiste Massillon* admirably urges,

The spirit of our ministry is a spirit of prayer. Prayer is the ornament of the ministry, the leading feature of our character. Without prayer, a minister is of no use to the church, nor of any advantage to mankind. He sows; and God gives no increase. He preaches; and his words are only like *sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*. He recites the praises of God; while *his heart is far from Him*. It is prayer alone, then, that gives the whole strength and efficacy to our different administrations; and that man ceases, if I may use the expression, to be a public minister from the time he ceases to pray. It is prayer which supplies him with consolation in all his labors. Or else he celebrates the ordinances of religion as the hireling performs his work—he considers them as a heavy task, or a severe imposition, if prayer doth not assuage its troubles or console him for want of success (*Charges*).

In the same impressive language he addresses his clergy in another place.

My brethren, a pastor who does not pray, who does not love prayer, does not belong to that Church which *prays without ceasing*. He is a dry and barren tree which cumbers the Lord's ground; he is the enemy, and not the father of his people; he is a stranger, who has usurped the pastor's place, and to whom the salvation of the flock is indifferent. Wherefore, my brethren, be faithful to prayer, and your functions will be more useful, your people more holy, your labors will prove much sweeter, and the Church's evils will diminish.

If Solomon felt his need of heavenly wisdom to discriminate amongst his *great people*, and to devise and execute the best-conducted measures for their prosperity, do not we *go out and come in* before our people with far deeper responsibilities, and yet with the ignorance of *a little child to discern between good and bad*? The most eminent Minister will be most ready to cry out—*Give therefore thy servant an understanding*

heart (I Kings 3:7–9). For of how little avail are the most splendid talents, the most mighty eloquence, and the most devoted diligence, except the unction be brought down from heaven by frequent and fervent supplication!

Prayer therefore is one-half of our ministry (Acts 6:4), and it gives to the other half all its power and success. It is the appointed medium of receiving spiritual communications for the instruction of our people. Those who walk most closely with God are most spiritually intelligent in *the secret of his covenant* (Psalm 25:14; compare II Corinthians 3:5–6). Many can set their seal to Luther's testimony, that he often obtained more knowledge in a short time by prayer, than by many hours of study.

The most effectual hindrances to our work are those which impede our personal communion with the Lord.

Prayer will also strengthen our habitual devotedness to our work, as well as our natural capacities for it. Living near to the fountain-head, we shall be in the constant receipt of fresh supplies of light, support, and consolation—to assist us in our duties, to enable us for our difficulties, and to assure us of our present acceptance and a suitable measure of ultimate success. The same heavenly resource will furnish us with matter for experimental conversation with our people—giving us a clear insight into the workings of nature and grace, of sin and holiness; and enduing us with a spiritual ability to counterwork the wiles of Satan and the deceitfulness of sin in their incessant and fatal influence. Thus also we shall be enabled to adapt our ministrations, under the influence of Divine wisdom, to the several cases of our flock—speaking with power to the unawakened—with compassion to the hardened—binding up *the bruised reed*—and strengthening by solemn admonitions and exhortations *the things that remain among us, that were ready to die* (Rev. 3:2).

Nor is it the least advantage flowing from this habit, that it fits us to advocate the cause of our people before God, as well as to sympathize with their difficulties, and to lay ourselves out in their service. Probably the laborious fervency of Epaphras' secret exercises (Col. 4:12) were as fruitful as his public work; and who knows but that we shall find that our most successful efforts for our people were the hours—not when we were speaking to them from God, but when we were speaking for them to God? Another minister has wisely said, *The kingdom of heaven must suffer violence, and the people will not ordinarily be brought into it without some violence: but let me tell you, it is not so much the violence of the pulpit that doeth the deed, as the violence of the closet.*

In this view it is most important to associate our own interests with those of our people. The help we may thus be able to afford them in their difficulties, trials, and weakness is intimately connected with the spiritual temperament of our own minds, which is acquired and maintained through the same organ of heavenly communication which we recommend for their daily use and encouragement. The success of this operation is so certain that an eminent divine has laid it down as a general rule—that when we would have any great things to be accomplished, the best policy is to work by an engine which the world sees nothing of. Our blessed Master's example is here much to be observed. As man, he had most responsible concerns to transact with God. Nothing important was done without prayer. His entrance on his ministry was with prayer (Luke 3:21). His ordination of his first ministers was preceded by a whole night of prayer (Luke 6:12). After a day spent in works of instruction and mercy (such as would have included a week of our ordinary labor), time was redeemed from sleep for this sacred employment (Mark 1:21-35).

Prayer is one half of our ministry, and it gives to the other half all its power and success.

We cannot contemplate too closely this pattern of intermingling seasons of heavenly communion with active labor. Will not a spiritual pastor delight in the shade as well as in the sunshine, and love to be alone with God while he is most closely engaged in his work?

The most effectual hindrances, therefore, to our work are those which impede our personal communion with the Lord. When the great enemy thus successfully intercepts our spiritual supplies, the work of God in our hearts, and the work of God in our hands connected with it, languishes from the lack of its accustomed and needful support. We have great need to watch, lest public activity should be considered to atone for neglect of private communion with God; and thus our profession should become a snare to ourselves, and divested of all spiritual savor to our flock. Henry Martyn had occasion to lament that, through incessant sermon-making, lack of private devotional reading and shortness of prayer had produced much strangeness between God and his own soul. And in the review of the first year of his ministry, he judged that he had dedicated too much time to public ministrations, and too little to private communion with God. Thomas Scott [Bible commentator and successor to John Newton at the


church in Olney] gives a most wholesome caution on this point.

The principle that made the Apostle determine not to *serve tables*, though a good work in itself, should render Ministers in this day very careful not so to give their services, even to the most useful Societies, and to attending the meetings of them, as to prevent their *giving themselves continually to the word of God and prayer*. A danger at present seems to arise on this side (*Letters and Papers*).

The Writer would therefore wish to draw his own mind and his brethren habitually to this recollection, that nothing will enrich or console us in the neglect of intimate communion with God. We must *walk with God* at any cost, or our souls will die. Even Christian communion will form an empty substitute for this hallowed intercourse. The command is—*Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door* (Matthew 6:6). Shut out not only vanity and the world, but even for a time *the communion of Saints*. The soul may lose its spiritual vigor in any company but that of God—in the best as well as in the worst—in the Church, as well as in the world—in the active engagements of the Ministry, as well as in secular employments.

It was said of Fletcher that “his deepest and most sensible communications with God *were enjoyed in those hours when the door of his closet was shut against human creatures, as well as human cares*. His closet was his favorite retirement, to which he constantly retreated whenever his public labors allowed him a season of leisure. His public labors (astonishing as they were) bore but little proportion to those internal exercises of prayer and supplication to which he was wholly given in private. The former of necessity were frequently discontinued; but the latter were almost uninterruptedly maintained from hour to hour. He lived in the spirit of prayer” (Gilpin's notes on Fletcher's, *Portrait of St. Paul*).

Was not this the secret of the extraordinary power that rested upon his ministrations? The outpouring of the Spirit of supplication would revive our work and enlarge our success. We know who hath said—*Ask me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands command ye me* (Isaiah 45:11).

* Massillon was a French Catholic Bishop known for his powerful preaching of repentance. He was called to preach before King Louis XIV, who was responsible for the infamous St. Bartholomew's massacre. The king said to him, *I have heard many talented preachers in my chapel before, and was much pleased with them. But every time I hear you, I feel much displeased with myself*. Though Massillon was theologically defective in his understanding of justification, his admonition on prayer quoted by Bridges is most certainly scriptural and striking. 

Bring . . . the Books

William Gurnall's *The Christian in Complete Armour*

Reading is usually considered a leisurely activity for vacations and downtime. For those who labor in the Word, however, reading should be a *daily discipline*. Some books read like a stroll in the park—simple and pleasant. Others are like a hike through the foothills—challenging and exhilarating. But the reading of some books can be compared only to ascending Mount Everest—extremely *difficult* but *unforgettable*.

The last of these was my experience in reading William Gurnall's *The Christian in Complete Armour*. In case you are not aware, Gurnall's most famous book is the epitome of a Puritan tome. My Banner of Truth edition contains two volumes in one for a total of 1189 pages.

As with any book written in the 1600s, the vocabulary, sentence structure, and writing style are very different from the way we communicate in the twenty-first century. There are endless subdivisions that often seem to confuse rather than clarify. The preacher who is looking for a clever outline should look elsewhere.

So why would anyone make the commitment and investment of time to read such a challenging book? Let me give you some good reasons to tackle *The Christian in Complete Armour* in 2020. First, Gurnall's classic on spiritual warfare is especially valuable for anyone in the ministry. Consider the assessment of C. H. Spurgeon:

This "Complete Armour" is beyond all others a preacher's book: I should think that more discourses have been suggested by it than by any other uninspired volume. I have often resorted to it when my own fire has been burning low, and I have seldom failed to find a glowing coal upon Gurnall's hearth.

Although every believer is a soldier in the Lord's army, those in the ministry are especially engaged in spiritual warfare. Therefore, Gurnall makes many insightful applications to pastors. Consider the following gems that have encouraged my heart.

That which may pass for diligence in a private Christian's reading and search into the Scriptures, may be charged as negligence upon the minister (II:283).

He is the best student of divinity that studies upon his knees (I:172).

The preacher must read and study his people as diligently as any book in his study (I:231).

O how shall the people grow, if the minister doth not? And how shall he grow, if he doth not daily drink in more than he pours out (II:284)?

Unholiness in the preacher's life either will stop his mouth from reproving, or the people's ears from receiving what he saith (II:579).

Christ and the minister go into the pulpit together. A greater than man is there; master and servant are both at work (II:546).

Another reason that you should read this Puritan masterpiece is because it is a virtual systematic theology of Christian living. Pastor Gurnall addresses much more than spiritual warfare in this volume. He touches on multiple aspects of the Christian life, such as assurance, faith, holiness, and worship.

When I read this book several years ago, I collected twelve pages of quotes organized under twenty different topical headings. I have frequently found these quotations to be helpful additions to my sermons. One of my favorite quotes from Gurnall calls on Christians not to toy with sin but to turn decisively from it.

The Christian is to proclaim and prosecute an irreconcilable war against his bosom sins; those sins which have lain nearest his heart, must now be trampled under his feet. . . . Soul, take thy lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac, the sin which has caused most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit . . . lay hands on it and offer it up: pour out the blood of it before me; run the sacrificing knife of mortification into the very heart of it; and this freely, joyfully, for it is no pleasing sacrifice that is offered with a countenance cast down—and all this now, before thou hast one embrace more from it (I:13).

A final reason that you should read *The Christian in Complete Armour* is because it is a true Christian classic. Francis Bacon was right when he said, "Some books should be tasted, some devoured, but only a few should be chewed and digested thoroughly." Sinclair Ferguson places Gurnall's book in the last category.

Great books were written to show a great God and a great Christ to the people of God. You must never let yourself be tricked into reading lesser books about great subjects when you are perfectly capable of reading great books about great subjects (*Read Any Good Books?*, 8–9).

I conclude by giving two suggestions for reading this massive book. First, read it *slowly* over a long period of time. Second, read it with some type of *highlighter* in hand. This Puritan mine is filled with gemstones that you will treasure and want to share with others. ☞

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

Tim Leaman pastors Calvary Baptist Church in Westminster, Maryland.

Straight Cuts

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10)

Psalm 85 is a prayer for revival and blessing upon Israel. The psalmist remembers the Lord's past deliverance and forgiveness (vv. 1–3). He then asks Him to grant the nation repentance and revival and to show them favor again (vv. 4–7). Finally, he records the divine promise of restoration and blessing for the nation and the land (vv. 8–13).

In this latter section we find the picturesque promise "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (v. 10). Initially it seems reasonable to see here the reconciliation of apparently conflicting attributes of God. We might think of *mercy* as God's compassionate desire to pardon his sinful people and *truth* as His accurate determination that they do not deserve it. Similarly, *righteousness* seems to speak of God's judicial integrity by which He condemns the wicked, whereas *peace* seems to imply the sinner's reconciliation to God. As attractive as this interpretation may seem, it runs into some difficulties.

The term translated "mercy" is *chesed*. It could be rendered "lovingkindness" or "loyal love." It usually assumes a relationship between the persons involved and so therefore often conveys an element of loyalty. On the other hand, it also often involves acts of kindness that go far beyond mere duty. For example, Moses pleads for God to show *chesed* and to spare Israel from destruction after their rebellion (Num. 14:19). Although Israel is God's people, by their treason against Him they deserve destruction. In such a case, the term *mercy* accurately captures Israel's need. However, *chesed* has a broader meaning than *mercy*, as shown by the fact that the Lord expected Israelites to practice *chesed* toward Him: "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hos. 6:6). God did not need mercy from His people. What he required was loyalty.

Likewise, the Hebrew *emet* ("truth") has a slightly different nuance than its English counterpart. In addition to meaning truth as opposed to falsehood (Deut 17:4), *emet* conveys the idea of firmness or reliability. Because God is "true" He may be counted upon. For example, He may be trusted to fulfill His covenant promises. Likewise, God expects His people to serve Him in "truth," that is sincerely (Josh. 24:14; 1 Sam. 12:24).


"Mercy and truth" often appear together. Abraham's servant appeals to Rebecca's relatives to "deal kindly and truly" with Abraham (Gen 24:49), as does Jacob when he asks Joseph to swear to bury him in Canaan (Gen. 47:29). The phrase is also used of God's faithfulness (Gen. 24:27) and as part of His self-declaration (Exod. 34:6). In Psalm 25:10 it describes all the paths of the Lord, and in Proverbs 16:6 it is used in parallel with

the fear of the Lord. As these passages indicate, the terms are close synonyms expressing faithfulness and loyalty in action.

Similarly, the tension between "righteousness" and "peace" is only apparent. The first term, *tsedaqah*, has the basic idea of conformity to a standard. The term does not always mean absolute righteousness or perfection. Rather, it depends upon the standard in question. For example, the adjective form of the word is used to describe the party to a dispute who has the better legal case (Deut. 25:1). The term occurs about thirty-five times in the Psalms where it can describe both the actions of God (36:6; 51:14) and of those who fear Him (106:3). Frequently *tsedaqah* is what characterizes or ought to characterize the reign of kings (2 Sam. 8:15; Isa. 9:7) or the condition of a society (Jer. 22:3; Amos 5:24). In this context it is very close to the idea expressed by the English term *justice*. (Of course, in the case of our standing before a Holy God, the standard of righteousness is His absolute perfection, which can be satisfied only by the righteousness of Christ.)

Peace (the Hebrew word *shalom*) can mean the absence of conflict or threat (Lev. 26:6; Deut. 20:10). However, it can also include the idea of success or prosperity, as when David asked Uriah about the welfare (*shalom*) of Joab and of the people and the progress (*shalom*) of the war (2 Sam. 11:7). Theologically it can be the equivalent of *blessing*, as in the Aaronic benediction, "The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. 6:26). One sees this also in Psalm 85:8, where it says that God "will speak peace unto his people."

Although not as commonly encountered as "mercy and truth," "righteousness" and "peace" do occur in parallel: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isa. 48:18). Here, both terms seem to refer to covenant blessings. Isaiah 32:17 teaches cause and effect between the words: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace."

Therefore, instead of establishing a tension to be resolved between God's justice and His forgiveness, these four terms teach the comprehensiveness and intensity of God's promised blessing. Nevertheless, reconciliation is still at the heart of the passage. The righteousness and peace spoken of here are the work of God and depend upon His abundant mercy and truth as manifested in His reviving work. We know from the unfolding revelation of the Old and New that this blessing described in Psalm 85:10 is only possible because of the redemption and coming kingdom of the One who is called "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11), the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer. 23:6), and the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). 

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

Plenteous redemption! What a promise is found in Psalm 130:7—“Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption!” If we momentarily remove the word “plenteous” from the phrase, the verse still makes sense, but what a rich emphasis shines through when “plenteous” describes “redemption.” Webster defines “plenty” as “an adequate or more than adequate number or amount of something; an amount that is enough for a particular purpose.” This idea of plenty or abundance is prominent in Scripture. There is much benefit in reviewing the nature of God’s supply—that it is, indeed, plenteous.

The Appearance of Plenty

“Plenteous” is the translation of *rabah*, which appears 211 times and is most frequently translated “multiply” or “increase.” This word is found in God’s command to Adam to be fruitful and *multiply* (Gen. 1:28) and in Exodus where Pharaoh feared that Jews would *multiply*. Genesis 7:18 records that the waters *increased* greatly on the earth. Another rendering for *rabah* is found in Genesis 15:1: “Fear not, . . . I am thy exceeding *great* reward.” *Rabah* also refers to *great* distances (Deut. 14:24), and the way in which a fool could be *full* of words, as in Ecclesiastes 10:14.

In other Psalms the word “plenteous” highlights the mercy of God. In Psalm 86:5 we read, “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.” And again, in Psalm 103:8, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

In the Old Testament we find a description of the land into which the Lord brought His people: “And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof” (Jer. 2:7). The Lord promised blessings on obedience: “And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee” (Deut. 28:10–11). Similarly, Proverbs 3:9–10: “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”

The New Testament speaks passionately to the matter of abundance and plenteousness. “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom” (Luke 6:38). “The harvest truly is plenteous,

but the labourers are few” (Matt. 9:37). He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). In 1 Peter 1:3 we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The Appeal of Plenty

The concept of plenty works well for advertisers and companies such as the online dating website plentyoffish.com, or the old-fashioned boxed candy, Good and Plenty. Woven into our human nature is the appeal of plenty, or abundance. In 1897 humanistic philosopher, author, and teacher Ralph Waldo Trine wrote the very influential book *In Tune with the Infinite*. Trine’s preface reads, “There is a golden thread that runs through every religion in the world . . . through the lives and teachings of all the prophets, seers, sages, and saviors in the world’s history. . . . All who today . . . would exchange impotence for power, weakness and suffering for abounding health and strength, pain and unrest for perfect peace, poverty of whatever nature for fullness and plenty.” Trine’s key to a life of fullness and plenty was right thinking, otherwise known as “the power of positive thinking.”

An Appreciation for Plenty

For the spiritually sensitive there is an appreciation for God’s plenteousness toward His people. Arthur Bennett is the editor of *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* published by Banner of Truth. One entry given the heading of “Mercy” begins,

God of the Publican,
Be merciful to me a sinner; this I am by nature
and practice,
Thy word proclaims me to be, this I hope I
feel myself to be;
Yet Thou hast not left me to despair, for there is
no “peradventure” in thy grace;
I have all the assurance I need that with thee is
plenteous redemption.

Later in the prayer we find the statement, “May I encourage myself by the sense of thy all sufficiency.”

Isaac Watts penned many well-known hymns. One of his lesser known titles, “How Vast a Treasure We Possess,” is based on the phrase from 1 Corinthians 3:21, “For all things are yours.” The third stanza calls us to align our hearts with God’s purposes in every state:

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

Charles Spurgeon

If peace and plenty crown my days, they help me
Lord to speak thy praise.
If bread and sorrows be my food, those sorrows work
my lasting good.

In *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, Volume 6, published in 1870, we find this prayer under a heading “Hymns for Intercession”:

For The Church of England
Till then preserve the faithful seed, the remnant
left in Britain’s land,
The desolate church whose cause we plead, in
whose defense we firmly stand,
Her breaches mourn, her burdens bear in all the
agony of prayer.
Jesus, her ruinous walls rebuild, and let them with
Thy praise resound;
With peace her palaces be fill’d. Plenty be in her
temples found,
Plenty of unbought milk and wine, fullness of living
Bread Divine.

Elisha encountered a widow whose husband was among the sons of the prophets (2 Kings 4:1–7). The man had died leaving his wife with great indebtedness and her only resource—a little olive oil. Elisha instructed her to gather empty vessels from her neighbors, to “borrow not a few.” Then behind closed doors she was to pour out her meager supply into the many borrowed vessels. Exercising the obedience of faith, she followed Elisha’s instruction. As she poured, the Lord multiplied the oil until every vessel was filled; then the flow ceased. Elisha told the widow to sell the oil to satisfy the debt and then live on the remaining oil. From Elisha’s call to an active faith, American hymnwriter Lelia Naylor Morris (1862–1929) composed the hymn “Bring Your Vessels, Not a Few.” The chorus exhorts us to expect abundance of blessing from our God:

As the Lord commandeth you, bring your vessels
not a few.
He will fill your heart today to overflowing,
With the Holy Ghost and power.

Missionaries have experienced and written about the plenty in God’s store of protection. A ship approaching the Chinese port of Shanghai was caught in a terrible typhoon. Sixteen of the crew members were washed overboard and drowned, and only six survived the storm. Another ship, the *Lammermuir*, was caught in the same typhoon, but not a single life was lost. The *Lammermuir* carried the first team of missionaries under the fledgling China Inland Mission. God’s abundant protection was later described by one of those first missionaries, Miss Emily Blatchley: “But although Mr. Taylor had plenty of surgical practice with severe bruises and such-like hurts, not one life was lost, nor were any limbs broken. It is needless to say there were many narrow escapes.”

The Appropriation of Plenty

We’ve already established that the assumption in Scripture is that abundance is desirable. In Ephesians 4

we find Paul’s admonition concerning what we commonly refer to as the put-off and put-on principle. In verse 28 he commands that the thief stop stealing—that he instead should work, not only for the meeting of his own needs but to have an abundance from which to help others. God’s disposition toward His people is not miserly, and He blesses with abundance those whom He knows to be faithful stewards of that abundance.

In John’s gospel (6:1–14) we are given the account of the feeding of the five thousand. Knowing what He would do, Jesus asked Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” Philip’s answer implies that what seems to be the funds on hand would not buy enough food “that every one of them may take a little.” His reply sets up the delightful contrast between the appearance of a limited supply and the abundance of our Lord’s actual provision. In verse 11 we read that the disciples took the bread and fish from the Lord and distributed them to the people “as much as they would.” The verb tense in this statement indicates that the disciples likely passed the food around multiple times. Essentially the crowd had seconds and thirds, until they wanted no more.

The disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers, whereas in the wilderness God provided the exact amount of manna for that day (double on the day before the Sabbath). Jesus could have supernaturally multiplied the food to be exactly the amount needed. He addressed the supply of manna under Moses, but He shows His superiority by His abundant provision (6:32–33).

In an entry titled “The Habit of Wealth” in *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers expounds on the phrase from 2 Peter 1:4, “partakers of divine nature.” He speaks to how the divine nature is formed in us by being in the habit of grasping the provision God has made.

“Oh, I can’t afford it” we say—one of the worst lies is tucked up in that phrase. It is ungovernably bad taste to talk about money in the natural domain, and so it is spiritually, and yet we talk as if our Heavenly Father had cut us off with a shilling! We think it is a sign of real modesty to say at the end of the day—“Oh, well, I have just got through, but it has been a severe tussle.” And all the Almighty God is ours in the Lord Jesus! And He will tax the last grain of sand and the remotest star to bless us if we will obey Him. . . . No sin is worse than the sin of self-pity, because it obliterates God and puts self-interest on the throne. It opens our mouth to spit out murmurings and our lives become craving spiritual sponges; there is nothing lovely or generous about them.

Chambers ends that entry reminding the reader of 2 Corinthians 9:8, that “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

Pastor Gary Kramer and his wife, Brenda, head Philemon 7, a ministry of refreshment to pastors and churches. He is currently an interim pastor in New Mexico.



Social Justice and the Gospel

The True Nature of the Family of God

In the late nineteenth-century German historian Adolf Von Harnack produced a bestseller in the theological world. In English its title is *What Is Christianity?* The theme of his book essentially answered the question, “What is the essence of Christianity that makes it Christian?” Harnack proposed two fundamental ideas: the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. Typical of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological liberalism, the two propositions were never the “essence” of Christianity. Those concepts don’t exist in the Old or New Testament. The apostle Paul once quoted a pagan poet in Acts 17:28—“we are also his offspring”—in order to prove that God is the universal Creator and the sole begetter of humanity. This, however, has nothing to do with the spiritual Fatherhood of God, which has to do exclusively with redemption. The Fatherhood of God extends only to those who are adopted into His family by virtue of union with Christ (John 1:14), thus forming a family of God unique to Christianity. Therefore, there is not a spiritual brotherhood among all people. Brotherhood is established exclusively through the new birth, Christ being “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). The New Testament Church is the exclusive company of the redeemed (*The Prayer of the Lord*, R. C. Sproul, pp. 17–19).

All Men Are Our Neighbors

Christians do belong, however, to the “universal neighborhood” of man (Luke 10:25–37). Every believer has a spiritual obligation to help his neighbor when circumstances require it.

This is true not only of individuals; it is also true of churches. The religious Jews thought all neighborly kindness was reserved for Jews only. Jesus, however, taught them that every man is potentially one’s neighbor, regardless of creed or color: “Love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The tension between the mistaken universal brotherhood of man and the legitimate universal neighborhood of man is at the heart of the debate between social justice and the gospel. The Christian’s responsibility to be neighborly extends to both other believers and those outside the church (Gal. 6:10). The organized church in modern society has a permanent presence in the community by virtue of its property and buildings. The church, in this sense, is part of the community. As salt and light in the community (Matt. 5:13, 16), we should be good citizens who are generous, loving, and show common decency to others in order to establish goodwill in the community. This will create an opportunity to extend an invitation to attend a Christian concert, a dinner, a community event for the family, or a church service. The goal here is to gain a hearing for the gospel while treating everyone with dignity and respect because of the image of God in every person, because they are our neighbors.

Clarity about the Church’s True Mission

Some Christian social justice advocates, however, want to go much further than simply being good neighbors as fellow members in the “universal neighborhood of man.” They desire a programmatic social agenda as the end goal,

Continued on page 23

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not infrequently reflecting left-leaning, socialistic, or even Marxist political ideologies. Certainly, some social programs are good and helpful to society. Communities are benefited by organized opposition to abortion and homosexuality, the operation of hospitals, orphanages, adoption services, and even political organizations dedicated to good government and the preservation of God-given, inalienable rights. As intrinsically good as these activities are, they are, however, not the prime mission of the New Testament Church. In short, they are not the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). In time, these good causes, when they become the official programmatic mission of the institutional church, displace personal responsibility in evangelism and diminish or completely delete the gospel. Dr. Rolland McCune, late president of the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and professor of Systematic Theology for a generation there, often explained the history of the gospel in relation to socially oriented ministry by believers. He explained that the gospel in such ministries is usually given initial priority over social involvement, then parity with social involvement, and finally is completely replaced by social involvement (*Promise Unfulfilled*, 229–74). Rescue missions, for example, often succumb to this very pattern. Such ministries in my community rarely preach the gospel any longer or have abandoned the gospel altogether.

The true Church is not a political body, nor is it primarily a mechanism for social justice. It is an institution created by God to declare the whole truth of God as revealed in His Word and to compel its members to profess and obey His Word. Certainly, the Church should remind its members of their personal civic duties to government and their neighbors, some of whom may be their employees or their employers. Church members should love their country, show patriotism and may serve in government, the military, or other civic offices, since they are also citizens of the State. The Church should also identify and condemn public vice and promote civic virtue (Gal. 6:10). The Church is not bound to be silent in the civil arena when it is necessary to speak out about laws or community activities that are offensive to God and will do harm to men.

Nevertheless, spiritual matters are the primary purview of the Church, where we have fundamental relational and theological responsibilities. While the believer's civic responsibilities and duties should always be informed by his spiritual values, unlike Israel in the Old Testament, we render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17). The Church is not a new administration of the one people of God. It is a people of God distinct in identity from national Israel with unique origins, purposes, and destinies (Rom. 11; Eph. 2). Membership in Israel was ethnic and political (Deut. 23:1–3). Membership in a truly Christian local church as described in the New Testament requires regeneration, baptism by immersion, an orderly Christian life, and acceptance by the

congregation (Acts 2; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3), with no ethnic, physical, or political requirements for membership.

Keeping the Church Distinct from the Future Kingdom

A special emphasis of Christian social-justice advocates in describing the New Testament Church is to equate some aspects of the future Kingdom of God with the Church today. Most argue for an inaugurated Kingdom of God *now*. This means that they mistakenly use elements of the future Kingdom for Israel prophesied about in the Old and New Testaments as a justification for changing the current gospel mission of the Church to a social, and even, at times, political mission. The social and political elements of the future Kingdom ruled by Christ are not part of the mission of the Church. God's universal Kingdom is not the same thing as His mediatorial, messianic, millennial Kingdom. Confusing these Kingdoms confounds the mission of the Church and opens the door not only to the social gospel and a social justice agenda but also to a dilution and eventual deletion of the Church's spiritual mission. The true modernist does not secure converts with the gospel; instead, he attempts to politically facilitate the Kingdom of God and, naively, redeem all of creation. Such people see the Church's role during the Church age as promoting societal utopia. This is achieved, they say, through philanthropy, public education, social justice, economic socialism or Marxism, an end of all human oppression (whether real or perceived), and egalitarianism. This agenda becomes their understanding of "salvation" in the end.

The result of diluting the mission of the Church by including all sorts of nonspiritual matters in it is to "compromise the purity of Christ's Church with an endless pursuit of cultural relevancy and social acceptance" (Snoeberger, 71). As Dr. Snoeberger says elsewhere, "The Kingdom must be kept spectacular by keeping the contemporary Church out of it. And the Church's Great Commission must be kept central by keeping the Kingdom out of it." (For a more thorough treatment of this subject see Mark Snoeberger, "A Tale of Two Kingdoms," *DBSJ* 19 [2019]:53–71, and Benjamin G. Edwards, "Being Jesus, *Missio Dei*, and Kingdom Work: An Analysis, Critique, and Proposal for Modern Approaches to Holistic Ministry," *DBSJ* 19 [2014]:73–94).

Ethnicity, Culture, and Social Justice

In recent promotions of social justice some evangelical leaders have adopted secular categories of race, ethnicity, and culture while advocating socialist and even Marxist solutions to address social justice problems. But scripturally all human beings are descendants from one set of human parents (Gen. 1–2; Acts 17:26). Technically, we are members of one race. Ethnicity is simply a grouping of people according to physical characteristics, heritage, and sometimes geography. Man's greatest problems and the solutions to them are not rooted

Spiritual matters
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in race and ethnicity and addressing the divisions that arise from them on a physical, societal level.

Further, the challenges the world faces are not rooted primarily in culture. Culture is a set of values, behaviors, and beliefs of a particular people group or nation. Regardless of culture, all human beings, while made in the image of God, are totally depraved on account of the Fall (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12). Systemic causes for human injustice all find their root in this fallen sinfulness of every human being, not our differing cultures. Certainly, not everything about any human culture is evil. But every culture is influenced by evil because the men who comprise them are sinners by nature and practice.

A failure to understand these realities results in what we are witnessing in American culture. Various groups vie for the most victimized status for their race or ethnicity in order to manipulate society to unfairly feel false guilt about their plight. The hope is that social justice will be the response, mandated politically and resulting in a more equitable society. But ultimately the answer to cultural inequities is not political. It is spiritual. It is the gospel. The hearts of men must be transformed one by one, resulting in a more kind and generous spirit in every community, as well as better laws. In Christ we are identified as a new people of God (1 Pet. 2:9–10; Eph. 2). Our ethnicity, biological gender, or position in life becomes of secondary concern (Gal. 3:28) and does not negatively or positively impact our worth before God and should not affect our relationships with others. Social justice in America, sad to say, has become “Social Just-Us,” for just our race, just our ethnicity, just our social class, just our gender, just our sexual orientation. This is not good news for America, whose problem is pervasive sin, irrespective of the ethnic or cultural differences among us.

The gospel is the good news America needs. Some undiscerning evangelicals have fallen prey to using secular, divisive, and destructive social justice rhetoric to the point of demanding societal apologies to entire groups for the sinful acts of individuals. We dare not make social justice for these “oppressed” groups the mission of the Church. Sadly, there will always be genuine injustice in the world until Christ rules with a rod of iron in His Kingdom from David’s throne in Jerusalem. Our mission now is to make disciples of all nations, proclaim the gospel to every person, baptize and teach believers, realizing that the ultimate solution to the injustices in our world

is the true, unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. Our truest identity as men and women comes through repentant faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Through Him we may be empowered to do justice to others now and bear injustice until the Judge of all the earth rectifies all wrong and justice reigns forever.

Pastor Mike Harding has been the senior pastor at First Baptist of Troy, Michigan, for thirty-five years. He is a graduate of Bob Jones University and earned his MDiv and ThM degrees from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. Mike and Jenny have four children and eleven grandchildren. He also serves on the FBFI executive board and on the executive committee of Bob Jones University.



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Regional Reports

Rocky Mountain FBFI Regional Fellowship

The theme of the 2020 Rocky Mountain FBFI Regional Fellowship was “Our Labor Is Not Vain.” The Monday evening/Tuesday morning conference (February 3 and 4) was hosted by Westside Baptist Church of Greeley, Colorado. In spite of inclement weather, attendance throughout the sessions varied from thirty-five to fifty as people from Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska braved the winter conditions.

On Monday evening Dan Unruh, pastor of Westside Baptist Church, preached from Psalm 127:1 on “The Components of Our Labor” and on Tuesday morning on Revelation 14:13, “The Completion of Our Labor.” The keynote speaker, Dr. John Monroe, pastor of Faith Baptist Church of Taylors, South Carolina, brought three messages: on Monday evening, “The Character of Our Labor” (2 Tim. 4:7) and on Tuesday morning, “A Caution to the Laborer” (1 Cor. 3:11–15) and “A Comfort to the Laborer” (1 Cor. 15:58). The messages may be accessed at wbcgreeley.org.

One of the Tuesday morning sessions was a blessed time of sharing encouraging testimonies of the Lord’s faithfulness, demonstrating that, indeed, our labor is not vain in the Lord! The attendees enjoyed good fellowship breaks throughout

our time together, including breakfast burritos and a smothered chicken lunch provided by the ladies of Westside Baptist Church.



Northern California Regional Fellowship

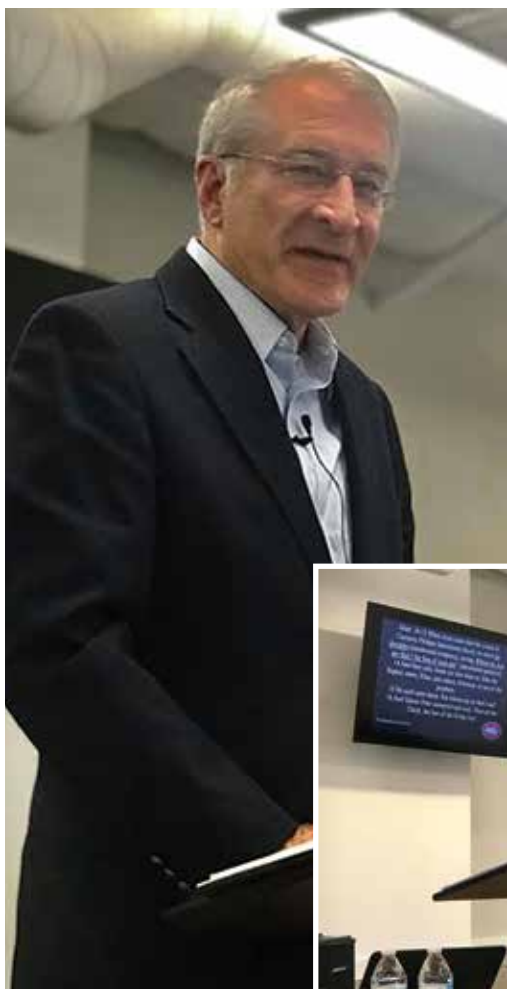
On March 9–10, 2020, Pastor Ron Perry and the Faith Baptist Church (Folsom, California) family hosted the FBFI Northern California regional fellowship.

Bruce McAllister and Marsh Fant from Gospel Fellowship Association Missions were the keynote speakers. Dr. McAllister gave us insight and suggestions regarding the coming shortage of pastors and the need to be creative in preparing men for ministry, both in the local church and at colleges and seminaries. Dr. Fant spoke on “Tools for Analyzing the Health of Your Church.” They also jointly spoke on “Common Traits of Healthy Churches” and provided good information on preparing a church (and us as pastors) for the inevitability of transition in ministry.

Gretchen Fant and Sarah Hartwig (from GFA Missions) taught a ladies’ track that was well received. Gretchen spoke on “Equipping Women to Help Women” and “Foundational Truths for Affecting Growth and Change.” Sarah spoke on how to “Love Across Generational Lines.”

Pastor Ron Perry and his church family were wonderful hosts, providing an attractive and welcoming place to meet and a wonderful tri-tip dinner for registrants on Monday evening. Each registrant was given a “goodie bag” with bottled water, candies, and granola bars along with the program for the meeting.

Dr. David Innes of Hamilton Square Baptist Church in San Francisco ended the conference with a brief challenge to remember that all true ministry is multi-generational. His focus was on Abraham, who received God’s promise but never saw the fruition of that promise in his lifetime. We are not called to be successful. We are called to work hard and be faithful, leaving the results of our life and ministry to God. He rewards in due time.



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In Christ We Are Saved Past, Present, and Future

Given the grandeur of God's holiness, the depth of man's depravity, the extensiveness of sin's consequences, and the all-sufficiency of God's grace, we should not be surprised when we struggle to develop a comprehensive understanding of God's plan of salvation. Yes, the basic facts of the gospel are simple enough for a child to grasp: Jesus died and rose again to deliver us from our sin (1 Cor. 15:1–2). Yet these facts depend on and contribute to a massive network of interconnected theological concepts.

Another challenge is that the Scriptures do not package up these ideas in a neat system. Indeed, in introducing his comments on the teaching on salvation in Romans, Leon Morris writes,

[Paul] sees the death of Christ as a great divine act that may be viewed from many angles. Indeed, one of our problems in working out what Paul thought the cross did is the fact that he speaks of it as doing so many different things and never

bothers to work them into a unified system. There is no doubting that he saw Christ's salvation as fully meeting our need, however that need must be understood, and equally there is no doubting that he saw the divine provision for meeting that need as complex (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 172).

Nevertheless, Paul does provide us an important clue for organizing the Bible's teaching on salvation. Some two hundred times he connects multiple aspects of salvation to the phrase "in Christ" and its equivalents. The preponderance of such phrases and their diverse application substantiate the claim of John Murray and others that union with Christ forms the center of God's saving plan (*Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, 161). In the words of 1 Corinthians 1:30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

This idea corresponds in Scripture with the fact that our Creator views all human beings as being “in Adam,” inevitably condemned and corrupted by the sinful choice of the first human. Consequently, our only hope is being joined to Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, so that we can partake of His righteousness and victory (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22). Thus, as I survey the “timeline” of God’s rich and full salvation, I’ll strive to keep everything connected to the sublime reality of *union with Christ*.

Salvation Past

Going back as far as possible, we stare in awe at the mysteries of “eternity past.” The Father *chose* us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4–6). While there is much we don’t understand about God’s election, we know this: it does not depend on human merit, nor can it result in man receiving the glory for salvation (Rom. 9:10–18; Eph. 2:8–9). We should also view election the way the Scriptures do: as a motive for worship (Eph. 1:3–14), comfort (Rom. 8:28–30), and service (2 Tim 1:8–12; 2:10).

After millennia of preparation, the appointed time came for the objective accomplishment of salvation! So that we could be joined to Him, Christ joined Himself to us through the *incarnation* (John 1:14). Because of His genuine human nature, He could vicariously render to God everything human beings owe their Creator. He subjected Himself to God’s law (Gal. 4:4–5) and to the death penalty incurred by our violation of that law (2 Cor 5:21; Heb. 2:14–15).

Christ’s death makes complete provision for our multifaceted needs. As a *sacrifice* it propitiates God’s wrath against our sin (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The blood Jesus shed on the cross also served as a ransom price (1 Pet. 1:18–19). Consequently, believers are *redeemed* from slavery to the law (Gal. 3:10–14; 4:4–5), sin (Eph. 1:7; Titus 2:14), and Satan (Heb. 2:14–15). Yet another blessing is *reconciliation*, the removal of enmity and the establishment of peace between man and God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18–21).

Salvation Present

As we move to our present experience, we move from the historical accomplishment of salvation to its personal application. Christians must make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20), and God calls all people to turn to Him (Acts 17:30). Conservative theologians teach that His gracious *effectual call* is what moves individuals to make this turn (Rom. 8:29–30). Scripture refers to various aspects of this call. John 6 speaks of “drawing” or attraction (v. 44; cf. vv. 37, 65). Another aspect is *illumination*, whereby the Holy Spirit uses His Word to open our spiritual eyes to the truthfulness of the gospel and the glory of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12–16; 2 Cor. 4:3–6).

Those who come to Christ in the present must experience *conversion*, which consists of repentance and faith. These are divine gifts (Acts 11:18; Eph. 2:8–9), yet they are also genuine human responses that men are responsible to give to the gospel (1 Thess. 1:9). In *repentance* the mind acknowledges the reality and

guilt of sin (Ps. 51:3), the affections sorrow over sin (2 Cor. 7:9–10), and the will renounces sin and determines to submit to God (Isa. 55:6–7; Acts 3:19). Repentance evidences itself after conversion in a life characterized by obedience to the Lord (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20).

Saving *faith* also engages the entire personality. The mind apprehends the facts of the gospel (Rom. 10:14, 17; 1 Cor. 15:1–4). The affections are stirred to a conviction regarding the truth of those facts (John 20:30–31; Rom. 10:9–10; Heb. 11:1). The will relies upon Christ personally and accepts Him as Savior and Lord (John 1:12; Acts 16:31). Indeed, John describes faith as believing *into* Christ (John 3:16, 36). Such a faith-relationship results in a pattern of good works (James 2:14–26).

Regeneration is the new birth, the impartation of God’s own life to us (John 1:12–13; 3:1–8; Eph. 2:1–6; 1 John 3:9). As a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), the believer has a spiritual mind (Rom. 8:6) or, more broadly, a new heart (Ezek. 36:26–27) with God’s law written on it (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). A work of the Spirit (Titus 3:5), regeneration brings about the indwelling of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), and through Him the ascended Christ Himself lives within us (John 14:16–17; 15:5).

As if that weren’t magnificent enough, *justification* secures our legal acceptance before God’s court through union with Christ. Here the Judge not only forgives all our sins (2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:7) but also imputes to us the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:5–8; 5:17–19; Phil. 3:8–9). God can do this and remain righteous Himself because His declaration of righteousness is based not on our own performance but on Jesus’ substitutionary obedience to God’s law (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 4:4–5) and His blood-shedding death on the cross (Isa. 53:11; Rom. 3:21–26; 1 Pet. 3:18). Because of justification, the believer is freed from eternal condemnation (Rom. 8:1), immune from any accusation that would separate him from God (Rom. 8:30–39). Glory!

Adoption refers to the Christian’s status as an adult son of God (Eph. 1:5). In principle, believers possess this status upon conversion (Gal. 4:4–5). Consequently, we enjoy the Spirit’s blessed ministry of assuring us that we are members of God’s family (Rom. 8:15–17; Gal. 4:6–7). Other benefits of sonship include the Spirit’s sanctifying leadership (Rom. 8:13–14) and the Father’s loving discipline (Heb. 12:6–8). The Christian’s adoption awaits consummation, however, when our bodies experience physical resurrection (Rom. 8:23).

God is not satisfied with simply rectifying our status. His salvation aims at restoring in us His image that was made at Creation but marred through the Fall (Gen. 1–3). This hap-

pens through *sanctification*. Many New Testament usages of sanctification terminology refer to our positional holiness as regenerated and justified people (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11). In theological discussions, however, sanctification typically refers to the work through which the Lord progressively makes us more holy internally and externally (1 Pet. 1:14–16; 2 Pet 3:18).

At conversion, union with Christ ended the enslaving authority of sin over

Truly, God’s saving plan addresses all our needs, problems, and longings. We are complete in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9)!

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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

Cutting a Covenant

Genesis 15:18 says that “the LORD **made** a covenant with Abram.” The Hebrew word translated “made” is, literally, the word “cut.” So I have heard some Christians make a point to say, “God **cut** a covenant.”

But what does this mean? The standard Hebrew-English dictionary, HALOT, suggests that the word “cut” was used for covenants because of the “cutting of a sacrificial animal as is customary when making a covenant.” Brown-Driver-Briggs, an older lexicon, says the same thing: “cut” is used “because of the cutting up and distribution of the flesh of the victim for eating in the sacrifice of the covenants.”

But over time, “cutting” a covenant ceased to be literal. It became a metaphor. This happened long, long ago. Even as early as Job (31:1), “I **made** [lit., “cut”] a covenant with mine eyes,” the word was getting used when no actual cutting was involved.

This is what happens in language. At first a piece of language is literal. Then it becomes a metaphor: to “cut” a covenant is punchy. But then after a while you don’t think about the metaphor anymore. Severing lambs is no longer involved in contracts—and yet the language of “**cutting** the covenant” persists. It’s become part of the language. It’s idiomatic.

This happens in English, most definitely. So many of the most random ingredients go into the everyday words we use. Did you know that “stationery” is called that because the “stationer’s” (or booksellers) was one of the few shops that “stood” [Latin *statio*] in one spot rather than moving around to various fairs and market days? But who thinks of “standing” when we ask, “Hey, where’s the white **stationery**?” Nobody. (Okay, except for me and the other people who listen obsessively to the *History of English* podcast with the incredible Kevin Stroud.)

One of the difficulties in reading ancient languages such as Hebrew is that from this distance it’s just impossible to know when or if “**cutting** a covenant” was a live or dead metaphor. Languages change over time. And if perhaps it was live for Abraham (did Abraham even speak biblical Hebrew?), was it still live for Moses half a millennium later? Or for David a millennium later? Or for Jesus two millennia later?

We don’t know. My linguistic gut (there’s metaphor for you) says no. There’s no way. Metaphors *always* die, and yet their skeletons bulk up and strengthen their languages.

Practical application: don’t mention “he **cut** a covenant” in Bible teaching. It’s almost certainly a dead metaphor, and the appropriate translation is “he **made** a covenant.” People should not be encouraged to go tunneling into word histories for the “true meaning” of simple words in their Bibles.

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The Genesis

Contrary to alarmingly popular modern scholarship, the fundamental literary function of Genesis is to relate actual historical events, not allegorical images of deeper “truths.” That does not mean, however, that those historical events are devoid of deeper, timeless theological significance. God builds into Scripture’s progressive revelation illustrative applications of truth that will be spelled out more clearly later. One naturally expects, then, the providentially governed events of history—and the inspired selection and presentation of those events in Scripture—to illustrate larger truths beyond the historical events as recorded. That’s not allegorical interpretation; that’s simply awareness that all reality is, in fact, theological.

Soteriology is central to the revelation and activity of God in human history—except for the first two chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1 and 2 are utterly devoid of any soteriological doctrine whatsoever. The need for salvation does not arise until Genesis 3. Beginning in Genesis 4, a recurring pattern can be discerned surfacing periodically throughout the Pentateuch and beyond:

1. Divine call for judgment/death.
2. Divinely initiated provision for deliverance.
3. Faith in God’s words as the means of deliverance.
4. Contrast with the consequences of nondeliverance (judgment).

You can find this pattern in numerous passages:

- Genesis 6–7 (deliverance of Noah’s family from the flood).
- Genesis 19 (deliverance of Lot and destruction of Sodom).
- Genesis 22 (deliverance of Isaac from sacrifice).
- Exodus 12 (deliverance of Israel from destruction in Egypt via the first Passover).
- Numbers 21 (deliverance of Israelites from deadly serpents).

But the pattern appears first in Genesis 3, the Bible’s premier picture of atonement by faith through substitution.

Identifying the Pattern

Divine Judgment—The judgment motif is not difficult to identify: perpetual enmity with a formidable adversary (3:14–15a), lifelong sorrow and toil (3:16–19a) and, in the end, death (3:19b).

Divine Deliverance Provided—The divinely initiated provision for deliverance is also easy to spot: a promised deliverer who would come through the woman herself and conquer

their adversary (3:15b), and a more immediate provision for the consequences of their sin (3:21).

Faith in the Divine Promise—The evidence of faith may evade our initial notice, but it’s there: Adam’s naming of Eve in keeping with the divine promise (3:20), and Eve’s apparent anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s promise in her naming of her seed (4:1).

Substitutionary Sacrifice—Subtlest of all is the reference to the substitutionary sacrifice, the loss of life that was necessary to address the immediate consequences of their sin; it is buried in a single, pregnant word: “skins” (3:21). The only way for Adam and Eve to be clothed with animal skins is for the animals to die.

Questioning the Significance

Is this passage genuinely soteriologically significant? Derek Kidner, one of my favorite interpreters, says, “It is unduly subtle and a distraction to see the atonement here.”¹ Instead, he thinks God delegated this task to Adam and Eve. Leupold agrees that when the text says that “God made . . . coats of skin and clothed them,” it means that God instructed Adam and delegated the task to him, but he doesn’t think it is a theologically significant event, just a purely a nontheological historical detail for the sake of information: “The meaning is what the letter of the statement says—no more.” If the text expressly says “God made” and “God clothed,” however, one wonders how Leupold’s explanation meets his own standard and matches “the letter of the statement.”²

But this interpretation seems to ignore the fact that Adam and Eve already *had* a covering (3:7). Why was it necessary to replace it? Was God merely interested in upgrading their wardrobe with something more durable? Victor Hamilton is right to underscore the intentional contrast between 3:7 and 3:21, “the covering of fig leaves versus the covering with tunics of animal skins. The first is an attempt to cover oneself, the second is accepting a covering from another. The first is manmade and the second is God made. Adam and Eve are in need of a salvation that comes from without. God needs to do for them what they are unable to do for themselves.”

And why tunics of *animal skins*? Leupold surmises that it was the simplest and most accessible option. But Keil and Delitzsch think there’s more to it than that: “This act of God laid the foundation for the sacrifices.” After all, the very next chapter of Genesis assumes, without any further recorded instruction, that Cain should have understood the inadequacy of his sacrificial offering (Gen. 4:3–7). So is this seemingly suggestive event merely an inconsequential piece of historical data? Or are others right to see signs of latent soteriological pregnancy in this verse?

of Salvation

Contextual Guides

Textual context links the statement in 3:21 to what precedes and follows it. Boice notes how 3:20 sets the stage for 3:21. Adam's naming of his wife is not just a random and unrelated historical detail. Eve ("life-giver," "mother of all living") was not yet a mother at all; that doesn't happen until 4:1. So why did Adam name her this in the immediate context of the curse? Interestingly Boice, Kidner, and Leupold all agree that Adam's naming of Eve was his response of faith to God's gracious promise of her offspring (3:15). In this act Adam "gives evidence not only of believing that God spoke the truth but evidence of belief in the salvation which God had promised" (Leupold). It is significant, then, that just as 3:20 was Adam's response of faith to God's statement in 3:15, 3:21 was God's response to Adam's faith in 3:20. Boice discerns several implications from God's action in 3:21: (a) the need for some sort of "covering" was both intuitive on man's part and conceded by God; (b) man's attempt to cover himself because of his sin was clearly inadequate; (c) God was the only one who could adequately provide for man's sin-related needs; and (d) the only way Adam and Eve could be "properly" clothed by God was for the animals to die.

Canonical context is just as important to calculate. The unexplained significance of 3:21 was not lost on the original audience. This account was not penned in some primeval vacuum or written for the benefit of Adam. The hermeneutically determinative question is not what Eve might have thought or how much Adam would have understood, but what Israel would have understood when they heard this. This account was part of God's revelation through Moses to the people of Israel. The Pentateuch was a literary whole that arose as a virtual unit within a brief timespan—between the Exodus from Egypt and the entrance into Canaan—for the immediate benefit of Israel. Moses wrote this history to and for the nation *in conjunction with* God's revelation of the vast, complex, and comprehensive sacrificial system that would ever after govern their relation and approach to Him. Israel could not have failed to note the connection between human sin and the death of animals, however implicit. That connection was spelled out for them repeatedly and in great detail in the rest of the Pentateuch. The soteriological implications of Genesis 3:21 may look to us like dubious deductions, but they would have been far more apparent and understandable to the Israelites to whom this revelation was first given.

Symbolic Significance

It is not accidental that the Bible's first account of death is the death of an animal and not man and that the immediate consequence of sin was the need of *clothing* (3:7, 21).

Likewise, the following soteriological facts that emerge from subsequent revelation cannot be coincidental.

Nakedness is a picture of sin (cf. Rev. 3:17–18; 16:15). Why was their own nakedness the first thing they noticed? Why did they take steps to hide their own nakedness? Why did Adam hide from God out of fear and shame "because [he] was naked" (3:10) rather than out of a consciousness that he had disobeyed and displeased God? It appears to be the instinct of conscience—consciousness of the exposure of the body reflected a consciousness of the exposure of their now-guilty souls before God. Their desperate but inadequate attempt to cover their physical nakedness was simultaneous with (and mirrored) their desperate but unsuccessful attempt to hide their guilt from God.

Clothing is a picture of an acceptable approach to God. Later in this same canonical context, when the sacrificial system designed to provide the only acceptable way into God's presence was formally inaugurated, the Levitical priests *did not make their own priestly garments* (Exod. 28:1–3), and *did not even dress themselves* (Lev. 8:1–9). Seiss (*The Gospel in Leviticus*) notes that "it was not left to the priests to find their own dress. God had provided it for them. The wedding guest need not bring a wedding garment with him; that is an article furnished by the maker of the feast."

Clothing becomes a picture of salvation and acceptance before God (e.g., Isa. 61:10; Matt. 22:11–12; Luke 15:22). We are tempted to give great attention to our attire and to be proud of our clothes, but clothing ought to remind us of our sin against God. As Matthew Henry notes, "Clothes came in with sin" and are actually "but the badges of our poverty and infamy." You can even hear the echo of Genesis 3:21 ("God . . . clothed [Heb. *labash*] them") in Isaiah's exultation: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for *he hath clothed* [Heb. *labash*] me with the garments of salvation, *he hath covered me* with the robe of righteousness"—attire, the NT teaches us, provided through the sacrificial death of Christ in our behalf.

¹ All the quotations from commentators that follow are easily located in their respective commentaries on Genesis 3:21.

² The argument of Kidner and Leupold that God delegated this task to Adam and Eve is inexplicable. The same verb "*make*" (*asah*) has been frequently and consistently used to describe direct personal action, never delegation (1:7, 16, 25, 26, 31; 2:2, 3, 4, 9, 18; 3:1, 7). On what basis does it suddenly change here in 3:21?

Jesus My Advocate

My heart was heavy this morning when my alarm went off at six. Scenes from the previous night's news were hounding me in my struggle to wake up. The "chatter" flying through my head was not a nice way to start the day. I was tired. A different kind of tired. The tired that comes when I know too much of sin and its effects. I wanted to stay in bed, but I knew that I needed to spend time with the Lord more than I needed sleep. In fact, this morning especially, I knew I *desperately* needed Him. I felt so many pressures from so many different areas and was discouraged. The Accuser was having his way with my emotions and was bruising me at will.

I stumbled down the stairs, made coffee, prayed the boys wouldn't wake up, and then found a good spot where I could really soak in the Word. This morning, right on schedule, the Lord had me in Mark 14 reading of the woman who sacrificed the "alabaster box of ointment of spikenard" to anoint Jesus' head when He was in the home of Simon the leper.

Broken

This woman wouldn't have been a follower of Christ unless she believed that He was the Messiah whom Israel had been longing for and waiting for all these millennia. His words changed her, and she saw him for who He truly was. Her heart was full of joy and gratitude for these truths. How could she possibly honor Him the way He deserved—the King of her heart? No doubt she thought of her most prized possession, an alabaster box of ointment. Mark 14:3 says she broke the box and poured it on his head. Where did that alabaster box come from? Wouldn't we love to know? Isn't it interesting that the Scriptures by their silence let us know that we don't need to know where it came from? Everyone knew it was very, very valuable, though. As Christ explained, she had "come aforehand to anoint [his] body to the burying."

An alabaster container was sealed with wax and resembled a white marble-like stone that is strong enough and thick enough to contain the beautiful perfume. It stays pure (and doesn't spoil) until the owner chooses the time to break it. Once broken the fragrance can no longer be contained, and all those nearby know of the sacrificial act.

I pondered the beautiful symbolism of the treasure being broken by its owner. I paused, sipped my coffee again, and let that timeless truth steep in my heart. My Heavenly Father "broke" the Son on the Cross where Jesus experienced the pain, the sorrow, the agony, the turning away of the One He had had fellowship with from eternity past. When Jesus was broken, He fulfilled all the requirements of the law, satisfied

the wrath of God, and brought the opportunity for reconciliation to "whosoever believeth in him." The sweet smell of that sacrifice was like no other and pleased the Heavenly Father, who broke the seal of the tomb. Because Christ "broke free" of the tomb, all the world for ages to come could now take pleasure in the truths that Christ *is* God, He *is* alive, and He *is* coming again! If Christ did not rise from the grave, there is no hope, and our faith is in vain!

My coffee might be cold now, but my soul was warmed with the joy and hope of the Resurrected Christ! Then the sweet Holy Spirit kindly stirred my heart with these questions:

- Are you willing to be broken so that the beauty of holiness can fully permeate this world and bring great pleasure to your Heavenly Father?
- Are you willing to take something you value and let Me break it?
- Are you willing to let Me take your husband and let Me break him?
- Are you willing to let Me take your children and break them?

I couldn't honestly say "yes" right then to all those questions, for that calling to brokenness is worked out in the trenches of prayer. They were very sobering questions to ponder, so I returned to the passage and was once again amazed.

Accused

This woman performed *the* most beautiful act upon Jesus recorded in the Scriptures. She followed. She sacrificed. She knew the Messiah, and she gave Him her all. And yet, here she was being accused. (Can you relate?)

Imagine what it was like to be a woman at that time—constantly put down, ill-treated, divorced on a whim, exhausted by housework, and rarely given respect or allowed to make any decisions. Even more striking are the stories of those whom Jesus found who were demon possessed! How did they become demon possessed? And it happened to so many! Almost all the women in the Gospels were in desperately hopeless situations, including Jesus' own mother. But Jesus became broken for the broken, became their only Hope, and thus had their highest praise and loyal love.

In some ways I wish the story had stopped right there so we that could enjoy this precious experience of pure worship

Continued on page 37



IF ANY MAN WILL PREACH AS HE SHOULD PREACH,
HIS WORK WILL TAKE MORE OUT OF HIM THAN ANY OTHER LABOR UNDER HEAVEN.
-CHARLES SPURGEON

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What's It Like Being a Chaplain's Kid?

Chaplain's kids are unique. We do not “fit in” with the missionary kids or the pastors’ kids entirely. Youth groups and churches often find it difficult to minister to military families effectively. Military brats, as we are often called, have a different culture—a culture that is built on an inconsistent life in which we have found comfort of sorts. We develop an itch every couple of years and begin purging all goods that we are unwilling to move again, getting ready to say goodbye to another group of people, and looking forward to or dreading the next duty location. Growing up a chaplain’s kid, I had the wonderful opportunity of spending time in Germany, Kansas, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, and spent time helping churches across the Intermountain West region. I even met Jessie (who is now my wife) while my dad was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas.

Chaplain kids have a lot in common with missionary kids. We may be Americans, but we spend the majority of our time in a different culture. The distinct smell of the Army, the unique cultural clothing of uniforms, and the mindset of training for war bring a sense of comfort and home amidst the chaos of the military. Unlike a missionary kid, where their whole family is involved with planting a church and sharing the gospel, a chaplain kid’s main mission is to support Dad wherever God sends him. It was through relationships of

ago, when Jessie and I began praying together about the chaplaincy and the proper time for me to begin this process, we prayed that God would make His way clear. Along the way, if God did not want this, there would be plenty of opportunities for Him to say no. I was confident in what I believed God had called me to, and I was taking the next right step. Jessie knew that God was calling me to the chaplaincy before we even got married; I had to become fully confident about God’s calling and needed to wait for the right time to begin the process.

Becoming an Army chaplain is a test of patience. At the beginning, it seemed simple, but each step revealed yet another step and often another piece of paperwork to sign. During this process I have been working on school and waiting impatiently to find out what’s next. After I was accepted by both the military and FBFI, I thought that everything would move rather quickly and I would find out when I could go to Chaplain Officer Basic Leadership Course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. But I find myself waiting—waiting to find out where my unit will be and when I begin this ministry as a chaplain candidate.

Second Timothy 1:6–7 reads, “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” These verses have been an encouragement to me through this process. I know what God has called me to do, and others have affirmed this calling in my life. I know that through God’s strength



CH (COL) Gary Fisher administering the oath of office to his son, Jeremy, in a recent “virtual” ceremony.

the FBFI that my family was exposed to International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona, where my wife and I received our bachelor’s degrees and where I am currently enrolled in the Master of Divinity program.

As an undergraduate-degree senior, I believed that God was calling me to be a chaplain. Knowing the struggles and the difficulties of growing up in the military caused me to take time, think, and pray to assure myself that this was truly God’s calling on my life, not just my wanting to be like my dad. I was not in a hurry to join the chaplaincy but wanted to be sure of the calling, and I still had my MDiv to work on. About a year

I do not have to be fearful of the future, but I can be confident in the equipping of God to do what He has called me to do.

Jeremy and his wife serve at Fruita Faith Baptist Church in Fruita, Colorado, where he is the pastoral intern. Jeremy is third-generation military and second-generation Army.



In Christ We Are Saved Past, Present, and Future

Continued from page 29

us and launched us into a God-oriented life (Rom. 6:1–10). As we embrace this reality by faith in sanctification, we can resist individual temptations, dying to self and experiencing something of Christ's resurrection power (vv. 11–14). God energizes us to desire and to do His will (Phil. 2:13). The Spirit is the special Agent of this energizing, producing in us the many qualities of holiness (Eph. 5:18ff; Gal. 5:16ff; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3–11). A major instrument in this process is Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16–17), through which our minds are renewed (Rom. 12:1–2) and we behold the transforming glory of our Savior (2 Cor. 3:18). Through this and other means of grace, God is saving us more and more from our sin!

This sanctifying work does not last for a season only. The Lord promises to *preserve* all His people throughout their earthly lives so that they enter His presence for all eternity (John 6:38–40; 10:27–29; 1 Thess. 5:23–24). This preservation happens through the Christian's divinely enabled *perseverance* in faith (Matt. 10:22; Heb. 10:39; 1 Pet. 1:5) and obedience (Col. 1:21–23; Heb. 12:14).

Salvation Future

At *glorification* those who have been united with Christ will be delivered from all the effects of sin and ushered into

Christ's death makes complete provision for our multifaceted needs.

direct and eternal fellowship with God. Upon seeing Christ, the believer will be entirely transformed into His image (1 John 3:2). This final stage of sanctification (1 Thess. 3:13) will accomplish a chief goal of God's salvation: Christ will receive glory through a host of people that reflect His beautiful character (Rom. 8:29–30).

At the resurrection the believer will receive a new body (2 Cor. 5:1–5; Phil. 3:20–21), one described as heavenly, imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (1 Cor. 15:35–57). Romans 8:23 describes this "redemption of our [bodies]" as our adoption. We will finally enjoy our full status as God's adult children, with all its accompanying blessings! Furthermore, our restoration will lead to the removal of all evil and the curse and to the restoration of the entire Creation to even more than its original glory (Rom. 8:18–23; cf. Rev. 20–22). The final redemption of believers will issue in the redemption of all things in and under Christ (Eph. 1:7–10; Col. 1:19–20).

Truly, God's saving plan addresses *all* our needs, problems, and longings. We are complete in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9)! If so, why seek satisfaction anywhere else? Why be characterized by guilt or gloominess instead of peace and confident expectation? And why live for any other purpose than to know Christ and to make Him known?

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Jesus My Advocate

Continued from page 34

without the marring that is about to take place. The Scriptures tell us that "there were some that had indignation within themselves and said [with scowls and contempt, I imagine], Why was this waste of the ointment made? . . . And they murmured against her."

What a contrast in the midst of this beautiful aroma! The filth of hell pours out an eternal stench.

They observed the sacrificial act, smelled the rare perfume, saw Jesus with the oil on His head, yet they called it a waste! Imagine how worthless this woman must have felt. They wanted to take her precious and valuable possession and just sell it—they didn't even try to convince her to keep it.

Defended

"Let her alone!" Jesus said, and I can imagine the house was suddenly dead quiet.

With one phrase Jesus quenched the fiery darts and showed His power over the Accuser. Then He asked them a question: "Why trouble ye her?"

Again, Christ, a man, goes counterculture in defending a woman and may also have demonstrated righteous anger here.

"She hath wrought a good work on me. . . . She hath done what she could. . . . Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her!"

Consider the fact that if everyone through the ages would know of her sacrifice, they also would know how she had been treated. You can't have one without the other. This promise was really threefold. They will know of (1) her willingness to let something of great value be broken in gratitude to the King of kings, (2) the willingness of Christ to be broken for all, and (3) Christ's power over her accusers and the Accuser of the brethren.

My heart that was heavy and discouraged earlier was strengthened and full of hope. Now I can hear the words of my Advocate rather than the words of my Accuser.

Rest assured, Jesus is also telling your Accuser, "Let her alone . . . she hath done what she could." Let these truths strengthen your heart: Jesus loves you. Jesus sees you. Jesus loves your sacrificial brokenness, for it permeates this filthy world with the beauty of holiness. Jesus is defending you to your Accuser too.

Christina Heffernan is passionate about the cross and the health of the Christian community. She enjoys evangelism and discipleship as well as mentoring others in healthy body, healthy mind, and healthy finances. Her husband, John, is the pastor of Victory Baptist Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina, and they have nine-year-old twin sons.

What Is Important to You?

Recently I read a statement from David Brainerd, that godly missionary to the American Indians, that deeply blessed and stirred my heart. He said, "There appeared to be nothing of any importance to me but holiness of heart and life, and the conversion of the heathen to God." What a powerful statement! There are two things I want to emphasize from this quotation.

First, a person must manifest a life of holiness in being used of the Lord. The Scriptures repeatedly challenge us in the matter of a holy and godly life. Romans 6:19 says, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." First Peter 1:15–16 declares, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Ephesians 4:24 challenges us, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." In order for a person to be effective in his service for the Lord, he must manifest a holy life. Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." The Lord declared to the men of God in Isaiah 52:11, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD." It is imperative that every child of God guard his walk with the Lord. A godly life will be a wonderful instrument that God can use for His glory!

The second thing I want to emphasize in David Brainerd's quote is "the conversion of the heathen." I urge you to examine and contemplate in your heart what is the thing of greatest importance to you. Is it a holy life coupled with the goal of reaching the lost for Christ? No one can answer that except the individual who is reading this article. This was the deepest desire of David Brainerd's life. Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." Now, we know in the context of this verse that it is not talking about soulwinning as we know it today. It literally means "to capture souls." That is, with godly wisdom on our part, we rescue people from evil ways that can destroy them.

In his book *Awake My Heart*, J. Sidlow Baxter put it very aptly when he wrote,

When we seek to rescue the perishing by bringing them to the Savior, we are exhibiting a practical wisdom than which none can be wiser. Soulwinning is highest wisdom for the following three reasons. First, it fulfills the highest of all functions to our fellow creatures, for we cannot possibly do any greater service to them than to bring about their eternal salvation in Christ. Second, it obeys the last and tenderest of our Lord's commands, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15)." "Ye shall be witnesses unto me (Acts 1:8)." Third, it receives the highest of all rewards. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (Daniel 12:3)." Far better be that kind of star, than the brightest "social star."

The Lord wants to use us in helping others come to the Savior. In Luke 19:10 Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." In Luke 5:32 He declared, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Our goal ought to be to broadcast the wonderful message of salvation to those who are lost. We have the most powerful message that mankind can hear. What is it? John 3:17 states, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

Recently I had a meeting in which we saw the Lord marvelously save a man, his wife, and their teenage son; they all came forward during the invitation after the message. What a blessing to see them come to the Savior! Afterwards they came to me and expressed their gratefulness for their newfound salvation. What an honor to point the lost to Christ; may we never get over the wonder and privilege of bringing souls to Him!

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