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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



Living Among Wolves

Living Among Wolves



FEATURES

6 Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves: Ministers with Innocent Discernment

Greg Stiekes

What can we learn from this admonition, given by Christ to His disciples?

9 That's Just Your Interpretation! A Historical Overview of the Biblical Hermeneutic

Bud Steadman

"That's just your interpretation" demonstrates one of two problems—either a lack of belief in the Scriptures or a faulty understanding of the interpretive approach to the Scriptures.

12 Living Among the Enemy: The Romans 12 Plan

Kevin Schaal

Our culture has rapidly gone from being nominally Christian, to secular, to opposed to Christianity; how are we to live obediently and victoriously in such an environment?

14 Rendering unto Caesar Part I: The Principle of Submission to Civil Authority

David R. Shumate

The conflict between religious convictions and duty to country is a compelling dramatic theme.

Our sincere thanks to Dr. Gordon Dickson for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

17 Rendering unto Caesar Part II: Practical Issues in Submitting to Civil Authority

David R. Shumate

How are we to apply biblical principles to difficult questions that pertain to the believer's relationship to government?

22 The Things Which Make for Peace

Gordon Dickson

Pandemics and politics have created a frustrating mix. How should a congregation respond?

DEPARTMENTS

5 Mail Bag & News from All Over

20 On the Home Front

26 Regional Reports

28 Culturally Blended Marriages: Joys and Challenges

Linda Shumate

32 At a Glance

Prophetic Fulfillment: Is Close Enough Good Enough? (Part 2)

Layton Talbert

34 With the Word to the World

The Right Approach to Reaching the Lost

Jim Tillotson

36 COVID, Chaplaincy, and the Church

CDR Tavis J. Long, CHC, USN

38 "Let Your Faith Be Bigger Than Your Fear"

Jerry Sivnksty

One cold March morning during a torrential downpour, I observed a man wrestling with a choice. Now, granted, it wasn't an earthshaking choice, but it was nevertheless fun to watch. You see, he was preparing to exit a Walmart while eating cotton candy. And did I mention that it was pouring down rain? The poor man had already thrown away the plastic wrapper, so what was he to do? Watching this, I imagined an announcer saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, what will he do?" Would he stand inside the entrance and eat his cotton candy? Or would he try to hold the sugary fluff under his jacket as he walked? Or would he run to his car like mad? To my great delight, he sprinted toward his car, found it locked and fumbled in his pocket for the keys. Now what do you think he was holding when he finally got into his car? Yep, all he had in his hand was a paper cone.

As I watched this, I thought it was an interesting metaphor for Christian ministry. Shallow teaching, even when artificially sweetened with psychology, still dissolves in a downpour. And the recent toxic mix of pandemics and politics has been like a perfect storm to discover true Christian convictions. This is no time for "cotton candy" preaching. If you are trusting in "the land of peace" as the prophet did (Jer. 12:5), then you have had some sleepless nights. This edition of *FrontLine* is designed to help you develop your discernment for the troubling times ahead; it will help you to trust in the Lord.

How can we be both "wise as serpents and harmless as doves"? What was Jesus emphasizing with these startling similes? Greg Stiekes' article answers these questions, amplifying the central theme for this *FrontLine* issue.

We all sense a need for discernment as our culture grows more chaotic. Yet as we try to apply that scriptural discernment, someone will say, "That's

just your interpretation!" Bud Steadman's article will help you answer that retort.

What does it mean to be a living sacrifice? In what sense are the powers that be ordained of God? And how can we grant fellow believers flexibility in these frustrating times? To answer these questions, three authors have collaborated to produce four articles on Romans 12, 13, and 14. These crucial chapters help us know how to face the challenging crucible ahead. Here you will learn how to live among your enemies and how to "render unto Caesar" what is due and still pursue the things which make for peace.

How do you cope with those weird, crooked places in your lot in life? Mark Minnick's article (see "The Perfection of His Providence" in the *First Partaker*) answers this question by highlighting the ministry of Thomas Boston; here you will find the discernment of a suffering saint. Boston understood the power of God's perfecting providence, and his sermons clearly conveyed the power of God's sufficient grace.

When a new marriage brings together significant cultural differences, how can new family members blend in? Linda Shumate addresses this increasingly common concern in her article "Culturally Blended Marriages."

Bruce McAllister's article helps you understand how to invest your life for eternal rewards; it's time to learn how to plant for a rich harvest.

How could you use *FrontLine* magazine in your church? Carl Wood's article explains how his congregation has used the magazine to great benefit. (See "FrontLine for All" in the *First Partaker* insert in the middle of the magazine.)

Life is too short to be shallow. May God grant discernment to all of us for the troubling times ahead.



Gordon Dickson



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First Baptist Church of Beaver, Utah

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I felt that the Lord was in our midst this week [at the FBFI Annual Fellowship], and it was one of the best times of refreshing that I've had in a long while. I can't remember a better FBFI conference.

*Bob Jones III
Greenville, South Carolina*

I thoroughly enjoyed this year's chaplain training [in Indianapolis at the Annual Fellowship]. I found the workshop [given by Daniel Minton] on post-traumatic stress to be particularly helpful. I have already used the principles taught in this workshop to help others. Praise the Lord!

*LT Plais Hoyle CHC (USMC)
Washington, DC*

The highlight of the last quarter was attending the FBFI national conference! Both the training and the preaching were the best I've experienced in all the years I have been attending.

*CH (CPT) Seth Hamilton
Fort Bragg, Fayetteville, NC*

Earl and Joan Barnett

are enjoying their new ministry at Valley Independent Baptist Missions (VIBM) and Canaan Baptist Church in Donna, Texas. They have been a part of VIBM since its beginning in 2002. Earl has served as vice president of the board since VIBM incorporated as a 501c3 nonprofit organization. He also served as a field representative from 2003 until 2012, when he and Joan came to King Cove, Alaska. VIBM is a support ministry serving missionaries in South Texas and Mexico and provides vehicle storage, mail service, and temporary housing. Through the years hundreds of missionaries have stayed in the facility. In addition, VIBM has a warehouse to provide clothing, Spanish literature, teaching materials, Bibles, and tracts. VIBM also sponsors an annual ladies' retreat in the fall and a pastors' conference in the spring in Mexico.

Earl and Joan will be coworkers in the ministry at Canaan Baptist Church, an independent Baptist church plant that their son-in-law and daughter, Jeff and Bettina Shue, inherited.



Tim and Jeannette Joyner served faithfully as missionaries in Uganda under Open Door Baptist Missions (Greenville, South Carolina) since 2005. Uganda is suffering under the second wave of the COVID pandemic, and Tim and Jeannette both became sick with the virus the week of June 1–4 and began treatment. Tim was admitted to the hospital on June 15 and was subsequently transferred to the ICU in a second hospital. It was there on Sunday, June 29, that he suffered cardiac arrest and went to be with his Savior. Tim was laid to rest on June 22, 2021, in Kanyandegeya-Fort Portal, Uganda. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."



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Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves

Ministers with Innocent Discernment

The twelve disciples sat listening carefully to Jesus' instructions with mixed emotions of joyful anticipation and nervous fear. He was sending them on their own mission, two by two, to preach the gospel of the kingdom. Up till now, according to Matthew's Gospel, the disciples had been in the background, merely following Jesus (Matt. 4:20, 22; 8:23), listening to Him teach (5:1), sharing meals with Him (9:10), and sometimes standing in awe of Him (8:27). But now Jesus had urged them to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest (9:38), and then He had called them together, singling them out from His other followers to be the first answer to that prayer (10:1–42).

Wise but Harmless

The first series of directives Jesus gave them on that occasion would have sounded familiar enough to these twelve men. He told them not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans but to take the message strictly to their own people, Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). Some would welcome them and be blessed, while others would reject them and be duly warned (10:11–15). But then their assignment seemed to take a dramatic turn into new territory, uncomfortable territory. For Jesus said,

“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves” (10:16). Then He began to describe for them some of their future experiences as proclaimers of the gospel. They would be flogged in synagogues (10:17), dragged before Gentile rulers to give an account for their message (10:18–20), ministering in a culture where they would be hated and where even close family members would hand them over to the authorities for execution (10:21–22).

The image Jesus portrays in this passage must have alarmed the disciples. “Sheep among wolves.” Sheep are prey animals. They frighten easily, and they can do little to defend themselves except to move away from danger. But wolves are fierce predators that move in packs, sorting and hunting their prey. They attack at the sheep's throat, but do not kill the sheep immediately. Rather, the sheep normally die of shock and blood loss as they are being eaten. Having lived in an agrarian culture, the disciples fully apprehended Jesus's meaning. He was sending them out to minister with the gospel as defenseless sheep amid a circling pack of vicious predators seeking an opportunity to devour them. How would they conduct themselves in such a dangerous situation? Jesus answered this unspoken question immediately,

using yet another pair of creatures to explain to the disciples how they should go forth. He told them, “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

We should not miss the significance of this familiar phrase. “Wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” Not only was this metaphor formative for His disciples on their first mission, but it is also highly instructive for our own ministries in the twenty-first century. In fact, it is arguable that Jesus’ portrayal of future ministry beginning in verse 16 was not in reference to that single mission trip alone but also to the preaching of the apostles after Jesus’s ascension and the proclamation of the gospel that has continued through His followers to this day (cf. Matt. 10:18, 22–23).

What is the significance of this metaphorical charge using serpents and doves? Some NT scholars suspect that Jesus may be using a preformed proverb (note Paul’s similar phrase in Rom. 16:19). But this saying most likely originated with Jesus Himself for at least two reasons. First, there is no record of this proverb in any ancient literature before Matthew 10. Second, no one, especially in a Jewish culture, would have ever thought to put these two unlikely creatures together in the same expression and actually suggest that faithful believers imitate both.

Serpents and Doves

To begin with, no one hearing Jesus that day in Matthew 10 could have missed His allusion to the serpent in the garden of Eden who tempted Eve to sin. In fact, the very word “wise” that Jesus uses, *phronimos*, is the same word used in the ancient Greek version of Genesis 3:1 when it says, “Now the serpent was more *subtil* than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.” *Phronimos* means “wise, subtle, cunning, crafty, clever, sly.” And because of its participation in the Fall, the serpent itself has ever been associated with cunning, most often with negative overtones. Jesus Himself even uses serpents and vipers in other places in Matthew to refer to the Pharisees (Matt. 12:34; 23:33).

On the other hand, the dove in the ancient world was the very picture of innocence and gentleness, a creature that would never offend anyone. The

adjective translated “harmless” is from a word group having to do with vessels of clay in which liquids such as wine and water were mixed. It literally means “unmixed,” as in “pure, undiluted, no hidden motives or agenda, sincere.” The dove depicted this kind of innocence in the ancient world. Natural historians even believed that the dove was a pure animal that had no bile. It was therefore the perfect creature to be an expression of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’s baptism (Matt. 3:16).

Could there be any two symbols from the animal kingdom that are more mutually exclusive than the serpent and the dove? In days of the first Adam, the serpent embodied Satan. In the days of the last Adam, the dove embodied the Spirit. In the minds of the disciples, therefore, the tension between these two symbols would have been palpable. Yet Jesus, in His unparalleled wisdom, joins together these unlikely creatures and their virtues to produce an approach to ministry that will carry the disciples through any danger that they may face on their mission.

Cunning by itself is not a vice—it’s a great virtue that the wise in Proverbs are encouraged to pursue (Prov. 9:16; 11:29; 17:18). Jesus even uses the same word, *phronimos*, to describe the wise man who built his house on a rock (Matt. 7:24), the wise virgins who are ready for the bridegroom (25:1–9), and the wise and faithful steward (25:45). Jesus is saying that when we go forth to minister in His name, we must have a serpentlike discernment. We must be cunning, astute, shrewd, prudent, judicious, perceptive, and vigilant. At the same time, we must be completely and sincerely devoted to Christ in loving service to others with the dovelike quality of innocence, genuineness, purity, holiness, and a slowness to offend.

However, we must understand that Jesus is not merely telling His disciples that sometimes they must be cunning and at other times they must be innocent. If we are cunning without innocence, we reduce the ministry of the gospel to a conning strategy that is willing to

cloud the message in order to escape persecution, or to spin the proclamation in a way that is more suitable to the sensibilities of the culture, or to pay great attention to the apparent success of the mission but ignore the heart of the messenger. But if we are innocent without cunning we can be naively trapped, taken advantage of, abused or disregarded in a way that demeans or surrenders our ability to proclaim the gospel.

A Model of Discernment



One of the Lord’s greatest apostles, Paul, is also a model of innocent discernment. His ministry to the Corinthians proved that he appeared gentle and humble when he was with them in their city, but that he was bold and discerning in his letters, destroying arguments and cunningly ensnaring falsehoods into obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:1–10).

In the Book of Acts Paul showed daring cunning in the way he navigated gospel opportunities in the cities he visited. For example, it was innocent discernment that gave Paul and the church the upper hand in Philippi. Paul had allowed himself to be beaten with rods without protest, though he was not given the fair trial due him as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:22–24, 37). So after the earthquake, when the city magistrates sent representatives to tell Paul to leave the prison, Paul basically said, “You tell them to come here themselves and make me leave!” Then the magistrates were scared and apologized in person, begging him to leave. They knew that Paul now had the authority to demand that they receive the same beating they gave to him. But Paul took his time (16:37–40). He wasn’t being pugnacious; he was being shrewd. He was saying, in essence, “We all know what went down here. And I don’t think that this new church in your city will have any trouble, will they?” “No, sir. They won’t.”

As Michael Wilkins remarks in his commentary, “Without innocence the keenness of the snake is crafty, a devious menace; without keenness the innocence of the dove is naïve, helpless gullibility” (*Matthew*, NIVApp 2003, 392).

Rather, Jesus is saying something much more profound. He is actually telling His disciples to *synthesize* these two virtues—cunning and innocence—into a new quality that sets apart His disciples from all others. He is telling them to minister with an *innocent discernment*. They are to be aware of danger and wisely navigate their culture, while maintaining their purity and their genuine concern for those they have been called to rescue from the culture.

Innocence and Discernment

Jesus Himself is the ultimate example of *innocent discernment*. We see His shrewdness in the way that He conducted His ministry amid the circling wolves of the Jewish religious leaders who were always looking for an opportunity to kill Him (Matt. 26:3–5; cf. John 5:18; 7:1; 11:47–54). We see it in the keen way with which He responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees as they attempted to trap Him in His own words, parrying their attacks with such clarity and force that eventually no one dared ask Him any more questions (Matt. 22:46). Yet, we see His innocence in the way that His enemies could never make any of their charges stick and in the way He gave Himself up for crucifixion though He had done nothing worthy of death. As 1 Peter 2:22–23 says of Jesus, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.”

In our own ministries today, we must learn the virtue of *innocent discernment*. We cannot simply smile and give the gospel naively, with no appreciation for the competing philosophies of our time. We must continually increase our knowledge of the Scriptures, but we must also gain insight and wisdom into our surroundings. We must struggle to understand the fresh and subtle attacks against the gospel

from the cancel culture, the feminist agenda, the LGBTQ community, and the doctrines of social justice. We must be fully aware how governmental forces are at work that may ultimately subvert our ability to preach the gospel freely. For even if we can explain the gospel with clarity and passion, our voices may be drowned out if we cannot navigate the workings of our society with unusual keenness.

At the same time, we must by God’s grace remain pure, blameless, untainted by the sin that is rampant in the world. This is a most serious charge. We may be cunning enough to match apologetical swords with the craftiest despisers of the gospel and overcome their falsehoods in their own arena. But if we ourselves are not innocent of sin, we will betray the message that the gospel has the power to save from sin, giving the enemies of the cross grounds for rejoicing. Therefore, while taking the gospel to our communities, we must make clever and wise decisions about what will help us to be most effective with the gospel. But we must live in a way that demonstrates genuine love and holy living, portraying the life of a sinner who has been transformed by the gospel’s power.

As Jesus prepared His disciples that day for their first solo mission, He was well aware of what they would face. But He also knew that an *innocent discernment* was the essential combination of virtues that would carry them through dangerous and troubling times. Jesus knows that this same combination of virtues will carry us through our ministries also, as we faithfully proclaim the gospel even when we and our message are despised, helping us to serve Him knowledgeably and to love people genuinely, while we continue to trust Him without fear.

Greg Stiekes is the pastor of Gateway Baptist Church in Travelers Rest, South Carolina, and he holds advanced and terminal degrees from various schools where he specialized in New Testament Studies. He lives with his wife, Rena, and their children in Greenville and serves full-time as an associate professor of New Testament at BJU Seminary.



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That's Just Your Interpretation!

A Historical Overview of the Biblical Hermeneutic

Have you ever been speaking to someone concerning a biblical truth which they did not want to receive, only to have them say, "That's just your interpretation"? Yes, it happens all too often. While we admit that there are some passages in the Bible "hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:16), the statement "That's just your interpretation" demonstrates one of two problems—either unbelief of the Scriptures or a faulty understanding of the interpretive approach to the Scriptures.

In his book *Hermeneutics* writer Henry A. Virkler provides this basic history of the study of interpretation of the Scriptures: "The word

hermeneutics is said to have had its origin in the name Hermes, the Greek god who served as messenger for the gods, transmitting and interpreting their communications to their fortunate, or often unfortunate, recipients."¹ Hermeneutics, then, is the science of interpreting Scripture.

Historic fundamentalism has with rare exceptions held to a literal interpretation of the Bible. Commentator Paul Merritt Bassett has defined the movement this way: "Fundamentalism is a term popularly used to describe strict adherence to Christian doctrines based on a literal interpretation of the Bible.



This usage derives from a late nineteenth and early twentieth century transdenominational Protestant movement that opposed the accommodation of Christian doctrine to modern scientific theory and philosophy.²

What is the essential difference between the two interpretive approaches predominant in historic Christianity—literal and allegorical? The term “literal” refers to taking the normal, customary approach to literature—the way all language is commonly understood. This approach refers to a literal-grammatical-historical interpretation when handling the Scriptures, but it does allow for figurative language in its normal use.

The allegorical approach is quite different in that it opens the door to subjugating the normal use of human language to the opinion of the interpreter. The allegorical method may at times employ literal language but just as quickly may abandon literal language—based on the choice of the interpreter. Taking an allegorical or figurative approach to a literal passage enables the interpreter to explain away the true meaning.

Key biblical doctrines are impacted by the interpretive method employed. Two of those are eschatology and the uniqueness of the New Testament church. “The basic differences between the premillennial and amillennial schools and between the pretribulation and posttribulation rapturists arise from the adoption of divergent and irreconcilable methods of interpretation.”³ A literal interpretation of the Old Testament results in one holding to an earthly reign of the Messiah—a nonliteral or allegorical interpretation most often explains it away. A literal interpretation emphasizes that the name “Israel” denotes the physical posterity of Jacob and is not to be confused with the New Testament Church. An allegorical perspective fails to accurately recognize this distinction.

Arriving at an understanding of the proper mode of interpretation demands a careful study of all pertinent Scriptures; this article, however, will focus on the chronological development of the interpretive methods in the history of Israel and the church.

The Old Testament Foundation of Literal Interpretation

It is generally agreed by all students of the history of hermeneutics that interpretation began at the time of the return of Israel from the Babylonian exile under Ezra as recorded in Nehemiah 8. Such interpretation was necessary, first of all, because of the long period in Israel’s history in which the Mosaic Law was forgotten and neglected. The discovery of the forgotten “book of the law” by Hilkiah in the reign of Josiah brought it back into a position of prominence for a brief season, only to have it forgotten again during the years of the exile. The teaching and interpretation of the Scriptures was necessary, further, because the Jews had replaced their native tongue with Aramaic while in exile. Upon their return the Hebrew Scriptures were almost unintelligible to them.⁴

The Intertestamental Model of Literal Interpretation

Jerome, in rejecting the literal method of interpretation, at the same time “calls the literal interpretation ‘Jewish’” when

speaking of the inter-testamental period.⁵ From his statement it appears that the literal method and Jewish interpretation were synonymous.

History records that “the method employed in Rabbinism by the scribes was not an allegorical method, but a literal method.”⁶ This is clearly seen in their view of the Messiah’s coming. The Jews were looking for a literal king to sit on a literal throne over a literal nation of Israel, as reflected in the beliefs of such groups as the Maccabees.

The New Testament Example of Literal Interpretation

The prevailing method of interpretation among the orthodox Jews at the time of Christ was certainly literal. Thomas Horne writes, “Although the Sanhedrin and the hearers of Jesus often appealed to the Old Testament, yet they give no indication of the allegorical interpretation; even Josephus has nothing of it.”⁷ Although the Jewish leaders arrived at false conclusions concerning Jesus Christ, it was not the fault of the literal method that led to their error; it was their failure to believe all that was written of Him as the Suffering Servant.

The accepted literal method of orthodox Judaism was the method of the apostles. F. W. Farrar in his *History of Interpretation* states, “The better Jewish theory, purified in Christianity, takes the teachings of the Old Dispensation literally, but sees in them, as did St. Paul, the shadow and germ of future developments.”⁸

The Church’s Departure from a Literal Interpretation

The conversion to allegorism as the dominant interpretive model began in the first few centuries of the church and continued through the Dark Ages.

The Accommodation of the Early Church

A multitude of spiritual antagonists arose to confront the church leaders of the first centuries. They were surrounded by paganism, crusading Judaism, and heresies of every kind. Out of this conflict there arose a divergent school of interpretation—allegorical—in an attempt to deal with the difficulties of their day.

In tracing the rise of the allegorical school, Farrar goes back to Aristobulus, who was the first to enunciate two theses destined to find wide acceptance and which would lead to many false conclusions in the sphere of exegesis: “The first thesis was that Greek philosophy was borrowed from the Old Testament, and especially from the Law of Moses; the second was that all the tenets of the Greek philosophers, and especially of Aristotle, were to be found in Moses and the Prophets by those who use the right method of inquiry.”⁹

The Jewish teacher Philo, born in 20 BC, had “adopted this concept of Aristobulus and sought to reconcile Mosaic Law and Greek philosophy so that the Mosaic Law might become acceptable to the Greek mind.”¹⁰ “The influence of Philo was most keenly felt in the theological school of Alexandria. . . . It was in this school that Origen (in the second century AD) developed the allegorical method as it applied to the Scriptures.”¹¹

Phillip Schaff summarizes Origen of Alexandria’s influence this way: “Origen . . . shows the same tendency as Philo, to

spiritualize away the letter of Scripture . . . and instead of simply bringing out the sense of the Bible, he puts into it all sorts of foreign ideas and irrelevant fancies. But this allegorizing suited the taste of the age, and, with his fertile mind and imposing learning, Origen was the exegetical oracle of the early church, till his orthodoxy fell into disrepute."¹²

The Empowerment of Roman Catholicism

In many ways it was the emergence of a centralized church (the early Roman Catholic Church) with its ecclesiasticism and the recognition of the authority of the church in all doctrinal matters that gave great impetus to the adoption of the allegorical method.

Augustine, according to Farrar, was one of the first to make Scripture conform to the interpretation of the church:

The exegesis of St. Augustine is marked by the most glaring defects. . . . He laid down the rule that the Bible must be interpreted with reference to Church Orthodoxy. . . . Snatching up the Old Philonian . . . rule which had been repeated for so many generations, that everything in Scripture which appeared to be unorthodox or immoral must be interpreted mystically, he introduced confusion into his dogma of supernatural inspiration by admitting that there are many passages "written by the Holy Ghost," which are objectionable when taken in their obvious sense."¹³

The Degeneration of the Dark Ages

With the growth of the Roman Catholic system and its allegorical approach to the Scriptures, it should not be any surprise that the Dark Ages prevailed. Louis Berkhof points out that during this time, "it became an established principle that the interpretation of the Bible had to adapt itself to tradition and to the doctrine of the (Roman Catholic) Church."¹⁴

The Reformation Revival of Literal Interpretation

Three Causes for the Transition to an Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture

1. The accommodation of the Early Church.
2. The empowerment of Roman Catholicism.
3. The degeneration of the Dark Ages.

It is not until the Reformation era that one can find again any significant sound Biblical interpretation being produced. The whole Reformation movement may be said to have been activated by a return to the literal method of interpretation of the Scriptures.¹⁵

Translators of the Bible into the common tongue, who did so much to stir up the flame of Reformation, were motivated by the desire to understand the Bible literally. Of these early translators Farrar writes, "Wycliffe . . . made the important remark that 'the whole error in the

knowledge of Scripture, and the source of its debasement and falsification by incompetent persons, was the ignorance of grammar and logic."¹⁶

William Tyndale, a man who gave his life for the Word of God, said,

Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the Scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense, thou canst not but go out of the way. . . . The Scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do; but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth, is over the literal sense, which thou must seek out diligently."¹⁷

The Modern Application of Interpretation

Contemporary Christianity has demonstrated that it is often willing to twist the Scriptures to support a theological system or to justify cultural practices. Men may claim loyalty to the Word of God, but such loyalty does not truly exist apart from a literal approach to the Scriptures in the normal use of human language.

Believers who are committed to a proper biblical interpretive method must stand for the truth but must also endeavor to apply it by living for Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures!



Bud Steadman is the executive director of Baptist World Mission, headquartered in Decatur, Alabama. Prior to joining BWM twelve years ago, Dr. Steadman was the senior pastor of Community Baptist Church in South Bend, Indiana.

¹ Henry Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 15.
² <http://mb-soft.com/believe/text/fundamen.htm>
³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 1.
⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.
⁵ F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: Dutton, 1886), 232.
⁶ *Ibid.*, 60–61.
⁷ Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (New York: Carter, 1859), 324.
⁸ *Op. cit.*, Farrar, 217.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.
¹⁰ Pentecost, *op. cit.*, 21.
¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.
¹² Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner, 1884), 521.
¹³ *Op. cit.*, Farrar, 236–37.
¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 23.
¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, Pentecost, 26.
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 278–79.
¹⁷ Charles Augustus Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* (New York: Scribner, 1899), 456–57.

Living Among the Enemy

The Romans 12 Plan

One of the most fascinating times in David's life was when he was living with the Philistines while fleeing from Saul. The Philistines were clearly the historic enemy of Israel, and David had beheaded their champion not many years before. Yet David found himself living among people that despised him and were the enemies of his nation and his God. He did not do that well. If not for the providential intervention of God, David would have gone to war with his own nation.

We find ourselves in a similar situation today. In just a few years our culture has gone from nominally Christian, to secular, to opposed to Christianity, and yet we still must live in this culture. This living arrangement is not new. It has been the status quo for most Christians throughout the Church Age.

New-Testament-era believers in Rome were in circumstances that make ours today look tame. Thirty to forty percent of the population of Italy were slaves. The average life expectancy for slaves was 17.2 years for males and 17.9 years for females. It was an immoral culture with a low view of women, an acceptance of pedophilia, rampant promiscuity, and a view that sex is about dominance. Violence—not virtual but actual—was at the heart of the entertainment culture of the Coliseum. It was to believers in these cruel and deviant circumstances that Paul gave his Romans 12 instructions. It was a blueprint not only for surviving but for living victoriously in a hostile environment. If we want to live obediently for God in our culture, we will have to follow these same instructions.

Surrender Everything for the Cause

Living victoriously demands an all-or-nothing attitude (Rom. 12:1–3). The living sacrifice of verses 1 and 2 is essential to not just surviving but winning in an adversarial culture. There will be no place for halfhearted Christianity in the years ahead. Every true believer must be all-in. This is not only the path for success, but the reasonable demand that Jesus has always made of all those who follow Him. He is Lord or He is not. We have a cross to bear because He had

a cross to bear. Believers around the world are living in this reality in this moment. We must follow.

Commit to the Body

Victory will be a team endeavor (Rom. 12:4–13). Paul's initial greeting in Romans 1 was "to all that be in Rome" and not to a specific church, although later he does mention the church in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3–5). By the time Paul writes this letter near the end of his third missionary journey (around AD 58), there were likely many house churches established in Rome. Paul urges all these people to commit themselves to ministering to one another in their local church bodies.

This ministry is not just filling slots in the program structure (Sunday school teacher, nursery worker, deacon, etc.), but using the gifts in each member, actuated by the Holy Spirit, to care and sacrifice for one another. This type of local church ministry is not structured, but spontaneous, springing out of genuine love and care for one another.

Bless your Persecutors. In Jesus' great High Priestly prayer He did not ask that we be removed from the world but that we would be kept from evil (John 17:15). In the same spirit Paul instructs the Corinthians that they will have to rub shoulders with wicked people in the world. The only way to avoid such contact would be to leave the world (1 Cor. 5:9–10). Like the Roman believers, we have no escape. There is nowhere we can go to avoid contact with the enemy and the wickedness around us. The Plymouth believers had the New World to which they could escape, but we have no such luxury. It is God's will for us to be in this place at this strategic moment. We did not choose this for ourselves, He chose us for it. Our only task is to be completely obedient to Him in it.

Obedience means blessing those who oppose us. This is a distressing command! It was not a new idea. Jesus introduced it (Matt. 5:44). Jesus then demonstrated it on the cross when He interceded for the Romans soldiers (Luke 23:34), and Stephen followed the same pattern at his stoning (Acts 7:60). The key is seeing those who are persecuting us as the objects of our pursuit rather than its impediment. Our battle is spiritual. It is with spiritual wickedness in high



places. Jesus came to save sinners—even the worst of them. Those who oppose us are also those we seek to win. That should change our attitude toward them. We will not win them by shouting them down in the streets or standing with placards at their funerals like the Westboro Baptist Church bunch did for a decade. We won't win them by lying to them and affirming their sin and sinful thinking either. We will be required to speak the truth in love which is a way of pronouncing blessing.

Abandon Arrogant Ambition. Paul commands the Romans to live humbly toward one another and have humble ambitions (Rom. 12:16). Seeking popular acclaim, great wealth, or high position becomes a liability for a believer in a hostile environment. All those lofty things can be held hostage by the Wicked

One to force sinful compromise. It is error to think that worldly assets—fame, money, power—make us more effective for the kingdom. Jesus transformed the world as an itinerant rabbi who had no place to lay His head. I must face the uncomfortable fact that I often want those things for me—not the kingdom—and I use ministry as my excuse to seek them.

Do Not React in Kind. A sinful reaction to sin is still sin—no matter how justified we feel in our behavior (Rom. 12:16). Our culture glorifies vigilantes. The fantasy superhero world is full

of them. Our responsibility is to be honest when others lie, to love when others hate, and to meet unkindness with charity, not only for the sake of those who persecute us but also for the sake of all those who watch.

Live in Peace with the Enemy If Possible. It is not possible to live at peace with everyone, but the command Paul gives is to do it as much as possible (Rom. 12:18). It is not Christian to purposefully pick fights. Enough fights will inevitably come to us without needlessly generating our own conflicts. My goal should be to live at peace with my gay or trans neighbors—to show them the kindness of Christ even if they hate everything that I believe. I cannot lie to them or for them, but I can love them with the love of Christ. I can be a good and trustworthy neighbor.

Do Not Seek Payback. This is different from the reaction in kind mentioned earlier. This is the type of bitterness that settles in the soul, harbors deep resentment, and schemes ways of returning harm to others. At the risk of sounding like a Disney character, the command of Paul is to “let it go” (Rom. 12:19). We do this by trusting that God will inevitably execute His perfect justice. He promises that He will. “I will repay” is a better and surer outcome than any harm conjured out of a bitter heart. When we truly recognize the holiness of God and the terror that awaits sinners at His judging hand, our hearts can turn from bitterness to pity and even compassion.

Battle Evil with Good. Evil will never stamp out evil. It will only trade one evil for another. Evil must be overcome with righteousness—with good (Rom. 12:20–21). We are commanded to feed the hungry, even if they hate us—to give water to the thirsty, even if they despise us and our Lord. Our goal is to eliminate enemies by turning him into family members in Christ—just as Jesus did with Paul on the Damascus road.

This is the inspired blueprint for living victoriously in a hostile world. We must have the faith to follow it.

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Victorious Living from Romans 12

¹⁶ Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

¹⁷ Repentance to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

¹⁸ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Rendering unto Caesar Part I

The Principle of Submission to Civil Authority

As seen in films such as *Sergeant York* and *Chariots of Fire*, the conflict between religious convictions and duty to country is a compelling dramatic theme. Alvin York was a backwoods hellion until he was confronted by the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing that killing was contrary to the Bible, he filed for conscientious objector status when drafted to serve in World War I. When his request was denied, he struggled mightily with his conscience. In the 1941 film version, a providential gust of wind moves the pages of York's Bible, and his eyes fall on these words of Christ: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Eventually York did fight in the war, was credited with silencing a German machine gun nest—killing twenty German soldiers and capturing 135 more—and became a national hero.

The text that informed York's tortured conscience is from Christ's wise response to His enemies, recorded in three of the Gospels (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25). The Pharisees and the Herodians got together to entrap Jesus in His words. The former were the overtly religious, who were popular with the people, and the latter were the politically connected, who were favored by Rome. They asked Him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. Their expectation was that any answer He gave would damage Him and His ministry. If He said yes, it would appear that He was disloyal to God, and His answer would alienate many of the people. If He said no, then He would be exposed to condemnation by Rome for promoting revolution. Christ's response to this trap was to demand that they show Him a coin with which the tribute was paid, and then ask

them whose likeness and inscription were found on it. When they replied, “Caesar’s,” He told them to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to Him. The result of the interaction was that the people were amazed at the wisdom of His answer.

The key teaching of the passage is this: honoring human authority is part of honoring God, and fulfilling our legitimate duties to rulers is consistent with worshipping God. As in many things, however, the challenge for the believer is how this works in practice. In Part I of this article we will consider what our obligations to civil government are, and in Part II we will consider how these play out in our day.

The Starting Point: Submission to Authority

The basic stance of the believer toward civil authorities is one of submission. Romans 13:1a says: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,” an obligation echoed in both Titus 3:1 (“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers”) and 1 Peter 2:13 (“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake”). In these passages the key verb is *hypotasso*, which means literally, “to place or arrange under,” that is, to subordinate someone, with or without his consent. In Romans 13:1 and Titus 3:1, the context makes clear that Christians are to willingly submit themselves to rulers, to place themselves in a subordinate position toward them and honor their God-given authority (Rom. 13:7).

The Basis: God’s Providential Rule

As is common in his epistles, Paul not only outlines the believers’ obligations but also establishes the theological reasoning undergirding them. In Romans 13:1–5 he lays out the principle of governmental authority.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

First, notice that command is universal: *every* believing person is to be in submission, *all* authority is from God, and *every* person in authority is ordained by God. Paul allows no room for picking and choosing when or

In Romans 13:1 and Titus 3:1, the context makes clear that Christians are to willingly submit themselves to rulers, to place themselves in a subordinate position toward them and honor their God-given authority (Rom. 13:7).

to which rulers we will submit—“The powers that be are ordained [by] God.” This is true even when governments are not as just or benevolent as they could or should be. The American Declaration of Independence asserts that governments “derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Historically, this idea was in opposition to the assertion of divine right of kings, and it represents a political ideal that prevails in much of the world today, at least in theory. We must recognize, however, that Scripture does not lay out a plan for secular government during the “time of the Gentiles” (that time between the fall of the Old Testament Kingdom of Israel and the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Millennial Kingdom).

Instead, the Scriptures assert God’s sovereign and providential rule over the world through “the powers that be.” Therefore, we can say that as far as the Christian is concerned, governments derive their authority from the consent of the divine Governor.

Second, notice that the command is spiritual. Obedience to the secular authority is not just a matter of prudence but of conscience. Because God ordains rulers, obedience to them is a duty that we owe to God Himself. Whoever resists, or stands against, the “power” stands against what God has ordained and will receive judgment, not just from the human power, but from God. The term translated “power” (*exousia*), used four times in Romans 1–3, means authority or rightful rule. *Exousia* is used many times to refer to Christ’s authority. It is also used of Pilate’s legal authority over the man Jesus, authority which Jesus acknowledged, pointing out that it came from God (John 19:10–11).

Third, notice the command reflects divine order. This can be seen in the significant repetition of the verbal root *tasso*, “to arrange.” One must be careful when making arguments from verbal roots. However, in this case the different words are closely related to each other in meaning. Believers are to “be subject” (*hypotasso*, “arranged under”) the authorities (vv. 1, 5). The authorities that exist are “ordained” (*tasso*, “ordered” or “arranged”) by God (v. 1). The one who “opposes” (*antitasso*, arranges himself against) the authority, resists the ordinance (*diatage*, the order or arrangement) of God.

Fourth, notice that the command is beneficial. God ordained human authority to perform important functions. They exist to deter evil (v. 3), to benefit the law abiding (v. 4), to exact God’s justice on the wicked (v. 4), and to engage the consciences of believers (v. 5).

The Duties: Show Respect; Obey; Pay Your Taxes; Pray

Scripture not only tells believers in general to be in submission to authorities but also lays out specific duties.

Foremost is the believer's attitude. An attitude of submission and respect flows naturally from trusting submission to God. Since all human authority comes from God, respect for authority is essential if we wish to honor Him. This principle is found in the commandment for children to honor their parents (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Honor here includes obedience (Eph. 6:1), but it means more than that. It is reflected in the way that we speak to them (Prov. 20:20; 30:11) and treat them (Matt. 15:4–6). Peter exhorts us to honor all people, especially "the king" (1 Pet. 2:17). Paul reminds us to give "fear [respect] to whom fear" is due and "honour to whom honour" is due (Rom. 13:7).

Properly honoring authorities includes obeying them. Jesus said to some of His followers, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Paul told Titus to teach the believers in Crete "to be subject to principalities and powers" and "to obey magistrates" (Titus 3:1). In addition, honor demands the provision of appropriate financial support. This principle was taught to Israel through the tithes and offerings for support of the priests and Levites. Christ also alluded to the duty of children to provide for their aged parents (Matt. 15:4–6), a duty which Paul also emphasized (1 Tim. 5:4). Regarding the government, that means paying our taxes. Paul commands believers to render to everyone what he is due. He then mentions two types of taxes, "tribute" and "custom." "Tribute" (*phoros*) was a tax paid to a foreign ruler and was a direct tax on land or on one's person. The "custom" (*tele*) was an indirect tax on business, like our sales or income taxes today.

The Limitation: Worship Only God; Obey God Rather than Man

Although the general posture and consistent practice of the Christian is submission to secular authorities, submission to human authority is not absolute, and obedience is not without exception. Both Christ and Paul make it clear that the authority of rulers is delegated to them by God (John 19:9–11; Rom. 13:1). Therefore, God's authority is greater. Loyalty to Christ must supersede even the greatest human loyalty. (Compare Matt. 15:4 with 10:37.)

The first limitation on believer's obedience to government is that it does not extend as far as worship. First Peter 2:17 says, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." Whereas believers should honor (*timaō*) the king, they must "fear", i.e., "worship" God (*phobeomai*). The refusal to worship false gods even at the command of the king is seen in the courageous faith of Daniel's three friends (Dan. 3) and of the tribulation martyrs (Rev. 20:4).

The second limitation is that believers cannot obey a command of government if it would cause

them to disobey God. As Peter and John put the question to the Sanhedrin, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19–20). Other examples where the Bible commends believers for obeying God rather than men include the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1:17), Daniel (Dan. 1:8; 6:1–28), and Moses (Heb. 11:23).

The obligation to obey God first also covers the case in which the believer flees persecution. Obedience to government does not require God's servants to turn themselves in to be executed for worshipping God. David fled from King Saul, although he did not seek his overthrow. Paul affirms that if he had done something worthy of death he did not refuse to be executed (Acts 25:11); nevertheless, when the governor of Damascus sought to capture him for preaching the gospel, he stole away (2 Cor. 11:32–33).

Note that these two limitations are closely related. God forbids us to have any other gods; and if we truly worship Him, we will obey Him in all things. It should be noted that few and limited are the cases in Scripture where the godly are called upon to disobey rulers in order to obey God. We must be careful not to imagine irreconcilable conflicts between our duties where none exist or to seek pretexts to disrespect rulers whom we dislike or to disobey them when we disagree. To do so is to dishonor God under the guise of honoring Him.

Conclusion

We live in a society that often tolerates and even promotes disrespect for authorities, whether they be governmental leaders, parents, teachers, employers, or even sports referees. The Bible makes it plain, however, that we as believers must be different from the world. The sovereignty of God means that honoring delegated human authority honors God, even though it is exercised by sinful human beings and human systems. Therefore, the believer's predisposition should be respect and obedience. This attitude cuts across the grain of our natural human tendency to resent

authority and to justify disobedience and disrespect by focusing on the foibles and failures of those in authority. While this is the normal case, we sometimes run into difficulties in application. Part II of this discussion will deal with some of those questions. Nevertheless, getting the principle right is the first step in making wise applications.

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Why Should Christians Submit to Authority?

1. All authority is from God, and every person in authority is ordained by God.
2. It is a spiritual command. Obedience to the secular authority is not just a matter of prudence but of conscience.
3. God's command reflects divine order.
4. The command is beneficial. God ordained human authority to perform important functions.

Rendering unto Caesar Part II

Practical Issues in Submitting to Civil Authority

As we saw in Part I, submission to government is a basic teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. What follows is an attempt to apply the biblical principles laid out in Part I to some difficult questions regarding the believer's relationship to the government.

Unjust or Oppressive Government Action

Sometimes people argue that since government is ordained to repress evil and to promote good (Rom. 13:3–4), a government ceases to be legitimate when it goes beyond this God-ordained function. Therefore, the argument goes, we are not obliged to obey government when it does evil. Notice that this position goes beyond the view that we must disobey government only when it would *make us* do evil.

There are several reasons that the former position is untenable. First, Paul does not base the legitimacy of rulers on how well they perform their duties but on the fact that God has placed them in authority (Rom. 13:1). God's sovereign ordinance is the basis of the believer's obligation to obey. Second, all human authorities are unjust when compared to God's perfect justice. Until the Lord Jesus returns, there will be no perfect human ruler, and until He destroys sin and death, there will be no perfect society. Third, how unjust does a government have to be to be illegitimate? We must not deny the extreme cases. Just as a home invader does not become your "authority" by virtue of holding a gun to your head, failed states may create circumstances where it is very difficult to discern who is legitimately in authority. However, we must be careful not to use the extreme cases as an excuse to disobey in normal cases. When Paul wrote Romans, the empire was a dictatorship, and it was unjust and oppressive in ways of which we in the West have little conception. Nevertheless, he instructed believers to submit to governmental authority. This does not mean that believers are without recourse. We have the privilege of appealing to the King of all the kings. We are commanded to pray for

those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–2), with the confidence that the sovereign Lord will hold rulers to account (Isa. 24:21; Dan. 5:22–30; Rev. 20:12) and that He is fully capable of turning their hearts (Prov. 21:1) or replacing them (Dan. 4:17).

Exercising Civil and Political Rights

In addition to prayer, believers sometimes have civil and political rights. Whereas most Jewish captives in the Exile had no political power, some, such as Daniel and Esther, were elevated to positions of tremendous influence. God used this influence to protect His people and advance His purposes. In the New Testament era most believers were slaves or subject peoples and possessed few, if any, rights. On the other hand, there were some that were wealthy, of privileged families, and well connected (Acts 13:1; 17:4, 12). They often used these privileges and resources to advance the work of the Lord (Mark 15:43–46; Luke 8:2–3; Acts 16:15, 40). Paul asserted his Roman citizenship to protect himself and the disciples (Acts 16:37–40; 22:25–30; 25:10), and he encouraged believers in servitude to obtain their freedom if they were able legitimately to do so (1 Cor. 6:21–23).

Based on these principles and examples, it is legitimate for believers to exercise their civil liberties and assert their legal rights. However, there are two important qualifications. First, we are stewards rather than owners of our privileges. We must use them for God's glory and the advancement of His work. The Corinthians had the legal right to take their private disputes with each other to civil court, but Paul denounced their terrible testimony (1 Cor. 6:1–11). There are clearly times when our testimony requires that we turn the other cheek or go the extra mile (Matt. 5:38–42). It is more important to stand for what is right than to stand for our rights.

The second limitation is that believers should always make their appeals in a way that shows appropriate respect for authority. We see this in the actions of Daniel (ch. 1) and of Paul (Acts 26:25). This does not rule out rebuking evil or injustice, as the prophets did frequently. However, we must be very careful that our anger does not get the better of us or that we disrespect God-ordained authority. Paul, himself, fell into this error when he unwittingly called the High Priest a "whitewashed wall" (Acts 23:3). This response hurt the case Paul was trying to make, and it seems to be in contrast to the response of the Lord Jesus in similar cir-

cumstances (John 18:23). Peter exhorts us to follow Christ's example (1 Pet 2:23).

Lex Rex

Lex Rex ("The Law Is King") is a concept that finds its roots in the Old Testament, where everyone, including the king, was subject to the Law of God. The idea made a reappearance in the seventeenth century as a counter to the absolutism of the monarchy. It is sometimes expressed as "the rule of law" and is the foundation of a constitutional government.

The idea of the rule of law is without a doubt beneficial to the wellbeing of citizens. It gives them a measure of protection against arbitrary and oppressive government action as well as a basis of appeal from such action. It is sometimes argued that the concept of *Lex Rex*, means that citizens may conscientiously disobey illegal or unconstitutional governmental orders. Such disobedience, it is argued, is not insubordination to those in authority; instead, it is being submissive to *higher* authority. There is a degree to which this is true and is recognized by our legal system. For example, a person who is charged with disobedience to a law may assert in defense that the law is unconstitutional. Often when the governmental prohibition inhibits the exercise of an important right, a person may challenge the law in court ahead of time, without having to disobey it and raise a constitutional defense in court.

While acknowledging the principle of *Lex Rex*, we must also understand its limitations. First, it does not give individuals a license to interpret their country's constitution and laws as they see fit. The United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, also established a system of government and a process for resolving political and legal disputes. All this means that "Caesar" is not simply one provision of the Constitution as I interpret it, but the entire governmental system. Therefore, we should follow the system of appeals, and once our appeals have been exhausted, we are obliged to recognize the legal validity of the rule in question. Then we as believers should obey it unless to do so would be to disobey the commandment of God.

The second limitation to the application of *Lex Rex* is the fact that even under a system of laws, governmental officials must have discretion in the interpretation and enforcement of the law. While written rules protect us against the tyranny of arbitrary officials, reasonable discretion by those officials protects us from the tyranny of inflexible bureaucracies. Therefore, respect for the written law does not exempt us from showing proper respect and submission to those who have authority to interpret and enforce it (Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13–14).

What to Do in Case of Conflict

Sometimes there is a conflict between a governmental interest and a divine command that can be resolved. This was the case faced by Daniel (Dan. 1:1–15). The king had appointed for the young Jewish men the same kind of food and drink that he consumed. This action was intended to give them the best possible nutrition to make them able to "stand before the king." The problem for Daniel, however, was that eating the food would make him unclean according to the Law. Daniel therefore appealed to Ashpenaz, the official ordered by the king to implement the policy, requesting to be exempt from the requirement. Ashpenaz told Daniel that granting him and his friends an exemption would work against the king's purpose for providing the food and would even endanger Ashpenaz's life to the king. Having identified the reason for the king's policy, Daniel went to Melzar, a subordinate official in daily charge of Daniel and his friends, and proposed a way to demonstrate that if they ate only vegetables, they would end up healthier than their fellow interns. Melzar agreed, and God overruled the expected result, causing the Hebrews to pass the test.

Finally, believers should understand that, as in many other areas of Christian life, the application of these principles requires wisdom. Not every believer or ministry will agree about what to do in a particular case. Where there is no clear violation of Biblical command or principle, we must demonstrate charity and leave space for the consciences of others (Rom. 14:5).

Daniel's Example of How to Handle Conflict

- 1.** Daniel purposed that he would not "defile himself"—that is, he would obey God's Law.
- 2.** Instead of simply defying the king's policy, he made an appeal. Then he proposed a way to meet the king's concern while still obeying God.
- 3.** God honored Daniel's faith and wise appeal and gave him and his three friends great success. Like Daniel, believers today should seek God's wisdom to render what is due both to God and to the government.

Two other examples from the Book of Daniel (chs. 3 and 6) demonstrate how believers should conduct themselves when called upon "to obey God rather than men." In both cases, God's people could not bend because to do so would violate the commandment to worship God alone. The orders specifically and deliberately contradicted a direct commandment of God (Exod. 20:3–5; Matt. 4:10). Neither Daniel nor his friends sought a direct confrontation with the government, but they did not allow the government edict to alter their devotion to God.

Notice, however, that in both cases God's people retained their testimony, showing respect for rulers (Dan. 3:26–27; 6:21), even while refusing to comply with their unbiblical commands. Moreover, they did not complain or rail against the punishment inflicted upon them but trusted in God to deliver and vindicate them (Dan. 3:17–18; 6:22). The New Testament saint, likewise, is called to demonstrate Spirit-engendered patience when suffering wrongfully (1 Pet. 2:20).

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

The Perfection of His Providence

High above my study desk and occupying nearly half the four-foot width of one shelf of a bookcase stands a handsome twelve-volume set of hardbound books that I treasure. First, because over twenty years ago it was the kind gift of a dear friend, but second, because I often find its content to be spiritually exceptional.

The author of these volumes was the Scottish pastor Thomas Boston (1676–1732). Though having lived three centuries ago, Boston is still read appreciatively. Sinclair Ferguson’s *The Whole Christ* (Crossway, 2016), has recently highlighted his leading part in the “Marrow Controversy” (an eighteenth-century battle over the anti-nomianism that continues to plague Christians, though under various, generationally new banners). Then there’s Boston’s *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, still considered a classic. In it, Boston deals theologically but pastorally with man in the states of innocence, depravity, grace, and glory. His theological acumen was such that Jonathan Edwards wrote of him as a “truly great divine.”

But Boston’s most helpful contribution to my own pastoring has been through his work *The Crook in the Lot* (reprinted by Christian Heritage, 2012). It’s a volume that I’ve recommended so frequently to my congregation that many of the folks now possess their own valued copies. I continue to use it several times a year, I’m sure, in pastoral counseling.

In the Scottish vernacular of Boston’s day, a “crook” was a crooked thing, and a “lot” was one’s situation, or a particular providence in one’s life. A “crook in the lot,” then, was a troublesome or sorrowful event or circumstance which God’s providence had appointed for you.

Boston knew experientially a great deal about such crooks. His father had been imprisoned for his scriptural convictions, and while just a boy, Thomas willingly stayed in the jail with him to keep him company. Later Thomas married a lovely Scottish lass whom he said that he *loved passionately and inwardly honored; a stately, beautiful, and comely personage, truly pious and fearing the Lord . . . a crown to me in my public station and appearances*. But their life together was often grievous. They buried six of their ten children, and the last twelve years of their marriage (before his death in 1732) were weighed down under Catherine’s suffering some form of mental disorder. This, combined with chronically poor health, left her mostly housebound and with only occasional seasons of inner relief. *Now were we, with our broken ship within sight of the shore*, Boston wrote, *but behold in a little time after, the storm rose anew; and the ship was beat back into the main ocean again*. Catherine’s story is told movingly in a biographical sketch included by Faith Cook in *Singing in the Fire* (Banner of Truth, 1995).

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

Boston served just two churches. The first was in the tiny village of Simprin, and the second, in the Scottish Borders’ town of Ettrick. Under Boston’s skillful pastoring and faithful preaching for twenty-five years, the congregation in the latter grew from around sixty to over seven hundred. You can read the inspiring saga in either Boston’s own *Memoirs* (Banner of Truth, 1964), or the nineteenth-century biography of Andrew Thomson (1895; reprinted by Christian Focus, 2004). I found that reading the latter helped me make better sense of the former.

By the time Boston began writing *The Crook in the Lot*, most of his teeth had rotted out, excruciating kidney stones bent him low, parts of his simple home crumbled in a state of disrepair which he could remedy neither physically nor financially, and he found himself much maligned throughout Scotland for his stand in the Marrow Controversy and other debates plaguing the

Inside

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

nation's churches. He called these painful years *the groaning part of my life*.

But Boston continued to display the faithful, humble submission which he urged on others in his slender volume on *crooks*. He would say, *A proud heart makes a cross to itself, where a lowly one would find none*. And again, *It is far more needful to have our spirits humbled, and brought down than to have the cross removed*. And yet again, *Standing on the shore and looking back on what you have passed through you will be made to say, "He hath done all things well."* Those things which are bitter to Christians in passing through them, are very sweet in the reflection on them. So is Samson's riddle verified in their experience.

In addition to *The Crook in the Lot*, Boston preached various messages that had to do with God's ways in Christians' lives. One of them, "The Perfection of Providential Dispensations," is included here out of the ninth volume of his *Complete Works*. The sermon was preached on the Lord's Day, July 16, 1709. Remarkably, from Boston's diary we learn that later that very day, the church elder upon whom he most depended, a Mr. William Biggar, fell dangerously ill. To Boston's troubled consternation he died just four days later. His grieving pastor buried him on Friday and wrote, *Thus the Lord pulled from me a good man, a comfortable fellow-laborer, and a supporter, or rather the supporter of me in my troubles in this place. . . . It was a complication of griefs*.

The sermon is here in entirety. I've changed only a word or two here and there for the sake of clarity. I've found it to be both insightful and spiritually savory, and I trust that it may shine into someone's heart today as a shaft of light in a dark time.

As for God, His way is perfect (Psalm 18:30)

The Psalmist by this time had followed the Lord through many a deep step, and he had endured various troubles. Here, in the text, he looks back on these ways in which the Lord had led him, and gives his verdict about them: *As for God, his way is perfect*. In these words there is,

1. A magnificent preface: *As for God*. David stands up here in God's defense against an ungodly world, to justify His proceedings: *As for God, I who have tried His way can speak to His commendation*.
2. That about God which he commends: *his way*. There is a twofold way. First, that wherein men walk to and fro with God. It is personal, with Christ who is the way to the Father, and it is real, in holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Neither of these are meant here. There is second, the way wherein God walks with men; the way of His providences and dispensations, the way He takes with men in disposing of them.
3. The commendation is, *perfect*. There is no flaw in that way. Be His dispensations ever

so hard, there can be no fault really observed in them by the most discerning eye. They are faultless.

These words afford us this doctrine: THAT THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE ARE ALTOGETHER PERFECT AND FAULTLESS, HOWEVER THEY MAY APPEAR TO OUR CARNAL HEARTS.

In illustrating, I shall:

- I. Take notice of some, among many, seeming faults our corruptions would spy out in the dispensations of providence.
 - II. Inquire in what respects the way of God is perfect.
 - III. Confirm the point.
 - IV. Make some practical improvement.
- I. I am to take notice of some, among many, seeming faults our corruptions would spy out in the dispensations of providence. [Boston now lists and explains nine apparent faults in Providence.]

1. The reason for dispensations is not seen. The design of Providence lies oftentimes hid, and it is no easy matter to discover it: *Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known* (Psalm 77:19). The Lord leads the man and he knows not where; therefore corruption is ready to storm at this, and disdains to follow the Lord unless He will tell him what way He is going. But the fault is in the eye, not in the way. Time is big with the discovery, but must go awhile before it is brought forth: *Now, while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate* (Acts 10:17). Or again, *Then cometh Jesus to Simon Peter; and Peter said unto him, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said unto him, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."* When the spectacles of faith are on, no fault appears.
2. Providence seems to forget the promises, and the Word seems to miscarry. Then we are ready to say, as in Jeremiah 15:18, *Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?* Abraham thought he saw this fault, and he would take a way of his own to rectify it. But though the promise tarried, yet it was accomplished, for Isaac, and not Ishmael, was to be his heir. Fool's haste is no speed.
3. Providence goes crossways to the promises, His works to His Word; pulling down with one hand what He seemed to be building up with the other. Thus it appeared, when

Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). So also it was when God threatened to cut short the days of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1). But there is no fault here yet. Wait the end, as in these instances. They are but raw travelers who think that the way lies always forward. The way in the wilderness is often crooked.

4. Providence runs, as it seems, quite contrary to the design of it. Many times the Lord has a design on foot for the good of His church and people. But a continued track of disappointments cross it more and more, till the very gravestone seems to be laid upon it. Thus it was with Joseph when he was put into the dungeon. But what fault is there here, anymore than when the sun sets to make it darker and darker until the break of day? Stay till the dawning of the design. Oftentimes providence reads best backwards. *For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left* (Deuteronomy 32:36).
5. Providence lays aside the most likely means. But where is the fault here? For if He lay aside these means, He will accomplish His designs by other means. And what though they be unlikely? This is what stumbled the world: *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God* (I Corinthians 1:23–24). Naaman in distress stumbled at the unlikeliness of the means prescribed by the prophet for the curing of his leprosy (II Kings 5:11). The disciples of Jesus also stumbled and judged the death of Christ a very unlikely means of leading Him and them to glory; and they had the same opinion of His ascension (John 16:6–7). Men have their own ways: they think that they know best what is good for them. But God knows that His people are not good choosers of their own lot, and His sovereignty will have a latitude.
6. Providence falls on means quite contrary to the design of it. But what the worse was the blind man that he was cured with clay put upon his eyes? The Lord works healing by wounding, and comfort by tears. The earthquake, the troubling of waters, the dungeon of Joseph, the den of Daniel, the whale of Jonah; yea, we know that *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28).

7. Wicked godless men getting the sunny side of the brae, walking contrary to God, and yet providence smiles so that never an ill turn seems ever to misgive in their hand. This made Asaph stammer, *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning* (Psalm 73:12–14). It shook Jeremiah (12:1–2). But there is no fault in this, that the sun of prosperity rises on the wicked: *For when the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever* (Psalm 92:7). The sun rose fair on Sodom that very day on which it was destroyed; all Israel followed Absalom; Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord; Haman finds all things going as he wished. But see the end of all these things.
8. Astonishing strokes lighting on those that are most dear to God. *There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked* (Ecclesiastes 8:14). Eli's sons are slain, his daughter-in-law dies, and he himself breaks his neck. The two sons of Aaron die at the altar. How numerous are the afflictions that came upon Job. But where is the fault here? Christ's cross, to a child of God, is better than the world's crown (II Corinthians 12:9–10).
9. Great afflictions meeting the Lord's people in the way of duty. This was Jacob's case in many instances. He was in the way God bid him go, yet he met with many trials and afflictions. It hath been so also with many of the Lord's people in all ages. But the Lord has his holy ends in these things; He shows them that they are sinful creatures; though they are in His way, He tries their faith and patience, and makes way for their having higher experiences.

II. I am to show in what respects the way of God is perfect.

1. All the dispensations of providence are exactly according to the pattern shown in the Word. If you would know wherein a man has exactly built a house, look to the draft given him. Meet with what we will, all may be reduced to, and explained by, scripture doctrines, prophecies, promises, threatenings, or examples.
2. They are exactly suited to the necessities of His people, and to the design of them. God weighs every grain of sand which He puts

in our hourglasses. He will never put in too little, nor too much. Nothing will be lacking. Nothing will be superfluous. *He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is He* (Deuteronomy 32:4).

3. In their times. Nothing is done too soon, nor too late. All fall out in their proper season, which is determined by unchangeable council of God.
4. In their stability. Our ways are unstable, and that is a great fault. But God's ways are not so. That which is crooked cannot be made straight. There will always be a crook in our lot. That is sure, and we could not even walk without it.

III. I shall confirm the point. Consider . . .

1. That the saints in their experience see this. They readily and fully acknowledge it. *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein* (Hosea 14:9). This is their unanimous vote when in a right mood, and will be so in Heaven when the web is out. Then they will say, *He hath done all things well*.
2. That they are the product of His infinite holiness, which can do nothing wrong.
3. That they are all directed, as well as contrived, by infinite wisdom; which knows best how to frame matters.

IV. It remains that I make some practical improvement, in . . .

1. The use of information. Are the dispensations of providence all right? Then (1), if anything be wrong with us, we may see where the fault lies; not in God but in ourselves (Job 10). The oar He rows His vessel with is in the waters of affliction, and therefore we think the oar is crooked. But that is our misjudging of God. And (2), we should justify God in the harshest dispensations, and give Him glory even when we walk on the mountains of darkness. Providence will withstand a look of the most piercing impartial eye. But when the eye is infected, it will take up things in their wrong colors.
2. There is comfort for the people of God, whatever providences they meet. Be they never so dark, be they never so little understood, yet

they are all right and faultless. God does not distribute favors to them by guess, but by measure and weight.

3. There is reproof to those who censure, murmur, and quarrel with the dispensations of providence. This is (1), to accuse God of folly, as if He were not wise enough to govern the world that He has made. O how often we fall into this, as if we could have ordered better than providence has done. Murmuring will step up and correct infinite wisdom. And this is (2), to accuse God of injustice, as if He were too hard upon His creatures, who deserve better at His hand. For why would people murmur at their right and due? And this is (3), to accuse God of impotency, as if He could not take away our crosses as easily as He brings them on, or could not make them work for our good.

Lastly, a word of exhortation. Let all of us, especially the Lord's people, be exhorted to submit and stoop to sovereignty, be our lot in the world what it will. There is none who lack their own crosses. Everyone has some burden or another to bear. And if we would in truth come after Christ, we are enjoined to *take up our cross, and follow Him*.

Thomas Boston died at the young age of fifty-six. For many years his practice was to renew a yearly covenant with the Lord. The last time he did so, he rose early in the morning and reviewed God's mercies to him in detail. Then he wrote, *Rising up from prayer with joy believing, I sang with an exulting heart Psalm 16:5 to the end*.

God is mine inheritance and cup the portion;
The lot that fallen is to me, Thou dost maintain alone.

Unto me happily the lines in pleasant places fell;
Yea, the inheritance I got in beauty doth excel.
And he concluded his memoirs,

Upon the whole, I bless my God in Jesus Christ, that ever He made me a Christian, and took an early dealing with my soul; that ever He made me a minister of the gospel, and gave me some insight into the doctrine of His grace; and that He ever gave me the blessed Bible, and brought me acquainted with the originals, and especially with the Hebrew text. The world hath all along been a stepdame [stepmother] to me, and wheresoever I have attempted to nestle in it, there was a thorn of uneasiness laid for me. Man is born crying, lives complaining, and dies disappointed from that quarter. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit—I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." 

Bring . . . the Books

It is still dark outside when I walk into our church lobby on a Saturday morning. I can see across the lobby several men already seated around the table in our conference room, Bibles open, mugs of steaming coffee in hand. Brotherly greetings and laughter continue as the remaining chairs welcome more bodies. One-on-one conversations around the table slowly diminish as each man notices that the leader for the day is preparing to speak. I glance around the room at these men with healthy appetites for the Word of God. My heart is filled with pastoral gratitude.

Not everyone gives up a Saturday morning for another church event. I listen with delight as the devotional is given. I find that my soul needs the message being delivered, but I am encouraged to hear a well-equipped layman delivering the Word. He has prepared well and studied supporting sources. On this day, the speaker references a *Straight Cuts* article in a recent *FrontLine* magazine issue that complements the point he is making. My heart is made glad again because he has referenced a periodical that is precious to me.

For several years our church has been buying *FrontLine* magazine issues in bulk, and I have been placing them on our church lobby table. They are free for the taking. Distribution took a while to catch on. I would occasionally refer to a specific article in the latest issue, and then I would see the magazines in people's hands as they would leave the building. If you are like me, you sometimes wonder if your attempts to help your people are indeed helpful. You can see why I was glad to hear the magazine mentioned in our men's meeting.

On another occasion, I was enjoying a discipleship session with one of our newcomers. We were covering the trustworthiness of Scripture. Personally, I find it challenging to lead someone through the topic of canonization. It seems like the student's eyes begin to roll back in his head because of theology overload. But this meeting went better than I expected. (Oh, me of little faith!) When we got to canonization, he surprised me by saying, "Pastor, I think I understand that okay. I read the article in that magazine out there, and it cleared up my confusion." He was referring to the article by Keith Gephart in the September/October 2019 issue. Thank you, Keith.

I sometimes forget that all my people do not have an equal grasp on our theological terms. Several months back I had preached a series through the Book of Romans. Without realizing it, I made mention several times to the fundamentals of our faith when making application. After one such message, I was standing in the lobby near our literature table speaking with folks as they were passing through the lobby. An out-of-town visitor who had been attending for

several weeks came up to the lobby table. He noticed the stack of *FrontLine* magazines and put his index finger on the front cover where the word "Fundamentals" appeared. He said, "Preacher, is this what you have been talking about?"

I told him that reading this issue would be a good start. I was right. I encouraged him to give the magazine to his home pastor when he was through with it.

Every pastor needs resources he can put into the hands of his members. I cannot possibly give my precious people all the truth they need in one-on-one encounters. *FrontLine* magazine has been carefully vetted and proven to be a helpful tool in the discipleship of the people who attend my church.

I have occasionally used an item in the magazine during the opening moments of our deacons' meeting. The themes and topics of the magazine often deal with pertinent issues, theological drift, and relevant church matters that I might not think to address with my leadership. There have been times we talked through a touchy topic because it was addressed in an issue of *FrontLine*. This would prove to be a wise investment of our mental energies. After our discussions, we would find ourselves confronted with that very issue in our congregation.

I appreciate that *FrontLine* magazine is not just reading material for preachers. Those who work hard to regularly put out this ministry tool have taken on the difficult task of simultaneously making the issues pertinent to the preacher and beneficial to the layman.

Our culture seems to be contributing more to the dumbing-down of our society. The church needs to be constantly generating noble Bereans who dig into their Bibles (Acts 17:10-11). We need to be intentionally equipping people who will equip others (2 Tim. 2:2).

FrontLine magazine reminds me of the multivitamin I take daily. I may not always get everything I need from my meals, so I take the supplement. Our people may not always get everything they need from our preaching. *FrontLine* is a great supplement for them. Pastors, try putting a dozen or more issues out for your people to take. Encourage them to pass them along to family members and friends after reading them. Perhaps you will find it to be the encouragement to your ministry that I have found it to be in mine. ☞

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

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Contact the FBFI Home Office at info@fbfi.org to learn more about purchasing bulk quantities of *FrontLine* magazine for your church.

In their commentary on the Book of Judges, Keil and Delitzsch tell us that there are only two credible views on the matter: either Jephthah burned his daughter as a bleeding sacrifice to Jehovah, or he dedicated his daughter as a lifelong virgin to the service of the sanctuary.

Literal Sacrifice View

Marshall Wicks (“Jephthah: Faithful but Flawed,” *Israel My Glory*, September/October 2005) writes: “The idea of perpetual virginity is not an ancient Near Eastern tradition. It *originated* in the ascetic period of the *early church* . . . [and] migrated *from the church to the synagogue* during the Middle Ages.”

Matthew Poole’s *Commentary* says that Jephthah “speaks of . . . one person meeting another . . . and never of any brute creature.” Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say, “This evidently points not to an animal, for that *might* have been a dog which, being unclean, was unfit to be offered . . . ‘shall surely be the Lord’s; and (or) I will offer it up for a burnt offering’—The adoption of the latter particle (or) introduces the important alternative, that if it were a person, the dedication would be made to the service of the sanctuary.”

Living Sacrifice View

Andrew Bonar said, “Jephthah’s daughter, like young Samuel, was set apart personally to the Lord. Hengstenberg says that there was an institution of holy women in the tabernacle, who, like Anna spent their time in prayer and fasting (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22).”

In *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* we read, “We are constrained by a consideration of Jephthah’s . . . evident acquaintance with the law of Moses . . . to conclude that (his daughter) was doomed to a life of perpetual celibacy” (Heb. 11:32).

The *King James Study Bible* states, “The text favors the view that since Jephthah was yet under the influence of the *spirit of the Lord* (verses 29–31) . . . his daughter was pledged to perpetual virginity (verses 37–40). . . . For God to honor the terms of Jephthah’s vow would make Him a participant in evil (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2–5; Deuteronomy 12:31–32). Since Jephthah’s daughter was his only child, he is rightly commemorated in Hebrews 11:32–40 for a full dedication to God that left his home destitute of an heir.”

Adam Clarke writes that Jephthah “might well be grieved that thus his family was to become extinct in Israel. . . . A woman to have no offspring was considered to be in a state of the utmost degradation.”

With regards to the phrase in Judges 11:40, “The daughters of Israel went yearly to *lament* (her).” Clarke continues, “I am satisfied that this is not a correct translation of the original. Keil and Delitzsch write that the Hebrew

here “does not mean ‘to lament or bewail’ but to praise.” Spiros Zodhiates says the Hebrew word “*taw-naw*” means “attributing honor, ascribing (praise), i.e. celebrate, commemorate, rehearse, lament.” Within the parameters of *the same book* of the Bible (Judges 5:11, KJV) “*taw-naw*” is translated not “lament” but rather “rehearse.” The maidens of Israel celebrated Jephthah’s daughter’s self-sacrificing patriotism—not her being burnt!

Keil and Delitzsch summarize:

We find insuperable difficulties in the literal interpretation of the words. . . . Not only were human sacrifices prohibited in the law . . . they were only transplanted to Jerusalem by the (later) godless kings Ahaz and Manassah.

If Jephthah vowed that he would offer a *human* sacrifice to Jehovah, he must . . . have been thoroughly depraved. . . . A human sacrifice was irreconcilable with the substance and spirit of the worship of Jehovah.

The entreaty of the daughter that [her father] would grant her two months’ time in order that she might lament her *virginity* . . . would have been out of keeping with the interpretation that she was to be *put to death* as a sacrifice. To mourn one’s virginity does not mean to mourn because one has to *die* a virgin, but because one has to *live and remain* a virgin.

The still further clause, “and she knew no man,” is not in harmony with the assumption of a sacrificial death. . . . It was *already* known that she was a virgin. . . . The historian described the fulfillment of the vow in these words, “He did to her according to his vow,” regarding the act itself as laudable. *A prophetic historian could never have approved a human sacrifice.*

Bleeding burnt-offerings could only be offered upon the lawful altar at the tabernacle . . . through the medium of the Levitical priests. . . . Is it credible that a priest . . . should have consented to offer a sacrifice . . . which was . . . the greatest abomination of the heathen?

Auberle remarks, “In truth it would . . . have been an anti-theocratic *abomination*. . . . The conclusion of the whole narrative in chapter 11:39–40 is to simply explain the origin of the feast that was held in honor of Jephthah’s daughter. God accepted (Abraham’s) *willingness* to offer up (Isaac) as a completed sacrifice. . . . There can be no doubt that Jephthah had such a dedication as this in mind.

This is nothing less than the *living sacrifice* concept to which the apostle Paul refers to in Romans 12:1. 

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

Each morning at home I enjoy a healthy bowl of cereal and fruit. I mix together raisin bran, Cheerios, Special K, Basic 4, shredded wheat, and sprinkle Simply Granola over it all. Then I add 2% milk, a banana, and occasionally blueberries. I love it! I finish it all off with orange juice, a men's multivitamin, and a fish oil pill—I figure I will live forever! Well, maybe not. I think about where the wide assortment of items comes from geographically. How much work went into planting, harvesting, preparing, boxing, shipping, processing, stocking, and selling these products! And all that I do is to take a minute to put them together for a quick, convenient, delicious breakfast. I think of God's goodness and bounty in providing these grains and fruit.

The Bible speaks often and profoundly about principles of planting for the harvest. Jesus Himself drew upon agriculture to illustrate and clarify how the ministry of the gospel works. His parable of the sower and soils provides framework for our expectations in ministry. John 4 illustrates how one unlikely person coming to Christ can lead to an enormous harvest of souls. On the eve of His crucifixion Jesus drew upon the familiar vineyard to motivate His disciples to greater fruitfulness (John 15).

Though my dad grew up surrounded by farming in South Alabama, I grew up in the suburbs in North Alabama—Decatur, Huntsville, and Hartselle. My dad loved to watch things grow—vegetables in a garden, flowers in our yard, and grapes on his fence and trellis. In his retirement years he developed a large garden. He knew what to do and he worked at it. I stand amazed at the skills of those who know how to make the most of their natural resources.

Missions

In my travels with Gospel Fellowship Association Missions I find myself speaking in missions conferences and sometimes on the theme of missions giving. I love the verse on grace-giving in 2 Corinthians: "And 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" (2 Cor. 9:8). God's grace is the provider and multiplier of bountiful giving. Verse 10 goes on to say: "Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness." When we sow bountifully, we reap bountifully! When we give generously, God resupplies and multiplies! There are great spiritual lessons to be learned from God's world of planting and harvesting.

Did you know that the average corn cob has 800 kernels on it? Did you know that the rows of kernels on a cob are always even in number? One kernel of corn, well-planted and well-cultivated over time, has

the potential to produce 800-fold! One sunflower can hold as many as 2000 seeds. A watermelon can have over 300 seeds. We see in farming how exponential growth occurs. Driving for miles through mature standing corn is enjoyable. Standing in a large field of blooming sunflowers is incredible! Walking through in-season citrus groves is overwhelming. Watching the cranberries being harvested through bog flooding is amazing. But it's even better to observe churches multiplying their fruitfulness with enthusiastic going and giving to the harvest fields around the world!

India and China

William Pettigrew went to far northeastern India in 1890. He was inspired by Adoniram Judson's ministry in nearby Burma (Myanmar). There he invested over forty years of ministry, especially in the Manipur region. He brought in Christian education, and churches were planted in a land of headhunters. My friend Jim Starr, former director of Vision 2020 Ministry to Asia, tells me that there are seven thousand Baptist churches in that part of India today. How amazing the fruitful harvest of souls over time from one life well-invested! Jim has made over seventy trips to India. He and Director Michael Privett encourage and train national leaders.

It has been my privilege to teach Chinese pastors and coworkers on several occasions. There is nothing quite like looking into the faces of the persecuted. These efforts were coordinated by others at great risk and are now virtually impossible. My Asian ministry friends have invested extensively in the spread of the gospel and establishing of sound, biblical churches in hard places. I would hear of thousands of churches in these fellowships. It is difficult to quantify the abundant fruitfulness. One day I asked my Asian students if there were enough churches for the people in their communities. They did not seem to want to answer my question, but finally they sheepishly did, affirming that, yes, there were plenty of churches. No doubt this meant smaller, hidden, secret assemblies of believers existed under the radar of a surveillance-dominated culture. God turned the sinister pressure of persecution to expand ministry as only God can. "The word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9)! Gospel seeds sown a century and more ago are still bearing much fruit today.

Bible Illustrations for Planting and Harvesting

There are differing types of soil into which seeds are planted, making all the difference in the results (cf. Matt.

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

13:1–3; Mark 4:1–19; Luke 4:4–15). Some seed falls upon the wayside or upon shallow or thorny ground, while other seed falls on good soil. The good soil produces varying levels of fruitfulness. This is so true to life and ministry. The seed is the same (the Word of God), but the soil content makes all the difference.

There is at times a surprising positive response to God's Word in unlikely places (John 4:1–42). Who would have thought that a flagrantly adulterous Samaritan woman would trust Christ and bring a city to the Savior? Who among Jesus' disciples could have imagined the whiteness of the harvest field of that Samaritan town as people flocked to Christ and His salvation and were personally convinced by Christ Himself so that many believed on Him (4:30–42). Who would have thought the Great Commission would specify Samaria as an evangelistic target (Acts 1:8) and then see this fulfilled in Acts 8:4–25 and with great effectiveness? This was only the beginning of Gentile conversions to follow!

There are differing levels of fruitfulness: no fruit, fruit, more fruit, much fruit, and lasting fruit (John 15:1–17). Between fruit and more fruit comes pruning. Between more and much fruit comes praying. There are conditions to fruit bearing: meditating, asking, loving, and obeying. Abiding in Christ is the overarching key for a life of fruitful ministry." George Reith (*The Gospel by John*, 102) says fruitfulness is "the entire and various outcome of the Christian life; Christian character, conduct, service; active and passive virtues; a consecrated manhood; body, soul, and spirit possessed and penetrated by the Spirit of God. It is the life of Christ conveyed into us by His Spirit, and like the distilling of the sap into grapes in the tree, transmuted into individual gift and grace, individual character for Christ."

There should be no carnal competition in the cultivating of God's harvest (1 Cor. 3:1–9). There should not be a personality-centered polarization around preachers such as Paul, Peter, or Apollos. One plants, another waters, but God gives the increase. Men of God are but instruments. God is the One Who gives the increase! We are privileged to be laborers together with God!

There is much patience involved in the planting and harvesting process (James 5:7–8). We should work diligently as we wait for the Lord's soon return. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." The farmer must wait for favorable weather, right soil temperature, and right moisture content as he prepares to plant. Timing is everything. Then he awaits germination, early growth, maturation, and anticipates a narrow window for quick harvesting. There are factors beyond his control, so he must be patient. But he knows that there is a time of harvest coming. We know in ministry "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

Indiana Farming

A few months ago I was preaching at a missions conference at Waterman Baptist Church in Lodi, Indiana, pastored by John Goldfuss. I stayed with a very

missions-minded farm couple, nearing the age of eighty. They and their relatives farm five thousand acres of field corn and soybeans. I greatly enjoyed driving around with the farmer, Bob Russell, in his truck, seeing the square miles of farmland, hearing how they plant and harvest, and seeing the massive farm equipment that can quickly plant or harvest wide swaths. Did you know that modern harvesting equipment can fill a huge moving grain bin in the field in only twelve minutes? The Russells are still farming in their upper years, living where he has lived his entire life. This reminds me of Psalm 92:14–15: "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

Dr. Ed Nelson

I have just finished reading Dr. Ed Nelson's fascinating autobiography, *A Sinner Saved by Grace* (Castle Rock: Mile High Publishers, 2020; 405 pages). He wrote it with the assistance of his granddaughter Emilee Nelson. God saved and used a Colorado farmboy born in December 1923 to bring in a harvest of souls throughout his ministry of evangelism, church planting, and pastoring. In 1990 when he finished his thirty years of pastoring South Sheridan Baptist Church in Denver, the church attendance was over 1400. In 1988 he commenced ministry to the Soviet Union in his mid-sixties, and these journeys continued for fifteen years and included trips to the Ukraine as well—eighteen total trips! Many people were won to Christ. In 1996 he planted a church in Tucson, where he served for ten years. Then he pastored one more Colorado church from age eighty-two to eighty-six. Dr. Nelson even preached a message in a church he had helped to start years ago—on his ninety-sixth birthday! Fruit in old age!

John Henry Jowett and Preaching

For many years I have kept in the front of my preaching Bible a quotation from John Henry Jowett:

I want the next ten years to be full of ripened service. I long to be able to expound the Word with greater power. But, O, the thing is so big, so wonderfully big that I seem as one who lifts a pebble from the shore, or one heather bell from these wide-spreading moors. The Book becomes increasingly wonderful to me. Every added experience in life gives me a new lens and deeper things are unveiled. But I suppose there is no bottom to the sea of grace, and that is the reason why we shall never lose our surprise throughout all eternity (Smith, Wilbur M., *Great Sermons on the Death of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965], 88).

May God give us grace to serve out well our years of "ripened service." May God give us the joy of seeing greater fruitfulness in the days ahead. May God's Word with its principles of planting and harvesting, sowing and reaping, encourage us to depend more upon the Lord! ☞

Bruce McAllister is director of ministry relations for Gospel Fellowship Association Missions in Greenville, South Carolina.

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The Things Which Make for Peace

Let's face it. Whether it's a COVID-19 vaccine or mandated quarantine, pandemics and politics have created a frustrating mix. How should a congregation respond? It's important to begin by thinking strategically. Where is Satan aiming his fiery darts? Is his chief strategy to undermine our economy or our government? No, as always, Satan's fiery darts are aimed primarily at churches. He uses these flying wedges to try to divide believers who live together in essential unity. With this in mind, it's helpful to understand how Paul instructed the church at Rome so that they could maintain peace in the church during troubled times.

The Problem in the Church at Rome

Paul was addressing a specific conflict between the weak and the strong. Though we cannot say for sure, the weak ones were apparently those who had not yet embraced the whole counsel of God. It is likely that they were Jewish proselytes who still struggled with eating certain foods (Rom. 14:2) and respecting certain days (14:5). The strong were well taught and were not troubled by their consciences.

The conflict was not about the fundamental doctrines of Scripture. The conflict was over secondary issues such as foods and festivals. And it's clear that the believers were supposed to grant each other a great deal of flexibility.

Peace in the Church

In Romans 14:1 Paul instructed the members of the congregation to receive each other. This did not mean to get close to people in order to "straighten them out" with doubtful disputes and quarreling. On the contrary, they were to love each other, using God's commandments as the illumination of the laws of love (13:8–10).

All of these things were to be done in the light of Christ's Second Coming (13:11–14). Every believer ought to walk in the light of that day, knowing that each must give an account at the Judgment Seat (14:10–13). The strong were encouraged to be like Christ, who patiently put up with the failings of the weak, instead of walking selfishly (15:1–3). Both strong and weak were to receive each other, refusing to pass judgment or despise each other (14:1, 3, 10). There was an urgent need for every member of the congregation to examine his ways in order to avoid putting a stumbling block in the path of his fellow members (14:13). The very real danger was that the work of God could be destroyed by secondary issues (14:15, 20). In short, Paul urged Roman believers to pursue the things which make for peace (14:19). As they did, the God of hope who would fill them with joy and peace (15:13).

Making Peace in Your Church

How can you pursue the things which make for peace within your own congregation? After all, not everyone agrees about governmental dictates nor about mask mandates. There are legitimate disagreements about vaccines and quarantines. And who hasn't seen hundreds of PSAs about COVID-19 hygiene? And every health advisor adamantly insists on his or her view of "the science." Where does it all end? In Romans 14 it is very clear that believers were to grant each other leeway about their understanding of the unchanging Scriptures. How much more, then, should we grant each other flexibility about our understanding of ever-changing science? The fact is that pandemics and politics, which are secondary issues, have created conflicts within congregations. But there is a more excellent way.

Following the principles of Romans 14, we can pursue "the things which make for peace."

Gordon Dickson has served as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, since 1994. Gordon and his wife, Harriet, have four children and four grandchildren.



In this edition of *FrontLine* magazine, you've learned:

- To "be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."
- What it's like to live among the enemy.
- What it means to "render unto Caesar."
- How to respond like Daniel (and Alvin York!).
- How to respond to those who say, "That's just your interpretation!"

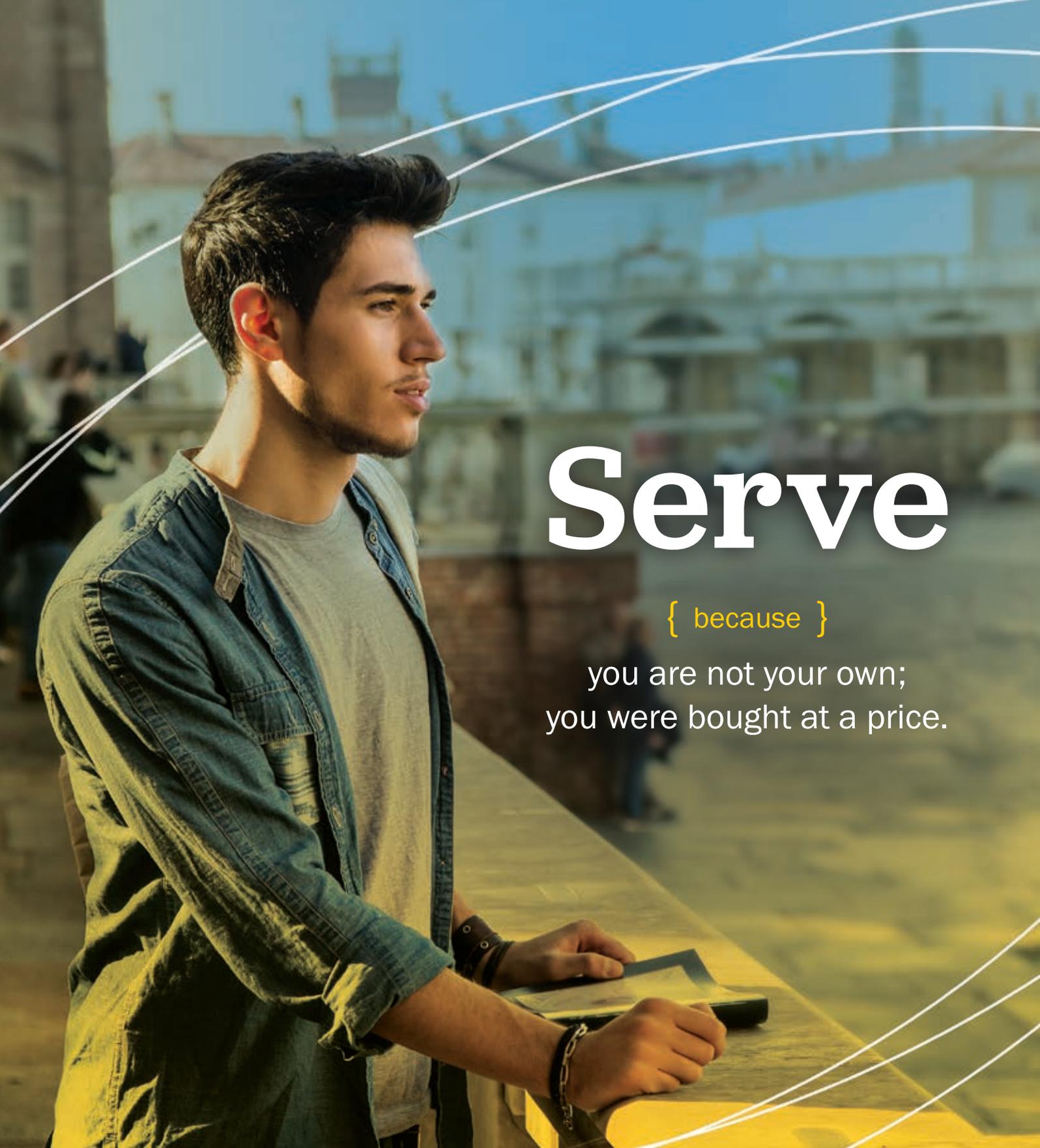
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A young man with dark hair and a light beard, wearing a denim shirt over a grey t-shirt, is shown in profile from the waist up. He is looking towards the right, holding a map or document. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and people. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. There are several white curved lines overlaid on the image, starting from the top left and curving across the scene.

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Torchbearer Award

The FBFI was proud to award Dr. Larry Oats with the 2021, 100th Anniversary Torchbearer Award in appreciation for his strong scriptural leadership, his faithfulness to the fundamentals of the faith, and his personal sacrifice in contending for the faith.

Dr. Oats has served behind the scenes at Maranatha Baptist Bible College and now Maranatha Baptist University since its inception. He has participated in equipping thousands of young men and women for the ministry and through them has seen many come to know Christ and serve. Dr. Oats' writing ministry will impact generations to come. He has served on the Positions Committee of the FBFI where his theological insight and writing have been extremely valuable.

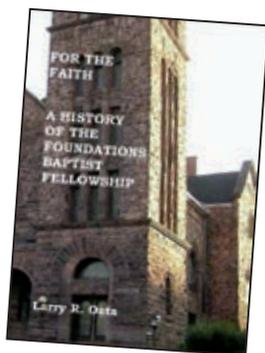
We are so thankful that he took on the monumental task of writing the history of the FBFI which is now published and available. Dr. Larry Oats has truly been a torchbearer for biblical Baptist fundamentalism, and it is our great privilege to recognize his lifelong impact on our movement.



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Wyoming Regional Fellowship

Jay Sprecher

The Wyoming FBFI/ Northwest Baptist Missions Fellowship met on April 26–27 at Friendship Baptist Church, Thayne, Wyoming. Total attendance, including volunteers and attendees from the host church, totaled forty-four. There were twenty-two pastors and pastors' wives from Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah. Pastor Mike Holmes of Baptist Youth Ministries and Pastor Joshua Spencer of Sinclair Baptist Church preached on Monday evening on the theme "For Such a Time as This." On Tuesday morning Pastor Doug Sondergaard of Shelley Baptist Church, Shelly, Idaho, and Pastor Jay Sprecher of Friendship Baptist Church continued the theme. Pastor Steve Pitchford led a prayer season, and Pastor Mike Holmes led a beneficial summit session. The host church provided breakfast and lunch and inspiring special music while making great fellowship time available.



100th Annual Fellowship

Doug Wright

Pictures on the 100th FBFI Annual Fellowship booklet (a Black Lives Matter protest, the COVID-19 virus, President Biden and a military leader, an LGBTQ gathering at the Lincoln Memorial, and a church in the center of the photos) illustrated this year's FBFI Annual Fellowship theme: "Understanding the Times," taken from 1 Chronicles 12:32.

Our meeting was held at Colonial Baptist Church in Indianapolis Indiana. The actual 100th annual fellowship scheduled for June 2020 was, of course, cancelled because of COVID, but the attendance rebounded nicely this year. With nearly two hundred registrants and a full slate of exhibitors, the preaching and fellowship were even sweeter.

FBFI President Kevin Schaal preached the opening session and exposted Scripture, affirming the parallel





between our culture and times and Roman culture and times. The key to such times is how pastors, churches, and believers in general should respond—especially to government mandates. That same theme, of course, was echoed in much of the preaching and in many of the workshops. Subsequent general session speakers Bob Jones III, Paul Hartog, Mark Minnick, Bud Steadman, Gordon Dickson, Col. Mike Sproul, and Craig Hartman preached from passages relevant to the theme. Breakout sessions and ample times of fellowship allowed attendees to enhance their understanding of the practical application of Scripture as well as to enjoy face-to-face fellowship.

Following the first general session on Monday night, Larry Oats introduced his book *For the Faith*, a history of the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International. The book traces the one-hundred-year history of FBFI from its formation as a response to liberal influences in the Northern Baptist Convention to its current status as a fellowship united in “perpetuating the heritage of Baptist Fundamentalism complete, intact, pure, and undiluted to the succeeding generations of fundamentalists” (FBFI Vision Statement).

Those who attend the FBFI Annual Fellowship have come to appreciate the outstanding effort each host church puts into making the experience pleasant and relaxing. Colonial Hills Baptist Church and Dr. Chuck Phelps continued that tradition. Their church family welcomed us with excellent meals, great facilities, and a gracious spirit.

Plans are well under way for next year’s Annual Fellowship to be held at Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, June 13–15.



Linda Shumate

Culturally Blended Marriages

Joys and Challenges



A man and a woman meet each other, their relationship develops, and they marry. Despite good preparation, things are usually not quite as they expect. Two sinners are learning to live together and learning to honor God in all their interactions. Each needs to learn how to subdue selfishness to serve the other and to solve problems with effective communication. The more disparity between their upbringing—economics, education, Christian heritage, family style, region of the country, urban/rural—the more differences they may have to work through because they may enter marriage with different unstated expectations. My mother told me of the first time she visited my dad’s family. Her father always came to the breakfast table in suit and tie, formally dressed for work, and she was shocked (a strong word for my mother) to see my dad’s father at the table in his pajamas and robe. This was just one of many differences.

Blessings and Challenges

When spouses come from two very different cultures¹ and perhaps different native languages, their family life can bring both some unique blessings as well as some unique challenges. The blessings are in the richness of experience—the couple can celebrate the best aspects of each culture, and their children grow up experiencing and loving both. When the partners are from widely different backgrounds, their different opinions about things such as holiday celebrations, gender roles in the home, disciplining of children, and the role of extended family can lead to conflict. The couple may not even be aware of some of these differences until the children are born. Now add to that mix some additional challenges of language limitations and a smattering of cultural pride and you can see that people in a culturally blended marriage may have a few extra occasions for disagreements; they may have to work more intentionally to communicate love and respect in a way that each spouse values and to build a family culture that each treasures.

Perhaps you have studied a foreign language and thought that its grammar was “weird.” Maybe you have traveled in a different country and had difficulty adjusting to the way people did things. Different cultures may value punctuality, efficiency, personal connection, and personal space differently. Even what’s considered a polite greeting may be different

in a different culture, both in society in general as well as in church. A teacher friend of mine is wise in emphasizing to her Spanish students that these things are not “weird,” they are just *different*.²

Cultural Assumptions

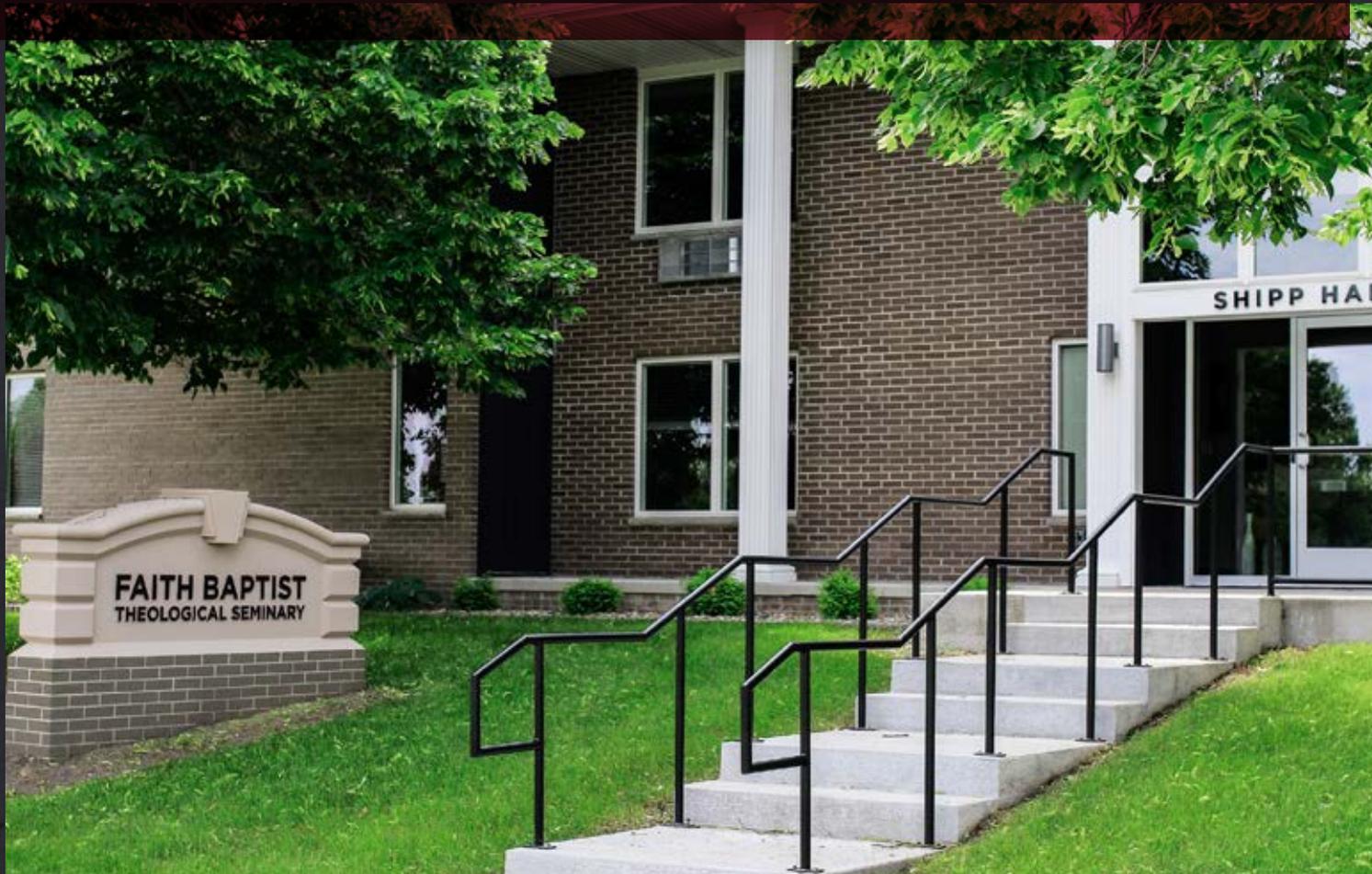
A visiting preacher and his wife came to our church in Greenville, South Carolina, from a Spanish-speaking country. Afterwards many church members greeted them by shaking hands. I was glad to see this warmth extended to our friends. The wife’s perspective, though, was that Americans seem cold because they only shake hands. A kiss on the cheek is the typical greeting for all Christians, men and women, in their church. Our perceptions of the same event were influenced by our cultures. When I was at their church, I received kisses from many people, which was a little hard for me. I had to remember—“not weird, just different.” In a marriage, if either partner thinks that his or her culture is “better,” conflict will inevitably result. There is no place for cultural hubris. Family practices must agree with scriptural principles, but no one should assign right or wrong to mere cultural preferences.

The scriptural principles that apply in any relationship are just as important in a culturally blended one. The partners must practice mutual submission (Eph. 5:21); they must esteem the other better than themselves (Phil. 2:3). They must love and respect each other (Eph. 5:22–33). They should be growing in their walk with God, both individually (2 Pet. 3:18) and together (1 Pet. 3:7). They speak truth to each other (Rom. 15:14) and are willing to both challenge each other spiritually and to be challenged (Gal. 6:2).

Cultural differences can create opportunities for conflict, but effective communication is the way to reconciliation, just as it is in any relationship. Spouses may cause offense to each other but shouldn’t allow an offense to become an insurmountable problem. Consider whether the offensive behavior or thinking may have a root in the cultural difference and talk about it frankly. Don’t excuse a lack of reconciliation on cultural problems. No matter what the cause, bitterness over unresolved offenses will damage you and through you, have an effect on others.

Continued on page 35

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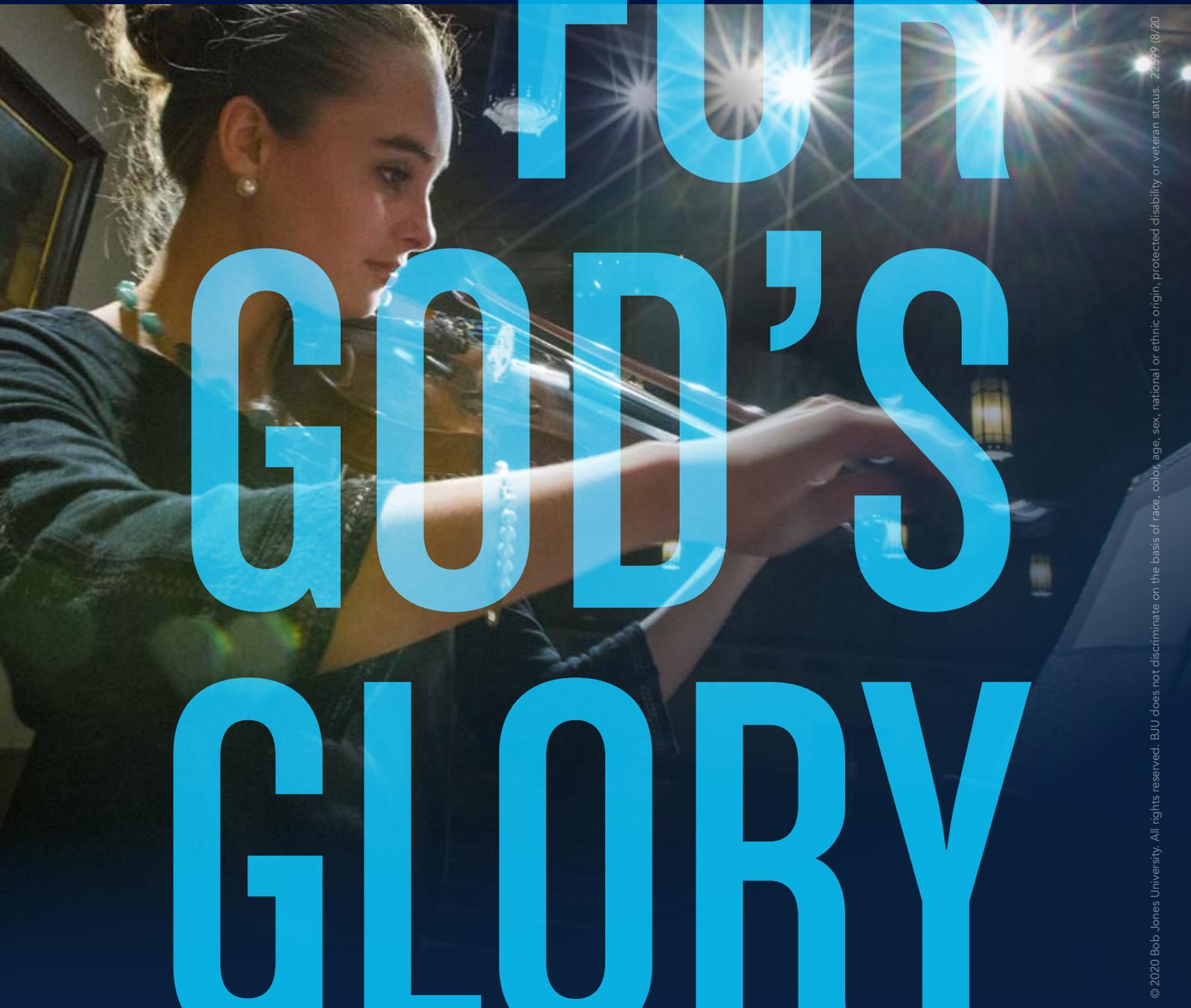
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Layton Talbert

Prophetic Fulfillment:

Was Judah in captivity seventy years? Or was it actually around sixty-seven or sixty-eight, and God just rounded up? Eugene Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests* is, in my opinion, the best history of Israel to be found. I recommend it enthusiastically and use it as a text in my seminary course on OT Historical Books. His handling of the seventy-year prophecy of Judah's captivity, however, seems to me uncharacteristically loose.

A period that began in [605] and ended with the overthrow of Babylon in 539. . . . This is obviously a round number since the captivity was only sixty-six years in fact, but the figure is close enough for Daniel to use it (Dan. 9:1–2). The reference to seventy years in Zechariah 1:12 and 7:5 applies to a different period, that between the destruction of the temple (586) and its rebuilding (515).¹

Given our insistence on the precision of God's other numerical/chronological prophecies, this seems unnecessarily concessive. Some think any insistence on numerical precision hermeneutically unnecessary; after all, doesn't God always use round numbers? Actually, no. In Isaiah 7:8 he foretells an event "within threescore and five [i.e., sixty-five] years." God could easily have predicted here either a precise period of time or a general range ("within seventy years").

To insist that seventy years means seventy years need not mean seventy years *to the day*; but it ought to be assumed to mean seventy years *to the year* unless it can be positively proven to be otherwise. But when, precisely, did the seventy years begin and end? And is there more than one seventy-year time period in view? Several passages shed light on these questions.

Jeremiah 25:1, 9–13

Note especially the words of verses 11–12: "These nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity."

This prophecy from God came to Jeremiah "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah"—the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, which also marked the opening phase of that captivity in 605 BC.

The apparent difficulty in this case relates to the prophecy's starting point (*terminus a quo*). Since the prophecy comes in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC), and Cyrus the Mede took Babylon in 539 BC, that allows a maximum of only sixty-seven years (counting 605 and 539 inclusively). For some, this is "close enough." But I think there is a better resolution. To begin with, we err when we assume that all the seventy-year prophecies apply only to Israel.

The thrust of this prophecy is that Judah *and the surrounding nations* would *serve the king of Babylon seventy years*. Babylon and Media allied after the death of King Ashurbanipul of Assyria in 626, and captured and destroyed Assyria's capital, Nineveh, in 612.² When the Assyrians relocated their capital to Haran, Babylonian King Nabopolassar conquered that as well, successfully resisted an Assyrian counterattack, and effectively ended Assyrian dominance in the region in 609.³

Jeremiah 25 specifies seventy years of Babylonian domination *over the nations*, after which God would bring judgment on Babylon (just as He had brought judgment on Assyria through Babylon). It seems likely, then, that the seventy years in this prophecy began shortly *before* the prophecy was actually given. (We know that Jeremiah's next seventy-year prophecy clearly comes after that prophetic timeclock had already commenced ticking; see below.)

The best solution in my opinion, then, is that the seventy years of Jeremiah 25 began in 609 BC with the ending of Assyrian hegemony and the beginning of Babylonian domination. That domination over the nations ended when Medo-Persia overthrew Babylon in 539—seventy years later.

Jeremiah 29:1–2, 10

Note especially the words of verse 10: "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." This prophecy, a letter from Jeremiah to those already in exile, comes after the second major deportation of Jewish captives from Judah (597 BC). Unlike Jeremiah 25, the language of this prophecy seems to be specifying the duration of Judah's exile "at Babylon" which began with the first deportation in 605. That means the seventy years would expire about 536–35 B.C. More on that below. But first, several other passages shed additional light on these two prophecies.

Daniel 9:1–2

Daniel records this experience in 539 BC, relating his own reading of Jeremiah's prophecy, which he describes as recording "the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish *seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem*." This description, along with other internal indicators, points specifically to Jeremiah 29 (see above), the letter Jeremiah had sent some decades earlier to the exiles in Babylon. So, this reference also focuses on the fulfillment of the seventy years that culminate in the return and restoration of God's people to the land, which began in 605 and, as discussed in the following reference, likely ended in 536–535.

Is Close Enough Good Enough? (Part 2)

2 Chronicles 36:20–21

“And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.” The emphasis here is on the completion of seventy years, but this time with specific reference to the *land* of Judah. This passage specifically marks the beginning of the seventy years for Jerusalem at 605, since it references the beginning of Judah’s captivity. The difficulty in this case centers on the ending point (*terminus ad quem*)—what year the return actually occurred. Here we reach the heart of the whole discussion.

Cyrus took Babylon on October 12, 539 BC.⁴ The official “first year of Cyrus”—and hence the year of his decree recorded in Ezra 1—was 538.⁵ While we are told specifically that Cyrus’s decree was issued in his first year, we are not told how long the Jews’ preparations, nor exactly when (how long after the decree) they actually returned to the land.⁶

The task of return was a monumental one; the preparations for uprooting and the thousand-mile journey were certainly time-consuming endeavors. It’s unrealistic to imagine that Jews who had settled homes and established businesses over a period of seven decades simply up and left on an arduous months-long journey at the drop of a yarmulke! A year or two for all the organization and preparations necessary for the move is not at all unreasonable to postulate.⁷ In the absence of any data that specifies the precise year of return, 536/535 is an eminently reasonable and realistic date.⁸ This would handily accommodate the seventy years prophesied on Jerusalem beginning in 605.

Zechariah 1:12–16; 7:4–5

But there’s one more intriguing prophecy:

O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? . . . Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. . . . Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *month*, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even* to me?

Zechariah’s opening prophecies are dated to 520 (1:1, 7). Zechariah 1:12ff. seems to envision this seventy-year period as ongoing, and the completion of the temple (which would

come four years later in 516) as the terminal punctuation mark on that period. It’s difficult to pinpoint the date of his later prophecies, but Zechariah 7 seems to be looking back on the same time period indicated in Zechariah 1. The reference point for the seventy years described in Zechariah, then, seems to be the destruction and rebuilding of the temple (586–516 BC).

Conclusions

The data actually seem to indicate the possibility of a threefold seventy-year prophecy fulfilled by three overlapping but distinct events:

1. Seventy years of Babylonian domination over Judah and the surrounding nations (609–539), after which the king of Babylon would be punished (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10a).
2. Seventy years of captivity in Babylon (605–536), at the end of which the Jews would be restored to their land (Jer. 29:10b; 2 Chron. 36:20–21; Dan. 9:1–2).
3. Seventy years of indignation on Jerusalem and Judah (586–516), a reference to another dimension of Judah’s chastisement from the temple’s destruction to its rebuilding (Zech. 1:12ff; 7:5).

Our distance from these historical events makes certainty difficult and demands diligence in exploring all the historical data. This effort has ramifications not only for our hermeneutical integrity but also for the integrity of God and the precision and reliability of His words. I suspect that in the end, once all the historical data are on the table, we will discover that God’s predictions were not merely “close enough” but far more exact than we ever imagined.

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¹ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 2nd edition, 469–70.

² R. K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times*, 244–45.

³ Merrill, 449–50; F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, 78.

⁴ Bruce, 92.

⁵ Merrill, 480.

⁶ Ezra 3:1 mentions “the seventh month,” but most interpreters argue that this is not the seventh month of the year of Cyrus’s decree.

⁷ Andrew Steinmann’s meticulous commentary argues for a five-year period of preparation and a return in 533 (*Ezra and Nehemiah*, 38–39).

⁸ Walter Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 491.

The Right Approach to Reaching the Lost

Jim Tillotson

It is interesting attending conferences and seminars where different people share what they think is the right approach to reaching the lost. Some feel it should happen only through personal discipleship so there is no need to have an invitation after a church service. Others have an invitation in case a visitor would like to make an appointment to go through the gospel at a later date, and some invite people to come forward to receive Christ right away. Some feel you should not have an evangelistic sermon. Others are passionate about evangelistic sermons.

I know of ministries using each of the approaches mentioned above that are seeing many people come to Christ. The danger can come when we become convinced that our way is the only way.

I think Romans 14 is clear that we should be gracious with a brother in Christ and celebrate the fact that people are getting saved. I personally believe it is important to build relationships with lost people in order to share the gospel, but I also believe you can see people with whom you did not have a previous relationship come to Christ. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, or Jesus and Zacchaeus would be such examples. As 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 states, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase”!

So what do ministries and people who are seeing people get saved have in common? It seems the common denominator is intentionality. Some want to take a lost person through the *Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*. Some want to do Evangelism Explosion. Some want to do a four-week John study. Some want to build a relationship and then just take them through the Romans Road. The plan of salvation is the same, but the approach is different. Yet those who are seeing people saved are intentionally looking to use some method or plan to reach lost people. It seems lazier for many to give money, even those who do not have much to give, rather than personally talking to a lost person and seeking to share the gospel with him or her.

Many Christians, if not most, would say they want to see people saved, yet they are not personally and intentionally reaching out to lost people. It seems the people and ministries that are seeing people saved on a regular basis are too few and far between. It is not an easy thing to carve out some time each week to

intentionally interact with lost people. However, those who are seeing people saved find two to four hours a week out of the 168 hours available to intentionally interact with the lost. If we are to be like Christ, we will need to carve out some time to spend with lost people.

Would anyone ever describe us as the friend of publicans and sinners? Second Corinthians 5:10–11 states, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” It seems that an awareness of hell is one of several things that should help motivate believers to be personally active in sharing the gospel.

Al Lacy, an old-time evangelist, took all the verses on hell in the Bible and wrote the following description of what hell might be like in his book *The Worm That Never Dies*. Every time I read it, it reminds me how important it is to do something to reach those around me with the gospel.

Try to imagine your body with the most excruciating sunburn. Add to that the awful pain of your whole frame scalded with boiling water. To this, add the agony of bodily movement. The skin stretches. Untold daggers of pain flash through your body. You want to hold still, but the burning from the flames will not allow it. The bubbling brimstone makes you scream. Your hair is on fire. Your feet and hands blister, while you gnaw your tongue, trying to relieve the torment. Your throat is raw from screaming and wailing.

You are falling in the darkness. You feel something solid. Oh, if only you could stop falling! Your body tries to cling to the solid surface. Suddenly, you are slipping. The horrid smell of blazing sulfur commingles with the sickening odor of burning hair and scorched flesh. Nausea overwhelms you.

Someone suddenly reaches out of the darkness and grasps you in terror. They begin to gnash on you with their teeth. All the time you are both screaming at the top of your lungs. You shake the gnashing person off in the darkness. Breathing heavily from the

Continued on page 37

Culturally Blended Marriages

Continued from page 28

Fluent Communication

Honest and complete communication is hard, but if spouses have a language difference it can be even harder. It is hard to speak intimately and without reserve in a language other than your own. There must be a certain level of common language, but which heart language is the relationship conducted in, the wife's or the husband's? If one spouse is less fluent in a second language, communication usually defaults to his or her native tongue. This can create a subtle division because one spouse is almost always speaking in his or her second language. This is not always bad, and it can be fun. In fact, that can be one of the attractions that brought the couple together, but now imagine trying to work through a disagreement. Being able to say precisely what you mean is important, but instead of speaking freely, you have to think about vocabulary and verb tenses, and you know that you probably sound like a fifth grader. Or imagine your spouse speaking this way. Language fluency differences that are fine, even cute, in daily interactions can become stumbling blocks when a couple is trying to work through problems or disagreements.

If you have ever tried to communicate in a second language, you remember the frustration of having thoughts that you just can't express. Mutual respect is key; remember that lack of fluency does not indicate lack of thinking. Guard against pride. Both partners must be committed to good communication, whether that means encouraging a

less-than-fluent spouse and then listening patiently with understanding, or saying something several different ways with your own more limited language skills until your spouse understands what you mean. Never let language fluency differences become a power struggle.

If someone seeks your advice, tell him or her that a bicultural family experiences the same blessings and difficulties as any other—but with a few unique extras in both directions. If both spouses are aware of the challenges and are committed to personal spiritual growth and good communication, they can meet those differences and be effective at resolving them. Then the different perspectives can enrich their family life and perhaps even give them unique ministry opportunities.

Linda Shumate ministers alongside her husband, David, in Phoenix, Arizona, where he is the director of MGM International, a missions agency focusing on the Spanish-speaking population in the US and abroad. She has raised children and done a variety of ministries as the Lord has brought opportunities her way.

¹ By cultural differences I am not referring to major differences in spiritual beliefs. This article assumes that both partners are genuine Christians and have similar fundamental doctrinal understanding and experience.

² Americans tend to value efficiency in business transactions, getting to it and getting it done, while other cultures may place a higher value on creating a connection through personal conversation before entering into the business matter. They may see each other as either wasting precious time or as being very cold and unpleasant. Some cultures value a strong handshake and direct eye contact, whereas others may view both of these as forward and not respectful.



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COVID, Chaplaincy, and the Church

To date, the Department of Defense has lost 355 personnel to COVID-19. That includes members of the military, civilians, contractors, and dependents. Of those 355 people, twenty-six have been military personnel. Of those twenty-six, seven have been Sailors in the United States Navy. Of those Sailors, one was a member of the crew of the *USS Wasp* (LHD 1). I am the Chaplain of the *Wasp*. He was my Sailor.

Our church supports ninety missionaries. Of those ninety, ten are sent out of Good News Baptist Church. I am one of those missionaries. I am a United States Navy Chaplain endorsed by the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International (FBFI), and my pastor is Mike Ascher, also an FBFI Chaplain but with the Chesapeake Police Department.

Both Good News Baptist Church and the *USS Wasp* are located in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Good News is in Chesapeake, and the *Wasp's* home port is Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval base. (Seventy-five ships and 149,000 personnel call it home.)

In Acts 13 it was the church at Antioch that sent Saul and Barnabas after they had separated them to the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them (Acts 13:2-4). It was the church at Antioch to which Saul (now "Paul") and Barnabas returned to rehearse all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

The local church has always been the mechanism for missions. It sends the missionary, it supports the missionary, it receives the missionary. It is impossible to biblically accomplish the New Testament work of missions without the local New Testament church. In fact, missions is the mission of the local church, and the missionary is the agent sent out to execute that mission.

The partnership between the missionary and his local church is indispensable. They are mutually invested in each other's ministry. Good News understands and exemplifies this relationship—something I experienced firsthand when I saw in a tangible way the investment my church has in my ministry as a Navy Chaplain.

The *Wasp* and COVID

When COVID struck America in March of 2020, the United States Navy implemented some draconian, albeit very necessary, measures to ensure that the United States fleet maintained its readiness. Daily temperature checks, the requirement to wear masks at all times in public, the restriction of movement (ROM) for personnel under investigation for COVID, and quarantine for those who tested positive for COVID became norms over 2020 and into 2021. The *Wasp* was no different and implemented all these measures as it strived to maintain a ready posture.

Nevertheless, in spite of herculean efforts, COVID still infiltrated the *Wasp*. Though it never hindered the mission and never took the ship out of commission, when the second wave of COVID swept through the United States in the winter of 2020 and 2021, the *USS Wasp* was affected in a way that touched the entire crew.

In January a *Wasp* Sailor contracted COVID. He was certainly not the first aboard the ship to contract the disease, and he was not to be the last, but he was the first to be admitted to the Intensive Care Unit for treatment. During the pandemic, as with most commands, *Wasp* had its share of COVID cases, but none had required hospitalization, let alone ICU. But in mid-January a seemingly healthy first class petty officer began to experience flu-like symptoms, and within two weeks he was in the ICU fighting for his life as his organs began to shut down. Just two weeks after he had been admitted to the ICU, doctors gave him no hope of recovering, and his wife was faced with the horrific decision to remove life support. On February 12, three minutes after being removed from life-support, the Sailor took his last labored breath and passed away.

Though it was a seemingly small gesture, Pastor Ascher offered Good News as a venue to hold the ship's memorial service for the Sailor. In the peak of the COVID pandemic, auditoriums that could accommodate the hundreds of Sailors who would attend the service were difficult to find. But Pastor Ascher offered a beautiful sanctuary, a team to provide livestream capabilities to allow the Sailor's extended family in





the Philippines to view the service, a photographer, and the entire church staff to support the ship in providing a dignified and meaningful memorial service.

A Partnership . . . a Relationship

Within a matter of weeks, the partnership between a local church and their missionary manifested itself in a tremendously unique way. Now, certainly, as a member of Good News, I have witnessed, many times, and even been a part of, their active ministry to foreign missionaries. The church is a missions-minded church. Additionally, because of his affiliation with the Chesapeake Police Department, Pastor Ascher understands the nuances of institutional ministry. Nevertheless, on this occasion, I was on the receiving end of their missions mindset, and it instilled in me once again that beautiful and tremendously necessary relationship that must be cultivated between a military chaplain and his sending church.

The *Wasp* agreed that Good News could host the memorial service, and her Command and Sailors were grateful for the generosity and hospitality extended to them. So on a Friday morning in March, with a sanctuary full of Sailors and a grieving family on the far side of the world logged in to the church's website, Good News Baptist Church demonstrated its profound commitment to missions at home and abroad.

Could we have had the memorial service without the assistance of Good News? Probably, but it would not have provided the church with the opportunity to be a blessing to their missionary and his mission field. The memorial service could have passed into the command chronology as another event. But when the people of Good News did what they did to support their missionary, it was fruit added to their account, and the mutual benefit was tangible.

It is true that the *Wasp* may never truly understand the unique relationship that their chaplain must have with his sending church. But what they do understand is what Good News did for their chaplain. They continue to talk about Good News and the generous hospitality they experienced on that day. In fact, Sailors have since visited Good News precisely because the church, in an austere COVID environment, reached out to minister to their missionary when he needed them most. As a chaplain sent out of Good News and serving aboard an American warship, I am still reaping the blessings of the support I received from my church, and I think both Good News and the *Wasp* are as well.

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The Right Approach to Reaching the Lost

Continued from page 34

concentrated exertion, you fill your lungs with smoke. While you cough and gasp, the word "WATER!" escapes your lips. Your throat is on fire. Your tongue feels like a white-hot iron against the parched roof of your mouth. The roar of the flames and the piercing screams of the doomed and the damned seem to tear at your eardrums. Oh, for just a moment of silence! But it never comes. Your mind flashes back to earth when you had no pain. You long for even a minute of relief. But it never comes. You close your smarting eyes. The scorched eyelids begin to burn against your eyeballs.

In your mind, you picture streams of cool, running water. You can remember every cold drink that ever passed your lips. The memory intensifies your burning thirst. Oh, for just a DROP! If only for a brief, heavenly moment, you could just feel a little moisture in your throat! But it never comes. You passed up everything heavenly when you passed by Jesus. You gave up a painless eternity for a few days of sin. You forfeited the cool waters of the River of Life to drink from the caldrons of Satan's cisterns. You substituted religion for salvation and got Hell instead of Heaven. By your own foolish, stubborn choice . . . this is your eternal state. Burning in torment! Crying in pain! Oh, how sad (Al Lacy, *The Worm that Never Dies* [1978, self-published], 95-96).

May we all look to find some time this week to build a relationship with someone who does not know Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. We are all equal in time, but we are not all equal in use of time. May we use our life wisely!

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

Let Your Faith Be Bigger Than Your Fear

Recently I was in a pastor's home in Virginia. I looked on the wall and saw this statement: "Let your faith be bigger than your fear." It really impressed me because I know how many people are living in a state of constant fear. Many have been fearful because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Others are gripped by fear because they have lost their jobs. Our country has been paralyzed by the fear of uncertainty. Even more heartbreaking is the reality that fear has overtaken the lives of many born-again believers. What is the answer? What should the Lord's people do when fear seems so monumental? There is a right way and a wrong way to respond to fear.

Let us first observe the wrong response to fear. When the Lord led the children of Israel out of Egypt, Pharaoh and his army pursued them. The Scriptures record what happened when the Israelites saw the teeming thousands of soldiers and chariots coming after them. Exodus 14:10–12 says,

And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

Their fear led them to dismay and despair. The fear in their hearts was as high as Mount Everest, and they felt they could never climb over it! That is what fear will do—lead us into a state of hopelessness. Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare." But probably the worst response to fear touches those who have never received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Unbelievers fear what family members and friends will say or think of them if they do get saved. They fear what they will have to give up or lose if they make a profession of faith. This type of fear is so powerful that the

Bible puts it on the top of the list of those who will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. Revelation 21:8 solemnly states, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Now I want to address the right response to fear and the right kind of fear. Proverbs 22:4 says, "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life." A person who truly fears the Lord stands in reverent awe of God's holiness and majesty. He recognizes God's power to the extent that his fear of the Lord strengthens and increases his faith. Therefore, his faith becomes greater than any fear he may encounter.

Back to Exodus 14 and the Israelites' fear of the Egyptians. In verses 13–14 we see Moses' fear of God, which enlarged his faith:

And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

Faith trusts God and overcomes fear. First John 5:4 declares, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Today, when so many people are living in fear, every child of God needs to heed the admonition of 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." I trust that you will always be aware of the teaching of 1 John 4:4: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

Remember, "Let your faith be bigger than your fear!" Right now, you ought to pray the prayer of Luke 17:5, "Increase our faith."

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