

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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# FRONTLINE

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Our sincere thanks to Dr. Kevin Bauder for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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# Biblical Counsel for Medical Choices

**A**ccording to the Bible, sin and death are inextricably linked. Paul tells us, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5:12). With death, sin brought a whole flood of decay, disease, and disability. We cannot always trace particular diseases to individual sins, but there are particular diseases that result from specific sins. The fact is that the malfunctioning of our bodies would not have occurred unless we were sinners.

As a rule, God wishes us to push back against the natural results of the Fall. We uproot weeds from our fields, we irrigate deserts, we domesticate animals, and we eradicate pests. In so doing, we exercise our God-ordained dominion to heal part of the damage that sin has done to the created order.

We also look for ways to mitigate the damage that sin has done to our bodies. We pay attention to nutrition and sanitation. We do exercises and stretches for strength and mobility. We investigate substances that will support or restore health. We study ways of removing or repairing injured parts of the body.

In short, we believe that the practice of medicine is one of the ways in which we can rightly seek to relieve some of the suffering that human sin has caused. Even though we may deliberate which treatments are most effective, we see medical advances as good. This is the theme that Brett Williams addresses in his article.

Nevertheless, medicine, like any human invention, can also be used for evil. Therefore, it is not an unquali-

fied good. Christians must make wise moral choices about their use of medical technologies and procedures. These choices force us to ask difficult questions, and our authors offer guidance through some of the most difficult of those questions.

May we employ medical insights to enhance or hinder fertility? David De Bruyn examines that issue. What should Christians think about cosmetic surgery? Ryan Martin offers biblical principles to help us. Should we use vaccines that have been tested on stem cell lines derived from aborted fetuses? Michael Riley shows that this issue is more complicated than we might guess. What does it mean to die, and are we saving life when we prolong the dying process? Mark Stuckey offers insights from a medical and Christian perspective.

Two other questions are worth addressing. Given the current state of medicine, should a Christian go to work in a medical field? Todd and Ruth Kilburn answer that question. How should we evaluate theories about conspiracies in the medical field—and in other areas? Mark Snoeberger gives us biblical tools that will help.

We have tried to make this issue of *FrontLine* practical, thoughtful, biblical, and interesting, but we do not pretend to have offered the final word. While we have not addressed all the questions that arise in medical ethics, we have tried to select the ones you are most likely to face. May God help you to evaluate these issues wisely.

Kevin T. Bauder

# Should We Heal or Pray? A

**A**midst the rise of American idealism after the Civil War, recent divorcée and amateur spiritualist Mary Baker Eddy self-published *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. By the mid-1880s, the book was a hit, and Eddy founded both the Massachusetts Metaphysical College and the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston. Eddy claimed that people relied too greatly on modern medicine and had lost the ability to tap into the divine “Mind,” which would result in healing from both spiritual and physical sickness. She argued that Christians should focus on the metaphysical while rejecting medical science, or (as she put it) “abandon pharmaceuticals and take up ontology.” While Christian Science is rightly critiqued as a current version of Gnosticism, Eddy’s claims pose intriguing questions. Should Christians seek modern medical care, or should they simply trust God? Furthermore, does the Bible offer any support for the modern practice of medicine?

## OBSERVATIONAL MEDICINE

Observational medicine, also known as rational medicine, originated in the fifth century BC with the Greek philosopher Hippocrates. Earlier healers, making no distinction between the physical and spiritual realms, viewed all illnesses as a direct result of divine displeasure. Healing was performed by priests and magicians. In the city of Kos, however, arose a class of

healers at the temple to Asclepius, the god of health, who were primarily dedicated to physical restoration. Hippocrates, having been raised in Kos, began to view some illnesses as the result of an imbalance within the body. He observed patients to see whether he could spot commonalities in their symptoms. He then recommended remedies based upon the symptoms. The Romans continued this medical philosophy, which became the foundation for all modern medicine.

Most Christians have generally accepted the prevalent medical theories of their day, but at times they have objected to current medical philosophies. During the second century Tatian, a disciple of Justin Martyr, rejected many medical explanations and remedies for maladies, attributing most to divine punishment or demonic oppression. He believed that physicians were rarely necessary, and that Christians should simply trust in God.

In the middle of the third century the Roman world was racked by a horrific plague that decimated the cities. Cyprian, who pastored in Carthage, described confusion among Christians who were troubled “that the infirmity of this disease carries off our people equally with the pagans” (*On Mortality*, 8.1). Later, during the fourth century, Basil the Great of Caesarea distinguished between sicknesses that were given directly by God for spiritual discipline (the vast majority, in his opinion) and those that were just a result of living in a fallen world (few

and far between). Only natural illnesses required a physician, so knowing whether the illness was a divine correction was key in praying for either “deliverance of our pains or patient endurance of them” (*The Long Rules*, 55).

Sometimes, however, early Christians advanced the work of medicine. Despite his concerns about inadvertently undermining God’s correction, Basil founded the first hospital, the Basileias. Here anyone (primarily the poor) could receive care from physicians. Furthermore, Basil was one of the first to employ physicians to research medical knowledge. Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil’s friend, described the Basileias as a place where “diseases are studied, misfortune made blessed, and sympathy put to the test.” Basil is just one example of many Christians who followed Jesus’ example of care and pity for the sick. In this respect, much of modern medical science (the observation, study, application, and care for the infirm) stems from Christian ideals and practice.

## ACCEPTANCE . . . WITH CAUTION

Though Christians have generally accepted prevalent medical theories, they have done it cautiously. They have always held these theories up to the critique and subjugation to Scripture and truth. God is sovereign and rules over every aspect of health. Health or hindrance flows from the hand of the Almighty. This is where the tension between faith and medicine must be balanced. Basil understood that God





# Defense of Modern Medicine

often controls and cares for His creation through creation itself. He wrote, “To place the hope of one’s health in the hands of the doctor is the act of an irrational animal. Yet, to reject entirely the benefits to be derived from this art is the sign of a pettish nature” (*The Long Rules*, 55). Physicians are not saviors and can no more heal a patient than create light. Nevertheless, they can be, and often are, used by God as instruments of common grace and specific care. Basil continued, “We shall view the watchful care of God impartially, whether it comes to us from some invisible source or by a physical agency” (*The Long Rules*, 55). Aside from miracles, then, all healing comes from God *through* natural agencies.

Caution is also necessary because some elements of medical theory have been contrary to biblical beliefs. Abortion has about as much to do with medicine as murder with physiology. William Keen, a Baptist who successfully performed the first brain surgery, is not the same as Stanley Biber, the pioneer of gender “reassignment” surgery. Christians should remember that *bona fide* medical practice differs from what we might call ideology with a scalpel or politics with a pill.

But what of Scripture? What does the Bible say about such things? During the first century, many ascribed illnesses to demonic possession. While Jewish medicine accepted some Greek theories, Jewish healing also involved magical amulets or attempted exorcisms. Jesus’ healings, however, were very different. Even though

exorcism was an important part of Jesus’ ministry (e.g., Matt. 17:17–18; Mark 1:23–26; 5:8–13; Luke 4:41), and many were amazed at His authority over the spiritual realm, Christ’s exorcisms never involved incantations or amulets. He spoke only words from the Word of God. Further, Jesus’ ministry of exorcism was always distinguished from His ministry of physical healing. Matthew records several examples. After delivering the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus healed a leper (Matt. 8:1–4) and, upon entering Capernaum, healed a paralyzed servant (8:5–13). Next came the miraculous healings of Peter’s mother-in-law (8:14–15) and, later, the healing of a paralytic (9:1–7), the healing of a woman with an issue of blood, the resurrection of the ruler’s daughter (9:18–26), and the healing of the two blind men (9:27–31).

On the evening that Peter’s mother-in-law was healed, “they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick” (Matt. 8:16). The text distinguishes those who were ill from those who were demon-possessed. Even with the stories of the Gergesenes and dumb demoniacs (8:28–34; 9:32–34), their physical issues were the result of possession, not an illness. In other words, Matthew showed that, unlike most Jewish healers, Jesus did not merely ascribe sickness to demonic possession.

Luke, a physician himself, records another example. Some mistakenly cite Luke 13:10–13 as proof that there is usually

a connection between physical maladies and satanic influence. In this case, a woman had a spirit of infirmity that resulted in a physical deformity for eighteen years. Though Jesus did not perform a specific exorcism to heal the woman, His subsequent conversation with the religious elite showed that He attributed the woman’s physical ailment to Satan (v. 16). The Gospels demonstrate that there can be both natural and spiritual causes to illness, and one should not always associate illness with a spiritual cause.

In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul’s command to “use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” reveals, at least indirectly, that Paul accepted the general medical practices of his day. Physicians in the first century believed that wine could be used as a tonic. The Roman physician Aulu Celsus wrote an eight-volume treatise on medicine that described the therapeutic properties of wine. Pliny the Elder, the great Roman scientist, agreed with Celsus’ views of medicinal wine. Many modern gastroenterologists concur with at least a part of these ancient claims. This text shows that Scripture underscores, at least tacitly, the distinction between physically caused and spiritually caused illnesses.

Though Scripture indicates that early Christians accepted medical theories, it neither espouses a specific theory nor should it be used to prove a particular theory. In our day, proof-texters try to find verses to support untested medicines or cures.

Continued on page 22



# Christian Choices and Reproductive Technologies

*L'chaim*, goes the Hebrew blessing: *To life!* Life is celebrated at its beginning and mourned at its close. Appropriately, we rejoice in life and living.

Few topics will so ignite debates among Christians as the ethics of controlling human fertility. How could it not? Here our discussion involves the most vulnerable of our society: the smallest of little children. Here we take up the questions of the goodness of procreation, of the divine prerogative in granting conception and life, and of the ethical limits of human ingenuity when it comes to managing human fertility. These questions superficially appear to hinge on whether we celebrate life or not. On closer examination, however, it's not as simple as that.

The question is clouded by our emotions: we are not detached observers. It is further clouded by the

increase of technologies over the past sixty years. Since the introduction of “the pill,” methods for preventing conception have multiplied. Techniques for encouraging or enhancing conception have also become numerous and bewildering. Beyond this, technologies such as CRISPR now exist for manipulating the genes of unborn children.

Keeping track of all this applied science is a feat in itself, to say nothing of examining the ethics of the methods employed. Instead of getting lost in the maze of a thousand technologies, Christians can turn to the timeless principles of Scripture, which promise to equip the believer thoroughly for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). Broader biblical principles on bioethics and procreation will supply a set of tools for evaluating each contraceptive or fertility technology.

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR BIOETHICS

As God's image bearers, men and women ought to subdue creation and bring it into a meaningful, orderly state that glorifies the Creator (Gen. 1:28). God remains the sovereign over life, its design, and its purpose (Deut. 32:39). Therefore, human scientific endeavors should seek to cooperate with what we discern to be God's design, conforming to creation where it is not obviously cursed or deformed by the Fall. Paul speaks of a man's or a woman's "natural use" (Rom. 1:27–28), which shows he believes that the human use of creation can either conform to God's design or violate it. Our goal in medicine or biomedical technology should always be to improve, repair, and maintain human life as God gave it. This guards against raw pragmatism as a guiding philosophy: the ends do not necessarily justify the means. Rather, we are limited by the sanctity of human life and by what we discern to be God's good design and purpose. We are further constrained by the truth of Genesis 1:26 that every human, however young, is part of the *imago Dei*, and all treatment, experimentation, or actions done to humans must be consensual.

By contrast, a secular view of reality enthrones humanity as sovereign over life. With no Creator to answer to, humans are at liberty to control and dominate creation. If we will, nothing constrains us from creating, re-creating, or engineering human life as we see fit.

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING PROCREATION

Without question the Bible sees children as a gift and blessing (Ps. 127:4–5). God's first blessing on Adam and Eve was the encouragement to "be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Some refer to this text as the "cultural mandate," a phrase that perhaps misses the tone of the passage. True, God was telling Adam and Eve to fill the earth with children. But this statement is in the context of a blessing, not a command. When someone says, "Have a nice day!" the words are a blessing, not a "Day-Quality Mandate." No one is instructing you to have a certain kind of day. The speaker is wishing you well, albeit with an imperative verb.

God's blessing on Adam and Eve should be understood this way. Children are a

privilege and a blessing. All things being equal, an important reason that people should get married is to have children. Avoiding childbearing is for exceptional situations: unusual callings to dangerous places, for example, or medical conditions that endanger the life of the mother. Some rare vocations almost require childlessness (Matt. 19:12). On the whole, having children is one of the purposes of marriage. To avoid childbearing altogether should be the exception, not the rule.

Having said that, it would be an argument from silence to infer that the blessing of fruitfulness requires that Christian parents should have as many children as their bodies allow. The physical ability to bear more children is only one factor in wisely applying the truth of Genesis 1:28. Fruitfulness is not merely a question of maximum quantity. A farmer seeks to cultivate the amount of land he believes he can responsibly handle. That is more than a consideration of physical land size for him. He must also consider his available tools, machinery, helpers, and many other factors. In some ways, limits are already placed upon him, and it is prudent for him to recognize them.

A similar approach pertains to a married couple considering what fruitfulness looks like for them. They should consider their aptitudes, ages, abilities, health, and a prudent (but still faith-filled) evaluation of their finances. Jesus discouraged starting what is impossible to finish (Luke 14:28). Their decision should also consider children already in the home, their ages, the space between them, each one's emotional and discipleship needs, or even special needs. Prospective parents should also take seriously their own desires for smaller or larger families.

Should we leave the matter of conception entirely up to the sovereign hand of God, with no attempt to control or limit it? A couple may certainly choose to do so, just as some couples choose to leave the outcome of decisions regarding ministry, missions, or certain health conditions up to the providential hand of God. In practice, though, the question is a matter of degree, not kind. Nearly all Christians gather information, pray, get counsel, use available means, and decide at what point they will "cast [their] bread upon the waters" (Eccles. 11:1), trusting God for the unknowns and final out-

comes. In this regard, let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Rom. 14:5).

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING CONTRACEPTION

Using these principles, controlling conception does not, in principle, violate the intended blessing of Genesis 1:28. Nor is it an abuse of the marriage bed. A woman's natural monthly cycle produces a window of time in which she is not fertile, and the Bible does not forbid married intimacy during this time. Therefore, God does not prohibit, or even frown upon, marital sex that does not produce children. The marriage bed is to be rejoiced in for its own sake (Prov. 5:18–19).

If sex within marriage without conception is not sinful, then it is not sinful for Christian couples to use moral means to practice it. If technology exists to extend periods of infertility, then using this technology is not, in principle, a violation of God's order. Using human means that order and regulate nature is not an abuse of nature, provided those means do not transgress a moral commandment.

With this in mind, we can say at least the following regarding contraception: Any contraceptive technology that kills or destroys a fertilized ovum is immoral. Life begins at conception, not at self-aware personhood, as pro-choice advocates have now begun to say. For example, the drug RU-486 kills a fertilized zygote. This form of "contraception" works by murder, plain and simple. Married couples who do not want to have children should not use this kind of technology.

Regular contraceptive pills are more difficult to evaluate than "morning-after" contraceptives. They vary in their chemical components and physiological actions. Most prevent conception altogether. Some opponents of the contraceptive pill claim that a "breakthrough" fertilized ovum is possible even when taking the pill, and since the uterus is thinned by the hormonal effect of the pill, the fertilized ovum will not implant. If this occurs, they argue, then you get the equivalent of an abortion. Similar concerns pertain to intrauterine devices (IUDs).

James Dobson's Physicians Resource Council (PRC), which comprises pro-life Christian doctors, examined the issue for two years. Ultimately, even they were



**NOT ALL QUESTIONS HAVE CLEAR ANSWERS. STILL, DESPITE THE GROWING SOPHISTICATION OF OUR SCIENTIFIC METHODS, TIMELESS BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES CAN SUCCESSFULLY GUIDE THE OBEDIENT AND THOUGHTFUL CHRISTIAN'S CONSCIENCE.**

undecided. The majority believed contraceptive pills do not produce unintended, spontaneous abortions. A minority of the experts felt that, though remote, enough possibility exists of an abortifacient effect to warrant warning women about it. In difficult matters like this, Christians must prayerfully decide if they would rather trust a broad consensus or err on the side of caution.

Of course, contraceptive technology can be used for immoral means. It can be used for immoral sexual intercourse. It can be used by married couples to avoid child-bearing for selfish, materialistic reasons, or because of an unbiblical ideology they have embraced. Yet the immoral use of the technology does not make the tool itself evil. The tool would be intrinsically evil if its only applications involved the abuse of the created order.

**BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING FERTILITY TREATMENTS**

At first glance, one might think that fertility treatments would pose no ethical concern for Christians, since no Christian opposes the promoting and nourishing of human fruitfulness. The problem is that some fertility technologies violate biblical

principles of bioethics and life in the pursuit of ensuring a successful pregnancy. For example, in some forms of in-vitro fertilization, multiple ova and sperm are united in a petri dish, then later transplanted. For the sake of obtaining a single implanted zygote, many are sacrificed. This means that practitioners are knowingly engineering the deaths of multiple human beings to obtain one that survives. Any technology which destroys fertilized ova to bring about one successful pregnancy is ethically wrong.

Christians have also debated the ethics of intra-uterine fertilization (IUF), or artificial insemination. Donor sperm is usually provided by the husband (AIH), but its application still requires the involvement of third parties. If the husband is infertile, a couple sometimes elects to use donor sperm (AID). Is this adultery by proxy? Is it only the wife's child? Is donor sperm immoral in itself?

AID cannot be adultery, for no union is involved. To argue that it is only the wife's child, and not the husband's, could easily become an argument against adoption. Still, a couple might wish to prayerfully consider their own conscience, and they ought to consider whether adoption might not be preferable.

Broad sperm banks to be used by homosexual couples or even single women who wish to become "spinster mothers" also raise problems within Christian reproductive ethics. God's normal plan is for children to have both a father and a mother. Seeking to conceive a child outside of wedlock can never be right.

Finally, what about surrogate motherhood? This technology uses the womb of another woman for AID or AIH. However, this technology carries much more emotional, social, and even legal baggage. It opens a possibility for the exploitation of women. The maternal instinct is strong, and more than one biological surrogate has experienced difficulty giving up her child. At minimum, wisdom suggests that adoption is a better course than surrogate motherhood.

Those who wish that ethical decisions about conception, fertility, and contraception were guided by clear commands and prohibitions will be disappointed by the moral complexity of the matter. Not all questions have clear answers. Still, despite the growing sophistication of our scientific methods, timeless biblical principles can successfully guide the obedient and thoughtful Christian's conscience. If we give ourselves to both careful understanding of the relevant Scriptures and a competent understanding of the reproductive technologies, we can please God, even in this ethically ambiguous area.

David De Bruyn, ThD, is the pastor of New Covenant Baptist Church in Johannesburg, South Africa.



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# Cosmetic Surgery in a

**A** model in Los Angeles obtains a slight facelift. A victim of tragic burns or birth defects undergoes surgery to repair disfigurement. A woman in Shanghai undergoes eyelid reconstruction to make herself look more like the Western women who fill her social media app. A young mom, wanting to look better for her husband, wonders whether she should have her breasts enlarged.

We live in a plastic age, where people assume they may mold their body into whatever form they wish. Cosmetic surgery, ushered in through advancing technology and lucrative business opportunities, has become a major cultural phenomenon. The Bible says nothing directly about cosmetic surgery. How should Christians think about such procedures?

The problem will not be going away. Cosmetic surgeries are on the rise. Three-fourths of plastic surgeons reported that in 2020 their work was in higher demand, and nearly a quarter saw their work double that year. The result was 4.7 million cosmetic procedures in the United States alone.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible's silence about modern cosmetic surgery does not mean that we may do as we please. When the Scriptures are silent, Christian discipleship requires discernment. When Paul prayed for believers, he asked God to enable them to "abound . . . in all judgment," that they might "approve things that are excellent" to the glory of God (Phil. 1:9–11). With humility, believers must use discernment to draw Christ-glorifying conclusions about issues that Scripture does not address. The Bible

does articulate truths that ought to guide Christian choices about cosmetic surgery.

## GOD CREATED OUR BODIES

God Himself made human beings as embodied creatures. He designed the human body "out of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7). God has designed every human body. The psalmist confessed, "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret" (Ps. 139:15). When we see our aging and sometimes unattractive bodies, we should remember that God in mercy knows their frailty (Ps. 103:14).

God in His providence saw fit that every human body should be formed just as it is. The Fall is certainly one reason bodies suffer deformities and genetic defects (Gen. 3:19). Even with physical defects, God has purposes for people to be born as they are (cf. John 9:3).

God has given to each person a unique appearance, whether unusually beautiful or plain. In 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, Paul urges believers to accept with contentment God's providential ordering of their lives. We must be content with how God has situated our appearance. Christian people ought to rejoice in the body God has given them: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14).

## GOD OWNS THE BODIES OF CHRISTIANS

God gave each person a unique body. Furthermore, God has a double interest in the bodies of saints. Christ has promised to raise believers' bodies new in glory at the Rapture (1 Cor. 6:14). The believer's body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost." We

do not belong to ourselves, for Christ has bought us (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

Some contemporary Christians seem to assume that God has little concern with what they do with their bodies, but Christ's ownership of believers' bodies directly opposes the modern spirit of bodily autonomy. Believers may not do as they wish with their bodies. Every decision about our bodies should be made under Christ's lordship and His eschatological interest in them (1 Cor. 6:15).

## BEAUTY IS GOOD

The Bible teaches about physical beauty. It recognizes that some people are more beautiful than others. The Bible is not a Gnostic book, as if the material world were of no concern. The inspired Bible candidly observes that Sarai, Rebekah, Rachel, Abigail, and the Shulamite woman were unusually beautiful (Gen. 12:11; 26:7; 29:17; 1 Sam. 25:3; Song 1:5). By inference, other women were less beautiful. The same is true of men (Gen. 39:6; 1 Sam. 9:2; 16:12; Ps. 45:2).


Beauty is not sinful but is a good gift from God to be received with thanksgiving. Wayne Grudem is right: "It is not inherently wrong for human beings to desire beauty or to desire to be attractive, handsome, or beautiful in appearance."<sup>2</sup>

## CHRISTIANS ENCOURAGE RESTORATION AND GROOMING

Believers should employ ordinary means to make their bodies presentable. Love is not rude (1 Cor. 13:5), and there is no particular virtue in appearing deformed or frumpish. We should correct disfigurements where possible, and we should



# Plastic Age

A close-up photograph of a woman's face reflected in a circular mirror. The mirror is shattered, with several cracks radiating from a central point. The woman has blonde hair and is looking down with a somber expression. Her hands are visible, holding the edges of the mirror. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**AN IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ANSWER IS, WHAT IS THIS PROCEDURE FOR? ARGUABLY, IF WISE AND WITHIN ONE'S MEANS, THE RESTORATION OF DISFIGUREMENT AND SOME BIRTH DEFECTS FALLS WITHIN ACCEPTABLE USE OF COSMETIC SURGERY.**



practice good hygiene and modest grooming. Sarah of old had an adornment, even though she emphasized the matters of the heart. Furthermore, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, so Christians should not disregard the body or treat it as if it does not matter. We should not become so careless about our appearance as to prevent people from hearing or respecting us. This principle should be wisely and thoughtfully applied to skin health, modest cosmetics, and procedures such as orthodontics.

Some cosmetic surgeries are acceptable, especially when they are intended to correct defects or to restore health. Jesus made similar corrections during His earthly ministry. For example, He healed the severed ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant (John 18:10).

An important question to answer is, what is this procedure *for*? Arguably, if wise and within one's means, the restoration of disfigurement and some birth defects falls within acceptable use of cosmetic surgery. Yet believers should never regard even restorative procedures as their right. Indeed, they should accept God's will if adequate restoration is unattainable.

## CHARACTER OUTWEIGHS PHYSICAL BEAUTY

While approving of beauty, the Bible does not see it as the ultimate good. Proverbs 31:30 says, "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." With the universal process of aging toward death, human beauty does not last.

Paul told both circumcised and uncircumcised to remain as they were (1 Cor. 7:18–19). Circumcision is a surgical modification of the body, so Paul's point is worth noting: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God."

In God's sight, virtue and godliness are more enduring and important than beauty. Peter commands believing women not to stress "outward adorning." They should focus instead on "the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:3–4). Peter illustrates this principle with holy Sarah. Though beautiful, Sarah knew that God prioritized the hid-

den beauty of her character. When internal character is the primary concern, physical beauty loses importance. Your offspring will praise your prayerful character more than your perfect cheekbones.

## GOD CONDEMNS IMMODESTY

In today's world being "sexy" has become a secular virtue. Many cosmetic surgeries are designed to increase sexual appeal. Anyone who doubts this should scan the list of currently-available cosmetic procedures. The secular standard of beauty has become increasingly sexual in a scandalously immodest age. We are not talking about braces or even nose jobs here, but of the procedures that focus deliberately upon sexual attractiveness.

Scripture does not permit believers to advertise their sexuality. The Bible commands women to dress themselves "in modest apparel" and "with shamefacedness [or modesty] and sobriety" (1 Tim. 2:9–10). The same principles apply to body modifications (Rom. 13:13–14; cf. Isa. 3:16–26). Proverbs 7:10 depicts the adulteress meeting the young fool "with the attire of an harlot."

Believers must not allow themselves to be confused by the increasing promotion of sensuality. People who advertise or artificially enhance their sexuality are violating biblical norms. Such individuals sin against themselves and against those whom they tempt. The desire to be the "hottest" person in the youth group or church is forbidden to believers (James 3:14–17). People who take surgical steps to make that desire a reality become the kind of individuals whom a godly potential spouse should avoid (Prov. 5; cf. Job 31:1).

## GOD ORDAINED THE AGING PROCESS

Christians should also take a sanctified perspective on the aging process. Though "the outward man perish," believers accept it as a "light affliction" compared with eternal glory (2 Cor. 4:16–17). God sends us different seasons in life. Wise believers bow to His good providence, not seeking expensive, short-term ways of masking time's realities.

Nevertheless, just as good grooming and the cultivation of appropriate physical beauty can *in general* be good things,

likewise reasonable and modest attempts to stunt the effects of old age can be a creaturely good. Still, wise believers will think carefully about 1 Peter 3:3–6 and the ultimate vanity of external appearance before investing significantly in attempts to make themselves look younger. Indeed, today's cult of youth runs counter to the biblical culture that prizes elders and the "gray head" (Lev. 19:32; Prov. 16:31; 20:29; 1 Tim. 5:1–2).

## CHRISTIANS LOVE OTHERS

We live in an image-saturated culture that has promoted an artificial stereotype of the ideal woman. Many women find the stress of living up to this image overwhelming. The resulting human stories are tragic, eventuating in eating disorders, depression, and even suicide. Love of others forces believers to grapple with this crisis.

The models, movie maven, and music divas of mass media are trying to sell unprecedented standards of feminine beauty. These standards put downward pressure on other women who feel they must measure up. The problem is worldwide; those born in far-off lands seek to replicate the appearance of American television and movie stars.

Meanwhile, this new standard of external beauty eclipses the ordinary beauty of mothers and daughters. The cosmetic surgery industry seeks to exploit this flat, one-dimensional view that values women primarily for their accessible (but ironically infertile) sexuality. These cosmetic procedures perpetuate a terrible objectification of women.

This trend is not mitigated by the current tendency to feature plus-size models in immodest attire. One does not correct over-sexualization and objectification by sexualizing and objectifying yet another group of people. Christian women and men must resist these trends by exemplifying modesty, valuing the ordinary beauty of the people around us, and exposing the stereotyped standards for the deceptions that they are.

## GOD COMMANDS THE WISE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR MONEY

With all elective cosmetic surgeries, Christians must consider whether they are

Continued on page 33



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# Christian Ethics, Abortions, and

*And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. Romans 3:8*

A basic principle of Christian ethics is that Christians are never permitted to do evil. This remains true even if that evil might accomplish some other good. In the context of Romans 3 Paul's argument is that even though "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," we must not defend sin with the thought that it would bring glory to God. Since glorifying God is the highest good and that highest good cannot justify sinning, then it follows that no lesser good can justify sinning.

Elective abortion is sin. We must therefore conclude that the sin of abortion is not justified even if it is pursued to obtain some otherwise virtuous goal.

This presents us with a problem. Many modern medicines and vaccines have been developed or tested using tissue cell lines originally taken from aborted babies. This practice is exceedingly common. Indeed, when I searched Google for "HEK-293" (the designation of one important cell line), the top results were for ads to purchase samples of these cell lines. I found this jarring: "Order now and get it on Friday," the website promised. The banal commodification of a tragedy, of a *baby*, violates any normal sense of natural affection (2 Tim. 3:3).

## FETAL CELL LINES AND COVID VACCINES

The ethical issues raised by fetal cell lines gained prominence because the COVID vaccines and particularly the *mandate* for some to receive the COVID vaccine made the topic unavoidable for many

Christians. Prior to the COVID pandemic, broad arguments against virtually all vaccines were widely known but not widely held. This anti-vaccine position tends to stress the potential harmful side effects of vaccines, prominent among them the claim that childhood vaccines create an increased risk of autism. Though there was a segment of evangelical Christians who were broadly anti-vaccine, being against vaccines was not a distinctively conservative position, either politically or theologically. Indeed, some of the least-vaccinated counties in the nation were overwhelmingly left-leaning.

COVID made medicine political. If you knew a person's voting record, you could reliably guess what he thought about COVID's origins, its seriousness, the usefulness of masking, and the legitimacy of the COVID vaccines. Within the past two years, resistance to the COVID vaccine has become a trademark of political conservatism. And because conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists are overwhelmingly also conservative politically, opposition to the COVID vaccine is now a common feature of conservative churches.

The rollout of the COVID vaccine, accompanied by pressure that everyone be vaccinated as soon as possible, provoked reasonable skepticism. The mistrust deepened as vaccines were not merely encouraged but mandated by some employers and government agencies, regardless of the presence or absence of known risk factors. People who previously had no objections to vaccines in general now objected to this vaccine in particular. Because almost none of us have adequate medical training to understand why a vaccine might or might not be effective or what its possible side effects might be, we turn to others with that expertise. But that move itself became difficult with the COVID vaccines: any-

one raising concerns with the vaccine was tagged with trafficking in "misinformation" and scrubbed from mainstream social media sites.

Those with misgivings about the vaccine had few options to refuse to comply with the mandates. One possibility was to secure a religious exemption, typically in the form of a letter from a religious leader stating that receiving this vaccine would be a violation of that religion's ethical principles. But on what grounds could conservative Christians make that claim?

One basis was that the COVID vaccines were developed using cells from aborted babies. As most conservative Christians are (rightly) pro-life, this seems a strong moral argument against receiving the vaccine. If all versions of the COVID vaccine use cells obtained from abortions either in production or in testing, this raises a genuine ethical question for Christians. Christians ought to be pro-life, rejecting abortion as a moral evil. If a vaccine or other treatment is produced from tissues obtained through such a moral evil, does that not make those who benefit from the vaccine complicit in the evil?

The claim that the COVID vaccines utilize cell lines taken from aborted babies is accurate. This is true for all three vaccines widely used in the United States. As early as June 2020, *Science* reported,

At least five of the candidate COVID-19 vaccines use one of two human fetal cell lines: HEK-293, a kidney cell line widely used in research and industry that comes from a fetus aborted in about 1972; and PER.C6, a proprietary cell line owned by Janssen, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, developed from retinal cells from an 18-week-old fetus aborted in 1985. Both cell lines were developed in





# Stem Cell Lines

the lab of molecular biologist Alex van der Eb at Leiden University.<sup>1</sup>

The final Johnson & Johnson vaccine was produced using the PER.C6 line of cells from the aborted baby. The two mRNA vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer, were tested on the HEK-293 line of cells.

To be fair, the origins of HEK-293 are now obscure. Many sources flatly state that the cells were derived from an aborted baby: the “cell line origin is from a single healthy, *electively terminated* female fetus” (emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> But the researcher who developed the cell line merely assumed that the child had been aborted rather than miscarried.<sup>3</sup> While the use of tissue from aborted babies was customary enough for the researcher to assume that was the source of HEK-293, it cannot now be proven either way. This certainly complicates the *specifics* of our discussion—whether this or that medicine, vaccine, or treatment depends on cell lines from aborted babies. But the *principle* at issue—whether Christians are morally justified in benefiting from such medicines—remains an important question.

## FETAL CELLS, MEDICINE, AND MORAL CULPABILITY

The debate over the COVID vaccines brought this ethical issue to the awareness of many believers for the first time. But the COVID vaccines are not unique in their dependence on cell lines derived from aborted babies. The use of HEK-293 for testing medications is astonishingly widespread. An article offering ethical counsel for Roman Catholics on this issue gives thorough evidence that almost all commonly used medicines have been tested on HEK-293.<sup>4</sup> This includes both prescription and over-the-counter medications. Other cell lines that are

definitely the product of elective abortions have also been crucial in the development of medicines, especially common vaccines such as chickenpox and polio.

Once we recognize the scope of the problem, the need for biblical direction becomes more apparent. Clearly, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod. 20:13) is relevant. However, the person taking a medication is not engaged in the act of murder, at least not directly.

It is vital that we pause here to note that the cell lines we are discussing are replicating cells from babies aborted thirty to fifty years ago. It would be a factual error to say that the production of a vaccine requires a steady stream of new tissues from aborted babies. That would be clearly morally abhorrent, but that is not true of the issue before us.

The connection between the recipient of the medication and the original murder is now quite indirect. In cases like this, because we do not have a clear and distinct verse in Scripture that addresses the question, we tend to rely on arguments from analogy. We consider a similar set of circumstances in which the biblical principles are easier to apply and the ethical decision is more obvious to us. If we are persuaded that the situation is relevant, we take that as a reason for making a similar decision in our present case.

The most obvious comparison might be to an organ transplant from a murder victim. If I am in need of a new heart, am I somehow culpable for murder if I am willing to receive the heart of a murdered man? I suspect most believers would not think so. But perhaps this is not the most valid parallel. Suppose the hospital where I am to receive my heart transplant also engages in doctor-assisted euthanasia. Should I receive my heart there, knowing

its source? In my estimation, this is closer to the situation we are considering—and it is one that seems morally much less acceptable.

In all the cases we have considered thus far, the temporal connection between the evil and the benefit is still quite close. Does the situation change if the evil action is more remote? In the case we are considering: does it matter that these cell lines are decades past the original murder?

It seems to me that the passing of time does decrease the culpability of those who might benefit from a past sin. Consider a case in which a person discovers that his family home sits on ground wrongfully taken from an owner several generations prior. Does that discovery lay any ethical obligation on the current owner? Is he morally culpable for the past sin because he is currently benefitting from it?

Certainly, if the property was taken illegitimately, he should say so without qualification. But while sin has effects (and even judgments) across generations, culpability for the sin is laid on the one who sins: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezek. 18:20). I am not convinced that every person who benefits from a past sin is complicit in that sin.

I also understand that I will have brothers and sisters—perhaps many of them—who are unconvinced by this analysis. That said, reasonable consistency demands that the brother who does disagree (particularly if he cites this issue in a public declaration as to why he must, on religious grounds, be exempted from a vaccine mandate) should also refuse to use any

other medicine similarly developed or tested on fetal cell lines. For someone to continue to take these other medications while seeking a formal religious exemption to the vaccine would demonstrate ignorance of the facts or dishonesty

## CONCLUSION

Issues that involve indirect moral culpability are notoriously difficult. Consider boycotts: should a Christian support a business that endorses our culture's current moral degradation? Ideally, we would like to avoid doing so. We recognize that our patronage of a business is a source of the money that they are using to undermine our values.

But most of us have found that the complex nature of modern commerce makes a consistent strategy of boycotts difficult—and probably impossible. This means that Bible-believing Christians who share common ethical commitments can reach very different conclusions about whether they can in good conscience buy certain goods or shop at certain stores.

The gravity of the evil of abortion should temper any inclination a Christian

might have to dismiss concerns about the development and testing of medicines. Those whose consciences are troubled by the role abortion plays in modern medicine have good reason to be troubled. Those who believe they can use such medicines in good conscience (and I count myself among them) should acknowledge the difficulty and not pretend as though there is no cause for hesitation. While there is room among brothers for reasonable conversation, we should not seek to compel a brother to violate his conscience.

On the other hand, those who object to the COVID vaccine or even all vaccines because of the connection to aborted fetal cell lines will find it difficult to maintain their position consistently. Consider that the mRNA vaccines were tested on HEK-293, just like Tylenol, Tums, Pepto-Bismol, Robitussin, hydroxychloroquine, and ivermectin—and the list goes on. As most will find themselves unable to completely avoid all products with a connection to fetal cell lines (either in development or testing), this should temper the impulse to rain censure on those who have been vaccinated.

Michael Riley, PhD, pastors Calvary Baptist Church of Wakefield, Michigan, and teaches as an adjunct professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.



<sup>1</sup> Meredith Wadman, "Abortion opponents protest COVID-19 vaccines' use of fetal cells," *Science*, June 5, 2020, accessed September 30, 2022, <https://www.science.org/content/article/abortion-opponents-protest-covid-19-vaccines-use-fetal-cells>.

<sup>2</sup> "HEK293 Cells: Background, Applications, Protocols, and More: A Guide to One of the Most Commonly Used Cell Lines," *Synthego*, accessed September 30, 2022, <https://www.synthego.com/hek293>.

<sup>3</sup> Brett Salkild, "Does the Origin of the Fetal Cells Used for Developing Vaccines Make Any Difference?" *Church Life Journal*, March 19, 2021, accessed September 30, 2022, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/does-the-origin-of-the-cell-lines-used-to-test-covid19-vaccines-make-any-difference/>.

<sup>4</sup> Matthes P. Schneider, "If Any Drug Tested on HEK-293 Is Immoral, Goodbye Modern Medicine," *Through Catholic Lenses*, January 28, 2021, accessed September 30, 2022, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/throughcatholiclenses/2021/01/if-any-drug-tested-on-hek-293-is-immoral-goodbye-modern-medicine/>.

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# The Ethics of Death



**D**eath. It's a term that evokes many negative thoughts and emotions. It certainly raises questions in the minds of believers. What is death? For that matter, what is life? When exactly does one stop living and enter death? These questions have been asked through all the ages.

During the past fifty to one hundred years, some medical treatments have blurred the line between life and death. This blurring confronts present-day Christians with additional questions. Are all medical treatments obligatory for Christians, or may a Christian rightly forgo some treatments? Is there a time to stop some of those treatments once begun? Which palliative measures are legitimate for the dying? Is hospice a justifiable option? What about organ donation and transplantation?

## PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

To find answers to these questions we must begin by understanding the concepts and meanings of death and life. These concepts can be discussed from various standpoints. For example, philosophy (including metaphysics) and psychology both relate life and death to proposals about what it means to be human. What one gets out of such proposals depends greatly on the worldview that one carries into them. The world is filled with philosophers who disagree about nearly every important question. They debate whether death is natural or unnatural, whether it is essentially an irreversible cessation of

organismic (biological) functioning, or whether it is the irreversible loss of personhood. These debates reveal that a useful understanding of death must rely upon more than philosophical insights.

What can science tell us about death? The problem here is that science has trouble defining death because it has not yet determined the nature of life. Scientists can recognize that matter and energy exist and are constantly reconfiguring over time, but they have no infallible mechanism for deciding which of these configurations is alive and which is dead. Certainly, observable biological phenomena still influence our general ideas of death. The problem is that these observable phenomena are not sufficient to define it.

Some of those observable phenomena are, however, worth mentioning. We usually think of death as a point in time: one moment you are alive, and the next you are dead. After all, death certificates show a specific time of death, don't they?

Nevertheless, death usually occurs as a process that results in a complete transformation. It begins when our physical being is no longer able to maintain homeostasis. "Homeostasis" is a big word for the delicate balance of many physiological factors. It is a self-regulating process by which an organism maintains internal stability while adjusting to external conditions. It involves complex interactions and multiple feedback systems, both positive and negative. These systems maintain a balance and set a point of ideal function for the body. This point can

be modified by higher control centers, such as the brain, brain stem, and spinal cord.

Homeostasis occurs when many systems are working together rather than against each other. For example, one of our systems regulates blood pressure, heart rate, and the heart muscle's strength of contraction. Another system involves the rate and depth of breathing. In a living body, both these systems must work together within a certain range, whether the individual is sleeping in bed or running a marathon. They must also work together with still other systems, such as the body's system for controlling its own temperature. This system is directed by the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that sits near its base. It must keep the temperature of the body within a very narrow range around 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. If we get too hot, we start to sweat. If we get too cold, we start to shiver. If our body's temperature deviates too much, that condition may threaten our life.

The body has even more systems that must work together to maintain homeostasis. We require a balance of salts (not only sodium chloride—table salt—but also others) both inside and outside our cells. Maintaining this balance requires our kidneys and bowels to excrete or absorb additional amounts. This balance of salts is necessary for us to maintain a balance of acids, which in turn are produced by metabolism of proteins (involving the kidneys, liver, and lungs). We must have a balance of sugar in the blood stream and tissues (this system involves the pancreas, bowel, liver, and kidneys). Our autonomous nervous system requires a balance of hormones, and this system is regulated by the brain, hypothalamus, pituitary gland, kidneys, liver, pancreas, bowel, heart, and lungs.

Occasionally, one or more systems get out of balance, and a person becomes sick. Healing consists of restoring the system(s) to homeostasis. When homeostasis is irreversibly disrupted, then the process of physical death has begun and is moving to an inevitable conclusion. At this point, the person is dying.

## DEFINING DEATH

The difficult thing for both physicians and patients is to identify when the balance has been permanently disrupted. Over the past five or so decades, this identification has become more difficult. Therapies have developed rapidly that enable physicians to reverse more and more alterations of homeostasis. Conditions that would have been fatal in the recent past are now curable. The line of irreversibility has moved.

These medical advances were already creating dilemmas by the late 1970s. Congress and President Jimmy Carter created a President's Commission to study these issues. The commission was tasked to study many topics, among

them the ethical and legal implications of deferring death. The commission formally identified death as "the permanent cessation of integrated functioning of the organism as a whole." It further developed criteria for determining when death had occurred. These criteria were adopted into the Uniform Determination of Death Act (UDDA) which, over the years, has been accepted in one form or another by each state. The UDDA states that

An individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead. A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards.

The last phrase was deliberately vague to allow for advancement in research and technology that may change the tests of standards for determining brain death. In fact, this has already happened to such a degree that many in the medical community are calling for a revision and clarification of UDDA.

What do they want to substitute? Many physicians are proposing a standard of "medical futility." Medical futility is a condition in which, based on available medical data and professional experience, the interventions of medicine (drugs, surgery, and other procedures) are judged to be no longer beneficial. In other words, medical interventions have little chance of prolonging life. An example of medical futility would be when organs of three or more systems (cardiovascular, pulmonary, liver, kidney, central nervous system, the brain and spinal cord) fail simultaneously in the Intensive Care Unit. When such catastrophic failure occurs, the likelihood of recovery is near zero, even with aggressive therapies (such as ventilators, medications, dialysis, and so on).

When applied properly, either the UDDA standard or the standard of medical futility can provide a way of recognizing an individual's irreversible loss of ability to maintain homeostasis. Once homeostasis is lost, the process of dying has begun. It will come to an inevitable conclusion.

## FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

So much for medicine. What does Scripture say about death?

We know that God created humans in His image from the dust of the ground, and that He enlivened us with His own breath (Gen. 2:7). Therefore, life is sacred. God also warned us that if we violated His commandment and ate of the fruit of the tree, then we would die (Gen. 2:17; 3:19). Furthermore, our bodies would return to the dust of the ground, and our spirit

would return to the God who gave it (Eccles. 2:17; Matt. 27:50). Ultimately, God is the one who is in control of life and death. He is sovereign and His will is always fulfilled in these matters (Deut. 32:39).

God and His Word are decidedly pro-life. Death is described as our enemy and portrayed as the last enemy to be conquered. This will occur when we are resurrected with an incorruptible body (1 Cor. 15:35–58).

If we bear these truths in mind, they will help us to answer some of our questions about death and dying.

First, what is death? Death occurs when the soul leaves the body and returns to God, who gave it. Of course, we lack any medical means of detecting souls. Nevertheless, given the evidence that we do have, we can safely say that the soul has left the body when the heart and lungs permanently cease to function, or when the whole brain is dead.

Second, which medical treatments should Christians see as obligatory? The short answer is that we should favor those treatments that preserve life rather than prolonging the process of dying. If homeostasis has been irreversibly disrupted—in other words, if an individual has entered the dying process—then prolonging that process does not carry the same moral weight as preserving life.

Third, is there a time to stop medical treatments? My answer is that when an injury or disease has reached a point of irreversibility, when homeostasis cannot be restored to the body, then the time has come to refuse or withdraw medical treatment. To do so is to acknowledge God's sovereignty over life and death. This is the time when hospice and palliative care (rightly done) can help to relieve suffering during the dying process (Luke 10:30–37; 1 Tim. 5:23; Prov. 31:6).

Fourth, may believers donate their organs for transplant once death has been declared? I believe that the answer is "yes." When an adequate and accurate diagnosis of whole-brain death has been made, and when the organizing principle of individual life is gone, the body will begin to deteriorate, even under continued mechanical treatment. At this point the spirit has left. It is no insult to the departed or to the Creator if usable organs are taken to save other lives.

Christians have both the Word and the Spirit to guide them. With these guides, they are empowered by God to make right decisions about the end of life. Armed with biblical principles, an adequate knowledge of medical reality, and bathed in prayer, they will be able to honor God in their choices about dying, just as they can in all the decisions of life.

Mark W. Stuckey, MD, is a board-certified anesthesiologist.



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# Mailbag

**G**ood morning, Malinda. Hope you are having a great start to this New Year!

Our children successfully received their first subscriptions to *FrontLine*! . . .

Thank you, again, for all you do for this great publication!

*Becky Tompkins  
Greenville, SC*

**I** just finished reading the book *For the Faith: A History of Foundations Baptist Fellowship International* by Larry Oats. At first impression I thought the book was going to be dry and boring, but was I ever wrong. Many of us have heard the phrase, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana). This phrase should be the sub-subtitle of Dr Oats's book. What he did in this book should be an eye-opener for all of us in the FBFI. It was one thing to be reminded of the men who did the "heavy lifting" in decades past, as they fought to keep Christianity pure and untainted. However, it was amazing to be reminded that some of the same things they debated are some of the exact same conversations that we are having today.

*Joe Willis  
Adams, TN*

**I**'ve been an independent Baptist missionary in Utah for fifty years with Baptist Mid-Missions. Thought your [Andrew Threlfall] article in *Straight Cuts* was good [Nov/Dec 2022]. I had an interesting experience about that verse [Acts 2:38].

In 1985 a member of our church in St. George, UT, brought up to me a copy of the NKJV and asked me if I thought it was a good new translation. I replied that there were some places in it that bothered me in the translation. I said, "Let me show you in Acts 2:38." So we looked it up, and the translation was "for" the forgiveness of sins. It was a second edition dated 1985, and the one I had reviewed was the first edition dated 1982 (I think). In the 1982 edition they had translated it "so that your sins will be forgiven." I had written to the head of the translation committee in 1982 to point out that the problem with that translation of Acts 2:38 was a very serious error and included a quote from A. T. Robertson as to the nature of the best translation. The KJV uses "for" the forgiveness of sins, which can be interpreted either way. In other words, it is sort of neutral. I don't think my letter was the reason they changed it, but others must have complained also, and I'm glad. We use that translation in our church and ministry.

*Mike Bardon  
Ephraim, UT*

**D**o you know of any churches who are taking tours to the Holy Land this year? We went on a tour a few years ago and really enjoyed ourselves, but we were only in the Holy Land for three days. We have started thinking it would be nice to go back and spend focused time in just the Holy Land, and we would like to be with like-minded people and have good instruction.

*Mike Moreau  
Schaumburg, IL*

**Editor's Note:** You can see a listing of all the church tours scheduled with *Shalom Ministries* at <https://shalomnyc.org/holy-land-tours/>



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# SOUND WORDS

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

## FIRST PARTAKER

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

### Growing Theologically (Part 2)

Last time I raised a vital question for pastors: *Are you growing theologically?* I attempted to explain briefly why this kind of growth is so important and then offered two suggestions for beginning to nurture it. The first was to spend a month or two studying one of the standard catechisms. The second was to expand your study to include one or more of the historic confessions of faith.

I hesitate to inject personal experience into the discussion, but perhaps it would be of help for me to say that I make use of both of these kinds of sources frequently. Often my grasp of a truth is sharpened so that I'm better able to express it succinctly in a sermon. Sometimes I'm prevented from misstating a particular theological nuance. And it would not be overstatement to say that I'm almost always wonderfully enriched by even a short exposure to the sections of catechisms and confessions relevant to my sermon themes that week. So much so, in fact, that one of my regrets is that through the years I haven't been able to spend considerably more time just rummaging around in them.

There are two further suggestions that I'd like to give for growing theologically, but before doing so it might be helpful to say something about a particular word that surfaces frequently in the use of these kinds of sources. It's the word “reformed.”

#### “REFORMED” THEOLOGY

Much of the content of historic catechisms and confessions of faith is denominated “Reformed.” What does that mean? Is it a problem?

Actually, all orthodox Christians hold to the overwhelming majority of Reformed theology. That's because Reformed theology is largely the elongated statement of the fundamental doctrines of the Reformation. These are expressed most succinctly in the five foundational *solas*: *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), *solus Deo gloria* (glory to God alone).

Grounded in those immovable *solas*, not only the Reformers, the English Puritans, and the Scottish Covenanters, but also the next generations of English Evangelicals and early Baptists studied, discussed, preached, and wrote their way down to the precisely worded confessional statements generally agreed upon by orthodox Christians of every denominational persuasion.

However, as we know, there are variations between equally Bible-believing theologians on certain points within some (though not all) of these major doctrinal areas. Most often these differences occur in three areas: soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. It's a bit broad-brushed to say it like this, but the general understanding today is that it is Calvinistic soteriology, Presbyterian ecclesiology, and amillennial eschatology that most distinguish Reformed theology.

As Baptists we disagree with the distinctively Presbyterian aspects of Reformed ecclesiology (most notably, pedobaptism). I assume that most, if not all of us would also disagree with some but not all aspects of Reformed eschatology. We agree with all orthodox Christians that Christ will return suddenly, bodily, visibly, and gloriously. But we disagree with some orthodox Christians about when that return will occur in relationship to other end-time events.

Similarly, some of us might also disagree with some but not all of the aspects of Reformed soteriology. Not the *solas*, of course, but (to take one example) whether or not the *sola gratia* of justification is to be understood as irresistible.

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Even though most of the historic catechisms and confessions are Reformed in one or more of these areas, it is nevertheless wise and immensely helpful to make judicious use of them. Our Baptist forefathers (some of whom actually *were* Reformed in their soteriology or eschatology) have not only done so, but often even adopted word-for-word a great many of their confessional statements and catechetical affirmations.

For instance, one of our earliest Baptist ancestors was the English pastor Hercules Collins (d. 1702). In 1680 Collins published what he titled *An Orthodox Catechism*. But most of it wasn't Collins's own work. It was his revision of the widely used *Heidelberg Catechism*, written over a century earlier by Lutheran theologians. Collins omitted only one of the *Heidelberg's* 129 questions and then added just ten of his own.<sup>1</sup> He explained to his congregation this heavy reliance upon the *Heidelberg*:

*In what I have written you will see I concenter with the most Orthodox Divines in the Fundamental Principles and Articles of the Christian Faith, and also have industriously expressed them in the same words. . . . Now albeit there are some differences between many Godly Divines and us in Church-Constitution, yet inasmuch as those things are not in the Essence of Christianity; but that we do agree in the fundamental Doctrine thereof, there is sufficient ground to lay aside all bitterness and prejudice, and labour to maintain a spirit of Love each to other, knowing we shall never see all alike here.*<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, each of our own churches probably has a confession of faith included in its constitution and to which we require subscription for church membership. But we didn't author these ourselves. Most are short condensations, adaptations, or revisions of earlier, standard Baptist confessions—often the *1689 Baptist Confession* quoted above, which made extensive use of the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647).

It might also be helpful to note at this point that it was this *1689 Confession* which C. H. Spurgeon buried alongside the Bible under the foundation stone of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in August 1859. As he explained to the church,

*The articles under the stone are simply these: the Bible, the Word of God, we put that as the foundation of our church. Upon this rock doth Christ build the ministration of His truth. We know of nothing else as our standard. Together with this, we have put The Baptist Confession of Faith, which was signed in the olden times by Benjamin Keach, one of my eminent predecessors.*<sup>3</sup>

I trust that this brief digression has been helpful. The point is simply that all of us are Reformed in the great fundamentals of our theology. The standard catechisms and

confessions are as much for us as for brethren (including many of our Baptist forefathers) who may be more narrowly denominated by that word in certain particulars.<sup>4</sup>

I'd like now to suggest a third and then a fourth way to stimulate theological growth.

(3) *Reading systematic theology regularly, constantly if you can.* The next step up from studying a confession is to read systematic theology. What catechisms introduce and confessions expand, systematic theologies flesh out entirely. For instance, a catechism can define justification in a single sentence. A confession will expand that definition to a paragraph. But a systematic theology will enlarge it to a chapter or even an entire volume.

## AN OBJECTION

To some brethren, to study systematic theology is to be a kind of theological nerd. Others spurn it almost by conviction. To them, systematic theology is something that competes with the Bible and threatens to displace it.

Unfortunately, some have drawn support for this stance from certain things quoted out of their context from the sermons of even someone as doctrinally precise as C. H. Spurgeon. For instance, in a sermon preached in 1860, Spurgeon began,

It is time that we had done with the old and rusty systems that have so long curbed the freeness of religious speech. The Arminian trembles to go an inch beyond Arminius or Wesley, and many a Calvinist refers to John Gill or John Calvin as an ultimate authority. It is time that the systems were broken up, and that there was sufficient grace in all our hearts to believe everything taught in God's Word, whether it was taught by either of these men or not. . . . If God teaches it, it is enough. If it is not in the Word, away with it! Away with it! But if it be in the Word, agreeable or disagreeable, systematic or disorderly, I believe it.<sup>5</sup>

What must be kept in mind when evaluating this statement is that at this point in his early ministry in London, Spurgeon was under intense attack from hyper-Calvinistic ministers who objected to his fervent appeals for anyone and everyone to come to Christ.<sup>6</sup> They had pressed the application of their soteriological system (one to which Spurgeon himself happened to subscribe) to an unbiblical extreme. In reply, Spurgeon was arguing that the Scripture, not any system whatsoever—not even Calvinism—must reign supreme. But he wasn't arguing for scrapping systematic theology. In fact, this particular sermon was titled "Election and Holiness," and in it he proceeded to explain election in accord with standard Calvinistic systematic theologies.

Remember also that Spurgeon had the *1689 Baptist Confession* encapsuled, along with a copy of the

Scripture, underneath the cornerstone of the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle. In addition, it was for his insistence that the Baptist Union begin to require its members to subscribe to an orthodox doctrinal confession that Spurgeon lost many friends and supporters in the Downgrade Controversy. Spurgeon certainly believed in the importance of and adherence to clearly defined systematic theology.

It is true that a certain kind of carnal, cerebral satisfaction in systematic theology can displace the Scripture in our affections. But that isn't because the theology itself is dangerous. It's because we're still susceptible to the pride that comes from amassing knowledge for wrong reasons.

For wonderfully right reasons we would do well to be always reading through and marking up some volume of systematic theology. Not that we're always reading such works straight through from page one to the end. But just as routinely as we brush our teeth, we should be reading something in systematic theology. Why? For one thing, it's virtually impossible to advance very far in our knowledge of the whole counsel of God without doing so.

This point was made emphatically by another Baptist brother, Andrew Fuller, to the Hertfordshire association of Baptist ministers in June 1796. In a sermon titled "The Importance of a Deep and Intimate Knowledge of Divine Truth," Fuller argued at length of the need for ministers to systematize the truths of their Bibles: If we would possess a deep and intimate acquaintance with divine truth, he stated, we must view it in its various connections in the great system of redemption.

Fuller began with the observation that, *Systematic divinity, or the studying of truth in a systematic form, has been of late years much decried*. But, he pointed out, *to be without system is nearly the same thing as to be without principle. Whatever principles we may have, while they continue in this disorganized state, they will answer but little purpose. Like a tumultuous assembly in the day of battle, they may exist, but it will be without order, energy, or end [purpose]*.

This is most certainly true. Disorganized truth, no matter how biblical, will generally fail to answer questions, meet objections, build confidence, and satisfy both mind and heart. But when truths are considered *in their various connections*, Fuller noted, *far greater advances will be made in divine knowledge than by any other means. The discovery of one important truth will lead on to a hundred more*.<sup>7</sup>

Fuller was so convinced of this that just a year before his death in 1815 he began an enterprise to compose a systematic theology organized around the doctrine of the cross. Unfortunately, he died before advancing the scheme beyond the doctrine of the Trinity.

There's not space here to discuss further reasons for

reading systematic theology regularly. But perhaps a warning from B. H. Carroll (1843–1914), Baptist pastor, theologian, and first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, will clinch the importance from another angle.

A church with a little creed is a church with a little life. The more divine doctrines a church agree on, the greater its power, and the wider its usefulness. The fewer its articles of faith, the fewer its bonds of union and compactness. The modern cry, "Less creed and more liberty," is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy—it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but none the less deadly.<sup>8</sup>

## THE PRACTICE

Let me just share that I've never found the regular reading of systematic theology to be an easy thing to keep up. Perhaps you have. That must be wonderful. But my own experience is that though my heart is all for it, time constraints, and the challenge of fixing my attention on material of this density even when I do have the time, make it a task that I have to pursue with real discipline. Otherwise, it doesn't happen.

What works best for me is to set a goal to read so many pages a day (or a week). I don't always work hard at sticking to these kinds of goals, but they do at least make things seem less formidable. It's one thing to stare late in the afternoon at a book that's nearly three inches thick. It's much different to contemplate the possibility of reading just five pages of it today. And then to add another five pages sometime tomorrow.

Something else that I've found to be helpful is to buy an audio copy as well, if its available. A good reader will move you through two or three times as many pages as you might read on your own. Most devices can even accelerate the rate of reading if you wish! I've downloaded to my cell phone an audio copy of one of the systematic theologies that I'm plugging away at right now. Often when I'm in the car I listen to a few pages and then read them later in my hard copy. That's not only a double dose, but my reading of the hard copy goes more quickly after hearing the audio version.

## RECOMMENDATIONS?

I'm a little hesitant to make specific recommendations. I would hate for someone to experiment with a particular title that I've suggested but have a bad experience with it and dismiss the entire idea of regularly reading systematic theology. What would probably be most



helpful would be to note that there are at least two good approaches to what to read.

One is to choose a good author and to read entirely through his work in a disciplined way over a period of months. But it's critical that it be a *good* author. We're going to have only a limited amount of time to give to this kind of reading. You want to use that time for the very best, not the mediocre. I just now counted the number of complete systematic theologies in my own library. There are over thirty. Most are a single volume. But eleven of them are multiple volumes, Lewis Sperry Chafer's eight volumes being the largest.

Some of these I hardly ever touch. Years go by without my cracking them open. A few I turn to frequently because they are the ones with which I'm most familiar. Berkhof (our textbook for two semesters of Systematic Theology when I was in seminary), Culver, Grudem, and A. A. Hodge (*Outlines of Theology*) are in this class. Before moving on, I want to mention that the latter is seldom known today, but it's one of the very most helpful works for a preacher. For instance, due to the subject matter of sermons the last four weeks, three or four of my church members have asked me after services for an explanation of God's having allowed the Fall. One of those who asked is an eight-year-old! Here's A. A. Hodge's answer (quoting a "Prof. Haven of Chicago"):

Either God cannot prevent sin, *i.e.*, either (a) in any system, [or] (b) in a moral system involving agency.

Or for some reason God does not choose to prevent sin, *i.e.*, either because (a) its existence is of itself desirable, or (b) though not in itself desirable it is the necessary means of the greatest good, or (c) though not in itself tending to good it may be overruled to that result, or (d) because, in general terms, its permission will involve less evil than its absolute prevention.

It is obvious (a) that God has permitted sin, and (b) hence it was right for him to do so. But why it was right must ever remain a mystery demanding submission and defying solution.

One couldn't go through that sequence of reasoning with an eight-year-old, but something like the final paragraph is what I offered to the child and her mother last night. And it satisfied. But for sermons giving rise to questions about this issue, the options Hodge lists would be exceedingly useful to the adults.

The other approach to reading systematic theology is to single out selected chapters, especially those in some way paralleling your weekly sermon passages and subjects. In preaching through books such as John, Romans, Galatians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Hebrews we encounter extended passages on foundational doctrines (the Trinity, Christology, justification, sanctification, Divine sovereignty, ecclesiology, etc.). These are the very ones

about which there are entire chapters or even whole sections in the systematic theologies. Our preaching of a short section in Colossians or Hebrews concerning the Divine sonship of Jesus Christ will be deepened and enriched many times over by drawing upon even a few chapters in sound systematic theologies.

(4) *Familiarizing yourself with works on the history of doctrine.* There's little remaining space to discuss this important area of theological growth. But let me just quote from Louis Berkhof's preface in *The History of Christian Doctrines*.

The study of doctrinal truth, apart from its historical background, leads to a truncated theology. There has been too much of this in the past, and there is a great deal of it even in the present day. . . . Ancient heresies, long since condemned by the Church, are constantly repeated and represented as new doctrines.

We don't want to be found doing that! Or lacking the knowledge to be able to respond helpfully to false notions that people pick up. Those notions, whatever they are, are not new. Sound theologians have answered them convincingly in the past.

I hope that these suggestions will encourage you to turn your mind and heart toward the wealth of systematic theologies that will grow you doctrinally. Don't neglect systematic theology!

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Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at [mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons](http://mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons) and on your favorite podcast app: search for "Mount Calvary Baptist Church" and subscribe.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom J. Nettles, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life* (Founders Press: 2021), 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography: Vol. 2 The Full Harvest, 1860–1892* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1987), 10.

<sup>4</sup> I wonder if the wider chasm between most independent Baptists and orthodox believers of other doctrinal persuasions isn't defined so much by whether the theology is Reformed or not but by whether it is covenant or dispensational—a distinction stemming first from a variation in hermeneutics.

<sup>5</sup> "Election and Holiness," *New Park Street Pulpit* (rpt. Baker Book House, 1990), VI:133.

<sup>6</sup> Iain Murray's *Spurgeon and Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* recounts the history of this regrettable, prolonged assault upon Spurgeon.

<sup>7</sup> The entire sermon is reprinted in Fuller's collected works (rpt. Sprinkle Publications, 1988), I:160–74.

<sup>8</sup> *Colossians, Ephesians and Hebrews*, in *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (rpt. Baker Book House, 1986), 140.

## Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*

Andrew Murray (1828–1917) was born in South Africa to Dutch Reformed missionary parents. He and his brother John were sent to Scotland to live with their uncle, who was a pastor. They were educated there and then in Holland to prepare for the Dutch Reformed ministry. They returned to South Africa and became pastors of churches in that denomination. Andrew’s ministry took him to the edges of civilization and beyond in South Africa. In addition to being a pastor, he was a zealous evangelist, founder of Christian schools, and trainer of missionary church planters, while also serving for twenty-five years as the moderator-leader of his denomination. His ministry began in 1855 and continued unabated until he was ninety-eight years of age, when he departed to be with Christ.

Murray was a mighty force for orthodoxy, revivalism, and fervent evangelism both in South Africa and internationally. He authored some 250 books, which were disseminated throughout the Christian world, providing pastoral instruction and care for hundreds of thousands of believers. Many of his works continue in print today and are often described as devotional classics. One of the recurring themes of his many titles is the subject of prayer. *With Christ in the School of Prayer* stands as his great work on this topic—and perhaps among the greatest works on the subject in the history of the Church. Written in a clear, penetrating style, this work is simple yet profound in its insights, an earmark of great Christian expositional-devotional writing.

In the preface Murray bemoans how little prayer is understood and practiced: “But when we learn to regard it as the highest part of the work entrusted to us—the root and strength of all other work—we will see that there is nothing we need to study and practice more than the art of praying.”

Using the famous statement of the disciples after seeing Christ pray, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), the author unfolds in thirty chapters the instruction of Christ about prayer. Each chapter is a free-standing essay, consisting of an exposition of a passage about or statement from Christ on prayer, accompanied by appropriate exhortation and application. (Only chapters 17 and 28–30 diverge from this pattern, using other passages related to prayer as their bases, though still clearly connected to the teaching of Christ Himself.) Each chapter contains many other relevant passages to achieve accurate and fuller exposition of its theme. Those passages are referenced throughout and presented as endnotes. Every chapter concludes with the heading “Lord, Teach Us to Pray” followed by a written prayer relevant to the chapter’s specific content.

Like reading a well-designed menu in a fine restaurant, a quick overview of the thirty chapter titles of this work (one for each day of the month for slow, thoughtful reading, which was

Murray’s intention) provides a window into the rich and diverse contents of this work, a resource for deep meditation, and a veritable seedplot for thorough preaching on prayer. Consider them:

The True Worshippers.	Prayer in Harmony with God.
Alone with God.	Prayer in Harmony with the Destiny of Humanity.
The Model Prayer.	Power for Praying and Working.
The Certain Answer to Prayer.	The Main Purpose of Prayer.
The Infinite Fatherliness of God.	The All-Inclusive Condition.
The All-Comprehensive Gift.	The Word and Prayer.
The Boldness of God’s Friends.	Obedience: The Path to Power in Prayer.
Prayer Provides Laborers.	The All-Powerful Plea.
Prayer Must Be Specific.	The Holy Spirit and Prayer.
The Faith That Takes.	Christ the Intercessor.
The Secret of Believing Prayer.	Christ the High Priest.
Prayer and Fasting.	Christ the Sacrifice.
Prayer and Love.	Our Boldness in Prayer.
The Power of United Prayer.	The Ministry of Intercession.
The Power of Persevering Prayer.	The Life of Prayer.

Are you hungry yet? As a foretaste of the great food for heart and mind in this work, consider what Murray writes in his chapter on “Obedience: The Path to Power in Prayer.” He addresses the mistaken idea that the sweeping promises of God to answer our prayers are unconditional. The great condition for answered prayer is obedience, he explains, which is the supreme expression of love for God by the believer. He begins his explanation with John 15:16, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” He calls thirty other texts into service to this passage to provide substantive proof that true love for God is expressed by obedience, resulting in faith-filled praying for fruit bearing. He then drills down further to show that the motive behind our praying must be right for God to answer our prayers, citing James 5:16. Specifically, the motive of fruit bearing for God’s glory is the chief basis for an answer to our prayers. It is His will that we bear much fruit for His glory, always.

There is plenty more like this to give you a burning heart as His disciple. Some are new insights, some are freshly stated reminders, but all are compelling. Read on and be strengthened in your praying!

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Steve Hankins is the former dean of BJU Seminary. Currently he teaches Homiletics and writes.

## The Golden Calf: “A god,” “gods,” or “God”?

Exodus 32 is the earliest recorded instance of some of God’s people making and worshiping an idol. On that occasion they made a golden calf. Translators differ on what they think the people asked Aaron to make for them: “a god” (Exod. 32:1, 23 NASB) versus “gods” (Exod. 32:1, 23 KJV). These differing renderings of the same plural Hebrew noun *elohim* show that some translators have rendered it as an indefinite singular (NASB), but others have rendered it as an indefinite plural (KJV). In both cases, the translators signify that the text is not speaking of the true God.

Significantly, however, both the NASB and the KJV translate *elohim* in a later passage to say that the people said that the same calf was their “God” (Neh. 9:18). Given these different renderings of the same Hebrew plural noun, what is the correct understanding of whom or what the people asked Aaron to make for them—“a god,” “gods,” or “God”—and of whom they worshiped?

To answer these questions, we examine relevant evidence from the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the Greek New Testament. We will consider six statements about the golden calf that the people made and worshiped in Horeb.

**In the Hebrew Old Testament**, two statements have *elohim* as the direct object of a verb followed by an *esher* clause that has a plural verb: “Make us gods [*elohim*], which [*esher*] shall go [plural Hebrew verb] before us” (Exod. 32:1, 23). In these statements, *elohim* functions as the implicit subject of the verb in the *esher* clause.

Two other statements also have *elohim* functioning in the same way in an *esher* clause: “These be thy gods [*elohim*], O Israel, which [*esher*] brought thee up [“brought up” is a plural Hebrew verb]” (Exod. 32:4, 8). These statements, however, differ from Exodus 32:1 and 23 because *elohim* in Exodus 32:4 and 8 is not the direct object of a verb.

In all four of these statements in Exodus 32 about the golden calf, *elohim* functions as the implicit subject of a plural verb. Because it is the implicit subject of *plural* verbs, the KJV has properly rendered it as “gods” in each case. Moreover, the plural demonstrative pronouns (“these”) used to refer to the singular calf in Exodus 32:4 and 8 show that “gods” and not “a god” or “God” is correct.

A fifth statement has *elohim* in a similar construction as the occurrences in Exodus 32:4 and 8: “This is thy God [*elohim*] that [*esher*] brought thee up [singular Hebrew verb]” (Neh. 9:18). This statement, however, differs from Exodus 32:4 and 8 in important ways because it has *elohim* as the implicit subject of a *singular* Hebrew verb, and therefore renders it as “God” and not

“gods.” It also has a *singular* demonstrative pronoun (“this”) referring to the singular calf, which supports a singular rendering.

This differing evidence from these five statements about the use of *elohim* to speak about the golden calf makes it difficult to be certain from the Hebrew Old Testament exactly what *elohim* signifies in these verses. Because four of the five statements, however, do have *elohim* with a plural Hebrew verb, and two have plural demonstrative pronouns referring to the calf, the evidence from the Hebrew Old Testament favors understanding that the people asked Aaron to make “gods” for them and not “a god” or “God.”

**In the Septuagint**, all five statements about the golden calf have the plural “gods” (plural forms of *theos*) and plural Greek verbs (Exod. 32:1, 4, 8, 23; Neh. 9:18), and three have plural Greek demonstrative pronouns (Exod. 32:4, 8; Neh. 9:18). Because the Septuagint never uses the plural of *theos* to speak of the true God and because all three statements with demonstrative pronouns have plural pronouns, the Septuagint supports understanding that the people asked Aaron to make “gods” for them and not “a god” or “God.”

**In the Greek New Testament**, Stephen spoke about the making of the golden calf in his selective rehearsal of significant events in Israel’s history: “Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods [*theous*] to go before us” (Acts 7:40). Acts 7:40 is an inspired quotation of Exodus 32:1, and in the Greek text of Acts 7:40, “gods” is the plural *theous*. The Greek New Testament never uses plural forms of *theos* to speak of the true God. Because the Greek text has a plural form of *theos* in Acts 7:40, we learn conclusively that the people asked Aaron to make “gods” for them and not “a god” or “God.”

Interpreters disagree whether the people in Horeb made for themselves a god, gods, or God. They also disagree about whom the people idolatrously worshiped through the idol. Because of what Aaron said, “To morrow is a feast to the LORD” (Exod. 32:5), some interpreters hold that they idolatrously worshiped Yahweh. Four out of five statements about the golden calf in the Hebrew Old Testament and all five statements in the Septuagint, however, show that they made and worshiped gods and not Yahweh (cf., “They forgot God their saviour” [Ps. 106:21]). Acts 7:40 in Greek decisively confirms this interpretation. Having “in their hearts turned back again into Egypt” (Acts 7:39), the idolatrous people made “gods of gold” (Exod. 32:31). They idolatrously worshiped them (Exod. 32:8; Ps. 106:19) and “rejoiced in the works of their own hands” (Acts 7:41; cf. 1 Cor. 10:7).

Rajesh Gandhi blogs regularly ([apeopleforhisname.org](http://apeopleforhisname.org)) and occasionally ministers in preaching, teaching, and music.



## How Shall They Hear Without a Preacher?

**"F**or whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written [Isa. 52:7], How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:13–15).

There are two kinds of preachers. Just two! The mindset of the first preacher is that *he has to say something*. This preacher often just stands up and engages in the "preaching of foolishness." The second preacher *has something to say*. Paul calls it "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21). The word "preaching" (*kerygma*) focuses on the substance of what the preacher (*kerusso*, "the herald") has gleaned from the text that is before him. Paul told Titus that God "manifested his word through preaching" (Titus 1:3; "the preaching," ESV; "the proclamation," NASB). This is what we are to do. We must "render apparent literally or figuratively" (*Strong's Concordance*) what the text or verse is saying—*nothing more, and nothing less*. This takes work. We must dig deeply into the mine of God's Word in order to find gold, silver, and precious stones. For "every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13).

### VOICES FROM THE PRESENT

What follows are statements by five preachers, all with differing ministries.

*A senior pastor with decades of experience:* "Our Lord preached the Word of God. His disciples were sent out to preach the Word. Our biblical command is to preach the Word. And God has promised to bless preaching even though it is foolishness to the world (1 Cor. 1:21)." Vance Havner used to say this (or something close to it): "God did not call preachers to band concerts, social events, or philosophical lectures. His will is for us to 'Be instant in season, and out of season,' and to 'Preach the Word!'"

*A pastor called to preach later in life:* "The Bible itself establishes the primacy of preaching in the local church. In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul charges Pastor Timothy to 'preach the Word.' He doesn't say 'dramatize,' or 'illustrate,' or 'lead a discussion group.' These may all serve useful purposes, but the biblical mandate is to preach. The word is *kerusso*. It means to herald a message—to boldly and forcefully proclaim it. Paul says 'preach,' and he

specifies what to preach: 'Preach the Word.' The Word of God is pure truth (John 17:17). The church is the 'pillar and ground of the truth' (2 Tim. 3:15). To this end, the preacher is to hold forth the Word of God for all to see and understand. This explains why the pulpit is located at the center of the platform in most churches. The preaching of the Word is to be front and center."

*An interim pastor:* In regard to the primacy of the pulpit ministry in the local church, "Going to church had never been a part of my life. The limited exposure I had involved someone reading a verse or so and then just talking. When my wife and I attended a Bible-preaching and -teaching church, the pastor read some verses and sat down. I thought, 'Here we go again.' However, when he later got up to preach, he invited everyone to open their Bibles and *he taught us what the verses meant*. Not only that, he showed how these verses applied to our lives today! I was hooked and could not wait to get back the following Sunday and hear more. Many good men have drifted into a 'read a verse and talk' approach. Why? It takes hard work to dig out the meaning of a passage and make proper application. And sometimes the truth of the passage and the application offend people, and they get upset or even leave the church. When I prepare a message, I try to determine what the text says. It excites me to study the verses and see what they say rather than what I may want to say. I have found that messages prepared and preached this way excite the hearers too and makes them want to come back and hear more. Second Timothy 2:15, 'Study!' First Peter 5:5, 'Feed the flock.'"

*Church planter:* "Among the necessary qualifications for pastoral ministry is *didaktikon*, 'able to teach' (1 Tim. 3:2, NASB), the requirement that a pastor be a skillful teacher. The apostle Paul includes this quality among things like moral purity and gentleness. It is chief among the pastoral duties. A pastor must feed the church of God. John Broadus believed that preaching was the focal point of church life (*On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*). D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was emphatic that preaching has always been the greatest need in the church (*Preaching and Preachers*). Haddon Robinson wrote that preaching stands as means through which God works in His church (*Biblical Preaching*). I completely agree. A man who is not *didaktikon* is not fit for pastoral work. God has not gifted him for the job, and it is not the Lord's will for him to pursue the pastorate. God's flock must be led and fed, and only someone who is a Spirit-filled skillful teacher can accomplish this task."

*Seminary student:* In regard to the importance of preaching, "Instant gratification for the individual has become the highest

and best good pursued by our culture. Preaching is relegated to a dietary supplement, designed to meet the superficial needs of the hearer. The all-determining question of ‘What does the text say?’ is substituted for a more applicable option: ‘What can I say about this text?’ The text then operates as the launching pad for the preacher to arrive at his favorite hobbyhorse, political agenda, or man-centered discourse which will generate a larger following on social media platforms. In responding to the cultural norms affecting preaching, the appropriate course is not less preaching. Rather, the church is in need of a more robust diet of expository preaching, in which the preacher cuts straight the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15), bringing the authorial intent to bear upon the life of the hearer. This is true for two primary reasons: *who God is* and *what the Bible says*. God is righteous (Ps. 19:7–8). God is omnipotent (Ps. 119:103–5). God is immutable (Isa. 40:8). God is transcendent (Heb. 4:12–13). God is loving and gracious. (Rom. 1:16; 10:17). The Bible is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–20). The Bible is inerrant (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Ps. 19:7; 31:5). Every attribute of God . . . builds a case for the primacy of His Word and therefore, the preaching of His Word. Because the Word of God is inspired, when expository preaching happens, God speaks. Because the Word of God is inerrant, expository preaching expresses the character of God perfectly. Because the Word of God is authoritative, expository preaching wields authority over the life of a believer. Because the Word of God is sufficient, expository preaching will meet the needs of the broken human heart. Since the Word of God will never change, expository preaching will always be the primary means by which God works through His Word. Because God is both transcendent and immanent (Isa. 57:15), even the vilest sinner may come under conviction by the Holy Spirit as the Word is preached. Because the Word of God has the power to save, expository preaching will result in faith from hearing the Word of God, in accordance with God’s appointed purpose. Because of who God is and what His Word says, there is no other option but to preach it expositionally, demonstrating what God has said, bringing that truth to bear in the life of a believer.”

*Charles Spurgeon*: “The true Jerusalem blade, the sword that can cut to the piercing asunder of the joints and marrow, is preaching the Word of God. We must never neglect it, never despise it. The age in which the pulpit it despised, will be an age in which gospel truth will cease to be honored. . . . God forbid that we should begin to depreciate preaching. Let us still honor it; let us look to it as God’s ordained instrumentality, and we shall yet see in the world a repetition of great wonders wrought by the preaching in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

*Phillips Brooks*: “Nothing but fire kindles fire. To know in one’s whole nature, what it is to live by Christ; to be His, not our own; to be so occupied with gratitude for what He did for us and for what He continually is to us that His will and His glory shall be the sole desires of our life . . . that is the first necessity of the preacher.”<sup>2</sup>

*D. Martin Lloyd-Jones*: “What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason. . . . Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.”<sup>3</sup>

*John Wesley*: “I set myself on fire, and people come to watch me burn.”

*Richard Baxter*: “I preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.”

Dayton Walker is the interim pastor coordinator at Gospel Fellowship Association Missions in Greenville, South Carolina.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “*Preaching! Man’s Privilege and God’s Power*,” on Mark 6:20, November 25, 1860, *New Park Street Pulpit*, Volume 6.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching*, originally published in 1877. Republished in 1989 by Kregel under the title *The Joy of Preaching*. As cited in James Rosscup, “The Priority of Prayer in Preaching,” *The Masters Seminary Journal*, Spring 1991.

<sup>3</sup> D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 97.

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## Should We Heal or Pray?

### A Defense of Modern Medicine

Continued from page 6

These range from biblically based bread recipes to brightly colored elixirs that promise both health and prosperity. Books and social media sites are filled with promises that misuse Scripture to push some supplement, oil, or diet. One of the tragic results of postmodernity is that everyone has become a supposed expert and every opinion, whether learned or ignorant, is equal. To parody *The Music Man*, the trouble (with a capital T) is that every computer and cell phone has become River City, and anyone can be Professor Harold Hill. Shysters are everywhere, and suckers abound. Christians shouldn't easily fall prey to such claims.

### MEDICAL SCIENCE OR PSEUDOSCIENCE?

How can a Christian know the difference between medical science and pseudoscience? To recognize the distinction, we should ask three questions. First, has this claim been peer reviewed in the academic process? Secondly, is the claim extreme, or does it sound too good? Lastly, who profits, and how? All science needs financing (so does theology). The problem isn't necessarily the money itself, but how the money relates to research. Does the money drive the medical claims, or does it support the claims? "Wisdom is justified of all her children" (Luke 7:35).

Medical science does not deal in truth. Truth is reserved for theology and philosophy. Instead, medicine dwells in the realm of observation and correlation. As illnesses are observed and tested, researchers form hypotheses and then perform more tests. Medicine, like all science, changes with observation and assumptions. Whether these changes are good or bad is a matter of practice, testing, and skill.

Not every medical theory that Christians have accepted has been correct. Hippocrates' observations laid the foundation for another Greek, Galen of Pergamum. Galen proposed a theory about balancing four bodily fluids or humors. This theory dominated medical thinking until the middle of the nineteenth century. Current germ theory and the science of bacteriology are not even two hundred years old. As the theories have changed, Christians have adapted to different ideas about health and medicine. If the Lord tarries, future generations of Christians will no doubt do the same.

The veracity of Scripture and belief in God's all-encompassing control have not and will not change. This is why faith is not observational. It is deeper and truer. Modern medicine is simply human rationality applied to observation and testing. Wisdom dictates that we neither reject it outright nor presume its infallibility. Christians would do well to heed Basil's advice, given almost two millennia ago: "When reason allows, we call in the doctor, but we do not leave off hoping in God."

Brett Williams, PhD, is a former pastor. He now serves as provost at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.



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# Want to Work in Healthcare? Here's What to Expect

**A**s followers of Christ and those dedicated to the gospel, we are called to live in the world while having a character and way of life that are distinct from those of the world. Matthew 5:13–16 reminds us that God's people are salt and light, and Jesus exhorts His disciples to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Nevertheless, Christians live with a tension that is often difficult to navigate. Simply trying to convince the world intellectually of what is right rarely works. Scripture teaches that the "natural man" does not receive the things of the Spirit of God and cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). Understanding the role of salt and light as influence becomes even more significant for believers whose workplace might require activities that are opposed to the principles of God's Word.

Nowhere in Scripture are Christians told to withdraw from contact with the unsaved. Instead, they are exhorted that, while living within the world, they must not adopt the values, ethical standards, or moral direction that the world system imposes. How then would a Christian entering the workforce seek to reconcile the call to influence the workplace with the caution against adopting the standards that it holds? Should Christians simply avoid some jobs because they will become difficult to do with integrity? Specifically, how should medical professionals engage in the workplace to live out their faith without compromise?

Some Christians caution young people to consider a different career path than a job in healthcare, whether as a doctor, nurse, respiratory therapist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or some other healthcare specialist. They suggest that before long, Christians will not be able to work in these fields with integrity. We might ask, however, what integrity means in this conversation, and how a Christian can uphold it.

## **DIRECT AND INDIRECT INTEGRITY**

First is the matter of direct integrity. Some current practices in healthcare are morally reprehensible. These include abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell therapies, and other issues where biblical principles clearly apply. Other areas may require more nuanced applications of biblical morality: COVID vaccines, IVF (*in vitro* fertilization) and frozen embryos, for example. Another challenge involves applying moral principles to higher patient acuity (the availability of services to patients that require more extensive and complex care). Judging these matters takes more than just medical training or academic rigor. At their core they are spiritual issues. Christian medical professionals must think critically about them through the lens of Scripture, basing difficult decisions upon God's absolute truth. Sometimes the medical workplace may seem to leave little room for Christian perspectives, but that should not discourage believers from being present to influence and discuss these sit-

uations. If God's people do not voice the truth, how will the medical community be dissuaded from practices that violate it?

Equally challenging are matters of indirect integrity. These are decisions that are not of an immediately moral nature but that have the potential to create conflict. An example is the tension between good patient care and the demands of a medical system that relies increasingly on the numbers and management of the people it treats. Healthcare workers are sometimes asked to do more work with fewer resources, to work longer hours, and to pay more attention to computers and charting than to patients. This tension creates ethical questions. How can professionals meet patient needs with fewer resources while under pressure to use the computer during interviews? How can they keep up with the demands of a tight schedule while simultaneously taking time to listen to patients—and to actually hear them? When and how should healthcare professionals challenge standards that are established by abstract data and profit margins? Healthcare professionals are working *both* for their patients and for their employers, and those two sets of concerns do not always coincide.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

Doctors and nurses entering the workforce today face more expectations than ever before. They are given much responsibility very quickly after (sometimes before) graduation and testing. They must be knowledgeable about the physical



care of their patients, but they must also continue research and training to ensure that they are using “best practice” or “evidence-based” medicine. In many instances, an old-fashioned bedside manner and people skills have been replaced by good computer skills and being able to type and listen at the same time.

One nursing instructor said that she was less concerned about a student’s desire to help people than with the student’s dedication to learning, knowledge, and critical thinking. She said she could teach anyone off the street to straighten the sheets, but it took someone special to be able to observe patients carefully enough while straightening those sheets to assess what the patients needed and when they needed it. That kind of critical thinking was necessary to keep those patients alive, even if the sheets were crooked.

Christians who choose to work in healthcare will encounter difficult situations that truly do challenge their integrity. All those considering the field need to know what kinds of things they will face. They will see patients at their worst. They will be treated poorly, often by those they are trying to assist. They will encounter unreasonable expectations from management and from other healthcare workers.

## A CALLING

The growing number of ethical challenges in the field of healthcare may discourage some Christians from choosing careers in this field. Nevertheless, healthcare is a calling, and Bible-believing Christians are needed in this calling. Like all callings, it requires expertise. Physicians need to have vast medical knowledge. Nurses, medical technicians, lab assistants, and others within the medical community also require considerable training and expertise. Doing these jobs well may take years of preparation. But skill and learning are necessary for any calling.

As Christians, our calling goes beyond technical knowledge and professional skill. It includes a life of discipleship and involves the development of excellence: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. . . . And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:17, 23). This excellence includes an understanding of how and why we use intellect and skill both to bring pleasure to God and

to influence others that they may see our good deeds. This is our true calling as disciples in the workplace. We are not called to a place that promises comfort, recognition, and respect. Rather, our calling is to live a life that models Christ such that our character and work will prompt others to glorify God.

Sometimes Christian integrity is an intensely personal matter. Ruth once had a student nurse in a rehab/long-term care clinical setting who, during one shift, kept disappearing. From Ruth:

I became frustrated at what I perceived as a lack of effort to learn the skills being presented that day. Then the nurse to whom she had been assigned told me that they were caring for a patient who was in the last stages of life. In fact, the patient died before the end of the shift. My student, without prompting, had gone to sit with the patient and to hold the patient’s hand; she didn’t want the patient to have to face death alone. At that moment, I had to reevaluate my opinion of the student. It seemed that she understood the concepts of empathy and beneficence better than most. She was even willing to put her education on hold to care for a patient—which is what healthcare is supposed to be about.

Working in healthcare gives Christians a unique opportunity not only to show Christ but also to be with people at a time when they may be asking questions they would otherwise not ask. Being ill, facing surgery, or experiencing other medical issues frequently causes people (your patients) to question both their eternity and their previous choices. While we can’t initiate “religious” conversation, we can certainly be available to answer questions and guide patients to the Scriptures. We can also direct patients to chaplains whom we know will give them biblical answers to their questions.

God doesn’t call us to relax and find easy ways to live. He calls us to be a testimony to the world. How better to do that than to get into a profession where we meet the worst of people at their worst moments, and then to show them Christ’s love. A calling in healthcare can greatly honor God.

Does that mean we should give up our convictions? Absolutely not! The Bible still shows us what sin is, and it still tells

us that we should not participate in it. We are not to be of this world. Nevertheless, we are in it, and we have a responsibility to live as shining lights to those who do not know Him. We can do that by living with integrity in a world that seems to focus on outcomes at the expense of character.

In one field of healthcare—nursing—the basic tenets include justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, accountability, fidelity, autonomy, and veracity<sup>1</sup>. These tenets reflect, at their core, biblical values. Faithfulness to these God-ordained values will enable us to engage a world that increasingly resists absolute truth. The healthcare professions confront us with ethical and moral dilemmas of both the direct and indirect kind. Nevertheless, even in the face of outright hostility toward His disciples, Jesus promises that He has overcome the world. We have the privilege to exhibit the heart of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit toward the people we serve.

In his speech challenging the United States to invest in the race to the moon, President John F. Kennedy said, “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things not because they are easy, but because they are hard.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the call to follow Christ is not undertaken because it is easy, understood, or popular, but in spite of its being hard and lonely and often fraught with difficult decisions. Jesus Himself stated, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Todd Kilburn is CFO of Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and until recently served as CFO for the Office of the Idaho State Board of Education. Ruth Kilburn, MS, RN, BSN, teaches nursing and collegiate science.



<sup>1</sup> Darby Faubion, “Ethical Principles in Nursing + Why They’re Important,” accessed September 15, 2022, <https://www.nursingprocess.org/ethical-principles-in-nursing.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Piers Bizony, “We choose to go to the Moon: Read JFK’s Moon speech in full,” BBC *Science Focus* magazine, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://www.sciencefocus.com/space/we-choose-to-go-to-the-moon-read-jfks-moon-speech-in-full/>.

# Conspiracy Theories in the Church Today

**C**onspiracy theories. What are they? When and why do they abound? Who is most vulnerable to them? And how may we counsel people overtaken by them?

A conspiracy theory (conspiracy: from the Latin “to breathe together”—an apt word picture) is a model to explain troubling situations by blaming powerful persons or other entities who supposedly manipulate events and data so as to advance sinister agendas, irrespective of truth and the wellbeing of the many.

Conspiracy *theories*, on the other hand, are much different. Note the following characteristics of conspiracy theory.

1. Conspiracy theorists operate in the realm of *theory* rather than in the realm of *fact*. They construct explanations for what they don't know on the basis, principally, of suspicions and prejudgments. Conspiracy theorists regularly avoid the scientific method. Instead of dealing in public and objective evidence, they resort to speculation. They substitute provincial observations and lay analysis for professional, juried expertise.

enlightened cognoscenti (people “in the know”) who are good, and the “sheeple”—a massive block of naïve individuals—in the middle. These categories, once established, are fixed: it is unfathomable, say, to entertain the idea that “Big Pharma” might eventually be exonerated or, conversely, the network of homeopaths, pushers of vitamins and supplements, and peddlers of essential oils could be exposed as manipulators.

5. Unlike whistleblowers in real scandals, however, conspiracy theorists are rarely able to convince the majority, and instead tend to gain influence within smaller, closed communities of people inclined (for one reason or another) to favor minority views.

## WHY DO WE TEND TO BE VULNERABLE?

Christians are especially vulnerable to conspiracy theories for several reasons. First, we believe ardently, based on objective data (God's Word), that there is an invisible Deceiver in this world who networks with powerful henchmen, both demonic and human, to destroy the work of their Creator. This secret power of lawlessness is presently at work in the world (2 Thess. 2:3–7), resulting in a cycle of deceit that is continuous and complex (2 Tim. 3:13). And since we are warned repeatedly not to become prey to sundry forms of deception (Rom. 16:18; Col. 2:4, 8; 1 Tim. 4:1; etc.), we can easily become suspicious people.

Second, Bible-believing Christians at times also have legitimate reason to doubt the scientific community. Christians cling tenaciously to the objective truth of Scripture when it conflicts with prevailing scientific hypotheses on the origin of the universe, the evolution of the species, the geological/fossil record, the personhood of a fetus, and biblical miracles. And it is

## CONSPIRACIES VS. CONSPIRACY THEORIES

There have been many real *conspiracies* that have rocked our world. Watergate comes to mind along with the Teapot Dome Scandal and recent automotive emissions scandals. Unlike simple secrets that can be maintained indefinitely, large conspiracies are very difficult to pull off. The bigger the conspiracy, the greater the number of parties “breathing together,” leading to more communication, more paper trails, and multiplied occasions for exposure. The truth eventually gets out. The reason we know about the scandals listed above is that they were exposed by incontrovertible and public evidence. The exposure of conspiracies usually happens explosively and to the acknowledgment of all, irrespective of their personal sympathies and prejudices.

2. In fact, secondly, even to *claim* professional expertise is to be part of the conspiracy. This is perhaps the most stark and troubling feature of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories assume situations that require the involvement of multiplied members of well-informed and ordinarily altruistic guilds (e.g., law enforcement, medical professionals, the clergy, etc.) who secretly and completely betray their ideals *en masse* in order to support the conspiracy.
3. This leads naturally to a third characteristic of conspiracy theories: they are *undefeatable*. By repudiating objective data as tainted and professionals or experts as corrupted, conspiracy theorists reject the analytical means necessary either to confirm or to deny their theories.
4. Conspiracy theorists then divide the world into three categories: the powerful plotters who are evil, the



Secret



easy, after sparring with the Devil on these fronts, to conclude that the scientific method itself is the enemy.

And, third, Christians gather in smaller, closed communities of people inclined (for one reason or another) to favor minority views—the very kinds of places where conspiracy theories are most apt to flourish.

How, then, can pastors and churches resist the trend toward conspiracy theories in our churches, and how may we counsel those caught up in such theories? Specifically, what biblical principles should be applied to this problem? Consider the following.

First, we must determine to *hear both sides of every argument*. Proverbs 18:17 informs us that the first to present his case seems right—until another comes forward and questions him. Conspiracy theorists are skilled at convincing people, say, that the EPA is out to bankrupt America, that the FDA is out to poison America, that the FCC and FBI are in league to track all of the movements and conversations of all Americans, and that CNN is providing propaganda cover for them all. But when one actually goes out and listens to representatives of these groups, a different picture emerges.

For example, while it is likely that some environmentalists are tyrants by nature, the vast majority I've met (to the surprise of my conspiratorial mind) are simple folks motivated by concerns that I share as an avid outdoorsman: clean forests with tall trees, clear water, and pure air. Knowing this helps me to hear both sides of environmental issues and to be more objective with the data. That's a good thing, and it is likely the sentiment that the author of Proverbs is commending.

Next, we should determine to *value truth and objective evidence*. The context of Proverbs 18:17 is that of a courtroom, where discovering truth may at times determine life or death. And it expands on the fact that, in both Testaments, the testimony of multiple witnesses is always necessary to find someone guilty (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16). But what is true in the courtroom should also be true in the court of public opinion.

As People of the Truth, Christians should be exceptionally wary of the tendency to condemn without due process. And while similar condemnations fly both directions (What faithful believer has

not been accused of “hating women” for being pro-life or of being “homophobic” for failing to affirm the LGBTQ lifestyle?), Christians must not give in to reciprocal mudslinging and name-calling that erodes the truth. We are called both to “[rejoice] in the truth” and to “[endure] all things” (1 Cor. 13:6–7).

We also ought to determine to *respect our opponents and treat them charitably*, assuming their honesty and refusing to assign evil motivations. Piggybacking on our last point, Paul reminds us that love also “beareth all things, believeth all things, [and] hopeth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). And that's only after he tells us that love is “kind,” humble, and “not easily provoked.”

This is not to say that we must assume our opponents are always correct. But it does suggest that we should be slow to assign motives. Doctors once harmed people by bleeding them, but harm was not their goal. Meteorologists, too, are often wrong, but it's a rare person who believes in a conspiracy of meteorologists collectively bent on ruining our outdoor plans. We assume instead that meteorologists are wrong on any given day because they got bad data, analyzed it poorly, or simply fell victim to an incomprehensible God (in whom they may or may not believe) with a plan for His universe that is far too complex to distill and predict with any accuracy. Indeed, knowing this, we probably should develop a bit of sympathy for meteorologists—they have a really difficult job!

But here's the thing: We should extend the same courtesy to all. It's not that love renders us blind to the errors of those around us, but it should make us sympathetic toward those who are misinformed, confused, and trapped in ungodly worldviews (“and such were some of you”). And by cultivating sympathy, the conversation moves away from *ad hominem* name-calling and the uncharitable assignment of motives and toward opportunities to converse objectively and dispassionately about the collection and analysis of data, the merits and demerits of conflicting worldviews, and so forth.

In addition, all of this assumes that *Christians are in the world*. We must, of course, meet weekly in our small, closed communities of people perpetuating a biblical worldview that often runs contrary of majority public opinion. It's important that

we do this, because when we forsake the assembly, our faith is gravely eroded (Heb. 10:25) and we risk being released into Satan's realm so as to become part of it.

But while we must not be “of” the world, we will nevertheless be “in” it (John 17:15ff). And it is by rubbing shoulders with (not avoiding) those demonized by the conspiracy theorists that we learn what grace and mercy really look like.

Finally, we Christians, of all people, need to *make room for the providence of God* (proof texts: the books of Job and Ecclesiastes). Sometimes there simply is no blame to assign when life turns dark. It is generally true, of course, that sin stands behind everything evil in our world, but there is often no *specific* sinful act, person, or organization upon which we may heap blame. And just as a child may be born blind or a building may fall without assigning blame (John 9:1–3; Luke 13:4), so also disease, economic hardship, and the raging of the nations may simply be features of God's all-encompassing plan, the details of which we simply cannot know.

There actually *is* a conspiracy at work—a most benevolent conspiracy, the details to which God alone is privy (Deut. 29:29). And we simply need to believe that God knows what He is doing, refuse to question Him (Deut. 4:35), and trust Him to bring about His most perfect ends, knowing that, in this life or the next, the clouds of His frowning providence will break to divulge His smiling face.

## CONCLUSION

The public attitude of our day is trending toward mutually destructive conspiracy theories. The result is a breakdown of discourse and an uptick in distrust, division, tension, and even violence. It matters not who is to blame for starting the problem. It simply falls to us as Christians to do our duty, before God and in light of the Christian Scriptures, to “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled” (Heb. 12:14–15).

Mark Snoeberger, PhD, is professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.





## A Daughter's Duty and Delight

### Women Caring for Widows



**M**any public ministries in the church today can tempt women to think that private ministry in the home is insignificant. “One of the most subtle temptations of the Devil is his suggestion that we can best comply with the demands of duty in some place far away from our home.”<sup>1</sup> But that close-to-home ministry is vital. Charles Spurgeon reminds us that a mother’s ministry to her family is her “first and most pressing duty”—“She is doing the best possible service for her Lord.”

As our children age and mature, we may (rightfully!) breathe a sigh of relief that our days of chasing toddlers are over. However, God may still have plans to use those nurturing tendencies for another ministry—caring for widows in the church or home.

In 1 Timothy 5 Paul commands the church to “relieve” those who are “widows indeed,” that is, godly, believing widows who are sixty years or older and have no relatives to care for them. However, Paul also commands the widows’ relatives to relieve the church of this burden (1 Tim. 5:4). A man who refuses this ministry is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8).

Though the man heads the home and oversees this ministry, 1 Timothy 5:16 specifically commands women as well to care for widows. This specific mention of the women implies that a woman is likely heavily involved in the widow’s care, if she is not the widow’s primary caretaker if necessary. This kind of practical care is the same care that the godly widows themselves gave when they “relieved the afflicted” when they were younger (v. 10). This word “relieve” (1 Tim. 5:10, 16) means “to provide continuous and possibly prolonged assistance and help by supplying

the needs of someone.”<sup>2</sup> Sometimes this care involves legal aspects (e.g., becoming a medical or financial power of attorney). However, many of a widow’s practical needs may be physical or even emotional, making a woman a more appropriate fit for this caring role.

Paul calls this ministry an act of “piety” that is “good and acceptable before God” (1 Tim. 5:4). James calls it “pure religion and undefiled” (James 1:27). We can repay the blood, sweat, and tears of our mothers’ care for us by repaying them with our own (1 Tim. 5:4).

Even secular research supports the idea that a female family member is of great aid to the elderly. As Dr. Atul Gawande points out, “In the main, the family has remained the primary alternative [to nursing homes]. Your chances of avoiding the nursing home are directly related to the number of children you have, and, according to what little research has been done, having at least one daughter seems to be crucial to the amount of help you will receive.”<sup>3</sup> If even unbelievers recognize the ability of a daughter to care for family, how much greater is her responsibility when it is coupled with God’s clear command?

A woman’s God-given nurturing abilities and her obedience to God’s commands do not make caring for widows an easy or simple task. The care for widows will depend on what the widow needs and even what she wants. Family must wisely and graciously help, adjusting their level of care according to the changing desires and needs of the widows.

The Bible provides examples of women helping widows in varying degrees. Dorcas provided for widows by making clothing

for them (Acts 9:39). Ruth gave herself completely to the care for her mother-in-law Naomi by providing companionship, food, and eventually a grandchild for Naomi to love (Ruth 1:16–19; 2:2, 11–12, 23; 4:15–17).

Women, we must be prepared to care for our widowed mothers if the need ever arises. Perhaps this preparation calls for some conversations with our husbands, siblings, and even our parents. Maybe it means simply settling in our own minds that we will obey God’s command and honor our mothers however we can.

Boaz prayed for God to bless Ruth because of her ministry to Naomi: “The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel” (Ruth 2:12). May the Lord similarly bless us as we minister to widows today.

Holly Huffstutler has degrees in nursing (BSN, Bob Jones University) and biblical ministries (MA, Baptist Bible College), both of which she uses in homeschooling her four kids. She and her husband, Dave, live in Rockford, Illinois, where Dave pastors First Baptist Church.



<sup>1</sup> Newport J. D. White, *The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1910), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:461.

<sup>3</sup> Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 79.



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## Trusting God's

**W**e live in an age of radical skepticism. That's hardly news. Nor is it new. The polar opposite of skepticism is trust. In fact, let me sharpen that image just a bit: if skepticism is Antarctica and the South Pole is outright rejection, then the Arctic is faith but the North Pole is trust. At the risk of oversimplifying, *faith* is when I *accept* that something is true; *trust* is when I *act* as though it is true for me.

In one sense, the skepticism of our age is the least of our problems. You don't just live in an *age* of radical skepticism; you carry around inside you a *bent toward* radical skepticism. Your flesh is a radical skeptic! The skepticism of the surrounding culture only feeds and affirms that internal skeptic.

Skepticism manifests itself in lots of areas and issues. The one I want to focus on in this column is at the very core of how you live life amid hard providences and disturbing circumstances: your view of God's character.

### WHAT DOES GOD SAY HE'S LIKE?

How does God describe Himself? And what do we do when the circumstances around us make it look like God isn't the way He says He is? Lots of passages give a synopsis of the divine character. I suggest Exodus 34 for two reasons in particular: (1) this passage is a condensed catalog of multiple aspects of God's character, and (2) this passage is a quote directly from the mouth of God Himself.

Think about the context. This is *Mt. Sinai*, where God had already displayed His presence with smoke and fire and rumblings of thunder and blaring angelic trumpets! From Exodus 19–32, Moses spends forty days up there receiving God's Law, with all of its commandments and warnings and threats and sacrifices and penalties. In Exodus 32 Moses comes down from that mountain and finds that Law already radically broken by the very people who had earlier sworn they would do whatever God told them. God threatens to destroy the entire nation, but Moses intercedes for them, and God withdraws His threat.

Then Moses makes an astonishing request: "[Show] me thy **glory**" (Exod. 33:18). God's reply is equally astonishing: "I will make all my **goodness** pass before thee" (33:19). God essentially synonymizes His **glory** and His **goodness**. The next morning (34:2) God "descended" on Mount Sinai (34:5) to fulfill Moses' request. What would you have expected God to do in response to that request? When God displays His glory to Moses, what does He put first and emphasize most? His *compassion*, *graciousness*, *slowness to anger*, *abundant lovingkindness* [chesed], *abundant trustworthiness*, *loyalty* [chesed] *to His people*, and *forgiveness* (34:6–7a). Yes, God's glory also includes His justice and His judgment (34:7b). But listen to what God Himself foretells when He declares His glory!

We have to learn to rely on God to be *exactly* what He says He is—even when (and especially when) it doesn't *look* to us like He is. That's when we not only have to ignore the external skeptics around us but to silence the skeptic within. We do that by laying hold of one of God's words about Himself and, like a dagger, thrusting it into that skeptic inside us. It's the difference between evaluating God's character through the lens of your circumstances versus viewing your circumstances through the lens of what you know God to be, what God says He really is like—in passages such as Exodus 34.

A famous old hymn by William Cowper runs:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

But the next stanza especially captures our tendency to view God through the lens of our circumstances, to come to conclusions about His posture or character based on our experiences:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense  
But trust Him for His grace.  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

Cowper does not mean that God is smiling because He enjoys our pain and suffering but because everything He does in our lives—even when it includes our pain and suffering—is done with gracious intent, loving motive, omnipotent control, and wise purpose. I don't know anyone in Scripture who needed that second stanza any more than Naomi.

### REMEMBERING GOD'S KINDNESS

Naomi seriously misread God's providences and posture towards her. We don't have a lot of history on Naomi. It's all pretty much confined in the first five verses of the Book of Ruth. During the politically and spiritually unstable time of the judges, Naomi followed her husband Elimelech to sojourn in Moab during a famine, where their two sons took wives. While they were there, all three of the men—Naomi's husband and both sons—died, leaving behind not one but three widows. That's the backstory.

Naomi is convinced that all her sorrows came from a frowning God (1:13, 20–21). We can surmise our own explanation for her sufferings. Some say she never should have left Israel. Maybe. But she could hardly have refused to follow her husband. Besides, Abraham left the land, more than once. So did Jacob, for a long time. Even David did, more than once. Few, if any, ever fault any of them. God never commanded His people never to leave the land under any circumstances. If Naomi suspected a reason for all



# Character

these afflictions, she never says so. More importantly, the narrator never includes an explanation either.

We misunderstand and misdiagnose Naomi by thinking of her as a bitter old woman. When she returned to Israel she told people not to call her Naomi (“pleasant”) but to call her Mara (“bitter,” “harsh”). But the reason she gave for that name change was not because *she* was bitter; it was because her *life* was. Read 1:20–21 carefully: “Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: *for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly [harshly, severely] with me*. I went out full, and *the LORD hath brought me home again empty*: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing *the LORD hath testified against me*, and *the Almighty hath afflicted me*?” “Call me Bitter,” she says, “not because I’m bitter against God, but because God has made my life harsh, hard, bitter.”

When we say something was a “bitter experience” we don’t mean *we* were bitter about it; just that it was really hard and unpleasant to go through—a *bitter* pill to swallow. (The Hebrew word translated “bitter” is often used to describe the flavor of water or food.) That’s all Naomi is saying. Her words signal a woman who is grieved, weary, worn out, even despairing; but there is no evidence that she’s angry or resentful or bitter. In fact, what evidence we have of her disposition points in the opposite direction.

Look at what she says to her daughters-in-law in 1:8–9: “The LORD deal kindly with you. . . . The LORD grant you that ye may find rest.” People who are bitter against God usually don’t pray at all, but they certainly don’t pray for God to bless other people; yet that’s what Naomi is doing. And when it comes to what are perhaps the most famous lines in the book (1:16–17), we always focus on what the scene says about Ruth and her faith, but we rarely reflect on what those verses must say about Naomi. People who are bitter against God don’t attract others to the Lord; yet Ruth, despite her pagan background and even her own life experiences (she, too, lost her husband), wanted passionately to know and follow Naomi’s God. Naomi certainly had a hard time seeing the kindness of God shining behind the clouds of His “frowning providences” in her life; but she wasn’t bitter.

Trust is like an aircraft’s radar—it’s the only way to see through the clouds when you can’t see anything *but* clouds. Yes, God took her husband and both her sons; but God gave her Ruth. Yes, God brought her home “empty”; but God brought her home. Yes, they were cast upon the mercy of others for their very sustenance; but when you read the rest of the story you discover that God in mercy providentially narrowed the “others” to their kinsman Boaz. Yes, they were reduced to living off the land (literally!); but God saw to it that they got what they needed, and more.

Eventually, however, Naomi began to recognize that God was behind all these blessings and provisions, as well as the bitter

experiences: “Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness [*chesed*] to the living and to the dead” (2:20). Did she mean that Boaz had not withdrawn his kindness [*chesed*]? Or did she mean that the Lord had not withdrawn His kindness [*chesed*]? Grammatically, it could be either. Translations and interpreters are divided. Either way, from a narrative standpoint, the ambiguity is intentional (cf. Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, 107). We are meant to see the bigger picture that behind the kindness of Boaz is the kindness of Yahweh.

By the end, in the providence of God, Naomi holds in her lap a grandchild who would become the grandfather of King David himself. No one reading chapter 1 for the first time would have expected the outcome in chapter 4.

All the time she thought of God only as “dealing bitterly” with her, “testifying against” her, and “afflicting” her, He was actually nudging her toward His place of blessing and provision—far beyond anything she could have imagined.

Cowper’s hymn includes two more stanzas worth noting here. By the end of the book, Naomi could have sung these:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
With blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

William Cowper is expressing his trust that God *really is* the way He says He is, even when it doesn’t look or feel like it to us. “Yahweh’s compassions may come to us packaged up in hard providences . . . [and] lie hidden in a bundle of trouble” (Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings*, 295–96). If you are God’s child, His caring providence always aims to do you good, even though the circumstance may be an affliction from God, the process painful, the experience bitter, and the purpose totally dark to you.

Remember Exodus 34. When God described Himself and His glory to Moses, some of the first words out of His mouth are, “Merciful and gracious . . . abundant in goodness [*chesed*] . . . keeping mercy [*chesed*] for thousands.” You have His word on that.

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

# Eight Hindrances to Answered Prayer

**S**omeday I should write a book on all the amazing things I have seen God do up in Canada and now at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa. In my last article I wrote of an answer to prayer that changed the trajectory of my prayer life. I mentioned that at that time I had been preaching on “Eight Hindrances to Answered Prayer.” Let me share the eight things we see in Scripture that hinder our prayer life.

## WE DON'T PRAY

James 4:2 tells us we have not because we ask not. What air is to our physical life is what prayer is to our spiritual life.

I moved from Edmonton, Alberta, to Ankeny, Iowa, in August of 2015. In September of that year, I had a meeting in Southern Minnesota—I-35 North to I-94 East. The whole way up I was surrounded by a sea of corn on both sides of the road. As far as you could see was corn. On my way home, I thought I had turned South when in actuality I had not. I did not realize this until I saw a sign that said “Sioux Falls, SD—30 Miles.” When you see a sign like that, you are convinced the sign is wrong. I took the first exit, pulled into a gas station and asked, “Where am I?” They confirmed that I was almost to South Dakota.

In Alberta you know where you are because the mountains are on your right or left depending on if you are going North or South. When you are in a sea of corn, you have no clue where you are going. Some of you are now wondering how I got to be a college president.

However, if you went to a farmer in Iowa and told him he had to plant a field that big without a tractor, he would tell you “That’s impossible.” That is how we should

feel about living our Christian lives without prayer: “That’s impossible.” And yet so many do. We will never pray as we should until we see it as vital and indispensable to the life God has called us to live.

## UNCONFESSED, UNREPENTANT SIN

Isaiah 59:1–2 says, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Psalm 66:18 says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me.”

It’s not the fact of sin, for we are all sinners. It’s the hiding of sin and the refusal to repent of sin that hinders our prayer life. We may be great in many areas, but if in one area we are unwilling to repent, our prayer life is hindered. Imagine for a moment that I got up in the morning, yelled and screamed at my wife, slammed the door as I went out and peeled out of the driveway. Then at the end of the day, I walked in the door and said, “Hey, honey, I’m home.” My wife would say, “Don’t ‘Hey, honey’ me! I don’t want to hear anything until you apologize for this morning.”

In the same way, if we won’t repent of an anger problem or a porn problem or any other sin, and then want to talk to God

about a bunch of other things, the Bible says God will not listen.

## NOT LISTENING TO GOD’S WORD

Proverbs 28:9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” We turn our ear away by not reading God’s Word daily or by not paying attention in church. I have people tell me they don’t read their Bible, but they pray all the time. The problem with that is the wrong person is doing all the talking. If a church service is the best sleep you get all week, your prayer life is hindered. Go to bed early enough on Saturday night to pay attention on Sunday. You must be in the Word of God to know the will of God. How has your devotional life been? No time in God’s Word will hinder your prayer life.

We will look at the last five hindrances to prayer in the next issue. May God help us to have powerful prayer lives!

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.



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## Cosmetic Surgery in a Plastic Age

Continued from page 12

stewarding their resources wisely (Luke 12:21). Such procedures are quite expensive. In 1 Timothy 2:9 Paul warns women not to dress in “costly array.” A procedure that costs a hundred times more than a decent outfit can certainly be considered costly array, and this money goes toward a form of beauty that will pass quickly away. Of course, no cosmetic surgery should be done that is outside the financial means of the person seeking it.

## CONCLUSION

God gave us our particular bodies. He redeemed them, uniting them to Christ. He cares about how we use them, wanting us to emphasize our internal character above the “outer man.” He rebukes us when we use (or change) our bodies in sensual ways. He wants us to love others and to resist the objectification of women. God commands us to use our money wisely. Yet God encourages us to groom ourselves modestly and to restore health. With these truths in hand, together with the wisdom of our pastors and local churches, we should be able to discern God’s will concerning cosmetic surgery.

Ryan J. Martin, PhD, is the pastor of Columbiaville Baptist Church in Columbiaville, Michigan.



<sup>1</sup> Sarah Todd, “Why demand for cosmetic surgery is booming in a post-pandemic world,” *Quartz*, August 24, 2022, accessed August 30, 2022, <https://qz.com/why-demand-for-cosmetic-surgery-is-booming-in-a-post-pa-1849450517>.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 623.



## Regional Report

### CENTRAL REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

David Byford

On the evening of October 17, 2022, and all day October 18, over fifty individuals gathered in beautiful McPherson, Kansas, for the annual FBFI Central Regional Meeting. The theme of this year's exciting meeting was "Finding Hope in a Hopeless World." The host pastors for this event were Terry Post (pastor emeritus) and Joe McNally (interim pastor) of Wheatland Baptist Church

in McPherson. The three guest speakers for this event were Pastor Ben Heffernan from Ft. Scott, Kansas; Pastor Michael Wessberg from Raymore, Missouri; and Chaplain Joe Willis from Adams, Tennessee. Special music was provided by the Wessberg family and other families of the participating churches. As usual, there was an abundance of well-needed fellowship with the men and women who serve in this multistate region in the central plans of the US. A special thanks to the members of Wheatland Baptist Church for their generous hospitality in making this such a very special event.



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# Chaplain's Report

Kevin Schaal

## Please Pray for Our Chaplains

One of the great privileges I have as FBFI president is being able to fellowship with and support our chaplains. Our chaplains are among the finest anywhere in all the military and in the communities in which they serve. They are strategically placed, well-respected, and highly influential not only with military decision-making but also in ministry to servicemen, first responders, prisoners, and patients around the world. We are immensely proud of the work they do and thankful that we can support them in this work.

Below is a list our current FBFI-endorsed chaplains. Please pray for our chaplains. They not only face life-and-death circumstances daily but also are constantly ministering to people on the brink of eternity. The task of a chaplain requires an ability to see spiritual needs and meet them while working in a broad theological and political environment. They need God's wisdom to remain faithful and effective in their particular realms of ministry.

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CH (MAJ) Matthew Ortega, Maryland

CH (MAJ) Drew Paul, Florida

CH (MAJ) John Shay, Minnesota

CH (CPT) Mark Hanson, Wisconsin

CH (CPT) Chris Koehn, Arizona

CH (CPT) Ken Jackson,  
Indiana Guard Reserve

CH (CPT) Casey Stephens,  
Indiana Guard Reserve

### **Air National Guard**

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Ch, Maj Nathan Mestler, Arizona

Ch, Capt James Tilson, Nevada

## **Coast Guard Auxiliary Support**

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David Oliver, Belding, Michigan

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John Morgan, Akron Children's Hospital,  
Akron, Ohio

Paul Phelps (PTSI), Westfield, Indiana

Tim Senter (Hospice), Palatka, Florida

Bill Stutler (Hospice), West Virginia

Wayne Keast, (Wounded Spirits)  
Fort Bragg, North Carolina

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Brian Boyd, Portsmouth, Virginia

Don Karnes, Chesapeake, Virginia

Bob and Jane Keller, Santa Ana, California

Randy Livingston, Thomasville, Georgia

Daniel Minton, Westfield, Indiana

## **SECRET SERVICE**

Troy Shoaf (+ PD), Bolingbrook, Illinois

## **CIVIL AIR PATROL**

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Ch, Maj Mike Bardon, Richfield, Utah

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John Vaughn (Prison),  
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1LT KC Hansen, Buckeye, Arizona

1LT Ryan Hubbard, Cross Lanes, West  
Virginia

2LT Chad Fitts, Austin, Texas

### **Air Force**

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Samuel Jackson, Robins AFB,  
Georgia

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Caleb Schaaf, Toole, Utah

### **Navy**

ENS Mark Sarhan, Chandler, Arizona

## **APPLICANTS**

Antonio Anaya  
Brent Baughman  
Mike Bonit  
Jon George  
Jake Henshaw  
Josiah Lange  
Keegan Lauzon  
Greg Ream  
Chandler Russell  
David Schultz  
Chris Wagner  
Trent Wilson  
Adam Yates



## Announces **NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

[BAPTISTWORLDMISSION.ORG](http://BAPTISTWORLDMISSION.ORG)

With 21 years of service as a veteran BWM missionary to Cameroon, West Africa, Dr. Ben Sinclair was enthusiastically elected as the next Executive Director of Baptist World Mission at the Board's October meeting. He has a track record of effective service for Christ, coupled with a committed stand on the Word of God as a Baptist separatist. He will assume his role on April 1, 2023.

The current Executive Director, Dr. Bud Steadman, is excited to begin his new full-time role as BWM's "Missions Mentor," working with churches and missionaries more closely to advance the Gospel around the world.



# *Save the Date*

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Jerry Sivnksty

# Biblical Principles to Enrich Our Daily Living

**T**he psalmist declared in Psalm 39:4, "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." In Psalm 90:12 we read, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." A wise person will govern his life in light of eternity. He will incorporate biblical principles into his daily life as he goes through this earthly pilgrimage. What are these biblical principles?

The first one is praising the Lord. Psalm 113:3 says, "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name is to be praised." Psalm 57:7 states, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." Listen to the admonition of Psalm 150:6: "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD."

The second one is singing to the Lord. As we consider how the Lord has blessed us, we ought to do what Isaiah 12:5 instructs: "Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth." Many of us may not have the best singing voices, but that should not stop us from heeding the words of Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Our singing should always honor the Lord. The psalmist declared in Psalm 66:2, "Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious." If this principle of singing is not a regular part of your life, I trust you will begin to make it so even today.

The third principle is reading and studying the Word of God. Psalm 119:97

says, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." We read in Psalm 119:72, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." As a child of God, there should be a craving and desire for His Word. Psalm 42:1 says, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Thirsting for God's Word will draw you closer to Him, and you will find the sweetness of Scripture to be satisfying and enlightening to you. Remember what the Bible records about Jonathan regarding honey in the Old Testament? We read in 1 Samuel 14:27, "Wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened." Just as Jonathan's eyes were enlightened by the honey, so will your spiritual eyes be enlightened as you partake of God's Word. If someone goes without physical food for a while, he will become extremely weak. The same is true of our spiritual lives. Little of God's Word will result in a weak life because of a lack of spiritual nourishment. Our prayer ought to be, "Lord, give me a hunger and thirst for your divine Word; and may its sweetness to me be better than anything this world has to offer." Then voice to God the words of Psalm 119:18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." May we daily feast on the riches of the Word of God!

The fourth and final principle I want to address is giving thanks to God. First Chronicles 16:34 says, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever." If we would only stop

and think of how the Lord has blessed us, we would be more thankful. A good friend of mine, Dr. Walter A. Yoho, wrote in a booklet entitled, "Thanksgiving Feast," "Small minds exercise grumbling; spiritual hearts express gratitude."

In English, "to thank" comes from "to think." If we would think about our blessings more often, we would be more thankful for them and discover we have more blessings than we ever realized! First Samuel 12:24 says, "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you." Consider how much the Lord has done for you. Everything you and I have outside the gates of hell we owe to the grace of God. We should make Jacob's confession in Genesis 32:10 our own: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Dr. Yoho also wrote, "The man who is genuinely thankful for what the Lord has done for him is traveling the high road of Christian contentment and riding upon the high places of the earth." As Isaiah 58:14 declares, "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." I trust that what is emphasized in this article will be a blessing and encouragement to your life on a daily basis.

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



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