

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



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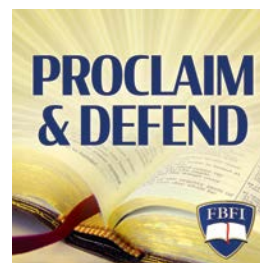


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Our sincere thanks to Dr. David Shumate for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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Gambling

What's the Big Deal?

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Five years ago the Supreme Court ruled that Congress could not prevent states from legalizing sports betting. Now thirty-five states and the District of Columbia allow it. Advertisements for sports-betting sites feature some of the most famous athletes and sports celebrities in the country. It is almost impossible to watch a sports program without some reference to the “point spread” or the “over/under.”

The mainstreaming of gambling in athletics is only part of a bigger trend. Whereas in 1910 gambling was legal in only two states, now it is prohibited in only two. Three-quarters of Americans surveyed said that they had gambled in the previous year. All but five state governments not only allow gambling but also promote it through their own lotteries. Gambling is now all around us, and technology has only accelerated this trend. As Stephen Marche puts it, “Once there was Las Vegas; now there’s a Las Vegas in every phone.”*

WHAT IS IN THIS ISSUE OF FRONTLINE?

If Christians are to respond correctly to this flood of gambling, we must first determine what God thinks about it. Is gambling a sin to be avoided completely, or is it merely harmless entertainment that can be enjoyed responsibly?

In a two-part article David Shumate argues for the former position. First, he asserts that gambling is a direct violation of the Tenth Commandment, which forbids coveting our neighbor’s property. Then he assesses gambling based on the two Great Commandments, to love God supremely and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Kristopher Endean continues this theological evaluation by discussing how gambling can put God to the test in a manipulative and unscriptural way. He then shows us how God wants us to put Him to the test in faith and submission.

In contrast to the gambling mindset, Larry Ball makes the case for Christians to exercise financial stewardship through

wise investing. He also gives helpful principles that Christians should consider.

One consequence of the spread of gambling has been an increase in compulsive gambling. This is true not only among the lost but also among believers. Precious brothers and sisters in Christ need practical spiritual help, either because they came to Christ as problem gamblers or because they became ensnared as believers.

Drawing on his study and experience in Christian counseling, Jim Berg has written a letter to a hypothetical believer with a gambling addiction. In it, Dr. Berg helpfully lays out the theology and practice of biblical change in this area.

Turning to governmental policy, Gordon Dickson examines the state-run lottery as an insightful test case. It is one thing for the authorities to tolerate the vice of gambling; it is quite another thing for them to promote it to bring in revenue at the expense of the public good.

A fundamental problem with gambling is that it reflects a wrong view of money. Increasingly in evangelical circles, however, one hears the argument that private property itself is the real problem and that socialism aligns with Christianity better than capitalism does. In our final article, Kevin Bauder shows that the Scriptures, while condemning covetousness, endorse both private ownership and gainful activity.

OUR DESIRE FOR OUR READERS

It is our fervent hope that this issue will cause you to think seriously about gambling and be a model for engaging similar cultural practices and trends. We pray that it will be a valuable resource for you as you seek to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in this world.

* “America’s Gambling Addiction Is Metastasizing,” *The Atlantic* online (November 26, 2021), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/world-our-casino/620791/> (accessed 5/12/2023).



Gambling and the Bible

Part 1: Does the Bible Forbid Gambling?

Christians in the United States have historically opposed gambling. Their efforts alongside those of other social reformers lead to the outlawing of gambling almost everywhere in the United States by the early twentieth century. In the 1980s Evangelical Christians fought, unsuccessfully, the increasing adoption of state lotteries as morally, socially, and economically evil.¹

Despite this opposition, there has arisen the idea, even among conservative Christians, that gambling is not inherently sinful. Rather, like other forms of entertainment, it can cause problems if overindulged, but it can be innocently enjoyed in moderation. Some Christians undoubtedly view gambling as poor stewardship of their time and money, but they would be reluctant to criticize other believers who gambled.

But is this view correct? Is gambling morally neutral, only to be avoided under certain circumstances or as a matter of wisdom? It is true that there is not a verse prohibiting gambling by name. However, if we carefully consider the nature of gambling, as well as what the Bible teaches about covetousness, we cannot escape the conclusion that the Bible does, in fact, forbid gambling. In Part 1 of this article we will ask whether the Tenth Commandment forbids gambling, and in Part 2 we will examine gambling in light of other biblical principles.

WHAT IS GAMBLING?

While there are various definitions of gambling, its essence is easy enough to describe. Gambling is an agreement between two or more people that each will wager something of value in hopes of gain, with the wager to be determined by the outcome of an uncertain event. Let's look at the elements individually. First, gambling is an agreement. Therefore, although there can be violence and fraud associated with gambling, they are not essential to it. Strictly speaking, gambling is voluntary.

Second, the players risk something of value in the hope that they will win more than they have wagered. Third, whether a player wins or loses depends on an uncertain outcome, whether it is the roll of dice, the outcome of a football game, or even the result of an election. The only proviso is that the outcome must be uncertain to the players at the time they place their bets.

There is, however, a final aspect of gambling that is sometimes overlooked but that is essential to understanding its true nature. In gambling losers pay winners. This is unlike business investment in which the profits (and losses) generated by a business are allocated among the investors. In gambling, by contrast, the winnings some players receive are collected from the losses of other players. It is a zero-sum game.

A simple example of gambling is two people betting on a coin toss. Each puts up the same amount of money and each has an equal chance of winning. The only source of gain by one is the other's loss. This definition also covers the case of multiple players, such as in an office pool for the NCAA Basketball Tournament. Each participant puts at risk a certain amount of money out of which the winners are paid. The outcome of the pool is determined by the results of the tournament games.

GAMBLING IS A DIRECT VIOLATION OF THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

The Tenth Commandment forbids desiring to have anything that belongs to someone else: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his [donkey], nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exod. 20:17; see also Deut. 5:21). The Hebrew word translated "covet" in this passage means to delight in or to desire. The word itself does not always refer to a sinful desire. The issue is whether the object of the desire is legitimate. In the Tenth Commandment what makes the desire wrong is the fact that it is directed toward that which belongs to someone else. Applying the commandment in today's social context, it is wrong to desire to have your neighbor's spouse or employees. It is

also wrong to desire to have his property. Unlike the commandment against stealing, the Tenth Commandment prohibits not only *taking* what doesn't belong to you but even *desiring* to do so.

Gambling falls squarely within this prohibition. Since what you win must come from the losses of the other players, you cannot desire to win without desiring to obtain what belongs to someone else. Sinful covetousness, therefore, fuels gambling.

DOES THE TENTH COMMANDMENT APPLY TO US?

Although the Old Testament covenant laws, including the Ten Commandments, were given to national Israel, they are still “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The New Testament affirms the Tenth Commandment specifically. Paul quotes it directly while demonstrating the power of indwelling sin to use the Law to produce sinful desires (Rom. 7:7–8). He also cites it along with the other four Commandments of the Second Table of the Law as an expression of the second great commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Rom. 13:9).

IS THIS JUST A “TECHNICAL” VIOLATION?

Covetousness is not a minor infraction. The Bible strongly and repeatedly condemns greed and warns against the spiritual dangers of wealth. Achan coveted and took some of the spoil of Jericho, bringing a curse (Josh. 7:20–21). Samuel's sons “turned aside after lucre, and took bribes” (1 Sam. 8:3). In Psalm 119:36, the psalmist prays, “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.” Proverbs also roundly condemns greed (1:19; 15:27).

The New Testament likewise rebukes covetousness. Christ includes it among the sins that flow from the heart (Mark 7:21–23) and pointedly warned His disciples to beware: “for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). He also taught against prioritizing and treasuring wealth (Matt. 6:19–20; Luke 12:20–21). Physical possessions can become idols, leading us to be disloyal to God (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). The Lord's parable of the soils lists

the “deceitfulness of riches” as among the thorns that choke out the seed of the word of the kingdom (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19).

Paul equates covetousness with idolatry (Col. 3:5). The “covetous person” is classified with fornicators, extortioners, idolaters, and drunkards, who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5). If a professing believer is characterized by covetousness, Christians should separate from him (1 Cor. 5:11). Christian leaders should withdraw themselves from teachers with “corrupt minds,” who believe “that gain is godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3–5).

WHY IS GAMBLING WRONG IF ALL THE PLAYERS AGREE TO WAGER?

Some might argue that because a bet is a voluntary exchange, it is acceptable. After all, if you agree with your friend to buy her car, you desire to have her car and she desires to have your money. However, the sale of property and gambling are fundamentally different transactions. When you buy your friend's car, you are giving her an amount of money that is worth more to her than the car is. As for you, having the car is worth more than having the money. Therefore, you both benefit from the exchange. In the case of gambling, however, what you are exchanging is the chance to take one another's goods without giving anything in return. Both parties are motivated by covetousness, and so both are violating the Tenth Commandment.

WHAT ABOUT PLAYING THE LOTTERY OR GAMBLING AT A CASINO INSTEAD OF AGAINST ANOTHER PERSON?

It may seem that if you gamble at a casino or play the state-run lottery you are not coveting the property of your neighbor. Rather, you are simply entering a game that the casino or the lottery commission has promoted to you. However, a bit of thought reveals this to be an illusion. No matter how many thousands of people gamble in a casino or play the lottery, the funds to pay the winners come from the losers. Gambling operators are go-betweens, collecting wagers and distributing winnings. The casino always gets its cut.² No matter the game's appearance, the participants are playing against each other, and so the

fundamental moral problem remains: I hope to walk away with what is yours, and you hope to walk away with what is mine. Therefore, we are both sinning.

WHAT ABOUT GAMES OF SKILL?

Some may argue that certain forms of gambling are legitimate because they involve the skill of the players. Those with a better understanding of the game are more likely to place good bets. They are, therefore, rewarded for their ability and effort. However, this feature does not remove the activity from the realm of gambling. Some games, such as lotteries or slot machines, are pure chance. Others involve placing bets on underlying activities that are contests of skill, for example, sports betting. Still other games, such as poker, involve some degree of skill on the part of the players. All are gambling, however, because the players are wagering on an uncertain outcome. All are also violations of the Tenth Commandment because they involve desiring to have what belongs to someone else. The element of skill does not change the fundamental nature of the activity. The fact that cardsharps use their skills to fleece an unsuspecting novice makes their behavior more sinful, not less.

Given the essential nature of gambling and the Bible's clear denunciation of covetousness, it is hard to escape the conclusion that gambling is sinful and should be avoided and opposed by Christians who want to honor God with their lives.

David Shumate is the academic dean of International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.



¹Jonathan D. Cohen, *For a Dollar and a Dream: State Lotteries in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2022), 10. See “Gambling,” National Association of Evangelicals Resolution, January 1, 1985 (<https://www.nae.org/gambling>, accessed 6/26/2023).

²J. B. Maverick, “Why Does the House Always Win? A Look at Casino Profitability,” *Investopedia* (<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/110415/why-does-house-always-win-look-casino-profitability.asp>, updated 11/29/2022; accessed 5/2/2022).



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Gambling and the Bible

Part 2: Does Gambling Violate Biblical Principles?

Part 1 of this article demonstrated that gambling is a violation of the Tenth Commandment's prohibition against desiring to have what belongs to someone else. In Part 2 we will look at how gambling relates to the fundamental biblical commands to love God supremely and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

GAMBLING AND LOVE FOR GOD

The greatest commandment is to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30; Matt. 22:37–38). This means that our attitudes, words, and actions should all honor and please God, putting Him first in everything. Gambling reflects a heart that does not love God in several important ways. First, it embodies a spirit of covetousness rather than of contentment, and, second, it contradicts our stewardship to God of our material possessions.

Gambling embodies covetousness rather than contentment. Although the Scripture is not opposed to wealth *per se*, it condemns an improper attitude toward wealth. Covetousness in the New Testament is equated with idolatry (Col. 3:5), a reality that Christ taught in His pointed admonition, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). On the other hand, a God-honoring attitude is one of thanksgiving and contentment (1 Thess. 5:18; Heb. 13:5). Paul lays out the opposing attitudes of con-

tentment and covetousness in his exhortations to Timothy. Contentment is a great blessing: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim. 6:6–8). By contrast, the desire to become rich brings a curse:

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9–10).

The allure of gambling is gaining something for nothing. In their extensive study of state lotteries, Cohen and Schwartz observe that the “entertainment” from playing the lottery is “the chance to dream, for a few moments or a few days, about a life of wealth.”¹ The mirage of striking it

CHRISTIANS MUST REMEMBER THAT WE ARE STEWARDS OF OUR ENTERTAINMENT CHOICES THE SAME WAY WE ARE STEWARDS OF OUR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS.

rich only inflames the fallen human tendency toward dissatisfaction and greed.

Gambling violates our stewardship. Our relationship to material possessions reflects our relationship with God, who gave them to us. God is the Creator and ultimate Owner of everything. The psalmist declares, “The earth is the LORD’s and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). God further asserts His ownership over the natural creation: “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10). We and all that we possess belong to Him (1 Chron. 29:14). Therefore, our property is ours in stewardship to God, and we have an obligation to use it for His glory and the advancement of His purpose (Luke 16:9–12).

Gambling violates our obligation of stewardship because it does not produce anything of value either materially or spiritually. First, because in gambling the losses of some pay for the winnings of others, overall material prosperity is not enhanced. The time and effort put into gambling by the players and the intermediaries ends up being wasted. Therefore, for the system to be sustained, the average expected return on gambling for each player will always be negative. This quality makes gambling unlike our labor or investing, which are calculated to produce a benefit for others as well as a financial return to us.

Gambling by the Numbers

\$55.93 billion

The amount of money Americans lost in gambling in the first eleven months of 2022.

4-6 million

The number of Americans with mild or moderate gambling problems.

2 million

The number of Americans with severe gambling problems.

75%

The percentage of Americans who reported that they had gambled in the past year.

33

Number of states where online or in-person sports betting is legal.

2

The number of states where some form of gambling was legal in 1910.

2

The number of states where gambling is illegal in 2023.

1 in 200 million

Odds of dying from a dog bite.

1 in 292.2 million

Odds of winning the Powerball grand prize with a \$2 play.

Second, the spiritual value of gambling is negative rather than positive. There are undoubtedly various motivations for gambling, including the anticipation produced by an uncertain outcome. However, it cannot be denied that an important, if not the most important, inducement to gamble is the possibility of winning. Wagering money enhances interest in the outcome, literally raising the stakes of participation. However, the nature of gambling is such that, if you want to win, it must be at the expense of the other players. Therefore, the fundamental desire behind gambling is sinful covetousness, and gambling cannot have positive spiritual value.

Is gambling in moderation innocent entertainment? It is not uncommon to hear people argue that, when properly controlled, gambling can be an innocent form of entertainment, such as attending a play or playing a board game with friends. However, merely labeling something “entertainment” does not make it legitimate. A vital question is *why* is it entertaining? As Brian Hand writes in his work

Upright Downtime, “Some entertainment is inherently sinful in its defiance of the parameters that God has already set for man. In the process of amusing ourselves, we can create an alternate reality that rejects truth.”²² As we have seen, the Bible condemns covetousness and warns against the desire to be rich. Although for many people gambling is highly entertaining, it is neither innocent nor harmless.

Christians must remember that we are stewards of our entertainment choices the same way we are stewards of our material possessions. Enjoying evil is condemned in the Scriptures. Paul admonishes that among believers there must be no “filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:4). He also culminates his denunciation of the sinfulness of pagan society by charging, “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but *have pleasure in them that do them*” (Rom. 1:32, emphasis added).

Therefore, since gambling is a vice, finding

it entertaining is not an excuse but a condemnation.

GAMBLING AND LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

Gambling not only breaks the First Great Commandment to love God wholeheartedly, but it also breaks the Second Great Commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. First, desiring someone else’s property is fundamentally inconsistent with genuine love for him. And, second, gambling causes them spiritual harm.

Covetousness violates the law of love. In Part 1 of this article we saw that the essence of gambling is the desire to have what belongs to someone else. The apostle Paul makes it plain that this is a violation of the law of love for our neighbor.

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:9–10).

This passage specifically mentions the prohibition against coveting as an expression of love to one’s neighbor. We cannot love people and at the same time desire to obtain their property without just compensation. Christ taught that our neighbors are not only people who live near us or are part of our social group—they are also any other person with whom we interact (Luke 10:36–37). Therefore, our obligation to love our neighbor applies to other potential participants in gambling, whether we know them personally or not.

Gambling causes spiritual harm. Gambling involves an even more serious violation of love for our neighbor than desiring their goods. If I gamble, I am participating in a system that promotes covetousness, not only in myself, but also in other players. I am therefore a party to their spiritual harm. The Bible is very serious about the evil of inducing others to sin (Matt. 18:6–7; Luke 17:1–2). Paul teaches, “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak” (Rom. 14:21). Thus, even in areas of personal liberty,

like eating certain foods, it is wrong for us to induce our brother to sin. Much more, we should abstain from unprofitable and harmful activities, such as gambling, for the sake of others.

The harm is magnified in the lives of problem gamblers. Although people with gambling addictions make up a small percentage of those who gamble, it is estimated that approximately two million people suffer from serious gambling problems and about four to six million have a gambling problem that is classified as mild or moderate.³ Compared to the general population that gambles, “problem gamblers are known to play longer sessions, more frequently, and more intensely. . . . It follows that problem gamblers account for a relatively large proportion of spending.”⁴ Among compulsive gamblers, researchers have found higher levels of bankruptcy,⁵ divorce,⁶ domestic violence,⁷ and suicide.⁸ If we are tempted to gamble, we must seriously consider the danger that it represents to ourselves and to our loved ones. We also must ask ourselves if we want to promote an activity that harms millions of people.

Even if gambling were not directly prohibited by Scripture, it would not be possible

to square it with the Christian desire and obligation to love God and our fellow human beings. Therefore, conscientious Christians will abstain from and oppose gambling.

David Shumate serves as the academic dean of International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.



¹ Jonathan D. Cohen and David G. Schwartz, eds., *All In: The Spread of Gambling in Twentieth-Century United States* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2018), 4, 6. It should be noted, while Cohen and Schwartz do not condemn this dream of wealth itself, they are generally critical of a system that promotes the vain hope of obtaining it through the lottery.

² Brain Hand, *Upright Downtime: Making Wise Choices about Entertainment* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2008), 16.

³ “How widespread is problem gambling in the U.S.?” National Council on Problem Gambling FAQ, (<https://www.ncpgambling.org/help-treatment/faq>, accessed 5/3/2023). “Gambling Disorder Fact Sheet,” Yale Medicine (<https://www.yalemedicine.org/conditions/gambling-disorder>, accessed 5/5/2023).

⁴ Ingo Fiedler and others, “Gambling Spending and Its Concentration on Problem Gamblers,”

Journal of Business Research, Vol. 98 (May 2019), 82 (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S014829631930058X>, accessed 5/19/2023).

⁵ Naomi Muggleton and others, “The Association Between Gambling and Financial, Social and Health Outcomes in Big Financial Data,” *Nature Human Behavior*, Vol. 5 (March 2021), 319 ([nature.com/articles/s41562-020-01045-w](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-01045-w), accessed 5/12/2023).

⁶ Martha C. Shaw and others, “Abstract: The Effect of Pathological Gambling on Families, Marriages, and Children,” *Research Gate* (Sept. 2007), (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6171219_The_Effect_of_Pathological_Gambling_on_Families_Marriages_and_Children, accessed 5/12/2023).

⁷ Nicki Dowling, “The Impact of Gambling Problems on Families,” Australian Gambling Research Center Discussion Paper, No. 1 (November 2014), 4. Australian Institute of Family Studies, (<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/impact-gambling-problems-families>, accessed 5/12/2023).

⁸ Charles Livingstone and Angela Rintoul, “Comment: Gambling-Related Suicidality: Stigma, Shame, and Neglect,” *The Lancet*, 6:1 (Jan. 2021), e4 ([https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30257-7.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667(20)30257-7.pdf) accessed 5/19/2023).

How Should Christians Respond to Gambling?

When it comes to the subject of gambling, believers must avoid three wrong responses.

We must not go along with the crowd. On the one hand, the more acceptable and popular gambling becomes, the easier it is for Christians to go along. On the other hand, the more acceptable something becomes, the more Christians need to insist on thinking about it the way God does. We will never be salt and light in this world unless we are willing to tell the truth and live accordingly.

We must not be self-righteous. Nobody went to heaven because he didn't gamble. The point of discussing the problems with gambling is not to boast of being morally superior to others but to know how to live redemptively. Doctors do not scrub up before surgery to brag about their cleanliness but to keep from infecting their patients.

God in His providence will give us opportunities to explain why we did not participate in the office basketball pool or go to the casino over the weekend. We must do this with grace and humility, not in

self-righteousness or legalism. Christ and His gospel must be our focus.

Likewise, we will increasingly meet people whose lives have been wrecked by compulsive gambling. We must be prepared, winsomely and convincingly, to point such people to Christ in salvation and to help them gain victory in Christ through sanctification.

We must not become discouraged. Many believers have fought unsuccessfully against the expansion of legalized gambling. It would be easy to become discouraged or indifferent. We must remember, however, that Christ's commission is to make disciples. His highest purpose is not the preservation of a superficially moral society but the building of His church.

We must have a vibrant, optimistic faith that communicates the hope of Christ to an empty, hurting world. While as Christian citizens we should continue to use our influence to hold back corruption, our main job is to offer the Water of Life to thirsty souls.

Put God

“My God will supply every need of yours” (Phil. 4:19).¹ This blessed text is just one of many in which the Scriptures promise that God will provide for His people’s financial needs. Although God has not specified exactly *how* He will provide for us, He has revealed general principles. God has ordained both the end (providing for His children) and the means. God generally provides through hard work (Ps. 128:1–2; 2 Tim. 2:6), gifts of inheritance (1 Chron. 28:8), and generosity among the people of God (Phil. 4:16). But God can also provide by sending manna like dew, piling up quail around the camp, or streaming water from a rock (Ps. 105:40–41).

So could God provide the money for your medical bills, school bill, car repairs, or grocery budget through winnings from gambling? Gambling in various forms is becoming legal in more places and is more accessible everywhere. (As I write, a third major casino is opening in our town.) Especially if you are working hard in your God-given vocation and still struggling to make ends meet, it is a legitimate question: Would God be pleased to give you a shortcut to financial success by providing through the local lottery? (And, while we’re at it, wouldn’t it be cool to tithe on \$31 million?)

Could God provide through the lottery? Perhaps. *Should I expect* that He will? I would say no. Here is why: Gambling is putting God to the test—something expressly forbidden in Scripture.

TESTING GOD: THE PROBLEM

Here is the scenario: God gives you money through a legitimate channel. You say, “Dear God, thanks for the money. But

instead of using it for my necessities, I converted it into bets. Since I know that You control the casting of the lot, I sure hope that You cast it in my favor so that You will protect what You already gave me rather than letting the casino keep it.” But what if God chooses not to intervene in your foolishness? Then you once again will need the same provision through a legitimate means, like more hard work or more generosity from others.

This is the same temptation with which the Devil approached our Lord on the pinnacle of the temple: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone’” (Matt. 4:6). Satan is suggesting that Christ should take a risk—a risk that would certainly result in harm without God’s direct intervention—while claiming God’s promised provision. The odds are pretty good that if you jump from a high building, you will hurt yourself unless you receive divine (or angelic) intervention. Similarly, the statistics are clear that you are far, far more likely to *lose* money in lotteries than you are to gain.²

However, Jesus had no command from God to jump off the temple. So Jesus responded, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (Matt. 4:7, quoting Deut. 6:16). Many English versions translate the Greek verb in this verse (and its corresponding Hebrew verb in Deut. 6:16) with the word “tempt,” which fits the negative connotation in many contexts; yet the concept behind this word is simply “put to the test.” For example, this is what God did when He asked Abraham to offer Isaac

upon an altar (Gen. 22:1ff.), what David did with Saul’s armor (1 Sam. 17:39), and what Daniel requested regarding his diet (Dan. 1:12, 14): each one designed and executed a test to reveal the character or quality of the thing being tested. In Matthew 4 Jesus is reiterating to Satan that God’s integrity does not need to be put to the test through an intentionally foolish action.

To rebuff Satan’s temptation Jesus chooses a significant Scripture passage. When Israel was thirsty at Massah (which means “testing”), “they tested the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’” (Exod. 17:7). Despite God’s repeated promises to be with His people, the Israelites faced a fundamental need and twisted it into a test: Is God really with us or not? This is the event to which Deuteronomy 6:16 and Matthew 4:7 refer.³

I have been leading my family through the Book of Numbers in our family worship recently, and the parallels to our current issues are striking. Paul tells us that the events recorded in Numbers “were written down for our instruction” (1 Cor. 10:11), and thus Paul warns us, “We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents” (v. 9). (Incidentally, they were complaining about the food—the manna—that God had already provided for them.)

I, like you, have to take a good look at our family budget on a regular basis and determine how we can adjust to make proper use of God’s means of provision. How easy it would be to risk part of my livelihood, hoping that God will allow me to miraculously beat the odds. Then, if God allowed me to suffer loss from my own foolishness, I would be tempted to



to the Test

ask, “God, are you going to provide for me or not?”⁴ But God has already promised to provide. Thus, the Word of God declares, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

WHAT ABOUT URIM AND THUMMIM?

The Urim and Thummim were a divinely ordained means of discerning God’s will by casting lots. Although the outcome could be of significant personal consequence (e.g., one’s life, 1 Sam. 14:41–44), this was not gambling, in that it was not the staking of property through hopes of personal gain at others’ expense. This was simply a means of determining God’s decision between two options.

Scripture attributes the outcome of casting lots (e.g., rolling dice) to God’s sovereign determination (Prov. 16:33). It is not merely “the luck of the draw.” Even so, God did not commit to answer by Urim and Thummim when the person asking was already acting in rebellion against His will (e.g., Saul in 1 Sam. 28:6). To rebel against God’s revealed will and wisdom and then to appeal for God to intervene in the lot is to put God to the test.⁵ In other words, we do not have the right to attempt to manipulate God by backing Him into a corner and then standing by to see if He will come through for us. Therefore, to risk God’s means of provision through gambling violates the principle “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

TESTING GOD: THE ANTIDOTE

Yet there was a time when God commanded His people to put Him to the test regarding their finances. In Malachi 3:10 God invited, “Bring the full tithe into the

storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” This promise applied literally to the Israelites, but it applies in principle to all of God’s people.⁶ If you have income that you are interested in investing in a way that will reap eternal rewards, give it directly to the Lord’s work. Then see what God can do.

The antidote to sportsbooks and lotteries is not merely better financial planning or more contributions to a 401(k). The opposite of gambling is *giving*.

In fact, many of the familiar promises about God’s provision in the New Testament are directly related to the grace of giving.⁷ For example, Paul encouraged the Philippians, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Why was Paul so confident that God would do this? Because that same God had met all of Paul’s needs by the

generosity of the Philippians, who even in their poverty (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1–4) had repeatedly sent Paul material help (Phil. 4:16).

In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul writes this maxim: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (v. 6). A bountiful harvest, Paul clarifies, means that when you are generous God will enrich you *so that* you can be generous again. God gives you “all sufficiency in all things at all times [so that] you may abound in every good work” (v. 8). Paul repeats, “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way” (v. 11). God’s purpose in providing for your needs is not merely so that you can make ends meet; it is so that you can give to others in your abundance—or even in your poverty.

TESTING OUR OWN HEARTS

So what are you to do if you have squandered your God-given wealth

Continued on page 37

Gambling: What It Is, What It Isn’t

Gambling is deliberately staking something of value in the hope of gain, contingent upon the outcome of an uncertain event, whereby the winners are paid from the amounts lost by other participants. Gambling does not include investing in business ventures (e.g., stocks), protecting assets against catastrophic losses (e.g., insurance policies), winning prizes (i.e., gifts), or competing for a prize with skill and fair competition. Nevertheless, gambling has many forms, some of which rely on mere chance (e.g., lotteries, slot machines) and others of which include elements of both skill and chance (e.g., sports betting, poker). Gambling in its various forms violates the biblical commands not to covet others’ wealth, to steward God’s provision, and to love your neighbor.



Investing versus Gambling

Stewardship is the wise use of the resources and gifts that God has given to us. Most believers would agree that gambling, staking something of value in a game of chance with the hope of greater gain, is not good stewardship. But what about investing? Is there a difference? Or is investing simply a more sophisticated form of gambling? Many believers are reluctant to invest and prepare financially for their future, equating the investment of their limited resources in today's markets with gambling. Identifying the distinctions between gambling and sensible investing is important for today's Christian in this modern economy. Proverbs 6:6–8 says, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."

Jesus told the story in Matthew 25 of a wealthy landowner who went on a journey and entrusted his goods to his three servants. To one servant he gave five talents, to another two, and to the third, he gave one talent. The first servant traded his five talents and made five in return; the second servant likewise traded his two talents and made two in return. Both of them had a one-hundred-percent return on their investment, which is good in any economy. The third, however, took his talent and buried it, fearing he would lose it. In this story the Lord commends the first

two servants who invested their talents and condemns the third who did not properly handle his master's affairs. He says to the third servant, "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with [interest]" (Matt. 25:27). Clearly the Lord is encouraging the wise use and investment of our resources.

Scripture also addresses the danger of wealth easily and quickly gained. Proverbs 13:11 says, "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." Gambling is taking risks by playing games of chance in the hopes that one will overcome the odds and reap a quick reward. Investing is the expenditure of resources in a manner which expects a reasonable return. However, investing can turn into gambling in some situations.

WHAT'S YOUR MINDSET?

How then can a believer be a wise investor and not a reckless gambler? For a Christian, the distinction between gambling and responsible investing begins with a mindset. Investing is not about getting rich quick. Stories abound of people who invest on a hot tip and make a quick fortune. However, not as often told are the stories of those who lose great sums of money based on a hot tip. People don't like to talk about what they have lost, only what makes them seem to be an investing genius. For the

average investor, the best stewardship of investment funds for the future is a low-cost index fund or a lightly managed fund with a discount broker. Even legendary value-investor Warren Buffett has advocated inexpensive index funds for most investors.¹

Another aspect of responsible investing is that of diversity. Diversity is important when investing in stocks, but there should also be diversity between asset classes. The stock market experiences significant ups and downs. Adding other classes of assets can help offset these price swings. One such asset is real estate, which has been an effective investment for many.² Purchasing a home rather than renting allows a homeowner to build equity that can later be used to purchase another home—or simply allows the owner to eventually live free of mortgage debt. Owning property as rental income can be a lot of work but can also be profitable for an investor. One avenue of real estate investing that avoids much of the work of being a landlord is to invest in Real Estate Investment Trusts or REITS, which can be traded like mutual funds or be held in longer-term investment strategies.

With the recent rise of interest rates, good quality bonds (corporate, treasuries, and municipal), money market certificates of deposits, and even long-term savings accounts offer attractive investment returns with little or no risk to principal.³ Responsible investors should consider a

4,12%

variety of investment classes for steady investment growth.

WISDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

A Christian investor should seek the advice of a financial professional, preferably a Christian who holds similar values to his and also has similar investment philosophies. Even if one is starting off with very little, getting good advice from the beginning is a wise use of time and resources. Sometimes a person may inherit a large sum of money or property. Deciding what to do with such a sudden windfall will introduce a novice investor into a world of terms and options that he does not understand. It is wise for a believer to seek godly, professional counsel in order to be a good steward of what God has entrusted to his care.

The responsible Christian investor should be aware of investing dangers. There is always the danger of greed and preoccupation with money. Even mature believers can be so consumed with following their investments that their time and energy are directed toward material rather than eternal things. Scripture warns against trusting in “uncertain riches” (1 Tim. 6:17). Successful investing can cause a believer to become comfortable in his physical wealth

and dependent upon his investments rather than dependent upon the Lord.

Wise and responsible investing, however, has many benefits. Besides the obvious benefit of providing for the physical needs of one’s family and future, successful investing can free the believer from crippling debt which can hinder or limit choices of ministry. Many young Bible-college graduates would be willing to go to the mission field or into other full-time ministry, but the crushing debt of college often follows them for many years, closing doors of service. Ministry choices even later in life are often determined by salary or associated financial concerns.

An often-unforeseen benefit of responsible investing is the ability to be generous in one’s giving to meet the needs of others as well as the needs of ministries which the investor supports. Generous giving does not have to wait until wealth is achieved and should always be a staple of the believer’s life and practice. Successful investing, however, provides opportunities to have a greater share in the lives of people and the Lord’s work around the world.

Stewardship of the gifts and resources God has given to us is not a “roll of the dice,” putting those resources at risk; rather, it is a wise and steady investment to bring a profitable return that will please our Master and ultimately be available for His use.

Dr. Larry Ball is the director of International Baptist Missions. He lives in Chandler, Arizona.



PLEASE NOTE: This article discusses general principles of investing and is not intended to offer personal investment advice. Individual circumstances and approaches will vary.

¹ Tanza Loudonback, “Warren Buffett thinks index funds are the best way for everyday investors to grow their money—here’s how you can start,” Business Insider: Personal Finance, Dec. 17, 2019 (<https://www.businessinsider.com/personal-finance/warren-buffett-recommends-index-funds-for-most-investors?op=1>, accessed 6/29/2023).

² See “How to Diversify Your Portfolio beyond Stocks,” Investopedia, Sept. 20, 2022 (<https://www.investopedia.com/investing/diversify-your-portfolio-beyond-stocks/>, accessed 6/29/2022); Justin Becker, “Is Real Estate a Hedge against the Stock Market?” Benzinga Pro, July 27, 2022 (<https://www.benzinga.com/22/07/28229910/is-real-estate-a-hedge-against-the-stock-market>), accessed 6/29/23). Of course, real estate, like stocks, can go down as well as up. The idea is to have a variety of investments that complement one another.

³ See Miranda Marquit, “7 Best Safe Investments of June 2023,” Forbes Advisor, June 15, 2023 (<https://www.forbes.com/advisor/investing/best-safe-investments/>, accessed 6/29/2023).

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A Letter to a Brother in Christ Enslaved to Gambling

Dear Brother _____,
My heart broke as I read your e-mail to me about your addiction to gambling and your discouragement about the financial and marital destruction you have caused. Your scheming, manipulation, and dishonesty have taken a heavy toll on your relationship with God and with your wife and children. I know it hurts deeply to think of these losses. I am grateful that you want to forsake this sinful lifestyle. I want to remind you of two baseline truths before I outline an overall battle plan.

First, you must not attempt to conquer this alone. God made Adam and Eve come out from hiding in the bushes and stand naked before Him before He offered them a solution. You must also become vulnerable before God, those you have hurt, and the spiritual leaders in your life who can help. Second Timothy 2:22 says that you must

Flee also youthful lusts [passions of immature thinking about life and its responsibilities before God and others]: but follow [pursue] righteousness [doing what is right], faith [keeping an eye on God for your help], charity [love; desiring the good of God and others first], peace [reconciling relationships], **with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.**

You won't find a solution that honors Christ from a twelve-step group or from a gambling buddy who is also trying to get "sober." Paul is saying that you must find others who are pursuing Christ wholeheartedly. You have proven you can creatively find solutions to whatever sin you are trying to hide. You must put creative effort into finding spiritually qualified help. I can't personally counsel you, but I can point you to other people and resources who can.¹

*Second, please understand that overcoming the enslaving sin of gambling is not substantially different from overcoming any other life-dominating sin.*² I want to remind you that addictions (even those with a chemical component) are essentially habits—habits that are supercharged because of attendant *emotional* rewards (buzz, sexual release, ecstasy, euphoria, anticipation of "playing the slots" again, the "thrill of the chase," etc.) and because of your body's ability to super-habituate your desires for these experiences. Those desires can seem almost compulsive, but "compulsive" implies that you can't resist, which is never true for a believer.

The result of this habituated interaction between our hearts and our bodies (including the brain) is a "voluntary slavery."³ Paul states in Romans 6:16 that "to whom ye yield yourselves servants [slaves] to obey, his servants [slaves] ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness."

Notice what Paul says next in verses 17–19. He describes what must happen for you to experience freedom from any slavery, including your slavery to gambling:

But God be thanked, that **ye were the servants [slaves] of sin**, but ye have **obeyed from the heart** that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the **servants [slaves] of righteousness**. . . . [F]or as ye have yielded your members **servants [slaves] to uncleanness** and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members **servants [slaves] to righteousness** unto holiness.

Because of the truths of Romans 6, I define addiction as "the enslaving, sinful habits we develop when we repeatedly choose to deal with our trials and temptations in our own ways rather than

turning to God and His Word for solutions." Ephesians 4:17–24 outlines the two options—living as an unsaved person (a Gentile) or walking the way Christ did. Notice the three steps of change found in verses 22–24 (the second paragraph below):

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that **ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk**, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That [1] ye put off concerning the former conversation [lifestyle] the [ways of the] old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And [2] be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And [3] that ye put on the [ways of the] new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

So here is the divine pattern which you must practice in the power of God's Spirit, out of loyalty to God who saved you and out of obedience to His Word until you have formed new habits of living that reflect the image of Jesus. I can only highlight in this brief e-mail the key elements in God's "recovery program" of sanctification. Your counselor will unpack them and help you apply them more specifically. Please note that at the heart of each of these elements and their applications is a humble heart that is turning from self-serving sin to God-pleasing righteousness—practicing right responses. If you are self-protective, self-promoting, self-justifying, and

self-centered about why you are getting help, you will not make biblical change. “God resists [fights against] the proud, but gives grace [divine help] to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5, NKJV). With that in mind, let’s look at Paul’s three elements in overcoming enslaving sin.

1. Put off the ways of your old self (Eph. 4:22). That is going to involve . . .

- Repentance—Taking sides with God against yourself and confessing sin to God and those you have wronged with the full intention of not sinning again (Prov. 28:13; Isa. 55:6–7).

I am attaching a handout—“Repentance and Reconciliation”—that I use with counselees who have severely damaged their relationships by their sin. Humbly work through the handout with your spiritual leader/counselor. (See pp. 16–17.)

- Restitution—Paying back what you have gained from others by deceit and then asking forgiveness. See the example of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10).

You may have hidden some assets from your home financial accounts so that your spouse would not discover your losses. You may have stolen funds from others for which you must face legal consequences, make repayment, and over time rebuild trust. You will need much godly counsel in how to approach this in a God-honoring way.

- Restriction—Being willing to take whatever consequences your sin brings because God will use them to change your heart if you will submit yourself to Him in the process (Heb. 12:11).

Keep in mind that a truly repentant person does not run from the consequences of his sin.

- Restructure—Removing whatever influences in your life trigger the cravings and lead you back into sin so that it is hard to sin again (Rom. 13:14; Matt. 5:27–30).

2. “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 4:23)—pursuing a relationship with God and imitating Him by consistently . . .

- Reading, memorizing, and meditating upon the Scriptures to make

God’s thoughts and ways your thoughts and ways (Isa. 55:8–11; Pss. 1; 119:9–11; 1 Tim. 4:15–16).

You already have mental scripts based upon lies that you quote to yourself when you are tempted. Those must be replaced with memorized truth from God’s Word (new mental scripts) that keep you on the right path of obedience to God.

- Placing yourself under the sound preaching of God’s Word as a member in a Bible-preaching local church (Heb. 10:23–25).
 - Cultivating fellowship with growing believers who are further along in their walk with God than you are and who will influence you towards God (Rom. 15:1–7, 13–14).
- ### 3. “Put on [the ways of] the new man” (Eph. 4:24)—pursuing the character of Jesus Christ by cultivating the virtues of mature Christianity. Spiritually mature believers are purposely and “diligently” cultivating the virtues Peter outlines in 2 Peter 1:5–7.⁴

- Virtue—being committed to developing and displaying the character of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:2–3).
- Knowledge—knowing the person, words, and ways of Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:24–27; 2 Pet. 3:18).
- Self-control—instantly obeying God’s Word in the power of God’s Spirit (Prov. 25:28; Gal. 5:15–25).
- Endurance—continuing to obey God’s Word in the power of God’s Spirit no matter what (Heb. 12:1–3; James 1:2–8).
- Godliness—loving Jesus Christ with my whole heart and promoting and defending what is important to Him (Matt. 5:10–16; Acts 20:24).
- Brotherly kindness—showing special concern for my brothers and sisters in Christ. (See the “one another” passages of the New Testament.)
- Love—sacrificing to meet the spiritual needs of others (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 12:15; 1 John 4:9–11).

Working through this process by daily surrendering to God, repenting of sin, and

obeying His Word with His Spirit’s help and with your counselor’s direction and accountability will develop the right habits of the heart and body. These changes will allow you to flourish as a human being before God and to have an impact for the kingdom of God to His glory. You will find that God will change your thoughts, your desires, and your behaviors.

The encouraging thing is that these passages of Scripture were written to churches whose members had been slaves to sin before they came to Christ. They devoted themselves to Jesus and His ways and turned their world upside down. Some, like Paul, had been murderers and proud Pharisees. Some had been demon-possessed. Others had been addicted to the pleasures of the day. By diligently cooperating with God, they were changed. You can change too, but you must not pamper yourself, make excuses for yourself, or give up.

This is battle, so you must take up arms! And you must not go into this battle alone. God provides His Spirit, His Word, and His church to help you.

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



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¹ Talk to your pastor or mature believer in your church. In addition, you can find a biblical counselor at <https://biblicalcounseling.com/find-a-counselor/> or at <https://partners.biblicalcc.org/counselor-map/>.

² For more help see, *Help! I’m Addicted* by Jim Berg (Shepherd Press, 2020) and Mark Shaw’s books *Hope and Help for Gambling* (Focus Publishing, 2007) and *The Heart of Addiction* (Focus Publishing, 2008).

³ Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 46.

⁴ For help in studying these characteristics of Jesus Christ, work through the *Freedom That Lasts Student Manual Level 1 with the Spiritual Life Journal*: <https://freedomthatlasts.com/store#adult-addiction-curriculum>.

Repentance and Reconciliation

Jim Berg

Siding with God against Myself

This information will help you look at your sin and its effects through God's eyes and through the eyes of those you have wronged. Key passages are Matthew 22:38–40; Revelation 3:19–20; Matthew 5:23–24.

This exercise is especially crucial for leaders. If leaders want followers to be humble (i.e., admit their sins and take instruction), leaders must lead in humility by repenting of sin and taking instruction from God and from their spiritual leadership. Humility isn't optional for the believer. Working through this exercise is also especially helpful for those who have seriously damaged relationships and trust through addiction with all its deception and destruction. The goal of repentance and restitution is reconciliation.

Jay Adams outlines reconciliation this way:

Reconciliation is a change of relationship between persons (God and man; man and man) that involves at least three elements: (1) confession of sin to God and to any others who have been offended; (2) forgiveness by God and by the one who has been offended; (3) the establishment of a *new relationship* between the offender and God and between the offender and the offended party (parties). In reconciliation, enmity and alienation are replaced by peace and fellowship.*

1. **Make a thorough list of your sins against God and against others (spouse, children, boss, etc.).** Pay special attention to *accusations* that they have made against you. These often reveal areas where they believe you have wronged them. List also sins God is convicting you about as you sincerely ask Him to do a thorough “housecleaning” in your heart (Psalm 139:23–24).

Maintain a running list and categorize the offenses under broader headings (i.e., sins of the tongue, sins of “lording it over others,” sins of dishonesty, sins of slander and gossip, sins of anger, sins of discontent and complaining, sins of neglect of God and His Word, etc.). Continue to add to the list as God convicts you further or as others bring up additional wrongs you have committed against them.

Make these lists detailed and explicit. You sinned against God and others with specific details. In 1 John 1:9, “confess” means “to state your offense in terms the wronged party would agree with.”

2. **Find Scripture passages that show that your sin against others was more importantly a sin against God because you violated His Word (Psalm 51).** List references for each category of offense. Pray that God will expose your sin (Psalm 139:23–24) and compare yourself with the virtue lists and sermons of Jesus for God's standards: Psalm

15; Matthew 5–7; 1 Corinthians 13:1–8; James 3:1–18; 2 Peter 1:1–15).

3. **Consider and be able to describe the hurt that you caused God and others by your offenses.** Hurt is what others remember more than anything else about your offenses. Even if you don't know the exact nature of the hurt, you must show that you have thought about the possibilities of what they must have felt and must have thought when you sinned against them (Romans 13:10; 2 Corinthians 5:13–15). Otherwise, they will have a hard time believing your sincerity when you ask forgiveness.
4. **List the possible spiritual battles you made others face because you were not walking with God yourself.** Were your actions stumbling blocks in their lives? Were they tempted to sin in some way because you sinned against them (i.e., anger, bitterness, hatred, despair/hopelessness, acting out, isolation, self-medication, violence, etc.) (Matthew 18:6–10; Romans 14:7–8; 13b)?
5. **Express godly sorrow to God over your sin and its effects upon Him (Isaiah 53). Be prepared to describe your grief at the hurt you have caused others (2 Corinthians 7:9–11) and grief at the spiritual battles you caused others to face when you sinned.** This is not a time to bring up the sins of the other person (i.e., “I was angry with you when you were disrespectful to me,” etc.). Rather, put the focus on your own sin (i.e., “God has convicted me that in that conversation we had yesterday, I was sinfully angry with you. Please forgive me,” etc.).
6. **Repent of these matters before God.** When we sin against God, we don't just sin against a rule; we sin against a relationship. God's rules exist because He is a certain kind of a person with a certain kind of character. His demands that we be holy spring from His own holiness. His laws that we not lie arise from His inherent truthfulness. When we sin, we are saying in effect, “I don't care what You are like nor what You want of me. I'm going to do what pleases me.”

Repentance means that you have changed your mind about how you acted (you no longer think it is ok, nor do you justify it) and have turned away from these sins with the intention never to repeat them again (Psalms 38, 51; Proverbs 28:13; Luke 15:11–21).
7. **Worship God and praise Him for His lovingkindness and tender mercies (Psalm 30, 32–34).** Growing in realization of the extent of God's forgiveness increases your love for and joy in God (Luke 7:36–50).

8. **Write out exactly what you are going to say to the one you offended and check it with your counselor before you seek forgiveness.** Wrongly handled, these confessions can bring more offence into the relationship. When writing out your confession, state the offence (i.e., “I was wrong when I . . .”), the passages you violated (i.e., “God has shown me that . . .”), your understanding of the hurt you caused (i.e., “I’m quite sure that my sin made you feel . . .”), and your understanding of the possible spiritual battles you triggered for the other person (i.e., “It’s very likely that when I sinned against you, you were tempted to . . .”), your grief over what you did to the person, and then ask forgiveness for the offense (i.e., “Will you forgive me for . . .?”).

9. **Get help about how to make thorough, biblical change (Romans 6:12–23; 2 Corinthians 7:8–11).**

NOTE: Not every offense against another needs this level of engagement. However, when the offenses are long-standing, the hurts deep, and the chasm between the two parties is great, this kind of thoughtfulness often needs to go into the confession/forgiveness/reconciliation dynamic if real progress is to be made.

Examples of Possible Categories of Sins and How to Confess Them

A. **Sins of the tongue (gossip, cutting words, slander, boasting/arrogance, profanity, deception, etc.)**

1. **I sinned against** John when I sarcastically cut him down by saying . . . (list the actual words you used).

- a. Scriptures violated.
- b. Hurts caused.
- c. Spiritual stumbling blocks created for others.
- d. What grieves you about your sin.
- e. Confession statement that acknowledges points a–d above.

2. Etc.

B. **Sins of immorality (pornography, illicit sex, sexting, sexually suggestive touching and talk, etc.)**

I sinned against my wife/my parents when I indulged in pornography. (Follow steps a–e above.)

C. **Sins of “lording it over” others (bullying, harshness, mistreatment/abusiveness, harassment, etc.)**

I sinned against my children by treating them harshly and impatiently. (Follow steps a–e above.)

D. **Sins of . . . (theft, anger/violence, laziness, greed, ambition, gluttony, excuse-making, blame-shifting, drunkenness, partiality, injustice, neglecting God’s Word, lack of faithfulness in church attendance and service, etc.).** (Follow steps a–e above.)

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* Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 63.

Are State Lotteries Good for the People?

State lotteries provide the best opportunity to study the impact of gambling on the populace. Enacting lotteries, states reduced the resistance to the legalization of casino and horse-track betting. From 7-Eleven to casinos and now to smart-phones, these other forms of wagering laid the foundation for a surge in legalized sport betting. Lotteries are still the most widespread form of gambling in the US. The games are highly publicized and the prize winners publicly identified. The financial take for the government is a matter of public record. "Hidden" lottery winners include the gaming companies and retail outlets. In spite of highly touted claims of benefit, the lotteries are a pernicious evil perpetrated by governments on their citizens.

LOTTERIES THEN AND NOW

Historically, lotteries were common in the colonies and states. But they came to an end by 1890 (except in two states). Evangelical preachers had denounced them as evil; widespread scandals proved just how evil they were. But state lotteries returned in the 1960s and '70s. They are now conducted by forty-five states: "Lotteries are currently the primary source of gambling revenues for states, representing nearly two-thirds of gambling revenues nationally and over 95 percent of gambling revenues in 18 states."¹

WHAT'S THE HARM?

Have you ever heard someone say, "The lottery is a tax on people who are bad at math"? Here are the numbers: the chance of winning the MegaMillions lottery is 1 in 176 million. Winning the Powerball is a 1 in 292 million wager. By comparison, the chance of being struck by lightning in one's lifetime is 1 in 15,300. The chance of winning an individual state lottery has been calculated to be 1 in 42 million. Yet about half of all Americans play the state lotteries. In fact, "Americans spend more on lottery tickets every year than on cigarettes, coffee, or smartphones."² One percent (2 million)

of Americans have a severe gambling addiction; 2–3% (4–6 million) are considered to have a less severe problem. Some studies indicate 1 in 5 problem gamblers has attempted suicide.

These terrible odds and heartbreaking statistics raise this question: Why are states raising funds this way? Instead of encouraging their citizens to be good stewards, lotteries victimize the vulnerable. State-run lotteries are like a regressive tax: most of their sales occur in low-income areas; most of the profits benefit areas with higher incomes. The games entice people who can't really afford to squander their money. Lottery companies know this and prominently place their advertisements in some of the poorest sectors of society. In the words of Jonathan Cohen, "Lottery is Robin Hood in reverse."³

Christians understand the reality: lotteries of all kinds exploit a human weakness. Vulnerable people believe that they can get rich quick. Gambling addictions have deprived the poor of essential income. Those who put their trust in the Lord become selfless givers; those who play the lotteries become self-centered gamblers. The lotteries shred the moral fabric of a society that has emphasized hard work. Savings, even for emergencies, are at an all-time low. But many retail outlets continue to cash paychecks and sell lottery tickets at the same counter.

What's the harm in buying a few lottery tickets? Believers love their fellow men enough to warn them about the dangers of craving riches in the first place. They understand that covetousness is idolatry⁴ and that

They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.⁵

A number of stories online indicate that even winning the lottery is frequently devastating. Jonathan Cohen has studied lotteries and lottery winners extensively. He maintains that the saga of the miserable loser is largely a mythical morality tale. It is difficult to know how to reconcile his analysis with the many tales of woe. Perhaps many of those were written as human-interest stories designed to catch the attention of readers. However, it is clear that many winners are shocked by how far family and friends will go to get a share of their winnings. The reality behind playing the lottery is this: "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase."⁶

THE BIG WINNERS

Gaming company lobbyists exercise an outsized influence on state governments. The lottery industry is dominated by two giant companies: International Game Technology PLC (IGT) and Scientific Games Holdings LP. In 2020 gaming companies produced \$82 billion in ticket sales. These multinational companies are cagey about revealing how much of their profit comes from the lotteries. But "the lottery is IGT's largest business segment and accounted for nearly 70% of its \$4.1 billion in revenue in 2021."⁷ These companies have lobbied the state legislators and been richly rewarded. For instance, I. Nelson Rose, a law professor and the foremost authority on gambling, said that the California lottery "was entirely the product of Scientific Games."⁸ So lotteries have become the go-to budget solution for politicians who fear a tax-weary populace.

HOW CAN CHRISTIANS HELP?

Another article in this edition of *FrontLine* deals with helping those who are addicted to gambling. What else can we do to help people to avoid these tragedies? The history of state lotteries in the US demonstrates the power of Christian influence. Those who study state lotteries are very much aware of this influence from Bible-believing Christians. They know that what the culture views as "sin" has a direct impact on their industry. As one pair of authors commented,

The belief that gambling constitutes a sin against God is tied to fundamentalism, or those religious sects that interpret the Bible literally. From this perspective, individuals must act as responsible custodians or "stewards" of the material goods they have acquired.⁹

Believers who glorify the Lord and practice the fear of God can be used to awaken the consciences of those around them. As state lotteries were reemerging in the modern era, the authors quoted above noted,

Fundamentalist pastors and preachers thus became the driving force to stop lotteries in the states. Their sermons and public addresses exhorted God-fearing folk to oppose the lottery and portrayed lottery proponents as leading us to sin. Here was the stuff of morality politics: references to religious principles dominated the policy debate and spurred substantial public interest and activity.¹⁰

"Proponents of lotteries contested framing the issue as a matter of sin, gaining the

Continued on page 24

ONE PERCENT (2 MILLION) OF AMERICANS HAVE A SEVERE GAMBLING ADDICTION; 2–3% (4–6 MILLION) ARE CONSIDERED TO HAVE A LESS SEVERE PROBLEM. SOME STUDIES INDICATE 1 IN 5 PROBLEM GAMBLERS HAS ATTEMPTED SUICIDE.

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Kevin Schaal

Managing Editor

Malinda Duvall

Publication Editor

Steve Skaggs

Assistant Editors

Kevin Bauder
Gordon Dickson
Mark Herbster
Ken Rathburn
David Shumate

Contributing Editors

Mark Minnick
Layton Talbert

Design

Mike Moreau

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Mailbag

I have retired after forty-five years as pastor. I've enjoyed your magazine and appreciate your efforts to inform the body of Christ. Keep up the good work. . . . Thanks for your service over the years.

*Greg Wahlberg
York, PA*

Please thank Pastor Kevin Schaal and . . . [Northwest Valley Baptist Church] for renewing our *FrontLine* subscriptions. This is a valuable asset to our pastors here.

*Mike and Gail Mestler
Kenya, East Africa*

Greetings from Brazil, thank you so much [Northwest Valley Baptist Church] for the renewal of this magazine! We appreciate so much your love, prayers, and support!

*Bill and Susan Kieffer
Goias, Brazil*

I was telling someone yesterday that it is one thing (among many) I appreciate about *FrontLine* is the chaplain's report. I knew Robert Spivey when he was stationed at Lomore NAS out here. He was in our church, and we really appreciate . . . [him] and Sarah. (Of course, their family is larger now.)

*Gary Freel
Clovis, CA*

Thank you so much for dedicating almost an entire issue to focusing on ministering in the church as a single adult and the accompanying challenges. This is such a neglected topic as so many singles strive to find their place and contentedly serve the Lord in a couples-centered world. Thank you for sensitively addressing it and encouraging us to continue faithfully ministering where God has designed us to serve. The *FrontLine* magazine is always a blessing and an encouragement to read, and I look forward to every issue.

*Esther Briddick
Decatur, AL*

Hello, in reading the [July/August] edition of *FrontLine*, the article about Ron Hamilton refers you to page 24 to continue. But it does not continue on that page, or any other that I can see.

Will you be printing another article about "Patch," and I would like to know how the rest of this article went.

*Thank you,
Debbie Opferbeck*

Editor's Note: We apologize for the confusion. The information about Ron Hamilton was part of a larger article entitled "News from All Over," which was continued on page 24. Information about "Patch" ended on

page 22. Another article about Ron Hamilton could be a possibility if it fits in with a future issue's theme. However, we have no plans in that direction at this point.

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SOUND WORDS

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

FIRST PARTAKER

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

Dust Off that Rusty Greek!

A constant issue in the use of the original languages of Scripture by pastors is how, instead of allowing knowledge gained in college and seminary to atrophy, one can maintain and increase proficiency in the languages over a lifetime. As a former longtime seminary Greek professor, I've had several decades to hear quite a variety of experiences from former students. Some have been quick to confess (without my asking—as though the matter remains perched on the edge of some shelf in their conscience?) that their Greek has become very rusty. My response is always tempered by my own experience with Hebrew. Nearly forty years since I completed my Hebrew coursework, though I can still find my way around in many Hebrew passages, I doubt that I could still pass the Hebrew translation exam that my doctoral program required. So, yes, I understand that rustiness firsthand and empathize with it. Many others, though, have taken a bit of time to drop me a note to express their gratitude to the Lord for the learning they gained in their Greek courses, testifying that they have continued to use that training on varying levels over years or decades of ministry and have found great personal and ministerial profit in doing so. Any teacher of the original languages worth his salt would of course wish that all his charges would continue learning and growing in the language(s) throughout their lives.

But maintaining and increasing facility in Greek year after year, decade after decade, is no simple task! It requires unflagging determination not to let other pressures crowd out regular—but not necessarily overly time-consuming—attention to the Greek New

Testament. And the difficulty is compounded, of course, when one has let that Greek testament lie unused too long. Recovering that lost learning is no small mountain to climb, especially when that disuse has extended for decades, and the rust has eaten up nearly the whole body of previous learning. Will the benefit of recovering lost facility with Greek sufficiently repay its cost?

It is likely apparent by now that the purpose of this article is to encourage pastors toward ongoing engagement with their Greek New Testament—especially those pastors who have lost touch with their Greek for many years and need encouragement to pick it up again in ways appropriate to their current stage in life and ministry. The fact that the summit of Greek mastery idealistically envisioned seems—and very likely *is*—unattainable does not lessen the benefits to be gained by climbing however high you can by whatever route may prove best suited to your particular case. So let me list and discuss some of the benefits to be gained by regular use of Greek in New Testament study.

BENEFITS OF REGULARLY USING GREEK

One of the foremost benefits is that *careful analysis of the Greek text provides the most precise and accurate understanding of a text's meaning*. The preacher who labors to preach what a text actually says, as opposed to what he wants to say about the text, will often have difficulty nailing down exact meanings from English versions. For example, what, exactly, does “consider” mean in Hebrews 10:24 (“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”)? An English dictionary lists several senses: “to think about carefully” or “to regard in an attentive or kindly way,” or “to arrive at a judgment about something.” It is not safe, though, to assume that all the possible meanings of an English

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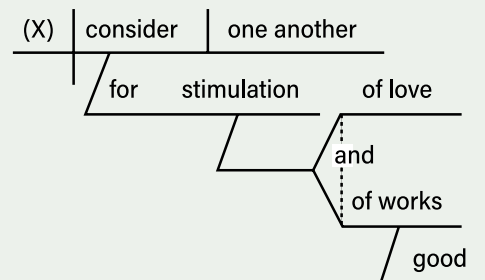
word are also possible for the underlying Greek. One of the simplest and most helpful points of Greek study is to research the meanings of particular Greek words in the lexicons. In this instance, we might find ourselves attracted to the sense of viewing someone in a kindly way (this meaning comes out perhaps most clearly in the cognate word “considerate”). But the Greek word (*katanoēō*) does not have such a sense. The Greek lexicon by Louw and Nida, which of all the major lexicons provides the most descriptive definitions, has several senses that could be appropriate for this passage: “to discover something through direct observation, with the implication of also thinking about it,” “to come to a clear and definite understanding of something,” “to give proper and decisive thought to something,” or “to give very careful consideration to some matter.” Whichever of these senses one accepts as best, what is clear is that the author of Hebrews is not talking about superficial awareness; his word denotes very careful and deliberate thought that produces correct understanding. The sense using the word “decisive” seems especially relevant, since the consideration in view leads to action (“to provoke unto love and good works”).

Sometimes the Greek reveals nothing beyond the English, but a great value of studying Greek is that *it slows you down and invites you to think carefully (katanoēō!) about the text*. Think of this gospel statement in Titus 2:14: Christ “gave himself for us.” Our minds naturally go to the cross as Paul’s primary focus, but is that necessarily *all* that Paul intended? Was Jesus not giving Himself for us throughout His public ministry? Was He not giving Himself for us in His patient training of the disciples? Was He not giving Himself for us when He obeyed his parents while He was growing up? What must it have been for Him to spend nine months in the confinement of Mary’s womb? Was this not an act of self-giving for us? Christ’s self-giving was not the work of a crisis moment; it was the labor of His whole earthly experience. These thoughts came to me one day as I was studying the Greek text—not because they are hidden in those Greek words but simply because I was taking time to reflect on them. Reading the familiar words of an English version can be like driving a daily route: you traverse the territory without attending to details. The Spirit can use the unfamiliarity of the Greek text to help us glean riches that we would miss if we read only in English.

Careful attention to Greek often *reveals detail that is not easily translatable into English and therefore is not evident in the versions*. A good example is the pronouns in the Beatitudes. In each Beatitude Jesus pronounces certain people blessed and then states the reason for the blessedness. Each reason begins with a pronoun that is emphatic either by its intrinsic form (the intensive *autoi*) or by its initial position in the clause (the possessive *autōn*). In context, this emphasis implies exclusivity:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the Kingdom of God belongs to them alone. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they—and only they—will be filled. This understanding sets the tone for the whole character of the Sermon on the Mount, which is loaded with both tender reassurance and sober warning—not a bad pattern for our own preaching!

Occasionally, details of the Greek text *uncover what appear to be outright misunderstandings on the part of at least some English translators*. While we should not be quick to fault the translators, neither is it wise to enslave ourselves to them as though they can never err. Hebrews 10:24 can return for discussion here. The ESV exemplifies the usual rendering: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” This rendering, though, departs from the Greek grammatical construction, which, rendered woodenly, reads, “And let us consider one another, for stimulation of love and good works.” The direct object of “consider” is the people, “one another,” not how to do something. And the objective genitive after “stimulation” is not the people but rather the pair of nouns, “love and good works.” This is a verse where the exercise of sentence diagramming can force one to reckon with the grammatical construction. The following diagram represents the Greek construction in English words:



What do we consider? One another. What do we stimulate by doing so? Love and good works. The Christian Standard Bible reflects this understanding: “And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works.” What is the difference in interpretation or application between these two renderings? The Greek construction and the corresponding CSB rendering are broader in focus. The text calls for more than just how to get others to do good things. When we *katanoēō* others, the result will likely be *our own* stimulation to serve them with *our own* love and good works. Yes, we might recognize that they need to be urged to such action. But mutual consideration will create a more general stirring up of love and good works than most English versions appear to call for.

Additionally, working with the Greek text *enables us to preach the text with an authority that comes only from “eyewitness” experience*. A challenge naturally arises: “But why do I have to do all this Greek work myself?

Can't I trust the translations and the commentaries? If I discover something that doesn't appear in *any* translation or commentary, am I really going to trust myself to preach the passage that way? Won't I be wiser to assume that my limited knowledge of Greek must be mistaken?" These are indeed weighty challenges. Certainly the mass of translators and commentators deserves deference. But what do I do when they differ among themselves? Is the majority always correct? The better we know our Greek, the better we will be able to evaluate the most important issue, which is how the various claims compare with the details of the text itself. When we reach our eventual conclusion, the fact that we have worked through the Greek text for ourselves equips us with a certain level of "ownership" of our understanding. Rather than parroting some human authority, we speak with an appropriate degree of assurance based on what the Lord has shown us personally from the text. This value of Greek study applies equally in cases where there's little or no controversy. Yes, there will be times when wisdom prompts us to set aside our personal understanding of a text in light of a mass of authoritative opinion. But there will also be times when the Spirit ministers a text-based confidence in proclaiming a particular understanding of a passage regardless of the mass of scholarly opinion.

The previous paragraph calls forth a caution, though. The preacher who often corrects the Bibles that his congregation depends on for their spiritual life serves neither his people nor his Master well. Believers need to be conditioned to read their English Bibles with confidence, not with suspicion! In cases where the Greek text leads the pastor's understanding away from the rendering of the version he preaches from or that his people read, he should communicate the text in a way that supports the English versions. In the case of Hebrews 10:24, the pastor can affirm the validity of the typical renderings and then bring in the CSB rendering (and/or that of the NKJV, which is similar), to make his point from a respected Bible version and not on his own authority.

ADVICE FOR RECOVERING THE USE OF GREEK

So what advice can I give to someone who wants to dust off his dormant Greek? First, I would suggest that you *embark on the task with conscious and constant dependence upon the Lord to guide and assist your labor*. Self-sufficiency will prove self-defeating, while prayerful dependence will yield delightful fruit.

Next, *set modest expectations for yourself*. You won't climb this mountain in a few gigantic bounds. Decide that you will fixate on the encouragement of making fruitful discoveries, not the discouragement of knowing so little about the text. Be careful, too, not to vow larger time commitments than you will be able to fulfill.

You can progress with just small amounts of time if you maintain consistency. Since you will certainly do well to include some "nuts-and-bolts" review along with whatever exegesis you pursue, a fine resource for help of that sort is the Daily Dose of Greek, a two- or three-minute survey of the Greek text of a single verse, moving progressively through a NT book. You'll find it at www.DailyDoseOfGreek.com. A great augment to that daily program would be to read through the treatment of each day's verse in an exegesis-oriented commentary, or in *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, or in the appropriate volume of the *Exegetical Summaries* series published by SIL International. If you prefer to focus on a passage you're currently preaching, then the written resources you consult can focus there rather than tracking the Daily Dose.

Don't be paralyzed by a fear of making a mistake. Of course you'll make mistakes; who doesn't? You'll make mistakes interpreting the English text without the aid of Greek, so you might as well make your mistakes while doing your best with the Greek. Not every idea you adopt from your Greek studies will emerge in your preaching. Our merciful Lord knows how to keep your more serious mistakes private. By the way, one of the best protections against error is to remain tentative in your conclusions until you can support them from a good combination of immediate context, other Scripture, commentaries and other exegetical works, and English versions. Most ideas you can't support in these ways are best kept private while you wait for further light.

You will do well to *give some priority to word studies that clarify the exact meanings of key words in a passage*. Determining word meanings is less technical than working out grammatical details. This task doesn't require recall of details about word forms. A wealth of information is available in current lexicons, which, in the past generation or two have begun to present word meanings in clearer, dictionary-style definitions (as illustrated above in the material quoted from Louw and Nida's lexicon, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*) rather than simple word- or phrase-based translation glosses. And today's software allows you to do your own inductive word study easily, since with a very few mouse clicks on any word you can generate a list of all the NT occurrences, shown in both Greek and English. I have found great reward by doing my own inductive study—examining the context of each occurrence for accompanying indications of what the word must mean in that sentence—before looking up lexical entries. Finding close correspondence between your work and theirs is a great confidence builder, and it aids that matter of "ownership" mentioned above.

You have every reason to *consider all competent exegetical tools to be helpful and legitimate*. Your teachers

may have put certain resources off limits because they wanted you to learn to walk on your own and not to develop a dependency on crutches. But you're no longer a schoolroom learner. Now you are a practitioner who needs the help of any and every competent tool. And if your Greek has become disabled, it now needs crutches! So reprogram your conscience as necessary to liberate you to use interlinear texts and software that provides word parsings.

Careful attention to Greek often reveals detail that is not easily translatable into English and therefore is not evident in the versions. A good example is the pronouns in the Beatitudes. In each Beatitude Jesus pronounces certain people blessed and then states the reason for the blessedness. Each reason begins with a pronoun that is emphatic either by its intrinsic form (the intensive αυτοι) or by its initial position in the clause (the possessive αυτον). In context, this emphasis implies exclusivity: Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the Kingdom of God belongs to them alone. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they—and only they—will be filled. This understanding sets the tone for the whole character of the Sermon on the Mount, which is loaded with both tender reassurance and sober warning—not a bad pattern for our own preaching!

Then, *just keep at it the best you can.* Start with whatever you were trained to do in your Greek courses and think about how best to adapt that approach to the needs of your own Bible study or sermon preparation. Familiarize yourself with new tools, whether in print or digital form. Explore whatever resources are available within your current Bible-study software; there are probably more included than you're currently aware of. Google plenty of questions in search of various kinds of help. If you can bear to spend some time on Facebook, you can get some good advice (likely accompanied by quite a bit of bad advice as well) from a discussion group named Nerdy Biblical Language Majors, administered by Will Varner. I host a group for diagramming, named Greek NT Diagramming, and my diagrams of the whole Greek NT are available in Logos and also at my website (www.NTGreekGuy.com), in PDF form. BibleWorks owners will also find the diagrams in that software.

Most textbooks on exegesis include instruction in another form of charting, in which you map out the flow of thought over the span of a paragraph. This exercise is invaluable for deriving an expository sermon outline directly from the structure of the text itself. While a student, you may have felt enslaved to your teachers' demands, but now it's time for you to take charge and set your own course by the needs that you perceive as you seek the Lord's help. Be creative, try new approaches, and don't be afraid to fail, since you can always adjust and adapt as you go. The only failure to fear is that of extending your Greek's dormancy!

I will close by anticipating a hesitation that I imagine some readers will feel. "Well, I've just never been any good at the languages. What you're saying is all well and good for people who are gifted that way, but that's not me." My first response is an encouragement. At the outset of the article, I mentioned testimonies I've received from students who have kept up their Greek. Do you suppose that those testimonies have come only from high-performing students? Though I have not kept count, I'm quite certain that the strong majority has come from middle- and lower-tier students who made it a point to acknowledge their nonstellar achievement. "Well done, ye good and faithful servants," who have fulfilled the degree of your giftedness.

To extend this reference to the parable of the talents, though, I hope you will let me turn a little more admonitory. Doesn't this hesitation sound to you like the excuse-making of the unfaithful servant who was entrusted with only one talent? Wasn't he instructed, just like those whose greater abilities warranted greater entrustments, to put that one talent to work? Yes, Scripture teaches clearly that not all are equally gifted, and modest self-evaluation is good. Whatever gift the Master entrusted you, though, He intends you to deploy for Him. Many of His faithful servants would have given *anything* to receive competent Greek instruction, but He did not allow them that privilege. How can one granted that privilege justify neglecting it? And remember, too, that the Lord requires of us only what will, in the doing, bring us rich blessing that will fill us with gratitude for His goodness. Gold and gems lie hidden in the Greek New Testament. Why not be a man of wisdom who mines them to the best of his ability, with such enablement as the Lord provides, and then gets to enjoy the fruits of the finding that He will surely bestow?

There is of course much more to say in expansion of various aspects of this topic. If demand emerges, perhaps further development will be possible, whether in *FrontLine* or elsewhere.

Randy Leedy was for many years a Greek professor at BJU Seminary and can currently be contacted via his website www.NTGreekGuy.com.

Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Wealth

Craig L. Blomberg is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Denver Seminary, where he has taught since 1986. He has authored or co-authored 25–30 volumes in his career. *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (InterVarsity Press, 1999, 292 pages) is volume 7 in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series edited by D. A. Carson.

Biblical Theology traces a subject through all, or some portion, of the Scriptures chronologically to develop that theme. (See Blomberg’s excellent description of his method in the last full paragraph on page 29.) This volume traces most references to material possessions of both the impoverished and the wealthy, and admirably achieves its goals of simplicity (for example, Blomberg transliterates Greek and Hebrew terms and “tries to avoid too much technical jargon”) and edifying instruction (the pastoral nature of many of his comments is noted below).

Blomberg’s introduction grabs the reader’s attention by starting with four pages of alarming statistics (pp. 17–20), surveys the broadly Christian response to world conditions (pp. 21–30), and concludes with a review of his own contribution to that survey (pp. 30–32). The bulk of the book consists of seven chapters in which he carefully assesses the pertinent biblical information, followed by a final chapter of “summary, conclusions, and applications.” I found this the best part of the book because it contains an explanation of how his study has changed his life.

I found this book enjoyable and valuable for three reasons. First, Blomberg includes timely, appropriate hermeneutical and applicational insights. For instance, in his discussion of Proverbs 30:8b–9, he agrees with Garrett that verse 8a is part of the introduction in verse 7, and not the first of Agur’s two requests. This clarifies the writer’s two requests: that God would not give him poverty, and that God would not give him wealth. Then he warns: “Of course, before we too readily label this a ‘middle-class’ ideal and content ourselves that we fall within this range, we must remember two things: first, polls consistently suggest that more than 80% of Westerners consider themselves middle-class, thus largely evacuating the term of any meaning; and second, the nature of the ‘middle-class’ ideal of Proverbs 30:8 is defined by the clause, ‘give me only my daily bread,’ a far lower standard of living than that to which most people calling themselves middle-class today aspire” (p. 68).

Blomberg astutely handles the hermeneutical “hornets’ nest” of the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–13). He recognizes the praise of the unjust steward as the most important issue in the passage. After citing several interpretations, he notes, “But the text states explicitly in verse 8 that the master commended the dishonest manager ‘because he had acted shrewdly.’ . . . Matthew 10:16 then provides an apt and succinct commentary: ‘I

am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (p. 122).

In Acts 20:35 Paul tells the Ephesian elders, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” I had always thought it meant that giving to another makes one happier than receiving from another. But Blomberg explains, “In context, what Paul understands Jesus to be saying is that ‘It is better for a person who can do so to give help to others rather than to amass further wealth for himself’ (I. H. Marshall 1980: 33b)” (p. 174).

Second, Blomberg is very pastoral in his applications to readers. His statements are often memorable:

- “We should ask God to meet our needs, not our greeds” (p. 131).
- “Christian leaders today need to model generosity in their giving, so that the average church-goer, whose offerings prove paltry in comparison, can see that greater sacrifice is both possible and necessary” (p. 55).
- Commenting on the Ephesian converts burning their magic books, Blomberg remarks, “Would that Christian witness could have similar effect on industries such as pornography in our own age!” (p. 173).
- “Those who are at least reasonably well off should give considerably more than a tenth of their gross income to God’s work. We must even go a step farther: the demand that the Christian tithe can even become a dangerous thing, for it permits the false conclusion that the problem of Mammon has been met and conquered” (p. 136). Blomberg exhorts: “When the American Christian average of total giving per family is below 3% of per capita income, surely we can do considerably better!” (p. 249).

Third and finally, *Neither Poverty nor Riches* is no mere “ivory tower” analysis but a deeply personal examination of a controversial subject. This is evident from his introduction, where he pledges all the royalties of the book to charity (p. 5), to his final summary (pp. 247–48), where he says, “I think it is important to share at least a few of my personal circumstances. In a culture that has been taught not to speak much . . . about personal finances, we need leaders who humbly but forthrightly explain and model biblical values.” When was the last time you read a theology in which the author explains how he personally models the conclusions drawn in the book?

James (Bud) Talbert planted Foundation Baptist Church in Calgary, Alberta (1988–2008), established Foundation Baptist College in Edmonton, Alberta, and has served as pastor of preaching and teaching at Lighthouse Baptist Church in Edmonton since 2012.

Who Is the Israel of God? (Galatians 6:16)

As he closes the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul writes, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (6:16). Who is the Israel of God?

Many interpret the "Israel of God" as all believing Jews and Gentiles, that is, as the church. They would interpret the verse with the final "and" indicating that "the Israel of God" is in apposition to "as many as walk according to this rule." Thus, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, *even* upon the Israel of God." This is grammatically possible (see Acts 5:21), but also grammatically unusual. Most who take this position argue that if Paul distinguished between Jews and Gentiles within the church, he would have undercut the message of the book that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile within the church (and thus would contradict the "rule" laid down in 6:15). In addition, G. K. Beale argues that Galatians 6:16 alludes to Isaiah 54:10, requiring "Israel of God" to include Gentiles: "This was a prophecy for Israel, with the implication, therefore, that it was not a prophecy for the redeemed nations except as they identify with Israel, convert to Israel's faith, and take refuge under the umbrella of Israel and Israel's God."¹

This position contradicts the main thrust of Paul's argument in Galatians and thus cannot be correct. Notably, the Judaizers held that there should be no distinctions between Jewish and Gentile Christians—Gentiles, they argued, must become Jews by obeying the Mosaic Law. Beale's claim that Isaiah 54 teaches that the Gentiles must "identify with Israel" is ironically close to the message of Paul's opponents—except that Beale has spiritualized Israel. By contrast, Paul's argument in Galatians is that Gentile Christians do not need to become Jews. Thus, it would be out of character with the book for Paul to close by identifying Gentile Christians as Israel. "His point has been to deflate the importance of Jewish identity, so why would he suddenly refer to the church" as Israel?²

Paul does not eliminate all distinctions within the people of God. For instance, Paul can say that men and women are equal in Christ even while differentiating their roles within the church (Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 2:8–15). Similarly, Paul continues to distinguish between Jew and Gentile within the church (Gal. 2:3, 12, 14; Rom. 4:11–12; 11:13) even while maintaining their unity in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Finally, it would be odd for Paul to newly introduce the idea of the church as Israel in closing Galatians and not return to this idea in Romans 9–11. Romans 9–11 is the most extended passage in Scripture that deals with the relation of Israel to the church, and it does not develop the concept of the church as Israel.

A better approach understands the verse as follows: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy *also* upon the Israel of God." The "Israel of God" refers to elect Israelites whom God will save. Adherents to this view observe that "peace" followed by "mercy" is an unusual order. Logically, the bestowal of mercy precedes the bestowal of peace. In addition, there is a "symmetry" in the verse:

peace upon them
and
mercy also upon the Israel of God

This symmetry suggests that two distinct groups with two distinct blessings are in view.³ If the first group, those who "walk according to this rule," refer to redeemed Jews and Gentiles who receive God's peace, the second group, Israel, still stands in need of God's mercy. The genitive "of God" indicates that the elect remnant of Israel is in view. In this verse, Paul prays for mercy to be shown to this remnant that they might be saved (cf. Rom. 9:3; 11:26).

Isaiah 54:10, if it provides the Old Testament background to Galatians 6:16, supports this view. The "peace" referred to in 54:10 refers to the covenant of peace, or New Covenant, which, as may be inferred from Isaiah 54, includes Gentile believers. The "mercy" in 54:10, however, refers specifically to the restoration of the nation Israel (in distinction from Gentiles, who are mentioned within the context).

This position handles all of the data most satisfactorily. It best coheres with the overall message of the book, it understands the final *kai* ("and") and *Israel* in line with their typical usage, it pays close attention to word order and logical flow, it coheres well with Paul's teaching in Romans 9–11, and it best accounts for the possible allusion to Isaiah 54:10.⁴

Brian Collins serves as an elder at Mount Calvary Baptist Church (Greenville, South Carolina) and as biblical worldview lead specialist at BJU Press.

¹ G. K. Beale, "Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 204–23.

² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 85.

³ Noted by Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 402, even though he adopts the view rejected above.

⁴ For a fuller defense of this view, see S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "Paul and 'The Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 181–96.

Scripture: The Ultimate Source of Illustrations

Writing a paper on archaeology during my graduate studies, I discovered a verse that pegs the aim of that discipline: “Truth shall spring out of the earth” (Ps. 85:11). I suspect biblical archaeologists get a special thrill when some new piece of evidence springs out of the earth and sheds new light on Scripture. Imagine the excitement when they discovered, in the Ein Feshkha Caves near the Dead Sea, a scroll of Isaiah predating any other manuscript by one thousand years—evidence that validated the prophecies of Isaiah seven hundred years before their fulfillment. In the same way, the preacher dedicated to discovery will find fresh truths springing up from the Scripture itself. What excitement when they shed an illuminating light on passages we attempt to explain! This column suggests New Testament (NT) passages from which to draw illustrations. We’ll follow the four main divisions of the NT.

GOSPELS: CHRIST THE CENTERPIECE OF THE GOSPEL

Humble Condescension. The duty of every preacher-shepherd is to define the entire Christian life in terms consistent with the life of our Savior. Self-abasement, resignation, apparent weakness, and inexpressible humility marked Christ’s earthly sojourn—and should characterize the pilgrimage of Jesus’ followers as well. This is superbly illustrated at the beginning of Jesus’ earthly life in the birth narrative of Luke 2:1–7.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Mary wrapped our Lord with ragged, makeshift pieces of cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough! From a human standpoint this is not that amazing. The natural instinct of mothers is to care for their infants. On the other hand, this is God, the God-Babe, uniting in His single person omnipotent divinity and true humanity. This is the one whose name was dictated by angels,

and whose character and work were announced before His conception: “Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31–33).

This is the one announced by myriads of angelic beings to the shepherds who were told they would find the Savior, Christ the Lord, in a feeding trough, of all places. The God-Babe was not laid in a white cloud wrapped with sheets of silver. He was laid in a sort of tray with remnants of food particles and the spittle of animals. From His beginning, He had no place to lay His head!

Forgiveness. The prophet Nathan, after unmasking the catastrophic moral failure of King David and sketching out the painful consequences for his sin, makes the most astounding comment on the forgiveness granted to him: “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin” (2 Sam. 12:13). The story of the notorious woman of ill repute in Luke 7:36–39 is spectacular for illustrating the importance of gripping the assured sense of sins forgiven.

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Envisioning the scene, Alfred Edersheim described her entrance:

Now from the open courtyard, up the verandah step, perhaps through an antechamber, and by the open door, passed the figure of a woman into the festive reception room . . . a woman borne down by weight of conscious sinfulness . . . who wearily toiled towards the light of far-off peace. (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1.3.21, p. 564)

After reading the thoughts of the self-righteous Pharisee who condemned Him for accepting such a sinner, Jesus admonished Simon to look behind the surface of her actions which beautifully

displayed the penitence and faith of a woman looking to Jesus to remove her sin. With a simple financial comparison designed to illustrate the immense love that gushes from the person who realizes the sheer magnitude of sin that Christ forgives, Jesus puts an exclamation point on the lesson with these startling words: “Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, **Thy sins are forgiven**” (Luke 7:47–48).

The ultimate lesson is *not* that notorious sinners end up loving more because they need more forgiveness. No! Great love for God is experienced when any sinner becomes acutely aware of the immense debt of cancelled sin. Our adoration for the Savior is proportional to our awareness of forgiven sin. To magnify the forgiveness of our sin is to magnify our Savior!

ACTS: THE CONQUEST OF THE GOSPEL

Conviction of Sin. What can better illustrate the gospel message of salvation than the conversion of Saul of Tarsus? The Lord’s inquisition of Saul on the road to Damascus is a striking illustration of a tortured conscience, which is often necessary to lead a man to Christ: “I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 26:14).

While it’s not a common idiom for us, Paul would have understood immediately. Goads (pricks) were an instrument used to force stubborn oxen and mules to obey the person driving a plow. Ox drivers carried poles with a sharp piece of iron affixed to the end. When the animal resisted his direction and kicked back, the ox driver extended the pole and the ox would drive his flesh into the sharpened iron goad. The instrument was used to forcefully guide and direct self-willed beasts. This is how the Lord convicted Paul of his obstinacy and pride. This struck Saul’s conscience with a blow he had never felt before. He was religious but not right with God. As James Stalker commented, “This image is the picture of a man wounded and tortured in conscience.”

EPISTLES: THE EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL PAR EXCELLENCE

Satanic Deception. There is hardly a clearer exposition in all Scripture illustrating why men can be so helplessly captivated in the clutches of the Devil than 2 Timothy 2:24–26.

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may **recover** themselves out of the **snare** of the devil, who are taken **captiv**e by him at his will.

When human sinfulness, even on the part of confessing Christians, becomes particularly vile and entrenched, such people are especially resistant to honest admission, repentance, and confession of their sin, all of which are prerequisite for forgiveness and restoration. The apostle Paul’s classic three-tier statement about Satanic deception explains why. The expression “that they may **recover** themselves” uses a word directly related to the use

of wine, and more particularly, the worst effects that wine can have upon a person. This means that Satan acts upon the soul and spirit of men like alcohol and narcotics act upon the mind and body of a man. Satan’s work brands conscience with a hot iron, making men unusually numb and insensitive.

The words “out of the **snare** of the devil” refer to the trigger stick that sets off an animal trap and drops a cage on them. It implies that sin can so thoroughly ensnare a person that he is completely powerless to set himself free, even though it is a snare from which God wants him to escape.

The words “who are taken **captiv**e by him at his will” is a military expression that suggests the way in which an enemy carries a person off as a prisoner of war. The person in sin is completely impotent to escape. He is handcuffed by Satan. Only the gracious intervention of God will avail to overpower the arch enemy. Even then, owing to human responsibility, the words “if God **peradventure** will give them repentance” indicate that their repentance is very tenuous and can’t be presumed. Be on guard, Christian!

REVELATION: THE CONSUMMATION OF THE GOSPEL

Christ’s Omniscience and Omnipresence. In Matthew 18:20 we are told, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I **in the midst** of them.” This is reiterated in the closing promise of the Great Commission: “Lo, I **am with you** always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:20). These great promises are vital to the church’s assurance and watchfulness. The messages to the seven churches of Revelation 2–3 illustrate this in probing and penetrating ways.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who **walketh in the midst** of the seven golden candlesticks; **I know thy works**, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Rev. 2:1–2).

The seven stars are symbolic representations for the pastors, and the seven golden candlesticks are the symbols for the individual churches. The imagery of the candlesticks derives from the golden menorah, the portable multibranch candelabra with seven oil lamps that continually burned within the Holy Place. The significance is that the churches must continually be sources of inextinguishable gospel light. The omniscience of Christ for all churches of all time is seen in the expression repeated to every church (“I know your works”). The omnipresence of Christ is seen in that He holds the stars (pastors) and stands directly in the middle of the light-bearing churches. Get it—Christ is the security and sustainer of its leaders, and He is standing central to the church. This means that a right vision of Christ must precede a right understanding of both pastors and the churches they shepherd.

Todd Nye has pastored in South Carolina and Ohio and has travelled for the last six years doing Bible conferences, evangelistic meetings, and church assessment and revitalization. He is currently seeking a full-time pastorate.

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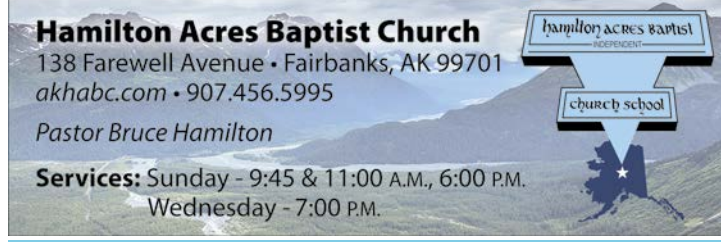


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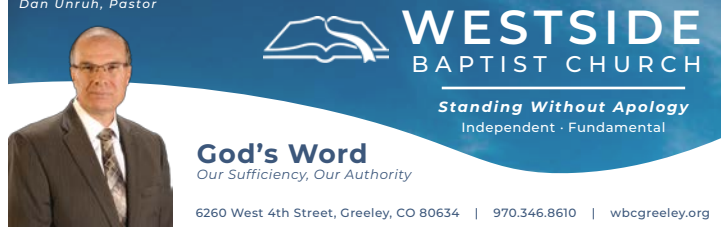
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March 11-12, 2024

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March 11-13, 2024

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News From All Over

The 2023 Torchbearer award was given to

Dr. Bud Steadman

at the 102nd FBFI Annual Fellowship at Faith Baptist Bible College, Ankeny, Iowa, on June 13, 2023, in appreciation for his strong scriptural leadership, his faithfulness to the fundamentals of the faith, and his personal sacrifice in contending for the faith.



Leland, working with Tony Facenda in assisting the Southeast region of FBFI, and consulting, pulpit supply and other ministry projects as the opportunity arises.



On Sunday, August 13, 2023, Tri-City Baptist of Westminster, CO, honored **Pastor Larry Robbins** for forty years of faithful ministry at Tri-City. He has served that congregation as an assistant pastor in various roles including choir director, senior adults' director, Sunday school superintendent, office administrator, and more. He also served as a City of Westminster police chaplain for over twenty years. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." The Tri-City church family is thankful for Pastor Larry's faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His people.



Dr. Michael L. Yarborough

retired from the pastoral ministry from Faith Baptist

Church in Delco, NC, on June 11, 2023, having served as pastor at Faith for the past twelve years. Mike views his retirement as an opportunity to transition from serving one local church to helping churches and ministry organizations as the need arises. He will be involved in Baptist Home Missions, helping a local church plant in nearby



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Are State Lotteries Good for the People?

Continued from page 19

greatest degree of success when designating lottery revenue for education.”¹¹ So, “lotteries thus come to resemble cigarettes; they constitute an entertaining (potentially addictive) sin that we regulate in somewhat ineffective fashion in order to enjoy the benefit of their continuing revenue.”¹² Let that comparison sink in. What if states hired tobacco companies to raise funds for public use? Imagine the uproar.

Why hasn't popular Christianity influenced a culture gone loony over the lottery? One author sees a significant societal parallel between the prominence of prosperity theology and playing the lottery. He wrote, “The gospel of health and wealth made ‘financial miracles an everyday prospect.’ The lottery represented an ideal avenue for everyday financial miracles.”¹³

In spite of highly touted claims of benefit, the lotteries are a pernicious evil perpetrated by governments on their citizens. Armed with this edition of

FrontLine magazine, why not start a conversation with your neighbors? Alert them to the ludicrous nature of the lottery. With compassionate fellow believers, reach out to those with gambling addictions. And while you are at it, write to your elected representatives to let them know what you think of the state lottery.

Gordon Dickson has served as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, since 1994.



¹ Lucy Dadayan, “Are States Betting on Sin? The Murky Future of State Taxation,” Tax Policy Center, Urban Institute & Brookings Institution, October 2019, accessed at https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101132/are_states_betting_on_sin-the_murky_future_of_state_taxation.pdf.

² Jonathan D. Cohen, *For a Dollar and a Dream* (Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition), 2.

³ Jonathan D. Cohen, “Lottery Is Robin Hood in Reverse,” *Commonwealth* magazine, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/gambling/lottery-is-robin-hood-in-reverse/>.

⁴ Colossians 3:5.

⁵ 1 Timothy 6:9–10.

⁶ Proverbs 13:11.

⁷ Tinashe Chingarande, et al., “State lotteries are increasingly ceding control to multinational firms,” Howard Center for Investigative Journalism: Philip Merrill College of Journalism (<https://cnsmaryland.org/2022/07/01/state-lotteries-are-increasingly-ceding-control-to-companies>).

⁸ Lauren Mowry, et al., “Scientific Games’ lottery playbook succeeded, then spread,” Associated Press, July 13, 2022 (<https://apnews.com/article/science-education-lotteries-arizona-california-1f76ec735d87c5aceda55f187e139330>).

⁹ Patrick Alan Pierce and Donald E. Miller, *Gambling Politics, State Government and the Business of Betting* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 56. The authors later include Southern Baptists and Mormons under their description of “fundamentalists.” They use the term more than eighty times in the book.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹³ Jonathan D. Cohen, “For a Dollar and a Dream” (p. 65), citing Tony Tian-Ren Lin, *Prosperity Gospel Latinos and Their American Dream*, 10–11.

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Is Socialism a Biblical Option?

Ever since Adam's fall the world has been broken in multiple ways. One of those ways is described in Genesis 3:17–19. These verses can be summarized by observing that, since the Fall, we live in a world of scarcity. Resources are fewer and harder to obtain than we might wish.

One effect of scarcity is poverty. Most people possess less than they desire. Some people have less than they need. Poverty results from scarcity, but it can be aggravated by factors such as indolence (Prov. 24:33–34), dissipation (Prov. 21:7), and even “bad luck” (Eccles. 9:11–12).

Nevertheless, poverty is not universal. Whether through dint of hard work (Prov. 10:4–5), ingenuity (Prov. 21:5), or “good luck,” some people enjoy more than they need. In a few cases they even possess much more.

The economic distance between the richest and poorest people is great. Socialism views this disparity as a form of injustice. Socialists believe that economic inequalities are necessarily the result of some people preying upon others, whether directly or indirectly. Consequently, they wish to eliminate both ends of the economic spectrum. In a socialist world, all people would contribute whatever they could toward the common good, and they would receive just what they need. Everyone would be guaranteed essentials such as food and lodging. No one would be permitted to amass wealth, since socialists believe that extra wealth is always accumulated at the expense of others.

WHERE SOCIALISM BEGINS . . . AND ENDS

Every socialist system begins by forcing those who have wealth to give it up. Since people do not usually relinquish their goods voluntarily, the threat of violence is necessary. The necessary threat of violence means that any widespread socialist system must be operated by the state. Indeed, in most socialist systems, the state must take over both natural resources and the means of production to secure what it calls “social justice” (i.e., economic equality). This system of state-sponsored expropriation and redistribution is euphemistically called a “planned economy.”

A planned or controlled economy has no room for free markets. Furthermore, if no one has capital (spendable wealth), then capital enterprise becomes impossible. Indeed, socialists see capitalism (free markets and capital enterprise) as a great evil. Since capitalism enables some people to become rich, then it is necessar-



ily an unjust system. Under socialism people are not supposed to invest their surplus because they are not supposed to have any surplus to begin with.

Socialism is necessarily a totalizing system. If the state controls the means of life through economic distribution, then it effectively controls all of life. Because economics touches every area of life, every area is brought under the purview of the socialist state. The socialist state cannot allow people to opt out

of the system. It will not allow people to criticize the system. Most importantly, it cannot allow perspectives and commitments that lead people to question the system. Socialism inevitably becomes tyranny.

FABIANS AND MARXISTS

There are some differences among socialists. For example, Fabian socialists want to introduce their principles gradually by modifying existing laws and governments, while hardline socialists such as Marxists tend to emphasize violent revolution as a necessary step in establishing a socialist society. The basic principles, however, remain the same, and these basic principles can be evaluated in the light of biblical teaching.

Granted, the Bible does not contain any systematic discussion of political economy. It does, however, have plenty of teaching that can and should be brought to bear upon political and economic questions. At the most elementary level, the Sinai Law recognizes and defends the right to private property. The Eighth Commandment is not about communal assets but about private possessions: “Thou shalt not steal” (Exod. 20:15). Likewise, the Tenth Commandment forbids coveting “any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Exod. 20:17). This commandment assumes that one’s neighbor owns private property by right.

This commandment is not teaching that we are wrong to wish that we had things that are like our neighbor’s. It is not teaching that we are wrong if we work hard to better our lot and to acquire such things. In fact, much of Scripture encourages that kind of industry. Rather, it is teaching that we must not allow our neighbor’s possessions to move us to envy. Like our neighbor, we are allowed to hire servants, marry spouses, purchase donkeys and oxen, and acquire any other sort of property. If we cannot afford to

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Standing in Service



“Stand here and hold this plate,” Daddy ordered.

My eight-year-old brain reacted in fear. Aaaaaahhhhhhhhh!

With an upward gaze, looking for his eyes through his protective face net, I appealed, “I’m afraid a bee will sting me.”

His calm response: “Well, bees can sense fear, so don’t be afraid.”

Striding down the flowered meadow, smoker in hand, he stopped at last in front of a tall, white hive and removed its square top. Puffy clouds from the smoker stunned the winged workers, temporarily rendering them inert.

Me? Way out of my comfort zone. Turn off my fear? No. Drop the plate and run? Better trust and obey my dad.

Too quickly, my towering, face-netted dad returned, with a frame of honeycomb—and some overzealous bees!

My legs felt floppy. Too late to run. Steady.

Chunks of honeycomb cut from the frame plopped onto the plate. Amber goodness oozed from the hexagonal cells and glistened in the sun.

Then a bee landed on my finger.

“Keep the plate still,” Daddy urged, piling on the last of the honeycomb.

“It’s stinging me!” I yelped. “Ow!”

Trust, obey, stand steady.

Daddy would scrape the stinger out.

I would have a swollen, aching finger.

And we’d all have honey with lunch.

Standing still—being at someone’s beck and call, by choice or not; patiently fulfilling assignments at great personal risk—these are concepts not always understood in our everyday lives.

As our Lord, and therefore the One who has the right to be in charge, God places

His children in service. The theme of service in 2 Kings 5 (the account of Naaman) includes servants named and unnamed, noble and ignoble.

Like Elijah before him, the prophet Elisha affirms whom he serves with the phrase, “before whom I stand” (v. 16).

First in that chapter is Syria’s leprous general serving his king. Then immediately afterwards—“And the Syrians had gone out . . . and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:2–3).

That little maid! Forcefully plucked from her own comfort zone. Without power, prestige, or her people. Still, she conducts herself in the tradition of Joseph and David of old. In service to the wife of the captain of the king’s host? At heart, she is really serving the Lord of Hosts. No bemoaning her status or deprivation; rather, she exhibits compassion for someone she could have hated. In a pagan society, she knows about Israel’s prophet, Elisha, and the power of the God before whom he stands. Her earnest words propel events that save the life of a distinguished warrior and show the power of her almighty God.

Unlike the little maid, I do not always recognize when God assigns me a fresh task. That grocery store line. That other driver. That customer service agent. That job. That nothing-makes-sense situation. That hospital room. That betrayal. That devastating loss.

Having that focus takes grace (James 4:6)—bowing before God in humility. It means no pride, no kicking against what He has allowed, no demanding what He has taken away, no believing the Deceiver’s

lies. It means refocusing on things “written aforetime . . . for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

God will help me as I—

- practice leaning on Him and His Word.
- patiently learn from His teaching.
- pass lessons of His Truth along to others.

This must be my mindset in the challenges that seem small. They are the preparation for the crushing, overwhelming, life-shattering crises.

Just as with holding the plate for my dad (and perhaps like the little maid), I am so often out of my comfort zone. My only option: keep trusting and obeying my Father. My life goal: pointing those in my path to His Son, Jesus Christ. My response to the stings that unleash fears in my heart? Believing that God offers His Spirit’s enabling power, love, and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). One day God will take away the effects of all those stings. And far sweeter than honey, that’s a result that will last for eternity.

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:10).

Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD (Ps. 27:14).

Priscilla Marsceau accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior as a young child. By His grace she aims to serve Him in the roles in which He has placed her as wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, niece, and neighbor. She feels especially privileged to be a part of Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, and looks for ways to serve her church family there.





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The English title (which comes from the Latin which comes from the Greek) designates “that which pertains to the Levites.” The Hebrew title, however, is “And He Called”—taken from the first phrase of the Hebrew text. Literally it reads, “And he called to Moses, and Yahweh spoke to Moses from the tabernacle of the congregation, saying. . . .” Like Exodus, Leviticus begins with what is known in Hebrew as a *waw* consecutive verb (“*And/Then* he called”). The very construction implies a sequence, signaling—like Exodus—the *continuation* of an integrated, ongoing narrative. (Note the progression from Exod. 40:1 to Exod. 40:33–34 to Lev. 1:1.) As R. K. Harrison notes, “The place Leviticus occupies in the [Pentateuch] exhibits the clear intention . . . to continue the narrative of the experiences at Sinai” (*Introduction to the OT*, 589).

But there is an intriguing larger arc pertaining to the expression “God called to Moses”: Exodus 3:4 (“*God called to Moses out of the midst of the bush*”), Exodus 19:3 (“*and the LORD called to Moses out of the mountain*”), Exodus 24:16 (“*and the glory of the LORD appeared on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud*”), Leviticus 1:1 (“*And the Lord called to Moses . . . out of the tabernacle*”). What do all of these have in common? In every case, the Lord is calling to Moses from a holy place sanctified by the glory of His presence—whether the Burning Bush, Mount Sinai, or the Tabernacle.

TIMEFRAME OF LEVITICUS

Leviticus picks up exactly where Exodus leaves off. Exodus ends exactly one year after Israel came out of Egypt (Exod. 40:17); everything recorded in Exodus (from the Exodus on, Exod. 12–40) happens in one year. The book ends with the construction of the tabernacle and its filling with the glory of God’s presence (vv. 34–35), but no sacrifices had yet been offered. Numbers begins exactly one year and one month after they came out of Egypt (Num. 1:1). So, everything in Leviticus happens in that *one month* between the end of Exodus and the beginning of Numbers. That’s not just an interesting historical datum; that’s important for understanding the few events that Leviticus records.

CONTENTS OF LEVITICUS

So, what *is* in Leviticus? Chapters 1–7 contain all the regulations regarding all the different sacrifices and offerings that would be required for the tabernacle, including the important regulation that the fire of the altar was never to be extinguished (6:12). Question: *Where would that fire come from?* Keep reading.

In Leviticus 8 Moses sanctifies Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, setting them apart to offer the commanded sacrifices and to function as the intermediaries between God and Israel. Chapters 8–9 include a running emphasis on Israel’s precise obedience to

all God has commanded (8:1, 4, 5, 9, 13, 17, 29, 36; 9:7, 10). All of these preparations relating to the worship of Israel’s holy God have been scrupulously laid out in detail by God Himself, and they’re doing everything exactly as the Lord commanded.

Again, the timeframe is important to note. After seven days of consecration for the priests, chapter 9 records the very first sacrifices offered in the newly constructed tabernacle, on the eighth day. In fact, it’s clear from 10:19 that everything that happens between 9:1 and 10:20 happens on that eighth day.

So, what happened on that first day of the first sacrifices to be offered by the first priests in the brand new tabernacle? “And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces” (9:24). “This heaven-born fire is the symbol of divine holiness” (Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 282) that God sent to consume the sacrifices on the altar, to signify His acceptance of them, and to sanctify the altar, the tabernacle, and this entire sacrificial arrangement as uniquely holy and His. This is the fire they are commanded to keep burning perpetually (6:12–13), because God is the origin and source of all worship that is acceptable to Him. The burnt offering signified the future fulfillment of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ as the only basis on which God will accept sinful man. It was a breathtaking display of God’s holy presence and acceptance.

When two of the consecrated priests “offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not,” then—in an eerie echo of 9:24—“there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them” so that “they died before the LORD” (10:2). The exact same five Hebrew words begin both 9:24 and 10:2! God sends fire to display His approval and acceptance of the sacrifice, but when Nadab and Abihu kindle their own fire to offer incense, God sends fire again to display His disapproval and judgment.

For seven days they do everything just “as the LORD commanded”; on the eighth day, in their very first act of worship as newly consecrated priests, they improvise, innovate, do something “which the LORD commanded them not.” The incense offering signified approach to God that is acceptable to God, because it is based on—you could say it is fueled by—His acceptance of the symbolic sacrifice of Christ. That’s the only basis of acceptable approach to God. We’re not free to innovate our own approach to God of our own devising.

What was wrong with what they did? There’s minimal explanation in the text. The term “strange” fire refers to fire of their own making, rather than the consecrated fire that fell from the Lord in 9:24. By using their own fire they were altering the God-given symbol of Christ and the gospel. Their motivation is unrevealed and, therefore, irrelevant; what the passage does indicate is that their action (1) was not what God commanded

Holy Worship, Holy Lives

(10:1), and (2) failed to sanctify God and the worship of God in the eyes of the people (10:3).

There's no indication that these were evil men, like Eli's sons. They simply took unauthorized liberties with God-directed worship. The text really isn't very clear about the nature of what they did or why. It could even have been an "innocent," inadvertent error on their part, such as Uzzah putting his hand out to steady the ark; these were the first tabernacle offerings, after all. If that strikes us as harsh or unfair, we have to understand that there are some things that are *worse* than death—such as desecrating the holiness of God. The worship of God is intended to be a joyful and glorious thing. But it is also a serious thing. The worship of a holy God must be a holy worship—divinely directed by God through the Scriptures. Worship of God that neglects to follow the word of God fails to reflect the holiness of God, and risks the rejection and even the anger of God. Even sincerity does not excuse unscriptural worship.

THEMES IN LEVITICUS

There's little argument that a central theme of Leviticus is *holiness*. The Hebrew root for "holiness" occurs 152 times in the book, in words such as "sanctify," "consecrate," "hallow," "holy," "holiness." The basic idea of this root is "separateness" or "distinctiveness." The related terms for "clean(ness)" and "unclean(ness)" occur another 230 times. Both terms encompass two basic ideas: (1) moral/ethical holiness as separation from sin (e.g., sexual sins); (2) ritual/ceremonial holiness as separation from designated defilements (e.g., unclean foods).

Regarding that second category, for example, it's clear that there is nothing morally or theologically evil about eating certain kinds of animals. When God prohibits Israel from eating certain foods, God does not say they are unclean absolutely, but that they are "unclean for *you*" (11:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 24, 28, 29, 31, 38) or "they are abhorrent to *you*" (11:10, 11, 12, 20, 23). God is calling them to be *distinct* from the surrounding nations, not only in terms of ethics and morality but even in terms of lifestyle (cf. 18:3–5, 24–30).

God's holiness is the basis for His expectation of the holiness of His people (11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8). God expects His people to reflect the character of the God who created and redeemed them. But that holiness is the result not merely of laws, but of sacrifices—perpetual reminders that we are *not* holy, nor can we *make* ourselves holy by obeying laws. Securing our standing before God requires the *continual* sacrifice of an innocent substitute.

APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The forward-looking christological significance of both the sacrifices (Lev. 1–10) and the feasts (Lev. 23) is unfolded in the New Testament. But the New Testament call to holiness is also rooted in Leviticus. Peter's explicit exhortation is a call to holistic distinctiveness that is rooted in the reality of your costly redemption (1 Pet.

1:13–21): "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1:15–16). That exhortation is grounded in Leviticus (11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7–8, 26).

The context of Leviticus 11:44–45 is a series of regulations regarding *not* moral purity or ethical integrity, but *diet*. The dietary regulations are not rooted in any inherent moral goodness or evil of certain creatures (otherwise we would not be free to eat all foods now); rather, they are a concrete expression of the holistic distinctiveness of God's people from all other nations, even in one of the most mundane, rudimentary, pervasive lifestyle activities of human existence—*eating*. The same command in Leviticus 19:2 comes in a context of obeying ("as obedient children," 1 Pet. 1:14) a series of regulations regarding respect for parental authority, keeping Sabbath, rejection of idolatry, humanitarian provision, and other expressions of counter-culturalism. A summary restatement occurs in Leviticus 20:7–8. The last occurrence of the command as stated is Leviticus 20:26, occurring again in immediate proximity to a dietary statute (v. 25).

Peter's focus on *holistic distinctiveness* is fleshed out in the rest of his letter by applications impacting very mundane, practical areas of life and relationships. Peter's application of the Leviticus theme corresponds to the book's two sections: (1) the sacrifices in Leviticus 1–10 find their fulfillment in the redemptive work of Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18–19); (2) the holy lifestyle of Leviticus 11–27 that grows out of that redemptive relationship finds its New Testament counterpart in Peter's quotation of the Leviticus call to holiness ("Be holy, for I am holy") as the Christian's mandate. The holiness laws in Leviticus—even those that are no longer in force for New Testament believers—still serve as paradigms of how God's holy character comes to bear on the big and small issues in the lives of His people in any era. The call to a holistic distinctiveness that reflects the divine character is a timeless calling.

Finally, Leviticus also includes linkages to the larger storyline of Scripture. A refrain in Leviticus maintains the connection with the larger emphases of both Exodus and Genesis: God's deliverance of His people from Egypt (11:45; 19:36; 22:32; 23:42; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13). And then there's a remarkable zoom forward all the way to Israel's captivity and beyond (Lev. 26:40–45), along with a promise of astonishing condescension that echoes throughout the Old Testament and into the New: "I will walk among you, and be your God, and ye shall be my people" (26:12). For that to be fully realized, however, will require a New Covenant—one of the unconditional promises of which is, I "will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:28). It is a New Covenant promise that Paul applies to us as well (2 Cor. 6:16).

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

Life Lessons from Lot

As I write this, we just finished the Annual FBFI Fellowship. The theme was on evangelism and discipleship. I would highly encourage you to go to the FBFI website at fbfiannualfellowship.org and listen to those messages. I personally felt it was some of the best preaching on the topic that I have heard. Sometimes when people preach on evangelism and discipleship, I go away feeling guilty. I went away from this conference inspired to go out and do it. Each of these preachers was actively practicing what he preached, which came out in their sermons. I have heard from many who attended who felt the same way I did.

As I contemplated the theme for an upcoming edition of *FrontLine*, “Redeeming the Culture,” I was struck by how much has changed in America over the past fifty years. I think if we had to decide who has impacted whom the most, we would have to say our culture has impacted the church more than the church has impacted our culture. In the Old Testament we see a Christian who was deeply affected by his culture. His name was Lot. Second Peter 2:8 tells us, “For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.” Lot is in sharp contrast to another believer, Abraham, who also lived at the same time in roughly the same area.

I hope we desire to impact those around us like Abraham did. But if you want to waste your Christian life, we see five easy ways to do that in the life of Lot.

FIVE EASY WAYS TO WASTE YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

Have wrong priorities (*Gen. 19:1*). Lot loved the things of this world and what

the world had to offer more than the things of God and what God had to offer. He is found in Genesis 19:1 in a place of honor, perhaps because Uncle Abraham had rescued the city. What was important to Lot? Possibly sports. He perhaps loved his favorite team—the Sodom Stingers—and never missed a game, especially when they played the Gomorrah Giants. His position in the community was important to him. Entertainment was probably important to him. Self was very important to him. Lot cared more about Lot than anyone or anything else in the world (vv. 19–20). Someone once said, “There is nothing that a man will not do to get his own way.” How often are we like Lot, filling our time with the things of this life and having no time for God? What does it take for you to skip your devotions, prayer time, or church?

Have wrong friends (vv. 4–11). Blend in with the wrong crowd. Desire to spend most of your time with the unsaved rather than the saved. Do everything you can to keep your coworkers, friends, and neighbors from knowing you are a Christian. Like Lot, you will find out that the world has no respect for a compromising Christian. Instead, we should be encouraging those around us to go to heaven with us. They should see Christ in us.

Totally neglect your family responsibilities (vv. 8, 14, 26, 31–38). Lot was a complete failure as a husband and father. What a difference between Abraham in Genesis 18:19 and Lot in Genesis 19. Lot probably never talked to his kids about God. He certainly never taught them to obey God. So when he warned his kids of God’s coming judgment, he seemed as one who mocked. He never developed a relationship with his wife that would cause her to follow him.

He never encouraged his wife to walk with God. It was just a topic they didn’t talk about much. The Bible is full of instructions regarding family relationships. Don’t waste your Christian life by having the same family life everyone else in the world has. Yours can be so much better.

Procrastinate in your obedience to God (vv. 16, 18). You waste your Christian life by putting off what you know God wants you to do. The Bible teaches that God is merciful, and it was a good thing for Lot that the Lord’s compassions were new that morning. What you put off today, you will probably put off tomorrow too. Someone once said, “The best time to do something worthwhile is between yesterday and tomorrow.”

Develop a callousness toward sin. Homosexuality was rampant in this city. Never take a casual attitude toward sin. Homosexuality is a sin. Sex before or outside of marriage is a sin. Drunkenness is a sin. These things are common and all around us today, so we must be careful not to become callous to them. When you start thinking “It’s not that bad,” you are heading toward a wasted Christian life. We must also be careful to separate sin from the sinner. Christ hated sin, but He was the friend of publicans and sinners.

Being a Christian is the greatest gift you have ever been given. Don’t waste it. If you have been or are starting down this path, it’s never too late to turn back. Our culture needs someone to care for them, not confirm them. May we be diligent in taking the Word to the World.

Jim Tillotson has served as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, since June 2015.





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Regional Report

NORCAL REGIONAL FBFI FELLOWSHIP REPORT

Dan Pelletier, Regional Coordinator

On Monday and Tuesday, April 24–25, 2023, the FBFI Northern California Fellowship met at Faith Baptist Church in Folsom, California. Pastor Ron Perry was our host. Around thirty pastors and laypeople were in attendance. The theme was “No Time for Lone Rangers” with 1 John 3:14 as our theme verse: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” The keynote speaker was FBFI President Dr. Kevin Schaal. Other workshops centered on the theme were presented by local pastors—David Innes, Ron Perry, Ben Smith, Brent Snow, and Kris Solberg. Two sessions for ladies were offered by Mrs. Jennifer Knauf and Mrs. Chris Pelletier. We had great food, wonderful fellowship, and everyone left encouraged to continue in the work of the Lord. Next year’s meeting is already in the works: “Creative Outreach” will be hosted by Campbell Bible Church and Pastor Geoff Stiekes. Evangelist Mike Redick will be the keynote speaker. If you’re in the area, we would love to have you join us!



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Is Socialism a Biblical Option?

Continued from page 26

acquire such things, however, envying our neighbor becomes the essence of greed.

The Bible teaches that it is wrong to love money (1 Tim. 6:10), and that love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. One need not have money to love money. A poor person who envies his wealthy neighbor is in the very throes of greed.

PRIVATE PROPERTY AND TAXATION

The New Testament also defends private property. For example, Ananias sold a possession, donated part of the money to the church, but then lied about what he had donated. In rebuking Ananias, Peter asked rhetorical questions: “Whiles it [the property] remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (Acts 5:4). These questions demand a “yes” answer. Peter was saying that Ananias had a right to his own property, and, when he sold the property, he had a right to dispose of the proceeds as he saw fit.

TO REPEAT, THE BIBLE STRONGLY ENDORSES AND DEFENDS THE NOTION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY. IT PLACES NO LIMIT ON THE AMOUNT OF PROPERTY THAT AN INDIVIDUAL MAY RIGHTLY OWN. IN THE BIBLE, WEALTH BY ITSELF IS NEVER VIEWED AS A PROBLEM. EVEN GREAT WEALTH MAY BE A BLESSING FROM GOD AND NOT A RESULT OF ANY LEVEL OF INJUSTICE.

Even governments do not have an unqualified right to expropriate private property. They do have a right to tax. When they exercise their right to tax lawfully, Christians are obligated to render “tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom” (Rom. 13:7). Words such as “tribute” and “custom” designate taxes, which are due to the state as a matter of right. Those libertarians who insist that all taxation is theft are biblically wrong.

Yet the state’s right to the property of its citizens is limited. When the state in the person of King Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard, he could not justly claim it (1 Kings 21:1–4). Queen Jezebel made the mistake of confusing raw power with legal authority (21:7) and hatched a plot to expropriate the vineyard. Her plot succeeded, but it was denounced by the Lord (21:17–29), and Jezebel eventually paid a heavy price for abusing state power (2 Kings 9:30–37).

To repeat, the Bible strongly endorses and defends the notion of private property. It places no limit on the amount of property that an individual may rightly own. In the Bible, wealth by itself is never viewed as a problem. Even great wealth may be a blessing from God and not a result of any level of injustice. God is the one who grants the power to gain wealth (Deut. 8:18). When God grants wealth to someone who is then able to enjoy it, that enjoyment is a gift of God (Eccles. 5:18–20), though wealth is a curse when the recipient is unable to enjoy it (6:1–2). Several of the heroes in the Old Testament were wealthy individuals. Job lost great wealth and then had it

restored by God. Abraham was rich enough to field a private army. Solomon was fantastically rich.

In the New Testament, the Wise Men chose to bestow a part of their wealth upon the Christ Child (Matt. 2:1–12). Also, the Gentile convert Lydia contradicts almost every tenet of socialism. Not only was she a woman of substance, but she made her wealth by serving as a link in the supply chain for the kind of luxury goods that the poor would never be able to afford (Acts 16:14–15). She was constantly engaged in capital enterprise and taking advantage of a free market. Yet far from rebuking her as unjust or exploitive, the Book of Acts holds her up as an exemplary Christian.

INVESTMENT AND CAPITAL ENTERPRISE

The significance of investment and capital enterprise is also recognized elsewhere in Scripture. When Ecclesiastes 11:2 says, “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth,” it is probably emphasizing the importance of diversified investments during uncertain markets. Certainly the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27) commends capital investment leading to increased wealth.

“Increased wealth” is a key notion. Socialism presumes that resources constitute a zero-sum game. If one person possesses more, then another person must possess less. In the Bible, however, God places humanity on earth to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). This fruitfulness includes not only human reproduction but also human production. Even in a post-Fall world people can alleviate scarcity and multiply resources through productive activity. We cannot rebuild Eden, but we can increase the total wealth of the world. By strangling human productivity, however, socialism always and everywhere increases scarcity. Even the poor in developed, capitalist countries are better off than ordinary people in socialist countries.

Most importantly, the Bible never holds inequality of condition (such as unequal distribution of wealth) to be an injustice in itself. Scripture does rebuke the wealthy who use their influence and power to deprive the poor of what little they have. The injustice, however, lies in the corrupt persons, and not in the disparity between riches and poverty.

The Bible does insist upon another kind of equality, though. Both rich and poor must be treated with equal dignity (James 2:8–9). They must also have equal standing before the law. God forbids a “preferential option” for either the poor or the rich (Lev. 19:15). Any authority who fails to judge both fairly is unjust (see Ps. 82).

In short, socialism fails to measure up to biblical teaching at almost every point. It must be dismissed as a flawed system and a bad idea. It is grounded upon a false notion of justice. It grows by inflaming envy. It rejects the biblical right of private property. Granted, capitalism can be abused, but the abuse lies with flawed capitalists. Socialism, however, is predicated upon abuses. The system itself constitutes a rejection of biblical morality.

Kevin T. Bauder is a research professor of theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.



The Sea in Perspective

My mind often drifts back to that day when the Lord taught me an important lesson. *As the Atlantic Ocean waves crashed over my head, I yelled to my two oldest children, who were waiting to enter the water, "It's not worth it! Do not come in! It's too rough!"*

We are the Spivey family, and we live in Key West, Florida. I have been married to Robert, a Navy Chaplain, for fifteen years, and we have a girl and two boys. In Key West we are surrounded by the beauty of constant sunshine, key lime everything, and coconuts falling to the ground just waiting to be picked up and drunk.

When we arrived at Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West in 2022, we found that the base had few resources and few people. However, from October through April—the vacation months in the Florida Keys—the population grows. On any given Sunday we will have as many as fifty people in a chapel service, but those fifty faces change every couple of weeks. Recruiting volunteers is a challenge. After all, who volunteers on vacation?

I try to help out as much as I can. When asked to start a ladies' Bible study, I happily agreed to do so. Then the music program at the chapel needed *anyone* who could play an instrument, so I became involved in that. There was no children's ministry; and we definitely needed that! So I lent my hand there. Then an invitation was given to help teach Financial Peace University. That was new for me, but I helped anyway.

These were only the things I wanted to do for others—certainly I could not neglect my own family! So I volunteered at our children's school while I made sure our oldest, Evelyn, made it to softball; and our

middle child, Ethan, made it to baseball; and our youngest, Elliot, to t-ball!

In my humanity, all this activity felt like Atlantic waves crashing over me. I was unable to catch a breath before the next wave hit. That is when God hit me with one of His own proverbial waves.

It was in the Atlantic that day when wave after wave came crashing down on my head. We were on *The Fury* (a pontoon boat) for one of our children's class field trips. We had been given the irresistible opportunity to explore the world's third-largest coral reef! I got into the water first. My children, still on the pontoon boat, were waiting to get into the water too.

That's when I told them the water was too rough and that it was not worth leaving the boat. But since I was already in the water, I wanted to look at the reef once more—so I put my face into the water. That's when I noticed it. The water beneath the waves was calm. Everything was still and quiet under the surface.

Jesus does not always stop our storms, but He can give us a new perspective. I have found that His presence is a place I can retreat. It is quiet even when my life is raging about me. This peace has often visited me in the form of this particular verse: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will





strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). On several occasions the trigger to refocus has come from the person who says, “That Bible study really helped me in my situation right

now. Thank you for offering this.” Or from someone else who says, “Thank you for taking the time to be here and help out.”

Everybody’s storms are different. My “storm” is nothing compared to others’ storms. I admit that some of these waves I

bring on myself, but some are placed in my life by Providence. Either way, God’s grace is always sufficient. When I quiet my spirit in His presence, He gives me the vision to see the beauty beneath the waves.

I do not expect the flurry of activity to stop here in Key West. There will always be a need—a ministry where I can lend a helping hand. But what I do not want is for my family to hear me say, “Do *not* come in! It’s too rough!” No, I want them to see the wonders that my Creator is doing in the lives of those around us. I want them to see the peace beneath the waves.

Sarah and Robert Spivey (FBFI Navy Chaplain) are currently stationed at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida. They’ve been married for sixteen years and have three children. Amidst her other activities, Sarah also works part time as a nurse.



Put God to the Test

Continued from page 11

through gambling? Return home and throw yourself upon the mercy of the Father, who delights in your repentance (Luke 15:13, 21–24). What are you to do if you have gained earnings through gambling at the expense of others? Work hard so that you have enough money to meet your own needs as well as money left over to meet the needs of others (Eph. 4:28).

Jesus warns us against becoming anxious about how God will provide for our needs (Matt. 6:31–33). God already knows what we need; and, as a good Father, He delights to provide (7:11). Our priority must be to seek to participate in what God is doing in the world and to align ourselves to His program—and then God promises to meet our needs.

God is faithful to provide through His ordained means for those who seek His priorities and invest themselves in providing for the needs of others.

So go ahead. Put God to the test.

Dr. Kristopher Endean is the dean of students and a professor at International Baptist



College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.

¹ Because of the way it consistently translates an important concept in this article, all Scripture quotations will cite the ESV.

² This is so much the case that a recent radio ad for our state’s lottery appeals to philanthropic ideals when the odds defy personal greed: “Arizona Lottery. When you play, Arizona wins.” Of course, if “winning” is measured by more than merely the financial bottom line, I am not sure that Arizona wins either.

³ Psalm 95:8–9 also explicitly cites this event, and it is probably one of the several “tests” in view in Numbers 14:22 and Hebrews 3:9.

⁴ Considering the prayer of Agur not to be too rich (Prov. 30:8–9), perhaps we must consider whether God loves us too much to let us win!

⁵ Interestingly, the Levites were the custodians of the Urim and Thummim *because* they valued the Word of God even above their own family members (Deut. 33:8–9; cf. Luke 14:26).

⁶ So also, although the tithe was specifically demanded under Mosaic Law and does not apply directly as a mandate for the New Testament believer, the example of proportional giving—often 10%—both before (Abraham and Jacob) and after (Paul) the Mosaic Law leads me to believe that a tithe is a good starting point for New Testament believers’ giving.

⁷ In addition to 1 Corinthians 8 and Philippians 4, see Deuteronomy 24:19; Psalm

37:25–26; Proverbs 11:24–25; 28:8; Ecclesiastes 11:1; Matthew 6:19–20, 31–33; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 8–11; Hebrews 6:10; 13:5.



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Faithful in Responsibilities

In Matthew 25 our Lord Jesus Christ taught a parable of talents. A parable is a human illustration that the Lord used to teach a spiritual truth. The whole thrust of this parable is to emphasize the importance of being responsible with what we are given. We read in verses 14–15, “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”

Notice that these three servants all received a different amount. Why? To illustrate that everyone must be dependable in the responsibilities given to him. From what I have studied, a talent equaled about one thousand dollars in our day. So the servant with five talents, or five thousand dollars, gained five more talents, or ten thousand dollars, for his master. The second servant with two talents likewise doubled the amount for his master. When the master returned from his journey, these two servants told him of the profit they had made for him with what was entrusted to their care. The master was pleased with what they had done. Look how he commended them in verses 21 and 23 (please note that the wording is almost identical in these two verses): “His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” Not only did the master commend his servants; he also promoted them to be rulers over many things.

We know that the Scriptures state in 1 Corinthians 4:2, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” We are to be faithful not only in financial matters but also in all things for our Lord. Why is this so important? I like the way Matthew Henry said it in his commentary on this passage. He wrote,

The stewards in Christ’s family must appoint what He hath appointed. They must not set their fellow servants to work for themselves. They must not require anything from them without their Master’s warrant. They must not feed them with the chaff of their own inventions, instead of the wholesome food of Christian doctrine and truth. They must teach what He hath commanded, and not the doctrines and commandments of men. They must be true to the interest of their Lord, and consult His honor. The ministers of Christ should make it their hearty and continual endeavor to approve themselves trustworthy: and when they have the testimony of a good conscience, and the approbation of their Master, they must slight the opinions and censures of their fellow servants.

This is applicable not only to those in full-time ministry but to all believers, regardless of their vocation. Whatever their occupation—farming, business, medicine, law—they are to be faithful in their responsibilities.

There is another profound truth in this parable we should not overlook. The Lord does not want us to compare ourselves with someone else who may be given more abilities, opportunities, and gifts

than us. Note what the apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:12: “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” If the Lord blesses, honors, or uses someone in a greater way than ourselves, we should rejoice in what the Lord is doing through them. We should never be jealous or envious of them. I like how R.C.H. Lenski stated it in his commentary on this passage:

The report of the second servant is exactly like that of the first. He hears exactly the same commendation and receives the very same reward of grace. Thus not the measure of the gifts in this life decides our station above, but the measure of our faithfulness in using whatever gifts we have. Some who have had few gifts but were altogether faithful in the use of those few will outshine others who were favored with many gifts, but were not fully faithful in administering the many gifts.

We all differ as servants of our Lord. One day we will each give an account to Him before the Judgment Seat of Christ. It will not matter how much you did, but how faithful you were with what He gave you to serve Him. Remember the admonition given in 1 Corinthians 4:2: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

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

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