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FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

The God of Beauty

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FRONTLINE

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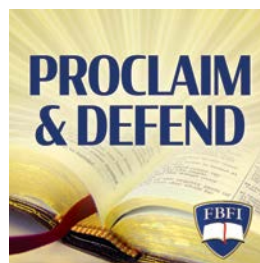


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Our sincere thanks to Mark Herbster for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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The God of Beauty

In his book *Till We Have Faces* C. S. Lewis said, “The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing to find the place where all the beauty came from.” For the Christian there is an internal awareness and an external acknowledgment that all the beauty one experiences in the world reflects the beauty of the one and only transcendent God! This recognition will undoubtedly elicit a response in the affections and will be the ultimate foundation of worship that adorns God accurately. Believers are to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron. 16:29; Pss. 29:2; 96:9)!

The intention of this issue of *FrontLine* magazine is to focus the minds and hearts of the readers on the beauty of God. This reflection on His beauty must not be simply an intellectual activity. The theology of God’s beauty needs to motivate practical decisions of discernment in the aesthetic arena as well as generate significant commitment to God’s command to “approve things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:10). The acceptance by many Christians of inappropriateness and even ugliness in the arts and worship is a direct result of either an ignorance of or a disregard for God in His beauty.

The subject of God’s beauty could never be fully handled even in volumes of books, but these articles may set you on a journey to know and apply God’s beauty in a more real and practical way. The articles are meant to challenge the reader in a philosophical and spiritual way. David de Bruyn begins this issue by defining the beauty of God. Joel Arnold follows with a biblical theology approach, showing how the beauty of

God is manifested through the story and themes of the Bible. Throughout church history God’s beauty has been an ongoing theme of serious discussion; David de Bruyn articulates well this progress of thought and theology. A common debate, even among conservative theologians, is the question of the subjectivity of beauty. Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Scott Aniol does a masterful job of answering this question.

The final four articles in this issue are purposefully focused on the practical application of God’s beauty. How does the beauty of God affect our worship? Doug Bachorik addresses the issues of worship and music in his article. How does the beauty of God influence those who are involved in the creative arts? Jonathan Johnson, a pastor who is also an artist, communicates many helpful thoughts and principles for musicians and artists in his article. Michael Riley gives a strong challenge to all believers to develop their senses so that they can approve and appreciate things that are truly beautiful. The final article by Kevin Schaal is a simple application of God’s beauty to a Christian’s identity in Christ.

In the foreword to Jonathan King’s book *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer says, “The point of focusing on the beauty of the Lord is to inspire readers to live fittingly at all times and places as followers of Jesus, to the glory of God.” Living in the reality of God’s beauty is what it means to be like Him and to be “changed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Mark Herbster

The Meaning of Beauty

For centuries, man has tried to understand the *idea* of beauty. When and why is something beautiful? He has also pondered the *experience* of beauty: why and how does beauty affect us when we encounter it?

Defining beauty or the beautiful is no easy task. Hundreds of attempts have been made, and no single definition has satisfied everyone.

Why don't Christians agree on beauty, especially since we all submit to the Word as our final authority? The question of beauty among Christians faces additional hurdles. One is that beauty is often discussed by philosophers, and some Christians frown upon philosophy. For them, if the idea of beauty seems more colored by the philosophizing of intellectuals than informed by clear biblical theology, they look upon the whole discussion with some suspicion.

To be sure, there are differences between the Bible's treatment of beauty and philosophy's.

First, even though the Bible uses the word "beauty" and many synonyms for it, Scripture never discusses beauty the way philosophers do. The Bible has no chapter on aesthetics or on the concept of beauty.

Second, the Bible has similar, but not identical, ideas to those of philosophy when speaking of beauty. Biblically, "beauty" or "glory" means something like "pleasure," "desire," "loveliness," "attractiveness," "splendor," "honor," or "weighty splendor." For a philosopher, "beauty" means something like "harmony," "pleasure," or "goodness."

So what to do? Is beauty a philosophical idea of little interest to believers? The answer is that philosophy and theology are friends that do not need reconciliation. They need only to be placed in their proper order.

Biblical revelation is always the key for understanding anything about the world. We must not begin with philosophy or even nature and then reason our way to God and His world. We must begin with God and His revealed truth. God's Word sets the terms to understand the idea of beauty. With that in place, we can allow philosophy to contribute to the discussion, because philosophy is trying to answer questions about reality, including beauty. Philosophers have given us three kinds of theories of beauty: classical, transcendental, subjective; and theologians have added their own. We'll summarize the three philosophical theories before giving priority to the theological theories, since God's Word must be our final authority on beauty.

CLASSICAL THEORIES

The classical theory of beauty originated with Pythagoras and was developed by Plato and later by Platonists. Here, beauty

is essentially *proportion*: the harmony of parts to a whole. Beauty is symmetry between composite parts or elegant relationships between parts that combine to make a unified, whole form. It can be an object (such as a beautiful building), or musical harmony, or mathematical elegance, but ultimately beauty is explained by the human desire for order, patterns, symmetry, unity, and equality.

TRANSCENDENTAL THEORIES

“Transcendentals” simply refers to realities that *transcend* our physical, material world. You might also call them “ultimate values.” The most popular triad of transcendentals is “truth, goodness, and beauty.” According to these theories of beauty, beauty is some kind of truth or goodness. Beauty is the truth about the world radiating out, or some kind of goodness: moral goodness, or physical excellence, or appropriateness. If something is true or good, then it is beautiful for being so.

SUBJECTIVE THEORIES

Subjective theories of beauty define beauty as the *experience* within a person. In other words, beauty is the pleasure we feel when experiencing certain objects or events. Of course, that raises the question: what are those things in the objects or events outside of the observer that provoke the response of pleasure? Those who hold to subjective theories do not necessarily deny that objects or ideas can have real qualities that a person may experience as beautiful. Rather, their claim is that beauty is ultimately a person’s *response* to these qualities, not something that exists entirely independently of people.

THEOLOGICAL THEORIES

Theological theories take God Himself as the foundation of beauty or as the ultimate form of it. In these definitions beauty is either an attribute of God or a way of speaking of God’s being or relationships. These take a few forms.

One is to define beauty as “being,” or existence: reality itself. Understanding beauty as “being” and God’s existence as the foundation of all reality makes beauty equivalent to God’s existence. God is beauty.

A second theological theory is that beauty is the glory of God. Beauty is the nature, character and will of God displayed and shared with His creatures.

A third form of theological definition of beauty focuses on the Trinity: seeing in the unity and harmony of persons in the Godhead the ultimate form of harmony and symmetry, especially in the love of the Persons for one another.

All of this presents us with a bewildering array of options. How do we decide between these competing theories of beauty? As Christians, we would firstly say that we cannot be satisfied with a definition of beauty independent of God. Beauty must be defined in relation to God. Beauty cannot be some standard that God meets; the very standard must be set by God’s perfection. For that reason, Scripture must define beauty in nature and art, not the other way around. With Scripture as our final judge, and the intellectual and Christian tradition to draw on, we can suggest a definition which seems to draw from the four sources, while prioritizing Scripture.

JONATHAN EDWARDS’ THEORY

Jonathan Edwards’ (1703–58) theory is perhaps still unrivaled both in its biblical loyalty and in its philosophical elegance. Edwards managed to draw the first three philosophical theories into his theological definition. He defined beauty as “being’s cordial consent to being in general.” That is a mouthful and requires some explanation. When referring to “being,” Edwards is referring to God’s being or existence.

In one sense, God’s perfect being is precisely what finite human beings can never know: it is His transcendent holiness, the Name that only He knows. This might be the ultimate form of God’s beauty, but it is inaccessible to us: “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). Only God can know God in this way.

When Edwards speaks of “consent,” he means it in the sense of loving union. In God, this “consent” is God’s own love within the Trinity. God is beautiful in a way known only to Him, but this knowledge of Himself within the Trinity results in a love that graciously communicates and shares. This radiant beauty is glory: the radiance of all God is made known by grace. We could define beauty as God’s essence lovingly and graciously irradiated. God is beautiful for those qualities in Himself that merit His love, and He is beautiful because He loves those qualities.

God’s loving sharing of Himself is the pattern for all forms of created beauty. The symmetry and harmony of beauty in the world is a picture of God’s delighted harmony in Himself. The pleasurable variety or surprising diversity in a scene, a musical composition, or a mathematical theory simply echoes the infinite God beholding Himself, communicating this in the Son, and reciprocal delight proceeding in the Spirit.

This can lead us to some conclusions about the meaning of beauty and our experience of beauty.

First, an object, idea or event is beautiful if it reminds us of God, reflects God, or illustrates God. God in His triune glory is the ultimate form of beauty; therefore, all created forms of beauty are beautiful to the degree that they remind us of God. Their excellence, symmetry, integrity, clarity, appropriateness, and consistency are signs and shadows of what God Himself is. Their truthfulness, purity, goodness, justice, and nobility display the glory of God (Ps. 19:1; Phil. 4:8).

Second, inner beauty is necessary to recognize external beauty. It is possible for someone to find God and His ways ugly. That response, however, is not a reflection on God but on the person exhibiting it. We would say that a kind of ugliness has deformed the heart so that such a person loves what God hates and hates what God loves. Minds that love goodness and truth will find delight in God. Those with good hearts do not love what is ugly. Everything in the world that is truly beautiful simply reflects the excellence of God’s being, and “beautiful” minds will love that beauty. When a person finds pleasure in God’s beauty, that pleasure and desire *is* his or her spiritual beauty. We become beautiful by loving what is beautiful. This is why Paul prays for growth in recognition of what is beautiful (Phil. 1:9–10).

Our chosen definition will likely not end the debate. But it can supply a firm starting point for Christians who, like the psalmist, desire “to behold the beauty of the LORD” (Ps. 27:4).

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The Most Beautiful Story

A traveller once visited the workshop of a renowned weaver only to be disappointed by a chaotic, messy tapestry on the loom. “Is there a problem with this piece?” he asked. “None,” the weaver answered and continued her work. “What, then, am I misunderstanding?” he continued. “Everything,” she answered. Frustrated, he paced to the other side of her workshop, only to discover on turning around that he had been looking at the back of the tapestry. The other side validated her reputation as the most skilled of artisans.

Scripture also contains challenging passages. The beauty of the storyline is not always obvious. But closer consideration reveals that the storyline of Scripture is not only a beautiful tapestry, but it is also constantly concerned with the topic of beauty. God is the inventor of beauty, and He speaks of it often.

CREATION

Unsurprisingly, we first encounter beauty at Creation. Summarizing each day of Creation, God surveys His handiwork and declares that “it was good.” God is the first and consummate artist. He fills the skies with intricate galaxies spread so far that no eyes but His will ever enjoy them all. He fills the prairies with tapestries finer than anything Solomon ever wore (Matt. 6:29). Beauty is built into the fabric of the world, an ever-present testimony to the artist. The

product of His labor is good because He is good.

Why did God choose to create in the first place? Because He wanted to! He enjoyed His artistry. And notice how effortlessly the original artist works! He merely speaks, and His masterworks come into being. This, then, helps us think about our own work. We cannot help but admire His artistry, and so we build zoos, parks, telescopes, and entire academic disciplines so that we can see more. Each new encounter with what God made brings fresh wonder, and our emotions instinctively confirm His evaluation. “Yes,” we agree in spite of ourselves, “it is good!” The choice to aesthetically engage is a bold affirmation that God made a good world and that the pursuit of beauty is a worthy endeavor. That’s because, made in His image, we also want to create beautiful things. Our efforts point back as a distant reflection to the first Maker. We never create as effortlessly as He did, nor are the outcomes nearly as beautiful. We are only creatures, after all. And worse still, our appreciation of beauty was marred by the great treachery, the day we chose sin over God.

SIN, THE FIRST MONSTROSITY

Adam’s sin introduced guilt, struggle, pain, and death into the world; it also introduced horridness. In the beginning, Satan was exquisitely designed, as were all the angels (Ezek. 28:12–15), but sin transformed him into a hideous monster (Rev.

12:9). So, also, all creation is infected by sin’s taint.

CREATING UNDER GOD’S TUTELAGE

And yet, people went on creating. The chronicle of technology and culture in Genesis 4 includes a passing reference to Jubal—“the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.” Humans will not only create tools for survival; they are inescapably artistic. Predictably, they used their God-given artistic powers for evil. Nowhere is this clearer than the perverse worship of false religion, from the sexually grotesque Canaanite religions to Aaron’s calf. These mockeries of the true pursue art in their own way—hideously and corrosively. Everyone has an aesthetic—rebels practice their art in angry protest.

But God chose to share His life-giving creativity with man. After God called out Israel as His people, He redirected their creativity—“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing” for the purpose of bowing down or worshipping it (Exod. 20:4–5). He followed this with detailed blueprints for the tabernacle (Exod. 25–31).

Why require such intricacy from a semi-nomadic nation in the middle of a desert? Why give so many details when we cannot enjoy the beauty directly? Why repeat the description twice (chs. 35–40)!? Because God, the Great Artist, cares about beauty, particularly when linked to



worship. The priests' robes are made "for glory and for beauty" (Exod. 28:2, 40). God ordained intricate "performance art"—imagery embedded in a cycle of feasts, complex sacrifices, and the Passover—as powerful visual messages. And He called humanity to participate in this work. Bezaleel's wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and workmanship came from the Spirit of God (Exod. 31:1–6; 35:31) as did Solomon's (1 Kings 6–7). Always, God's wisdom stands behind the process (1 Kings 5:7, 12; 8:15, 20, 66; 10:24).

GOD, THE CONSUMMATE WRITER

The continuing story is everywhere perfumed with divine beauty. The Historical Books teach us how the master storyteller is also the Lord of history and orchestrates His story in space and time. The Psalms extol the perfection of beauty in Zion out of which "God hath shined" (50:2). The writer of Psalm 27 has only one desire—"that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD." The Wisdom Books contrast the phony decadence of the prostitute with the pristine beauty of Lady Wisdom. Scripture illustrates beauty both in what it says and how it says it. When God speaks, His words are not merely functional. He writes with beauty and grace that sparkle across the millennia. His artistry shines in alphabetic poetry (Ps. 119), descriptive grandeur (Job 28), and masterful literary twists that delight and amuse (Num.

22–24; Esther), like "apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11).

THE BEAUTY OF THE CROSS

The climax of the story is Jesus, the paradigm of beauty. It's notable that He chose to take flesh not as eagle or lion—majestic though they be—but as man. Where human dignity was tainted in Adam, Christ restores pure and unsullied goodness.

Yet somehow the righteous One is beaten, broken, torn—until there remains "no beauty that we should desire him." We turn away our faces in shame and horror (Isa. 53:2–3). We cannot look at Him.

But if Eden and eternity show us aesthetic perfection, is the cross a climax of horror or beauty? Likely, the answer is both. The world sees the cross and scorns; for Paul it is reason to glory (Gal. 6:14). Christ has become to us "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). Horror turns to victory so that even the feet of gospel messengers are beautiful (Rom. 10:15). The cross transforms unwanted things and unwanted people into resplendent beauty. So, also, a church made up of "base things of the world, and things which are despised" becomes a beautiful temple to God's Spirit—superior to the best handiwork of Bezaleel or Hiram. We are Christ's body, united with Christ as our Head. Ultimately, we are Christ's bride, breathtakingly pure and opulent, like the New Jerusalem itself.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

The story ends as it began—with a beautiful paradise—but this time it is filled with people—a city. The New Jerusalem is an artistic masterpiece, an exquisite setting for the centerpiece—the glory of God and the Lamb. John describes the throne room as a shimmering kaleidoscope of colors, sounds, and creatures in harmonic praise before the throne (Rev. 4). God, the Master Designer, incorporates image bearers directly into the design, granting us a direct role in the joy of seeing, knowing, and worshipping Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

CONCLUSION

Aesthetics is hardly ancillary to the biblical story nor to human flourishing. Our quest and love for beauty reflect the One who made us. The biblical pattern of worship consistently shows both God's awareness of aesthetics and His high concern that our artistic choices correspond with His nature. If God shows such repeated concern not only with truth and ethics, but also with what is beautiful, can we do any less?

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The Story of Beauty in Church History

Most Christians throughout church history would have been puzzled by the phrase “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” For most believers for 1600 years, beauty was a real, objective quality, existing in God first, and then found in the created world.

Our era is the exception when it comes to beliefs about beauty. Only with a growing rejection of objective truth and objective good and evil in the last two hundred years did it become common to hear that beauty is nothing more than a “personal preference.”

How did the church at large come to embrace similar views? Wouldn't Christians defend the notion of beauty, since it is tied to the concept of the glory of God? To trace the winding tale of beauty in church history, we must begin before the church began.

THE EARLY CHURCH (AD 33-325)

Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Hebrew religion all flowed together to influence the nature of the early church. The Hebrews were a practical people and did not write theories of truth, goodness, and beauty. Beauty is more of an adjective than a noun in Hebrew thought. Greek philosophy, however, took theoretical philosophy to new heights. Plato adopted Pythagoras' view that beauty is order, measure, proportion, consonance, and harmony. Aristotle both accepted and modified Plato's view, focusing more on actual, particular beautiful things. He saw beauty as having the properties of order, size, and proportion. This is known as the classical theory of beauty.

This philosophical thinking about beauty was now part of the intellectual atmosphere of the early church. The Greek New Testament contains at least nine words associated with beauty, and the concept is clearly seen in texts such as Philippians 1:9–11 and 4:8.

For the most part, there was no controversy over beauty in the first three centuries of the church's life. Writers such as Justin Martyr (AD 100–165), Irenaeus

(130–200), Origen (185–254), Hilary of Poitiers (315–367), Basil the Great (330–379), and Gregory of Nyssa (330–395) wrote often on the vision of God and the perfection of beauty.

POST-NICENE AND MEDIEVAL CHURCH

Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo, is unquestionably the most influential theological and philosophical figure of the first millennium AD. His own struggles with sensuality made the topics of desire, love, and beauty of particular importance to him. Sadly, Augustine’s specific work on beauty has been lost, but he spoke clearly on beauty in several of his surviving works. Augustine echoed Plato when he wrote that beauty is a matter of ratio. In a beautiful object, beauty is the relations of the parts to each other and the whole.

Augustine made it clear that beauty is real and exists apart from the observer, and has an “objective” existence: “If I were to ask first whether things are beautiful because they give pleasure, or give pleasure because they are beautiful, I have no doubt that I will be given the answer that they give pleasure because they are beautiful” (*De Vera Religione*, XXXII, 59).

Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 500) continued the ideas of Christian Platonism. He saw a ladder of participation in the beauty, or light, of God, from the lowest creation, all the way up to God Himself.

Using the ideas of Plato, but more especially those of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas (1224–74) produced the closest thing to a developed theory of beauty in the Middle Ages. Aquinas expanded upon the classical theory. For Aquinas, beauty is comprised of three criteria: *integrity* (perfection of form), *clarity* (the splendor of proportioned form) and *harmony* (harmony of proportioned form). Aquinas saw beauty as having a real, objective existence.

Lesser known than Aquinas, the Italian Franciscan theologian Bonaventure (1221–74) likewise upheld Platonic ideas about beauty.

Perhaps what is most remarkable about the first 1500 years of Christian history is

how little the idea of beauty is questioned. Early and Medieval Christians believed truth, goodness, and beauty were real and objective.

THE REFORMATION PERIOD (1517–1648)

The Protestant Reformation did not take aim at beauty. Martin Luther’s love of music is well known, but he was primarily concerned with the relationship of faith and works, and so wrote no theology of beauty. John Calvin had more to say. He wrote that the contemplation of God’s beauty on the great stage of nature is a performance that absorbs the whole of creation. Reformation theology promoted the idea that all humans, not merely the clergy, have a calling that must be performed to the glory of God. This teaching arguably contributed to one of the greatest blooms of beauty in music, art, and poetry that would come to flower in the fifteenth-through-eighteenth centuries.

EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT AND PURITAN PERIODS (1648–1800)

The Enlightenment period saw a shift away from classical ideas about beauty. René Descartes (1596–1650), excited by Isaac Newton’s successes in science, believed that beauty in music could be reduced to mathematical ratios. Denis Diderot (1713–84) taught that observers judge things to be beautiful for utilitarian reasons: the beautiful thing nearly perfectly fulfills its role. Joseph Addison (1672–1719) located beauty within the human psyche, as did Thomas Hobbes. David Hume (1711–76) took subjectivism to its logical end. He taught that an emotion (such as pleasure in beauty) did

not correspond to anything outside the human’s mind. It could not be judged as true or false, right or wrong.

All this push towards beauty as merely an experience within human psychology meant the conversation about beauty moved away from a discussion of harmony, proportion, or unity and towards the idea of *taste*.

A lone bulwark against the Enlightenment drift was Jonathan Edwards (1703–58). Edwards’ view of beauty was fundamental to much of his theology. Edwards regarded God’s beauty as His most distinguishing attribute. In Edwards’ thinking, the usual concepts of beauty, such as symmetry and harmony, were really to be understood only as symbolic of a higher kind of harmony: that of persons. Edwards put forward the relatedness of the three Persons in the Godhead as the essence of primary beauty. The Trinity is the foundation of ultimate unity, equality, and harmony. Edwards managed to draw from several theories of beauty and harmonize them by modifying them all. He also managed to challenge the growing idea that beauty was merely “subjective.”

THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The discussion of beauty after 1750 took a decidedly secular turn. After Edwards, the vocabulary of beauty in Christianity falls nearly silent until the twentieth century. The church offered little resistance to a tidal wave of secular theories of knowledge, morality, and beauty.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) taught that the experience of beauty has nothing

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OUR ERA IS THE EXCEPTION WHEN IT COMES TO BELIEFS ABOUT BEAUTY. ONLY WITH A GROWING REJECTION OF OBJECTIVE TRUTH AND OBJECTIVE GOOD AND EVIL IN THE LAST TWO HUNDRED YEARS DID IT BECOME COMMON TO HEAR THAT BEAUTY IS NOTHING MORE THAN A “PERSONAL PREFERENCE.”

Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?

One of the last short stories C. S. Lewis wrote was called “Light.” In the story a man named Robin, who was born blind, has recently had his sight restored through surgery. Robin finds himself quite disappointed with his restored sight, however, because he really wants to see that thing called “light” that he has heard so much about; and yet, while his wife and others insist that light is all around him, he can’t *see* light. Weeks of being able to see but not being able to see light leads Robin to despair. Of course, Robin’s problem, and even the problem of his wife and others who could not manage to help him, was that light is not something we *see*; light is something *by which we see*.

Lewis’s story illustrates well how we often approach the subject of beauty. In our modern day beauty is something we look *at*; it is a subject we talk *about*; it is something in which we take pleasure; and, therefore, beauty is ultimately subjective.

However, as with light in Lewis’s story, beauty is not merely something to think *about*, to look *at*, and to simply *delight in*, but rather, beauty is what we come to know God and His world *through*. Or, to put it another way, beauty is not simply a category that stands separate from truth and goodness; rather, beauty is the means

through which we come to really know what is true and good.

For this reason, beauty must be objective.

THE BEAUTY OF GOD

Belief in absolute truth, goodness, and beauty is rooted in a conviction that all things come from God (Rom. 11:36). Everything that is true is so because God is Truth. Everything that is good is so because God is Good. And everything that is beautiful is so because God is Beauty. There are no such things as brute facts apart from God; they are facts because God determined them to be so. There are no such things as moral standards that are merely conceived out of convention; actions are moral or immoral because of objective standards of God’s morality. And in the same way, beauty is not in the eye of the beholder; something is beautiful when it reflects God, who is Beauty (Ps. 27:4; Zech. 9:17).

God is absolute Beauty, but this is not something simply to acknowledge; rather, Scripture commands us to *delight* in God’s beauty (Ps. 37:4). The qualities inherent in God’s nature are worthy of pleasure: they must be delighted in. Another way of saying this is that it is not pleasure in God that makes Him beautiful; it is objective qualities of God’s beauty that require delight in

Him. These qualities in God are absolute standards of beauty.

THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

The beauty of God then extends to what He has made: creation is God’s revelation, revealing His glory and His handiwork (Ps. 19:1). God created the heavens and the earth, but after He created the material universe, “the earth was without form, and void” (Gen. 1:1–2). Yet in the six days of creation, the Holy Spirit of God brought order to the cosmos—He fit the materials of the universe together in such a way that they exhibited the orderliness of God. This orderliness is reflected in the Greek term *cosmos*, which the Greek translation of the Old Testament uses to characterize the finished work of creation (Gen. 2:1; cf. Acts 17:24). God created the *cosmos*, an ordered arrangement of heaven and earth such that creation displayed His own orderliness. This is why God declares His creation “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The Hebrew word implies more than just moral goodness; the term embodies the idea of aesthetic beauty and harmony. Creation is beautiful because it reflects the order and harmony of God Himself.

Further, God calls certain manmade creations “beautiful” as well. For example, in prescribing how He wants the priestly

garments made, God says, “And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty” (Exod. 28:2). God gifted Bezaleel and Aholiab with the skills necessary to craft the tabernacle and its elements with skill and beauty (Exod. 36:1–2). These human creations may be considered beautiful inasmuch as they possess qualities that reflect the beauty of God Himself.

THE BEAUTY OF SCRIPTURE

Yet Scripture not only *describes* objective beauty, Scripture itself *is* beautiful. God’s Word is more than a collection of brute theological statements. Instead, God’s revelation of truth and goodness comes to us in various aesthetic forms—such as narratives, poetry, and oratory—that employ diverse aesthetic language. These aesthetic forms are essential since God’s Word is exactly what He inspired to communicate his truth and moral standards. When Scripture describes God by using metaphors such as “king,” “shepherd,” and “fortress,” these are not simply decorative; we come to know God more fully by seeing Him *through* those metaphors. Scripture communicates God’s truth with order and harmony—beauty—such that God’s truth is rightly imparted to the hearts and minds of His people.

To put it another way—truth, goodness, and beauty are three strands of a single cord that cannot be separated if we desire to truly know God and His world. I am afraid that many Christians do not recognize this, evidenced by the fact that many Christians are hesitant to affirm and

defend absolute beauty in the same way we defend absolute truth and morality. We have bought into the secular ideas that argue that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that art is merely the neutral expression of a given civilization. We view beauty as something to *see* rather than something *by which we see*.

LOOKING THROUGH

This concept of beauty being that which we come to know truth *through* is encapsulated in the word “aesthetics,” a term that finds its roots in the Greek word *aisthanomai*, which means, “I perceive, feel, sense.” Aesthetics involves *how* ideas are expressed, which affects perception. Every way in which we encounter truth shapes the way we perceive the truth. Like rose-colored glasses, aesthetic form is the lens through which we perceive truth, and the “color” of the lens affects our perception of the truth.

As Christians, we ought to strive to perceive God’s world as God does, seeking to discern and approve of harmony and order that reflects God’s own beauty. And true beauty—the beauty of Scripture and other manmade expressions—helps to form that kind of discernment within us. Paul prays for this very kind of discernment in Philippians 1:9–11:

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that

ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

What Paul prays for here is a love characterized by full knowledge of God and His Word. Christian love is not in the eye of the beholder; it is not love for whatever I happen to consider lovely. No, Christian love is delighting in that those things that *are* lovely. God commands us to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The term “good” there is the same term used in the Greek translation of “good” in Genesis 1, a word that embodies the ideas of harmony and order. Likewise, Paul commands us to “think on” those things that are objectively lovely and *worthy* of our delight (Phil. 4:8). Each of these passages necessitate affirming objective standards for beauty. We are called to test all things and then delight in those things that are worthy of delight based on how they compare to the objective qualities of order and harmony inherent to God’s nature and manifested in His creation.

This is made clear by the second term Paul uses to describe Christian love in Philippians 1:9—“judgment,” a translation of the Greek word *aisthanomai*, from which we get the English word “aesthetics.” Judgment is the ability to perceive true order and harmony in the world as compared to God’s beauty. It is the biblical virtue of wisdom,

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Beauty in Our Worship

Twenty-one years ago I was horseback riding in Baguio City, a mile above sea level in the Philippines. The group rode through a rather poor neighborhood, which was a bit shocking to my senses (my family had moved to the country just a couple of months earlier). At that time, most Filipinos lived below the poverty line. People worked daily just to buy their food and other necessities.¹ And yet, outside of many homes that could hardly stand against the frequent typhoons were varieties of potted plants. I saw brightly colored posters advertising Chinese print shops and Tanduay rum. Beauty is important to people, even in difficult circumstances. But what does beauty bring to our worship of God?

New Testament writers present worship as coming from the whole life of each Christian. We are made to worship God; a primary goal of our worship services is

to become more like Jesus. Music is a tool to achieve that goal, and beauty in music strengthens the power of music. Beauty in musical worship is a tool for spiritual beauty in our lives. Whoa—how did I get here?

THE THREE A'S

First, let's make sure we agree on what worship is. It is a vast topic, discussed in every part of the Bible, but D. A. Carson presents a useful summary: "Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so." And I humbly offer the Bachorik definition—worship is glorifying God by a combination of *Action* (the act of giving something to God), *Attitude* (right thinking about God and myself), and *Affection* (genuine love and enjoyment of God).

In previous dispensations, the three A's of worship were expressed primarily

through the sacrificial system and religious practices. New Testament writers present worship as an everyday affair. Rather than priestly music, clockwork-like observances, and perfectly prepared food offerings, we worship God by becoming more like Him. Matthew 5:13–16; Acts 9; 1 Peter 2:11–12; Romans 15:1–6; and 1 Corinthians 6:18–20 all make clear that our good works, godly living, and right attitudes make God look better in the eyes of other Christians and unbelievers.² In Titus, such growing godliness helps people see that God's Word is true and that it "adorn[s] [beautifies] the doctrine of God our Saviour."

Congregational music can encourage growing Christlikeness. First Corinthians 14 and Colossians 3 make clear that we sing to edify and that very action is worship: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." We sing to make ourselves more Christlike, whether singing songs of exhortation, correction, theology, or praise. And as we do that, we glorify God. As the Body (the local church) becomes more beautiful, the Head (Christ) is beautified in the eyes of the beholders.³

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MUSIC IS A TOOL TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL, AND BEAUTY IN MUSIC STRENGTHENS THE POWER OF MUSIC. BEAUTY IN MUSICAL WORSHIP IS A TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL BEAUTY IN OUR LIVES.

But what does musical *beauty* have to do with this? You may be tempted to think that I forgot the topic of this *FrontLine* issue! Psalm 96 highlights the importance of beauty to our understanding of God. Notice the beauty-related terms: “Declare his glory . . . his wonders . . . Honour and majesty . . . strength and beauty.” And then the Awful, humbling, and joyful command: “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” When God’s people worship the Lord in beauty, we say to unbelievers that “the LORD reigneth: . . . he shall judge the people righteously.” Why is beauty included in this? Because truth is declared not only by the content of the words but by the vehicle that carries those words.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VEHICLE

Have you noticed how, in a holiday parade, the beauty queen of a local county fair rides in a very expensive convertible, or classic car that has been meticulously restored? The sweetness of the vehicle makes a statement about the lady riding in it. Beauty in music helps reveal the beauty of God described in the lyrics, and it strengthens the impact of those words on believers.

Let’s briefly consider a few aspects of beauty to see what each brings to musical worship and makes us more like Jesus.

First, beauty is transcendent. It takes us beyond ourselves. Do you remember seeing or hearing something so lovely that it stopped you in your tracks and brought you out of place and time? Beauty does that to us. In worship it can cause us to get our eyes off ourselves and the distractions of the fallen world around us. Beauty makes our senses work for us instead of leading us astray.

Beautiful things include the familiar, the recognizable, and the accessible. A level of repetition in art draws our attention and gives us something to grasp. Beauty encourages openness to the truths in the songs we sing or listen to in music worship.

Beautiful things also include an element of variety, something surprising. This helps

keep our attention from wandering. In worship, beauty helps us remain focused.

Beauty is not the ultimate goal. Beauty is never just for the sake of beauty. In worship, beauty and music are not the ends. Beauty should point us to an object greater than itself. “Art for art’s sake” is not a biblical principle. This is hard for a musician to admit, but the scriptural depictions of beautiful music show it bringing about a result. In worship, beauty contributes to the shaping of godly lives.

Lastly, beautiful things contain nothing that harms us. The artistic creations of fallen creatures sometimes include harmful components. Photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe gained notoriety in the late 1980s due to the homosexual content of some of his work. His photos were justly recognized as remarkable photographic art, but we cannot describe it as beautiful because of the moral harm it encouraged. Artistic creation can approach beauty but not reach it when it harms its audience through the actual content or the thoughts and emotions it evokes.

On the contrary, true beauty improves us in some way, if only temporarily. Beauty in our musical worship can encourage spiritual growth that changes how we live.⁴ The absence of beauty can promote the opposite.

BEYOND YOURSELF

Beauty is a powerful tool. It takes you beyond yourself and gives you hope. Beyond yourself, because you are faced with something extraordinary, opening your eyes to your own smallness and failings; hope because it makes you long for something better. When we experience beauty in worship, it touches the strings of our entire being, and we vibrate sympathetically to the stroke of the divine Hand.

In Psalm 45:11 we see the longing of the Lord for beauty in His people: “So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.” If we worship God correctly, we change. Beauty in our church music, empowered by the Holy Spirit, helps augment our loveliness in the

Lord’s eyes as we become more like our precious Savior. When we strive to instill a glimmer of God’s beauty into our musical worship, our lives and churches will more completely give the Lord the glory due His name (Ps. 96:8).

Douglas Bachorik, PhD (Durham University), founded and directed the music program of Bob Jones Memorial Bible College (Philippines). He now chairs the music department at Maranatha Baptist University (USA).



¹ A significant portion of the population still lives in such conditions.

² It should go without saying that God is good regardless of how we make Him look. Our good or bad worship does not change God, but it changes the image of God people hold in their minds.

³ For a more complete discussion of the use of music for edification, please view my sessions at the Worship Conference 2022 (<https://www.theworshipconference.org/session-recordings1.html>) or a recent general assembly I presented at Maranatha Baptist University (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISQ7t-WC7Tg&ab_channel=MBU-ChapelLiveStreams).

⁴ Although I am extolling the importance of beauty in musical worship, we should note that there is nothing mystical or magical about the power of beauty in art. Outside of Christian content and context, its benefits are real but not necessarily spiritual or long-lasting. For proof of this, we need only look at the many religious institutions that have abandoned the Bible while maintaining excellent musical programs or to the history of Nazi Germany, where a land filled with the music of some of the greatest composers of all time spawned the terrible philosophies that led to the Holocaust. In the comments for Voces8’s 2019 performance of *The Deer’s Cry* (Arvo Pärt, composer), numerous viewers mentioned the power of the performance. One viewer reflected, “This is the rare piece of Christian music that I enjoy because of its religious nature rather than in spite of it. The feelings of love and fear and yearning strung across this sparse composition . . . elucidate the Christian notion of ‘faith’ more than any sermon or readings I’ve heard in thirty-two years. While I don’t expect I’ll ever be a religious person, I’m grateful for this window of insight and compassion.” How sad that the beauty of the music and presentation took him far but not far enough. Beauty is a powerful tool, but it is not enough. I suspect that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and a receptive, desirous heart, the negative influences of certain kinds of music may be more potent than the positive influences of other kinds. It is always easier to push something downhill than uphill.



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Beauty by Design

How are Christians to create beauty in their works? How can beauty become a practical goal for Christians in their worship and in their work? A brief reminder from the Exodus story helps us set off in the right direction for finding grounded answers to these lofty questions.

BEAUTY—COMMISSIONED BY THE CREATOR

When Moses went up to meet the Lord for forty days atop Mt. Sinai (Exod. 24), the first order of business was the collection of precious gifts for the creation of beautiful instruments of worship (Exod. 25–31). Here we read of a call for items that would be made “for glory and for beauty” (28:2, 40). Glory (*kābôd*) and beauty (*tiphēreth*) were meant as aims for the garments being described and for their use in worship reflective of God’s own glory and beauty (1 Chron. 16:29). But these aims weren’t merely ideas. The command of God was for *things*—buildings, tapestry, jewelry, clothing, and more—to *be* glorious, and *be* beautiful. In other words, to *make* glorious, beautiful *things*.

God selected artisans to put these divine aims into concrete works of artistry. Men such as Bezaleel,

Aholiab, and other “wise-hearted” crafters (31:1–6) were given wisdom by God (31:6) and “filled . . . with the Spirit of God” (31:3) to produce all these beautiful works for worship. From architecture to embroidery, sculptures to clothes, these artisans would have the same Spirit who was active in Creation (Gen. 1:2, et al.) guiding them in their creations.

Many observations from this story can aid and inspire Christian artists of any sort. I will make two, the first relating to God’s approval and the second relating to human endeavor in achieving God’s aims. These observations are followed by some practical advice, from one Christian artist to others, on how to pursue beauty in our work for the Lord.

TWO ENCOURAGEMENTS FROM EXODUS

First, we see in this story God’s pleasure in His people’s works of creativity. While the plan was modelled by God after a heavenly pattern (cf. Exod. 25:9; Heb. 8:5), the execution was left in the hands of human workers. God’s approval extended to all sorts of creativity. Not only were there abstract, geometric patterns in the colorful fabrics, jewelry, and metal-working, but there were also figurative works, including angels, animals, plants, and fruits. Besides the so-called fine arts of sculpting and carving, there were

the equally important arts of carpentry, metal-casting, dyeing, sewing, and more. Beyond these set-pieces of the tabernacle, the priests and people were engaged in the dramatic artistry of singing and playing music with instruments and songs that had to be produced and performed.

God condemned idolatrous artistry in many instances (e.g., Exod. 20:4; 32). Such condemnation was in reference to idolatrous worship, not a blanket condemnation of all art, as the story of the brazen serpent clarifies (Num. 21, then 2 Kings 18:4). The tabernacle and temple alike serve as examples of creativity used to worship the Lord with glory and beauty. Christians still must avoid idolatry as well as any other use for art that is displeasing to God. But, clearly, the Bible contains instances of God's people serving God with their creative works.

Second, we see in the story encouragement that God accepts our human efforts—where they follow His commands—to serve Him with creative works. Engaging both mind (“wisdom,” “understanding,” “knowledge,” “devise,” etc.) and body (“work,” “make,” “cutting,” “carving,” etc.), God called the whole person to the task. Work done for the Lord, including works of artistic creativity, demands intellectual and physical skill. Our biblical example goes against the idea popular in some cultures of an artist's being totally free of all care and thought. While the exercise of our God-given imagination involves freedom and our craft involves exploration, an honest artist will admit that purposeful effort goes into his works. This aspect of artist endeavor is echoed in the Exodus story.

It is noteworthy that God accepts such works of our hands when they are done in accordance with His will. Our Lord taught us that we must worship God in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24) and that our inner attitude and belief is the source of God's pleasure with our adoration. But the “fruit” of such inner devotion can produce works of praise and adoration that are seen and heard (Heb. 13:15–16). Yet, sometimes, what we produce—what we say, sing, paint, design—falls short of the high hopes of

our heart. Every creative worker knows the feeling of finishing a good work yet wishing it could be better. At some point, we must put down the brush, play the last note, arrange the last flower, and leave it be, hoping that it accomplishes its purpose. I find encouragement in knowing that God entrusted His pattern and plan into the frail hands of human artists and accepted the works which they did on His behalf. The artists of Exodus remind Christian artists that God can be pleased with these labors of love, done according to His standards for His service.

But wait—why mention “standards” in creative works to serve God? Isn't creativity a “free-for-all” arena where “anything goes” if it is done in the name of Art? No, it is not. Successful art, Christian or otherwise, is never without standards, skill, and discipline. Thinking otherwise is a romantic fantasy. Further, the popular idea of a wild artistic genius, unrestrained by cares of mere mortals, is also a fantasy. Yes, creative people think (and sometimes act) differently than those who are not, but this has never meant they cannot operate without discipline. Not only is it true that a prophet's spirit was under his control, but we can also say that an artist does not lose his mind—or accountability—when he creates. Christian artists have an additional requirement in their creativity: to serve and please God according to His rules, not theirs alone. Creativity is not an excuse to shirk the standards of expectations God has for our works or to trade the world's use of beauty for God's.

But how do we seek to display beauty for God's sake, according to God's standards? Here are a few practical tips I can offer as an artist, aesthetic philosopher, and pastor. Two are general artistic truths and three are specifically for Christian artists.

GOD SELECTED ARTISANS TO PUT THESE DIVINE AIMS INTO CONCRETE WORKS OF ARTISTRY.

BEAUTY—SIMPLE AND DEEP

First, what do we mean by “beauty” in the arts? At its simplest, beauty is a quality in a thing or experience that is aesthetically pleasing or correct. It is exactly as it ought to be, fulfilling or exceeding the expectation of our discerning senses. We can say it of a sunset, a person, a song, an animal, and many other things. Ecclesiastes 3:11 explains that God created a world of beautiful experiences and put into our hearts the capacity to experience them as beautiful. Beauty carries tremendous weight and significance to our hearts and minds; formal beauty can convey significance of content or expression that speaks to us with a resonance that echoes with ourselves as spiritual and physical beings. So, at its simplest, creating something beautiful is creating something that is formally fitting—it is ‘just right’ and delights us as it appears to our senses. When matched with a message of significance, it can be powerfully moving.

FORM AND CONTENT—THE MEDIUM AND THE MESSAGE

As we saw in the Exodus story and as we see throughout our daily lives, works of art are often a blending of an idea, emotion, or expression with the physical, material, or sensible. The classic way to refer to these two sides of the artistic coin is *form* and *content*. “Form” is the tangible, audible, viewable—the work itself, while “content” is the message it communicates or expresses. Sometimes form is the focus, as in pure designs and abstractions; sometimes content comes to the fore, as in prose or speech. Most often, the arts are a blending of the two. For works of great beauty, our effort is often directed to both the sensible form and the content it communicates or expresses. When a message is being conveyed in creative media, attention must

be given to the quality of the idea as well as that of the medium in which it is communicated. In seeking to create beauty in works of artistry and design, keep in mind the general need to harmonize form and content, medium and message.

APPROPRIATENESS—BEAUTY THAT IS FITTING AND BEFITTING

Spiritually, the Bible exhorts us to live a life that *fits* the character of a Christian and that is “becoming,” or worthy of, the name of Christ. Artistically, we have a similar connection and principle: form should match content, and the medium should match the message. Further, a work of art should be appropriate to the occasion, end, or use. We know it is inappropriate to giggle at a funeral or wail at a wedding. We can use that same discernment to decide what is appropriate for a work of art. Is the message solemn and sobering? Let the form be as well. Is it cheerful and glad? Let the medium express that. Some of our sense of the appropriate is intuitive, but it is also essential to know where artistic styles and mediums originate and what they mean—just because you might not be aware of the context of a style or medium doesn’t mean others aren’t aware. Educate yourself in what formal styles and genres are and where they come from to help decide if they are appropriate vessels for a Christian message.

AUTHENTICITY—BEAUTY THAT IS SKILLFUL AND SINCERE

King David was recognized for his ability in music (1 Sam.16:16–18), and the Psalms testify to his spiritual devotion. He was a godly artist who wedded formal beauty with beauty of message. Even further, our reading of Psalms 23 and 51 give us a deep sense of David’s life experience. Such songs resonate not only in their appropriateness but also in their authenticity—they are not mock-messages, play-acting, or posturing imitations. These were heartfelt works born out of sincerity. As Christian artists, we should be humble and self-critical, asking ourselves if our skill is honed for the task at hand. If not, we should work on our skill. We should likewise ask ourselves if we are merely aping or mimicking a custom, craft, or culture that we don’t actually understand or haven’t inhabited. I have ministered overseas for a third of my life,

yet I tread carefully when using artistic forms that are not of my home culture. It can be done, but good artistry seeks to be authentic in skill and sincerity. As Christians, we add to this carefulness the question of whether the artform can authentically express Christian values and messages. Again, we must educate ourselves. Just because something catches your ear or your eye does not mean you can or should do it yourself.

ACCEPTABLE—BEAUTY THAT IS HOLY AND HARMLESS

As Christian creators, we must labor for our works to be acceptable to the Lord and to those we serve. Romans 14:7 says, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” We do not simply make public works of art and design for ourselves (cf. Rom. 14:8). I say “public” because, of course, there will be hours of private practice for the Christian creative; but as we bring our works to a watching world, we take up the responsibility of representing the Lord—not just our personal pleasures. I must add that even in the studio, in the privacy of our workshops, we strive to please the Lord. Educating ourselves in the arts is not an excuse to expose ourselves to what displeases the Lord (see Ezek. 8:12). If you have the worldly expectation that an artist is free from the rules that govern the rest of society, you must reject this false notion. First Corinthians 10:31 includes works of art. We are called to be holy, harmless, blameless—even in works of art. A sign of Christian maturity is to move beyond “What am I allowed to do by God?” and to move on to “What ought I to do for God?” As a Christian creative, look for ways that you can serve God, not just yourself, with your God-given creativity. In ways that please the Lord, create works of beauty and glory that will bring honor to our beautiful, glorious Lord.

Dr. Jonathan Johnson lives and ministers in Hong Kong, China, with his wife, Catherine, and his three children. Jonathan pastors Island Baptist Church on Hong Kong Island, an international, English-speaking church with members and attendees from over a dozen nations and many different ethnicities.



Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?

Continued from page 11

the capacity to take all of the knowledge about God and His world that we glean from Scripture and creation and then discern what is truly beautiful—what *fits* with the order and harmony of God.

The cultivation of knowledge *and* judgment ought to be the aim of all Christian sanctification. Many Christians accumulate a lot of knowledge, but relatively few truly have the ability to perceive how that knowledge fits together harmoniously so that, as Paul continues in Philippians 1:10, we “may approve things that are excellent.” Biblical judgment is the ability to approve what is truly excellent as compared to the objective standard of God’s beauty.

This is why Christians *need* beauty. The aesthetic elements of Scripture, of creation, and of worship are not simply value-added; they exist not merely to make the acquisition of knowledge more engaging or interesting. Aesthetic elements in the Christian life are fundamentally *moral*, because they help *form* wisdom within us. Beauty *is* harmony and order, and so when we immerse ourselves in beauty—in works of art that manifest profound order in God’s world as He has intended, our moral perceptions are sanctified to be able to discern harmony in the created order. True beauty helps us to form lenses through which we are better able to perceive the beauty of God and His sovereign will in His world.

Objective beauty is an essential part of our Christian sanctification since it is what forms within us true love in all knowledge and in all judgment. And the ultimate purpose of delighting in God’s beauty is that our love for Christ might “abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that [we] may approve things that are excellent; that [we] may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

Scott Aniol, PhD, is executive vice president and editor-in-chief of G3 Ministries and professor of Pastoral Theology at Grace Bible Theological Seminary.





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Mailbag

In one of the 2024 training manuals for the men of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, we want to consider reprinting an abridgment of Pastor Minnick's two articles in *FrontLine* magazine in May/June and July/August issues on "The Distinctiveness of Preaching." Could we have reprint permission? (We would get Pastor Minnick's agreement after your approval.)

Steven Frakes
Greenville, SC

Thank you for another timely, necessary, and accurately addressed theme, "The Gender Controversy." Also I always appreciate the synopsis of the themes on p. 3.

In the "First Responder" business, specifically EMS, I encounter the spectrum of gender identifications. There are those that find my presence revolting because they know I represent Jesus Christ. And it is actually Him that they are rejecting because they are convicted of the sinful choices they make against their Creator. There have been times though, in their low times, when they will actually engage in a meaningful (vs. mean) conversation. Two instances stand out, one quite simple and the other more profound.

The first was a female with a masculine haircut. After our conversation she touched my shoulder in an appreciative way, for my help

getting their ambulance ready and for being present at 0500 (5 a.m.). The other was of an unidentifiable gender in appearance. I gave this EMT a kind greeting and asked, "Is there anything I can do for you?" The response startled me. She (by her voice) stated that her grandmother has just died and that she could really use a hug. As I was already standing out of respect in a professional conversation, in an instant she hugged me before I could react otherwise! (Note, I only hug my wife, mom, and daughters.) I responded with my best appropriate assuring hand on her back shoulder. The comfort she sought was real but only momentary (amen). I was able to quickly give her a gospel tract and share with her John 3:16 and 2 Cor. 1:3.

Glenn Booth
Pensacola, FL

I am a regular reader of *FrontLine* and Proclaim and Defend [proclaimanddefend.org]. While I have some differences with the FBFI, I am grateful for your stand for biblical separatism and intentionality about cultivating God-honoring ministries and churches.

In reading Don Johnson's blog, I noticed he made reference some years ago to the 2008 FBFI meeting held at Bethel Baptist Church of Sellersville, PA. Unfortunately, these sermons are no longer available at the BBC web-

site. Is there a way I can request them from the FBFI directly? I am not sure how far back the audio archives go on P&D. Any help you could give here would be most [appreciated] as I seek to think through issues of fellowship, separation, and fundamentalism in order to "learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:[10, NASB]).

David Alves
Dallas, TX

I really enjoyed the May/June 2023 issue of *FrontLine*! A timely issue. Dr. Doug Brown's article on "Preparing for Life's Final Transition" was particularly helpful. May I make copies of this article for my mom and two sisters?

Thank you for publishing a classy and enriching periodical!

Mike Keller
Orem, UT

We would like to request permission to use the article "The Doctrine of the Local Church (Ecclesiology) and Biblical Separation" by Larry Oats (Nov/Dec 2020 *FrontLine* magazine) in our "Church Matters" mini-course for incoming freshman (available to all students) to understand key topics on the matter of the local church and their responsibilities in this area as students.

Timothy Hughes
Executive Assistant to Alan Benson
Greenville, SC

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SOUND WORDS

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

FIRST PARTAKER

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

The Unique Role of a Pastor’s Preaching

This is the third article in a series that began with the question, Do we well to relinquish preaching?

It’s the question being raised across the country because of a contemporary trend to replace at least one of our traditional preaching services with smaller, interactive gatherings, especially small-group Bible studies or discipleship fellowships.

This series wholeheartedly advocates such smaller gatherings. In our church we have a weekly ladies’ cottage prayer meeting, six Bible study groups for women that meet at least once a month, a group of men who join for breakfast and fellowship on Friday mornings, another group of men who meet weekly to read Christian books, teen girls who meet in a home weekly for catechizing and fellowship, monthly meetings of women who are married to seminarians, and monthly meetings of both undergraduate and graduate men training for the ministry. The helpfulness of groups like these for teaching, discipling, and fellowship is not in question. At times in church history, they’ve been catalytic to outbreaks of revival. The only question being addressed in this series is whether they ought to be a substitute for traditional preaching services.

I’ve suggested that our answer is grounded, to a considerable degree, in what we perceive preaching to be. There are two generalities about which everyone agrees. The first is that preaching is the speaking of a single individual alone. The second is that everyone else only listens; no one other than the speaker is contributing

verbally in any way (apart from an occasional *Amen*). The communication is solely one way. Preaching is recognizably distinctive for being entirely a monologue. About this, everyone’s perception is the same.

Perceptions are now diverging, however, over whether or not this arrangement could be improved upon—merely by *supplementing* preaching with small gatherings, but even by *substituting* them for it. The previous two articles urged that before we do this it would be prudent to give renewed and prayerful consideration to what Scripture reveals about the uniqueness of preaching. When we do, we’re confronted with an inarguable fact: preaching is a deliberately heightened and enabled form of communicating truth, not by the pastor’s choice but by God’s.

That it is God’s choice is most conspicuously displayed in the two generalities above that distinguish preaching. But ironically, they can seem to some to be the very reasons for sometimes substituting something of our choice. A popularly read contemporary work describes Sunday preaching services as the church “program” or even an “event tactic.” It contrasts these unfavorably with the real work of the ministry, referring to them as maintaining “programs” or holding “events,” rather than “training disciples.”

Actually, however, it is preaching, with its two distinguishing factors (just one man speaking to people who are listeners only) that contributes immensely to God’s own discipling. He’s discipling everyone, lost or saved, in a fundamental truth: when it comes to voicing His words, He alone is the ultimate Speaker. The preaching circumstance displays this unmistakably. Multiple voices are not weighing in on the text. No one other than the preacher is contributing in any way. Everyone else *listens*.

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In the preaching circumstance, one Voice is speaking in the way that is the least distracted by anything human. There is just one man. And God has uniquely set him apart from his brothers and sisters in the congregation. He has been solemnly appointed and uniquely endowed to communicate for the great “I AM” (*holy and awesome is His name*, Psalm 111:9, NASB). For their part, the people are required to hear that designated spokesman, in that place, at that hour, just as they would hear and submit to God Himself. (*Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*, Acts 10:33.)

I trust that this does not sound overstated. If it does, then this certainly is a critical hour, and we are in great need of recovering what Scripture teaches regarding preaching. *Preaching is not merely the speaking of a man. If it is, then it is certainly not worth coming to church for. Preaching, if it is of the right kind, is the voice of God* (James Stalker, *The Preacher and His Models*).

Contrary to contemporary suggestions, it is not group discussion that is most suited to giving the Word of God *free course* (2 Thess. 3:1). The Word of God runs and is glorified through *the dividing asunder of soul and spirit* and the exposing of the actual, naked *thoughts and intents* of many hearts (Heb. 4:12). It is the preaching circumstance in which God generally does this most frequently and most effectually. In great part, this is because *the great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher are to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men* (Cotton Mather, *Student and Preacher*).

When the people’s hearts are confronted, not with each other’s experiences and contributions (no matter how helpful), but with the assertion of the *throne and dominion of God* through just one Spirit-empowered voice, what are the thoughts of their hearts then? Do they doubt? Do they debate? Do they withhold decision? Or are they quiet and contrite? Do they yield?

What God desires is clear as daylight: *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word* (Isa. 66:2). *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise* (Ps. 51:17).

But how are the people to be brought to this? God uses means. One of the foremost is the preaching circumstance, which compels them to be only listeners. That, by God’s design, divides the crowd. Read and study 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 prayerfully. You will see this Divine purpose—the dividing of the crowd—and the way in which God uses *preaching* (not just its content, but this very form of communicating it) to accomplish that end.

Even some who may have listened repeatedly will not continue to endure it. *The strongest feelings of a proud nature are brought into constant play against our*

unwelcome tale (Charles Bridges). “Who can stand to be addressed regularly in this way by a mere man?” they protest. “It is insufferable.” “Find other teachers,” the flesh suggests. *After their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears* (2 Tim. 4:3).

But it is then that the very nature of the preaching arrangement is used by God to rescue them from their pride, “*Listen to this man!*” it urges. “He is not speaking out of himself. He is God’s herald, *rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). “*Hear his preaching, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Do we apprehend sufficiently that those who submit to this Divine arrangement gain something absolutely essential for being transformed by the Word? They gain meekness. Meekness is nonnegotiable if we are to be disciplined by God Himself. *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way* (Ps. 25:9). One of the wonderful fruits of preaching is that it disciplines men and women in this humility, so that they become more and more *like Jesus, meek, loving, lowly, mild* (Horatius Bonar).

No other means of communicating, discussing, or teaching God’s Word has such a Divinely designed advantage. Done rightly, it constrains men and women to kneel at the foot of His Throne with submissive hearts. And then it proclaims to them, again and again and again, that for the trembling and contrite it is truly *the throne of grace* (Heb. 4:16). I believe this is confirmed by the fact that most of the important decisions we’ve made about following Christ and yielding to His will have occurred under the powerful persuasion of strongly applicational preaching.

Do we well, then, to relinquish that Divinely designed circumstance—with all of its purposed authority, dignity, and power—for something else?

BUT ISN’T TEACHING ALMOST THE SAME THING?

This is a very important question. Its significance to the larger question at hand cannot be underestimated. The first two articles took it up and responded with additional, more specific factors about preaching that explain why it is something distinctive, even from Spirit-filled teaching.

The answer begins with the word the Holy Spirit employs when He speaks of a man doing what we call *preaching*. He uses the word that referred to a *herald* (2 Tim. 4:2, et al.). I can’t refresh the significance of that now, but if you’re uncertain of it, I’d encourage your looking up the first article (or far better, looking up the Scripture’s usages of the word for yourself).

When you look at those passages you discover that biblical heralding (preaching), like teaching, instructs about Bible content. But it is distinguished from mere teaching by the fact that it instructs with a huge *plus*. It's that huge plus that turns preaching into something more. That *plus* consists of several components.

The first distinctive component of preaching is its insistent applicational character. This is particularly conspicuous when a preacher makes use of the confrontational triad of reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. Preachers have no choice about this. They are solemnly charged to do these things (2 Tim. 4:1-2). To be sure, other church leaders may do so on occasion; but it is the preacher (herald) who must do so consistently *in season and out of season*.

Of course, the preacher must do this kind of applying with great love for people (Eph. 4:15), and *as a father doth his children* (1 Thess. 2:11). If his spirit is right, he will often feel grieved, like a father, to have to administer it. In his *Diary and Life* the esteemed nineteenth-century Scottish pastor Andrew Bonar cautioned, *A man is never safe in rebuking another if it does not cost him something to have to do it.* When a preacher does this, there is another component that distinguishes what he is doing from that of a mere teacher.

The second distinctive component of preaching is its personalized application. It's not left in the abstract. Although he doesn't single out individuals, he has *categories* of individuals always in view (the unrepentant, the sorely tried, the despairing, the dull of hearing, etc.). To repeat a quotation from John Owen cited in the last article, *We are not to fight uncertainly, as men beating the air, nor shoot an arrow at random, without a certain scope and design.*

Although a teacher may make application, his *primary scope and design* is to inform the mind. A preacher, however, has as *his* primary scope and design to use that information to bring categories of listeners to a wholehearted submission to God. You see this in Paul's directions to Titus about his preaching. He is to *speaking . . . the things which become sound doctrine* (Titus 2:1). What are those things? Here come the categories of individuals. If they are *aged men*, they are to be . . . (v. 2). If they are *aged women*, they *likewise* are to be . . . (v. 3), *that they may teach the young women to be . . .* (v. 4). *Young men likewise exhort to be . . .* (v. 6). *Servants are to be . . .* (v. 9).

Now, it is true that right within this very passage is the direction for not just Titus, but the church members themselves to teach other church members about these things (*aged women . . . may teach the young women*). So that's a scripturally mandated ministry, akin to what goes on in small groups. There's no debate about that. But it is Titus who is charged with doing it with *all* of

those categories of individuals.

I'll come back to this in a moment, but we should pause to acknowledge God's wisdom in calling a church's primary preacher to be also its people's foremost pastor. The preacher's knowledge of them (at least in terms of categories) should be thorough, experiential, sympathetic, and in most cases, considerably beyond that which the lay elders or Sunday school teachers possess. That knowledge is what qualifies and equips him to apply passages to the various categories of people in an uncommonly close, personal, tender but insistent way. In most cases, if a small group leader or a Sunday school teacher regularly attempted to do something similar, he likely would be viewed, if not resented, as taking too much to himself. Why? It has to do with a third way in which preaching heightens teaching.

The third distinctive component of preaching is its note of authority. This element is not optional for a preacher; it is emphatically commanded. I return to Paul's instructions to Titus. Following his categorization of the listeners, Paul directs, *These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee* (2:15).

The word here translated *authority* is literally, *command*. Do this speaking and exhorting and rebuking with *all command*. Later Paul underscores that authoritative command when he says, *These things I will that thou affirm constantly* (3:8). This is translated more literally as *concerning these things, I want you to speak confidently* (NASB), or even, *I want you to insist on these things* (ESV).

This is not at all the same thing as being authoritarian. That's an air men assume to themselves. Pulpit authority is something different. A preacher who is Christlike makes no attempt at it. He *has* it, and the people sense it.

Why is this? We come now to something that takes this whole matter to the deepest level. Why does a preacher have an unusual degree of authority that is *felt*, that is *sensed* by people? What accounts for this? Here is the Scripture's answer: the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives to men like Titus spiritual gifts for their role as heralds. When they speak in that heraldic way, the Spirit then energizes (though not always to the same degree) the exercise of the gifts which He has given. What is the result? Preachers themselves try (rather futilely) to describe the experience with words like *unction, enlargement, boldness, liberty, or power*. Regardless of the word, the people have the impression that this man is speaking with unusual authority.

The preeminent example of this in the preaching of the gospel is our Lord. He returned from the wilderness temptations *in the power of the Spirit* (Luke 4:14) and proclaimed in Nazareth's synagogue, *The Spirit of the*

Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel . . . (v. 18). And what was the people's impression? *They were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power* (*exousia*, "authority"; v. 32). That is, He sounded as though He had the right to be saying all the amazing things that He did.

That authority is a critical necessity for being able to persuade, especially in evangelism. People have to be thoroughly convinced that the gospel is true and that we have a right to be urging them to stake their lives on it.

Paul claimed to have this authorization. *God . . . hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour* (Titus 1:2–3). What Paul said of himself is true also of all of us called and sent to preach. It is by God's *commandment*.

Preaching is not merely the speaking of a man. If it is, then it is certainly not worth coming to church for. Preaching, if it is of the right kind, is the voice of God.
(James Stalker)

Paul . . . insists that it was not by choice that he took on the work of preaching; it was a task entrusted to him. . . . Of course he was specially called as were all the apostles. Now, however, God has established an order which he wishes his church to observe. Thus those who are called according to God and who seek to serve him can say with Paul that they have been entrusted with the task of preaching. If they are rebuffed it is an injury done to God and not to their persons. But all must be done with authority, for false teachers may well claim God's name as they have always done. (John Calvin)

There is biblical example and direction for all believers to minister to one another. But you and I, as preachers, herald God's words by His *commandment*.

That same authority requisite to persuasive gospel heralding is also necessary for preaching the whole counsel of God pastorally. So, we see that Timothy was told both to *command and teach* the things Paul wrote to him (1 Tim. 4:11). Notice the word "command."

Since . . . [God] ordains mortal men to speak on his behalf, they are responsible for commanding us. Not that they act on their own initiative or impose laws on us, but as Paul says, they are to 'command these things.' . . . They are to speak in God's name and with his authority, so that every knee should bow before him and all of us yield obedience to him. (John Calvin)

Paul prodded Timothy (and by extension, every preacher) to recall that it was to this end that he had been given a gift (*charisma*, spiritual gift), and that he was not to neglect it (vv. 13–14)!

That brings us round to a question of comparison. Are we prepared to argue that this is very much like what we expect in our churches' small-group discussions? We expect fellowship. We expect teaching. We expect edification. But do we expect the convicting, commanding voice of the Lord in the voice of a man with compelling power and authority?

The whole reason for smaller, more informal gatherings is to offer something different. And that's my point. Preaching *is* different. I've attempted to expose some of the ways in which it is. But the point of doing that hasn't been primarily to define or contrast. The point has been to raise the question: Given the Divinely ordained and empowered heightening of the teaching of His Word when we preachers herald it rightly, do we well to be urging our people to relinquish this arrangement? Is this really a wise thing that we are doing?

J. C. Ryle raised an issue that ought to give us a sober pause as we consider this question. He compared preachers past and present, and asked why preachers of his own era weren't as Divinely empowered and effectual as those of the past. His conclusion?

They fall short as **preachers**. They have neither the fervour, nor fire, nor thought nor illustration, nor directness, nor boldness, nor grand simplicity of language which characterized the last century. . . . They are not men of one thing, separate from the world, unmistakable men of God, ministers of Christ everywhere, indifferent to man's opinion, regardless of who is offended, if only they preach the truth. They do not make the world feel that a prophet is among them, and carry about with them their Master's presence, as Moses when he came down from the mount. I write these things with sorrow. I desire to take my full share of the blame. But I do believe I am speaking the truth.

Is it possible that in considering whether to relinquish a preaching service or two, we are failing to reckon with the possibility that our churches are willing to try this because we, in our day, *fall short as preachers*?

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

Escape from Loneliness by Paul Tournier (Westminster Press, 1962)

Paul Tournier was a prolific writer and has been called the twentieth century’s most famous Christian physician. Some of his books were translated into thirteen languages. He was Swiss, and his life spanned most of the last century (1898–1986).

It is not surprising to find that Dr. Tournier quotes both Catholics and liberal scholars, such as Karl Barth and Kierkegaard, in a favorable light. European Christians often engage with broad Christian circles. The quotes are good ones, but one must read with discernment. Moreover, the writing style is not easy to read—but this may be due to the translation—and chapters were often thirty or more pages long. The book ends abruptly with no summary conclusion.

Dr. Tournier begins by explaining that he wrote this book to combat what he saw as a growing problem in our modern society: loneliness. By championing individualism, we have often created isolationism. Ultimately, a healthy sense of belonging can be accomplished only through a relationship with Jesus Christ and participation in His Church.

What follows are four chapters on various spirits we encounter in our human experience that hinder fellowship: the parliamentary spirit, the spirit of independence, the spirit of possessiveness, and the spirit of just demands.

The parliamentary spirit is the natural bent of man to compete and dominate others for self-promotion. Every sphere of life becomes a place of competition rather than cooperation or fellowship. Tournier believes that the cure is a mutual interaction between people as one sees in the body. Both brain and muscles listen to and benefit from each other. Ultimately, this comes down to trust and involves opening oneself up to another. He is speaking of a supernatural trust “which we put in others when we open up to them . . . because of their very weakness, instead of strength” (48) and can only come as “a gift from God” (49).

Tournier identifies the West’s preoccupation with independence over the past few centuries as a misunderstanding of Descartes’s philosophy. Unfortunately, men have used his emphasis on reason to make the individuality of man sacred, which has led man to demand individual rights. The author then lists a number of paradoxes as a result of such thinking that are well worth considering (58ff). He spends much of the rest of the chapter dealing with the repercussions of this thinking when it comes to the woman’s role in marriage and the family.

I found the chapter on the spirit of possessiveness to be particularly convicting. The author defines this as “greed, avarice, gluttony, the desire to dominate, intolerance” (87).

He emphasizes that not the act itself, but the motive is most important: “What is done for love for God and for our fellows is good. What is done out of selfishness and desire for personal enjoyment is evil” (88). True happiness derives from seeking the happiness of others. He ties the drop in the birth rate to this spirit of possessiveness. He further observes that he has “met many spiritual gluttons who, because they’ve made their intellectual cultivation a source of pleasure, have become sterile and dilettante” (99). The author even admits how difficult it is for him to receive a kindness from someone because he is conditioned to desire his respect and not his alms (103). The biblical response to this sinful spirit is a self-renunciation that is rooted in love for God.

His chapter on the spirit of just demands deals with the social-justice issues we are facing today. He maintains that this spirit is a “universal spirit of rebellion, of self-assertion, of criticism, of demands and jealousy” (117). He quotes Gustave Thibon: “Our fever for equality is one of the deepest and most serious ills of our age. . . . In the end, nobody finds himself able to stand being unequal to anyone else in anything” (118). Tournier observes that modern man has made a god out of equality, which would lead to the masculinization of women and the feminization of men. The Bible, however, shows that justice is rooted in obedience to God. The world today focuses on its rights, its losses, and its pain; the Christian focuses on his unworthiness and God’s grace that gives him far more than he could ever deserve. This Christian attitude allows for forgiveness to be extended, even in the face of great hurt. Conversely, “grievance and demanding lead inevitably to self-pity” (139).

In his last chapter, “The Spirit of Fellowship,” Tournier concludes that instead of resentment and retaliation, Christianity offers trust: “Trust begets trust; forgiveness disarms injustice; love creates fellowship and fellowship resolves conflicts; and an open and sincere attitude integrates the person into the fellowship . . . and lifts them out of their emotional isolation” (159).

I found the book thought provoking and encouraging. Tournier backs up observations and biblical principles with a plethora of case studies that help to bolster his points. Largely, one comes away from the book confident that Christ is the ultimate answer for man’s loneliness and that the Church is designed as God’s means for combatting the isolation found in society.

This volume’s themes and conclusions are just as relevant today as they were in the middle of the twentieth century, six decades ago.

 Kent Ramler pastors People’s Baptist Church in Frederick, Maryland.

Nehemiah: Righteous Wrath or Sinful Anger?

Readers might raise their eyebrows when Nehemiah recalls his actions against some wayward Israelites in Nehemiah 13:25: "And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair."

Did God commend Nehemiah's violence? Are there situations in which a Christian leader should use physical punishment against fellow Christians today? How do we answer these questions?

First, remember that Nehemiah is a narrative book. Narrative is not always normative, and the descriptive is not necessarily prescriptive. In fact, many details of biblical stories are not there for us to imitate. They reveal truth about God, the history of redemption, and many other matters, and they can powerfully illustrate what we already know to be true.

Second, remember that Nehemiah lived according to the Mosaic Law. The offenders had violated Israel's laws on intermarriage with the surrounding nations (Neh. 13:23–28), something all the more sinful as the offenders had promised to live faithfully in this very matter about twelve years earlier (Neh. 10:28–30; cf. 1:1; 5:14; 13:6). Intermarriage led to idolatry and could have provoked the wrath of God (Exod. 34:15–16; Deut. 7:3–4; cf. 27:15; 26; 28:15; Josh. 23:12–13; 1 Kings 11:2; Ezra 9:2; Mal. 2:10–16).

Third, even in the context of the Mosaic Law, Nehemiah's actions were actually merciful—something less than God's destruction of these people (Deut. 7:3–4). Ezra had addressed this issue on a larger scale (Ezra 9–10). Nehemiah addressed it here again in a smaller setting in western Judah where "their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language" (Neh. 13:24). Perhaps this smaller setting suggested Nehemiah's swift actions that, though exceptional, were in keeping with the Law.

He cursed them. This curse was a public rebuke for intermarriage. The Jews had previously renewed their commitment to these laws, calling for a curse upon themselves should they disobey (Neh. 10:29). They sinned, so Nehemiah pronounced God's curse on them on God's behalf.

He beat them. While this action (and the next) may surprise us today, remember from the passages above that anything less than destruction was mercy. Acting as a judge to condemn these men, Nehemiah limited their punishment to a personal, public beating, fully within his authority as Israel's governor at this time (Neh. 5:14; cf. Deut. 25:1–3).

He plucked out their hair. Ezra recalled when he dealt with this same issue: "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off

the hair of my head and of my beard" (Ezra 9:3). Nehemiah did not pluck out his own hair but the hair (and probably beards) of the offenders in order to shame them before all, similar to the actions of the Ammonite king Hanun toward the messengers of David (2 Sam. 10:4). Isaiah foretold that our Lord Jesus would give His "cheeks to them that plucked off the hair," adding to His suffering and shame (Isa. 50:6).

Fourth and finally, the immediate context of Nehemiah 13:25 indicates that God approved of Nehemiah's actions. Just as Nehemiah "contended" with these offenders because of their intermarriages, he also "contended" with other Israelites for two other serious breaches of Mosaic Law—their neglect of the house of the Lord and their desecration of the Sabbath (Neh. 13:11, 17). The Israelites had promised to address each of these very matters twelve years earlier (Neh. 10:30, 31, 32–39). As Nehemiah dealt faithfully with the first two (the house of the Lord and the Sabbath), he likewise dealt faithfully with the third (intermarriage). He concludes the record of his actions in each instance with a plea that the Lord would remember him and his "good deeds" in dealing with Israel's sins (Neh. 13:14, 22, 31).

Like Nehemiah, Jesus lived under the Mosaic Law. More than a governor, Jesus as King of Israel had full authority to use a whip to drive flagrant sinners from the temple (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46; John 2:15). Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4), and the church is not a theocracy that abides by the Mosaic Law today as Israel did in the Old Testament. The physical actions of Nehemiah and Jesus are not for us today.

Additionally, the New Testament teaches that a pastor is to be "no striker . . . but patient" (1 Tim. 3:3) and an example for all (1 Pet. 5:3). The church does not physically punish but calls the sinful to repentance and, at most, excludes the unrepentant (Matt. 18:15–18). The church should not use physical punishment, and a Christian would be among "fools" to "smite" someone "on the face" (2 Cor. 11:19–20), much like Ananias who commanded Paul to be smitten "on the mouth" (Acts 23:1–5).

CONCLUSION

Nehemiah administered an exceptionally sobering yet merciful physical punishment in response to sin and significant disobedience to the Law of Moses. Significant sin without repentance may lead to exclusion from the church today, but physical force is not for pastors to use, let alone for one Christian toward another.

David Huffstutler pastors First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois.

An Example of the Believer

In 1 Timothy 4 Paul writes to Timothy regarding personal godliness in the church. He exhorts him to be a good scholar of truth amidst the false teaching going on around them in verses 1–5. Then in verses 6–10 he tells Timothy to be a good servant for truth, reminding the people of the truth—as they remain faithful to it—while remembering the blessings of the truth they have been given. In verses 11–16 he exhorts Timothy to be a good speaker of the truth as he strives to be an example of the believer to his hearers. This truth reminds me of a saying I first heard from Les Ollila: “Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.” What I do speaks so loudly that people cannot hear what I am saying. A respectable life, no matter your age, is earned by living a consistent life according to the gospel. In verse 12 Paul goes on to explain several main responsibilities that Timothy must prioritize in his life. He is to be an example of the believer in five areas.

WORD—OUR SPEECH

Since Timothy ministered in Ephesus, he would have been familiar with Paul’s exhortation to the church: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). What we say manifests our heart, so what we say really does matter. Paul Tripp, in his book *War of Words*, gives some great insights concerning our speech:

Our words belong to the Lord. They were created by Him, exist through Him, and are to be used for Him. We were given the ability to communicate so that our words would help us do His work and bring Him glory. He is the source, the standard, and the goal of all our talk. He is the Lord of our mouths!

Tripp illustrates the wisdom his father gave him when facing a problem during his high school years. His dad had told him to be careful in speech and to choose his words carefully. He continues,

My father was saying, “Paul, words matter. They will either contribute to a solution or further the difficulty. Speak with caution and care.” Winning the war of words involves choosing our words carefully. It is not just about the words we say, but also about the words we choose not to say. Winning the war is about being prepared to say the right thing at the right moment, exercising self-control. It is refusing to let our talk be driven by passion and personal desire, but communicating instead with

God’s purposes in view. It is exercising the faith necessary to be part of what God is doing at that moment.

Tripp adds, “In it all, the tongue will serve the master to which the heart is already committed. The war of words is only won when God rules our hearts so that we gladly and consistently speak of Him. May God win the war for our hearts so that the battleground of words becomes a garden of good fruit, where the seeds of peace produce a lasting harvest of righteousness (James 3:18).”

CONDUCT—OUR BEHAVIOR

Our lifestyle and behavior must influence lives for the cause of Christ. When people see my wife, Brenda, and also know her mom, they often say that she looks so much like her. Brenda’s mom was a godly example, prompting Brenda to write a poem one Mother’s Day titled “I Look Like You.”

Since I was a very young girl,
I’ve heard the same phrase
Many times.
And I suppose that I did not always
Appreciate it like I should have.
“You look like your mother!”
And in my heart, I know I do.

But as I look in the mirror—
The mirror of my life,
And yours,
And I see more than your
Face, your eyes, your smile,
“You look like your mother”
Means so much more than I realized.

I remember the times you gave
Of yourself when you had nothing
Left to give.
You simply gave because it’s
Part of who you are.
“You look like your mother. . . .”
I pray that I look like **selflessness**.

I can picture the hours you
Spent at the sewing machine,
Creating masterpieces out
Of fabric,
So your children would not be forced to be

The only children not dressed in the latest trends.
“You look like your mother. . . .”
I pray that I look like **ingenuity**.

There are days when I am weary
From serving at church, or teaching,
Or even helping a family
In need.
But it’s hard to quit when it’s all you know.
“You look like your mother. . . .”
I pray that I look like **dependability**.

When I wake up on those mornings
Feeling discouraged, even sorry for myself,
I remember that you
Have been showing up to do whatever needs
To be done
For more years than I have been alive,
Whether you felt like it or not.
“You look like your mother. . . .”
I pray that I look like **faithfulness**.

As I have become a mother of grown children,
And I sometimes see them struggle,
I have the picture in my mind
Of your face
Smiling, sometimes through tears, but
Always letting us go out the door
Forcing us to face the struggles
In order to see how great our God really is.
“You look like your mother. . . .”
I pray that I look like **trust in Him**.

I look in the mirror today and I see
Your eyes, your nose, your smile, your cheeks,
And I think to myself that it is a privilege,
An honor
To look like the woman I look up to more than any other,
A woman in whose life I see Christ,
A mother who loves unconditionally,
A servant who is still serving faithfully.
“You look like your mother. . . .”
I pray that I do.

LOVE—OUR SELF-SACRIFICE

George Bethune wrote, “Love is a vigorous spirit that rules the whole man, ever directing him to the humble and loving fulfillment of his duties to God and man.” This sacrificial love reminds me of a man in the 1920s who manifested this special love for his son. He was one of Al Capone’s cronies who served him in his army of crime. During Prohibition “Artful Eddie” was indicted for his involvement with the distribution and sale of alcohol, but a higher court reversed his conviction, and he went free. Having caught the attention of Al Capone, Eddie was hired by Capone to run all the illegal dog racing establishments in the US. In that role Eddie rose to prominence in the criminal world.

Then one day, Eddie turned on Capone and “sang” to the police. Why? He wanted to go straight, he said. Why would he suddenly turn on the protection of Al Capone? Didn’t he know that he was, in effect, signing his own death sentence? Eddie told them that he knew the risk, and then added that there was nothing in life more important to him than his son, Edward Henry—who deserved a better life than his father had lived.

Sure enough, shortly thereafter, the mob murdered Eddie. But even though Eddie was gone, his self-sacrifice paid off. Edward Henry matriculated at Annapolis. During World War II he became the United States Navy’s number-one flying ace and eventually won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Edward Henry’s last name was O’Hare and, yes, Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport is named after him. “Artful Eddie’s” sacrificial love for his son caused him to go straight. Eddie sacrificed his own life for his son’s chance to make good (Paul Harvey, *The Rest of the Story*).

FAITH—OUR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Alexander MacLaren exhorts, “The meaning is faithfulness, and Paul’s thought is that the Christian life is to manifest itself in the faithful discharge of all duties and the honest handling of all things committed to it.” This is exhibiting faith through faithfulness. A young preacher once approached Dr. F. B. Meyer and asked how he could one day become as influential and well known as Dr. Meyer. Dr. Meyer responded, “Don’t waste your time waiting and longing for large opportunities which may never come. But faithfully handle the little things that are always claiming your attention.”

PURITY—OUR INTEGRITY

In the forests of Northern Europe lives the ermine, a small animal known best for its snow-white fur. Instinctively, this animal protects its glossy coat of fur with great care lest it become soiled. Hunters often capitalize on this trait. Instead of setting a mechanical trap to catch the ermine, they find its home in a cleft of a rock or a hollow tree and daub the entrance and the interior with tar. Then their dogs start the chase, and the frightened ermine flees toward its home. But finding it covered with dirt, he spurns his place of safety. Rather than soil his white fur, he courageously faces the yelping dogs who hold him at bay until the hunters capture him. To the ermine, purity is dearer than life! The Lord wants us to be a people who will keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (*A Treasury of Bible Illustrations*).

There is a reason that the Spirit of God moved in Paul’s life to exhort Timothy to be an example of the believer. May we humble ourselves in order for God’s grace to enable us to not forget our main responsibility: to glorify God by being an example of the believer in the midst of our busy ministries.

Mark Love pastors Colchester Bible Baptist Church in Colchester, Connecticut.

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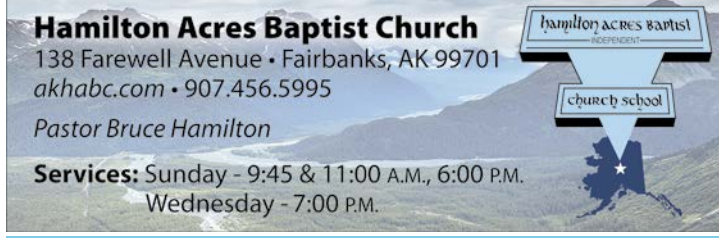
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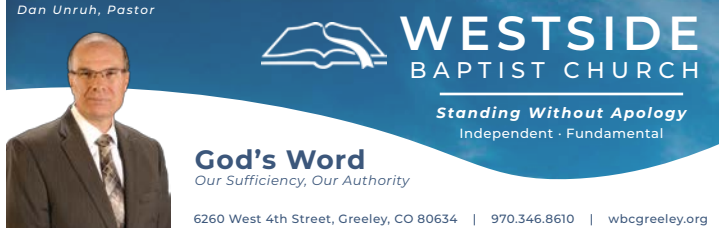
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News From All Over

Mike and Stephanie Smith

(Serving Missionaries Internationally Through Helps—SMITH) have used their God-given abilities to serve others through construction, preaching, teaching, counseling, and music for over twenty-five years. They have five children, three of whom are married, and two grandchildren. The Smiths are currently expanding their ministry by starting a Bible-based industrial arts school in Marysvale, Utah, which is dedicated to training ministry-focused tradesmen to serve the Church ("Legacy Trade College—Every Student Equipped for Service").



Chaplain Colonel Mike Sproul

was confirmed by the Senate for promotion to Brigadier General (BG) in the Air National Guard on September 1, 2023. His pin-on ceremony took place at Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona, on October 6, 2023.

For the past two years Chaplain Colonel Mike Sproul has worked as the State Chaplain for the Arizona National Guard, advising the Arizona National Guard senior leadership on all religious, spiritual, moral, and ethical matters. He led twenty Air National Guard and Army National Guard chaplains and nineteen Religious Affairs Specialists/Airmen regarding overarching policies, practices, and programs.

Previously, as director of the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps at Joint Base Andrews outside Washington, DC, he oversaw the equipping, training, and deploying of six hundred members of the Air National Guard Chaplain Corps as well as a staff of eight in Washington and was the direct advisor to the three-star Director of the Air National Guard on all things related the ANG Chaplaincy.

Chaplain BG Sproul is the senior officer/chaplain of all the chaplains and religious affairs airmen throughout the Air National Guard. He is also the liaison between the Pentagon and the National Guard Bureau Headquarters. He will sit in national defense meetings at the Pentagon and elsewhere when the Air Force Chief of Chaplains or his active duty one-star counterpart cannot attend.

Chaplain Sproul entered active-duty service as a direct commission in 1991 and has thirty-two years of service. He served five years on active duty, six years in the Air Force Reserve, and twenty-one years in the Air Guard. He has deployed four times. He has a Doctor of Ministry degree specializing in church administration and counseling.

In his civilian ministry, Mike Sproul served as pastor Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona, for twenty-three years and is currently the senior pastor of Littleton Baptist Church in Littleton, Colorado.

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The Art of Appreciating Beauty

Philippians 4:8 is often cited in discussions of Christians and the arts. In this verse, Paul admonishes us, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

We should draw two conclusions from this verse. The first is that aesthetic choices are not merely matters of personal preference. It is impossible that Paul’s command to think on “whatsoever things are lovely” means “think about whatever you think is lovely.” Our judgment of beauty must conform to God’s judgment of beauty. (See also “Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?” in this issue.)

The second conclusion flows from the first: if we are obligated to think about lovely things, and loveliness is not a matter of personal preference, then we must know *how* to discern the things that are truly lovely. It is a matter of Christian sanctification to be able to appreciate beauty.

Although the term “beauty” is often used in these discussions, its normal usage suggests something too narrow. Our topic here is axiology—the philosophy of value. How ought we to *value* this or that object? Should we prize it, adore it, and esteem it highly? Or (by contrast) perhaps it should be for us an object of scorn or loathing or even mockery? The term “beauty” in these discussions refers to all that which we ought to hold in high regard, but the ethics of how we value things covers far more than the sensory delight that a popular definition of beauty could imply.

How ought we to form these judgments? How do we cultivate an appreciation for that which is truly worthy of our approval, so that we “may be sincere and

without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9–11)? Ideally, I would write this article so that you might, by reading it, acquire a finely-honed aesthetic sense. But that is not possible for several reasons, not the least of which is this: written instruction about appreciating beauty is like written instruction about swimming. It is not worthless, but absent actual engagement with the intended task, mere words will fail to communicate the essential element of the subject.

For this reason, instead of attempting to outline a list of generic properties of beauty, I want to offer some practical instruction for Christians who wish to grow in their appreciation for that which is lovely, excellent, and praiseworthy.

MAKE SCRIPTURE THE STANDARD

In debates about aesthetics, it isn’t uncommon for someone to assert that the Bible has nothing to say about matters of style. I disagree. But suppose we concede this point, merely for the sake of argument. Even if there were no clear, direct biblical instructions on matters of style, the Bible itself evidences style. For this reason, its very presentation is the authoritative pattern for our lives.

As students of the Word, we take pains to determine *what* a given passage is saying. This is important. But we also ought to consider *how* a passage communicates what it is saying. The Bible is not a list of doctrinal propositions; its content is expressed in forms and styles. The Bible does not merely tell us what to believe. It communicates those truths in a manner that is intended to shape how we feel about those truths.

This is obviously true in the more literary sections of Scripture. Some people say that they do not enjoy poetry. God’s evident preference for it indicates that those

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

Philippians 4:8

people should repent. Yet as a medium, poetry is inefficient at the communication of true propositions. If the Bible were only about information, poetry would be an odd form to employ. Indeed, it often says things that are literally false (“God is a rock,” for instance), but such statements shape our affections.

These stylistic models are not confined to the literary genres of poetry or narrative. Paul’s epistles are full of substance, but they are also models of sanctified rhetoric. Paul not only teaches Christians what is true, but he demonstrates to us how to speak about—how to *feel* about—redemption and false teaching and fellow believers and so on. Our own artistic expressions should feel the same as these models.

Christians do not all agree about matters of doctrine, but conservative Christians of all denominations acknowledge that Scripture is supposed to be the standard by which all doctrines are measured. In the same way, even if we cannot come to agreement about every aesthetic judgment, we need to acknowledge that inspired Scripture is God’s model for us for how we should value all things. Giving attention to *how* the Bible speaks will help us grow in our love for what is truly lovely.

CONSTANTLY MAKE COMPARISONS

C. S. Lewis wrote this in an essay on the value of reading old books:

The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing

Continued on page 26



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through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes. They will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us.

The principle Lewis articulates here has a direct parallel when making aesthetic judgments. If we are familiar with only one way of expressing aesthetic judgments, we are likely to be blind to its weak points. But if we regularly compare the rhetoric, poetry, music, and architecture of our churches with those of other peoples, places, and times, we will be in a much better position to see the strengths and weaknesses of our art and theirs.

In our church I've sometimes offered a comparison of the hymn "Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed" to the gospel song "At the Cross." It is instructive to compare how the two tunes communicate, and whether they match the intense grief communicated in the author's lamentation for his responsibility for Christ's suffering. For those who have grown up singing only "At the Cross," it may never have occurred to them that the tune is likely too celebratory and confident to match the text. That aspect of the tune becomes far more apparent, however, once it is compared to the weightier and more somber tune of "Alas, and Did."

Perhaps you disagree with my particular judgment here; maybe you wish to make the case that "At the Cross" has a more fitting tune. But the essential thing is that in the comparison we can see the difference. Putting these two tunes next to each other allows us to perceive nuances of their character to which we would likely remain blind without the comparison. If we are going to learn to distinguish excellence, comparison is a valuable practical discipline.

SEEK COUNSEL FROM THOSE WHO HAVE CULTIVATED AESTHETIC DISCERNMENT

I have almost no mechanical expertise. If you pop open a hood and ask me if I see the water pump, I would have to say that I do not—even if the water pump is visible to me. My lack of knowledge means that there is a sense in which I am unable to *see* that which is visible. To learn to *see* (in the fullest sense) what is right in front of me, I must listen to someone with the expertise that I lack.

If beauty were merely a matter of individual taste, there could be no experts. But if some things really are beautiful—or lovely, or praiseworthy, or excellent—it follows that there will be those whose judgment is better than mine: there are some who see what others do not, who have learned better than I have to love what God loves. We are fools to rely entirely on our own wisdom on these matters, not taking advantage of those who can help us see the

beauty—or ugliness—inherent in artistic expressions.

Seeking out such expertise is no more an abandonment of the authority of Bible than is reading a systematic theology book or a commentary. There are theologians who have a better grasp of certain theological questions than I do. There are exegetes who have devoted themselves to the historical and grammatical particulars of certain books of the Bible in a way that I have not. When I seek out their counsel (in person or in print), I am giving due respect to the ascended Jesus Christ, who gave such men as gifts to His church (Eph. 4:11).

If the appreciation of beauty is an aspect of Christian sanctification, we ought to make some effort to learn from those who have sought to have their love abound with all judgment (Phil. 1:9). Instead of presumptuously dismissing those who see what I do not, I should listen longer. In some cases, I might submit to the judgment of those who watch for my soul (Heb. 13:17), even when I am yet unable to see what they see.

We must "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1:10). These three practices will help us do so more and more.

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



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The Beauty of Our God-Given Identity

“Identify as a . . . *what?*

In a fascinating article entitled *Freedom from Blackness* (<https://americanmind.org/salvo/freedom-from-blackness/>) posted Thursday [Sept. 5, 2021, on Proclaim and Defend], Jason Hill, a professor of ethics at DePaul University in Chicago, made this provocative statement.

The fabricated black race should never have been born. It was concocted out of false biological taxonomies by Europeans to justify a system of human physical bondage that, paradoxically, brought black people into the historical process. It was a cruel, artificial construct, and blacks have suffered enough under it. If racist whites owe blacks a reparative moral gesture, it is this—terminate your need to see blacks as blacks and refrain from establishing societal configurations that require them to prove their blackness. It is life-denying for blacks to resort to an appeal to their blackness as a legitimizing referent from which to both interpret and make sense of their humanity.

Hill goes on to say that the only remedy for racial conflict is to quit our habit of our self-identification on the basis of race. Past inequities need to be set aside—he uses the term “forgiven”—and people who see themselves as downtrodden because of their race need to commit *race treason* (his term, not mine). He refers to Dickens:

The virtuous race traitor believes, like Charles Dickens, that the relief of human misery lies not in social revolution but in a transformation of the individual heart.

Hill’s assertion coincides with a biblical truth that applies not only to race but to our culture-wide self-identification crises. Identity conflict is at the core of our present societal and spiritual problems, and only God has the answer.

THE HUMAN IDENTITY CRISIS IS NOT NEW

As Acts 9 opens, Saul of Tarsus seems to be a man confident in his personal identity as he requests official letters from Jerusalem to travel to Damascus and imprison Christians there and extradite them back to Jerusalem to stand trial. However, while he was on his way, Jesus revealed that Saul was dealing with an identity crisis of his own.

As the light shines down from heaven around Saul, Jesus asks a question of Saul and then makes a statement about him that addresses both of their identities:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (Acts 9:4–5)

In His question, Jesus identifies Christians as Christ and Christ as Christians. To persecute believers is to persecute Christ Himself. While this is a truly amazing biblical concept, it is the assertion to follow that I would like to explore.

In His statement about Paul, Jesus identifies Saul’s personal identity crisis. The goads of the Holy Spirit were already at work in Saul, and Saul was pushing back against them. As the Holy Spirit draws a person toward Christ, he begins to open his eyes to his own sin and inadequacy before God. The tendency of many like Saul is to resist the growing conviction of the Spirit—to fight back against the horrible reality of sin and its consequences.

What a joy when the sinner finally stops resisting and surrenders to the convicting work of the Spirit. Scripture identifies that moment for Saul when he, though totally blind and helpless before the One he sought to destroy, utters these words, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

In those simple words he acknowledges Jesus as his Lord and surrenders his stubborn will to Jesus.

But Saul’s identity crisis is not over yet. Because he is blind, his friends lead him by the hand to Damascus, where he sits in the darkness for three days without eating or drinking. The zealot that was Saul has now himself been crucified, but there is nothing to rise in his place—that is, no new personality to replace the old one.

THE BEAUTIFUL THING ABOUT BEING A CHRISTIAN IS THAT IN CHRIST WE GET AN ENTIRELY NEW IDENTITY!

We are no longer defined by our sin, our selfishness, or even by the injustices we have endured. We do not concoct some lame new identity for ourselves but instead receive something infinitely better—the identity that Christ has chosen for us. We become new creations in Christ.

While Saul sat in the darkness Jesus appeared to Ananias. He gave Ananias a message to take to Saul: “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:15–16).

Paul embraced his new identity and mission with whole-hearted enthusiasm. He never wavered from it. Many years later, as Saul (now Paul) neared his death he addressed Titus, his son in the faith with these self-defining words.

Paul, a **servant** of God, and an **apostle** of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of **God’s elect**, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; **In hope of eternal life**, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through **preaching, which is**

Continued on page 37



Mary

This time of year she appears in manger scenes everywhere: Mary, molded in plastic, glowing from a light bulb hidden somewhere deep inside. She's (inexplicably) blond and draped in a stiff blue gown. Her hands are folded serenely; under her hovering halo she smiles sweetly at her perpetually sleeping cherub. I look at a Christmas Mary and wonder—was the real Mary always that tranquil?

When she came back from visiting her cousin Elisabeth and appeared, pregnant, on the streets of Nazareth, surely the tongues of the local gossips started wagging. Did their whispered insinuations lead to uncertainties in Mary's own mind? Did she stare into the desert night sky and see question marks in the stars, wondering if she had really seen and talked to Gabriel—or had only imagined she did?

At the end of a jarring late-pregnancy trek to a strange city teeming with other travelers, waiting on the street while Joseph begged for a room—any room—where she could deliver her baby, did she ever moan, “What am I doing here? I want to go home. I want my mother!”

During hard labor did Mary wonder why God would ask this hard thing of her? Surely she felt sad when she laid her newborn in an animal feeding trough rather than a cradle lovingly handcrafted by her beloved Joseph. When frantic, heavy-breathing, smelly shepherds crowd-

ed into the stable to touch her tiny boy, she must have longed for a clean, private place to nurse her son.

Mary doubtless breathed a sigh of relief when, forty days later, she entered the temple with Joseph to make a dedication offering for baby Jesus. Finally, something normal—this ancient, familiar custom of Jewish law. But then a strange old man took the babe from her arms and began loudly prophesying over Him, ending with a prediction of heartbreaking anguish in Mary's future.

Was it anguish she felt when, from the safety of exile in Egypt, she heard that Herod was slaughtering other little boys? Did Mary's heart break for the mothers whose toddlers were being murdered because of the king's jealous rage toward her own precious son?

Think of her distress when Jesus was rejected by her other children. What happened in her heart when she heard that her own religious leaders were plotting to murder her son? Think of the courage it took for Mary to stand at Calvary and watch helplessly as Jesus was tortured and crucified.

Artists depict Mary as a delicate creature in a flowing gown, but it would be more authentic to dress her in denim and give her a backbone of steel. Life wasn't easy for Mary.

So, was she miserable, frustrated by events so out of her control and contrary to her plans? Was she enraged by the injustice of it all? I don't think so. To Gabriel she had called herself “the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1:38). A bonds slave doesn't expect an easy life.

Mary had feelings, of course, like every female. And I suspect that this woman of contemplative disposition, who knew how to treasure up thoughts for private reflection (Luke 2:19), had an even deeper emotional well than most of us. But when she surrendered her will to Jehovah, she also surrendered her feelings, and then, despite the sacrifice, simply obeyed.

Was it worth it? Someday you can ask her. Mary, the only person present with Jesus at both His birth and His death, has now been with Him in glory for over twenty centuries. If you, like Mary, call Him your Savior (Luke 1:47), you will meet her there.

The next time you spot a plastic Mary, think of the flesh-and-blood Mary and ask her Son to make you—like her—a handmaid of the Lord.

Claudia and her husband, Dave, help new and struggling churches through Press On! Ministries. Claudia is the author of five Bible-study books and *The Monday Morning Club*, a book of encouragement for women in ministry. The Barbabes have three adult children and seven grandchildren.





PASTOR



ACROSS OUR COUNTRY



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ADVANCE THE GOSPEL
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I'm always a little disappointed when Sunday sermons ignore theologically important days and seasons. That never happens, of course, on Christmas Day. Indeed, often the month of December is set aside for a miniseries examining, say, an extended incarnation passage or prophecy. It helps condition God's people toward a more spiritually reflective celebration of Christ's coming. I love that, because I'm already intensely focused on and trying to feed from those passages for several weeks prior to Christmas itself. One Sunday a year just isn't enough to give to such a history-shaking event as the incarnation. Likewise, Easter Day, of course, always rightly focuses on Christ. But what about the Royal Entry on the Sunday before Easter? What about a similar miniseries exploring the other events of Passion Week leading up to Easter? Or a series extending after Easter on the various post-resurrection appearances and experiences?

So, if you're disappointed by the apparently business-as-usual title and topic of this column in the November/December issue of *FrontLine*, I sympathize. Why am I ignoring the season and just continuing on with my series on the Pentateuch? How Christmassy is the Book of Numbers, after all? Actually, there is a Christmas connection in Numbers. So keep reading.

BACKGROUND AND TIMEFRAME

After our discussion of Exodus and Leviticus, you might glance at the first few words in 1:1 and assume the Hebrew title must be, "And the Lord spoke." Actually, though, the Hebrew title is taken from the *fifth* word of the Hebrew text: *Bemidbar*—*In the Wilderness*—which, as it turns out, is much more descriptive of the contents. That's where virtually everything in the book takes place. The Greek, Latin, and English titles take their cue from the opening event of the book: a census. But that's not the only census that is taken in the book; there are two. (1) Census 1 numbers the exodus generation that exited Egypt (1:46). (2) Census 2 numbers the wilderness generation that entered Canaan (26:51). But there are thirty-eight years *between* those two censuses; and *by divine decree*, no one from the first census was still alive when the second census was taken—except for Caleb and Joshua (26:64–65). (Moses was too, of course, but he doesn't count—literally—because he was a Levite, and they didn't number the Levites.)

As we discovered in the previous column, everything in Leviticus took place in the first month of the second year after the Exodus from Egypt. But actually, some of Numbers takes place in that first month as well. Israel keeps the first Passover at Sinai, one year after the Exodus, just a very few days after the death of Nadab and Abihu (9:1–4). Two weeks later, on the first day of the second month, God ordered a census of the people (1:1). About three weeks later, God directs Israel to leave Sinai (10:11); so they've been at Sinai all this time, ever since Exodus 19. Finally, Israel takes its first three-day journey from Sinai (10:33). Sometime later that year (no date is given) they arrive in Kadesh Barnea, and send spies to scout out the land they are supposed to inherit (13:25).

The next thing you know, it's suddenly thirty-eight years later—the first month of the fortieth year after the Exodus (20:1)! Four months later, Aaron dies at Mount Hor (20:28), followed by thirty days of mourning Aaron's death (20:29).

STRUCTURE

The Book of Numbers is

one of the most difficult in terms of "what in the world is going on?" The problem for us is that it is such a mixture of things—narrative, additional laws, census lists, oracles from a pagan prophet, the well-known Aaronic blessing—and it is not easy to see how it all fits together (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 49).

The book alternates between miscellaneous laws and directions for various offerings, interspersed with several historical-narrative (action) segments. It's almost as if the structure of the book itself reflects Israel's circuitous meanderings of the wilderness wanderings that it records. Consequently, outlines vary in their organization and usefulness.

So how does one organize all this mix of law, cultic regulation, and history? T. Desmond Alexander suggests a simplified overview of the book's content.

The initial chapters of Numbers [say, 1–10] focus on the preparations carried out by the people prior to leaving Sinai for the land of Canaan. These preparations show that the Israelites will be required to defeat militarily the nations that already occupy the land. However, the middle chapters of Numbers [say, 11–25] reveal . . . that the people's trust in God wavered in the face of opposition and, as a result, they failed to take possession of what God had promised them. Of all those who left Egypt as adults, only Joshua and Caleb would enter the promised land. Nevertheless, in spite of this initial failure, the final chapters of Numbers [26–36] reveal that the promise of land was renewed with the next generation of adults. God's promise to Abraham would not be thwarted by human disobedience (*From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed., 235).

THEMES

One overarching theme for the book as a whole seems to be the issue of *leadership*. The term for a tribal chief or leader (*nasiy'*) occurs over sixty times. Israel complains against their God-appointed leadership (repeatedly). Aaron and Miriam rebel against Moses' authority (12). A majority of leaders lead Israel to rebel against God's promises regarding inheriting the land (13–14). A general revolt against Moses' and Aaron's alleged leadership "monopoly" occurs *twice* (16–17). Even God's appointed leader fails and disobeys (20). The death of Aaron is recorded (20), as are the death of Moses and the appointment of new leader, Joshua

Faithfulness to a Complaining People

(27). So there is a continuous focus on both divine and human leadership throughout the book.

But there are also a number of terms that dominate various segments of the book: murmur/complain (12 times); weep/cry (10 times); pining for the “good old days” of slavery in Egypt (11:5–6, 18, 20; 14:2–4; 20:4–5; 21:5). Those parts of the narrative in particular will resurface in the NT, as we’ll see. The overall thematic tenor of the book is a testimony to God’s faithfulness to His people—a fatherly faithfulness that includes not only patience and provision, but discipline and chastisement as well.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The NT develops several themes from Numbers.

Christian Living: Israelites’ Negative Example (1 Cor. 10:1–12). Paul uses a series of Israel’s experiences in the wilderness (most recorded in Numbers) as “examples . . . for our admonition [i.e., instruction]” (1 Cor. 10:11), selecting sins that parallel the issues under discussion in Corinth. (1) *Lust for food* (10:6): Paul references Numbers 11:4ff. and Israel’s lust for the foods in Egypt rather than what God was graciously and miraculously providing for them. (2) *Immorality* (10:8): Numbers 25:1–9 parallels not only the theme of sexual immorality already addressed by Paul (1 Cor. 6), but also one of the dangerous dimensions of Corinthian idolatry, which was steeped in sexual immorality. (3) *Tempting Christ* (10:9): This is how Paul couches Israel’s disgruntlement at the various deprivations imposed upon them by God through His chosen leadership (Num. 21:4ff.). There seems to be a particular emphasis upon their rebellion against their divinely designated leadership (note Num. 24:5, 7). (4) *Murmuring* (10:10): Numbers 14:1–38 and 16:41–50 include examples of the “destruction” cited in 1 Corinthians 10:10b. Again, though the murmuring is focused at their human leadership (Moses and Aaron), God takes such murmuring personally since they are His appointed leaders.

Christian Ministry: Balaam (2 Pet. 2:15–16; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14). Balaam’s name occurs 53 times in Numbers. Balaam is never identified as a “prophet,” false or otherwise. He is called a “soothsayer” (Josh. 13:22), and his usual spiritual activity is described as sorcery, divination, or enchantment (Num. 24:1). He appears to have been an influential shaman of some local renown. It is his avaricious motives and counsel of moral seduction of God’s people for which he is roundly condemned in both the OT and NT. Peter even depicts him as being *insane*—not medically or clinically, but functionally (2 Pet. 2:16; “madness” = *paraphronia*, lit., “to be beside one’s mind/wits”). Not the kind of insanity that requires a straitjacket or padded cell, but the kind of everyday irrationality and insanity that insists on and persists in doing something even in the face of clear and repeated evidence that one should not. As such, Balaam is the biblical mascot for the avarice of false teachers (2 Pet. 2:15–16; Jude 11), and the biblical mascot for false teachers’ strategy of moral seduction that ensnares and pollutes God’s people and brings God’s judgment (Rev. 2:14–15).

Christological Illustration: The Bronze Serpent—Numbers 21:5–9 (John 3:15). One of the unlikeliest of stories—a story of complaint and judgment and death—becomes a picture of the saving crucifixion of Christ for anyone who will look in faith to Him lifted up on the cross as our sin-bearer and sin-substitute.

Christological Expectation: Balaam’s Unwitting Messianic Prophecy (Num. 24:17). Here, at last, is the Christmas connection in the book of Numbers. Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel, but God repeatedly compelled Balaam to pronounce God’s favor on Israel. In his fourth and final prophecy, Balaam uttered a powerful prophetic pronouncement pertaining to Israel: “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). When magi from the East appeared in Jerusalem fourteen centuries later, they asked, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matt. 2:2). Why would these learned, presumably Gentile observers of the night skies interpret the sudden appearance of this celestial phenomenon (whatever it was) as signaling the arrival of a Jewish king hundreds of miles away? And a Jewish king special enough to warrant this extensive, expensive journey? And their worship? What claim would any Jewish king have over them? And why would they identify it as “his star”? What explains all these connections? The only feasible answer is that they “linked the star to ‘the king of the Jews’ through studying the OT and other Jewish writings—a possibility made plausible by the presence of the large Jewish community in Babylon” ever since the Jewish captivity there six centuries later (Carson, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [1984], 8:86). And the only prophetic passage that makes an explicit connection between a star and a coming King is the providential prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24.

CONCLUSION

Not only does the Book of Numbers record the ancient history of an infant nation freshly delivered out of the womb of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. It also includes events and experiences that the NT pointedly applies to us as NT Christians. And it looks far ahead down the Bible’s storyline trajectory and anticipates the arrival of a King who would one day conquer all Israel’s—and God’s—enemies. From the miraculous birth of both the Messiah’s forerunner (Luke 1) and the Messiah Himself (Matt. 1), to God’s control over nations (the census in Luke 2) and the fulfillment of obscure prophetic utterances from even the most unlikely and dubious of sources (Matt. 2), our observance of the incarnation is a celebration of the all-encompassing providence of the God who rules all history.

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

Holding On to Hope

Our world is in desperate need of hope. Hope is as necessary to the human spirit as oxygen is to the physical body. When a person loses hope, he is often overcome with feelings of senselessness, purposelessness, and despair. A lack of hope is what leads some to commit suicide, taking a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

We all have lost hope at some point in our lives. Maybe it was like me in hoping the Oilers would win the Stanley Cup these past two years. Maybe you've lost hope that your coworker, neighbor, or family member will ever get saved. Maybe it was or is a health issue for you or a loved one. Maybe it's a series of difficult circumstances that make you want to take the advice of Job's wife. However, as a believer, we must never give up hope, because the Christian life is essentially a life of hope.

The word "hope" occurs over fifty times in the New Testament, and you will find that it is always connected in some way to God. God is the author of hope (Rom. 15:13). Over and over again we see that our hope is connected with our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Sometimes hope can be misplaced. There are those who hope to go to heaven without acknowledging Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. There are those who hope to grow in Christ without reading His Word or going to God in prayer on a regular basis. There are those who hope to live happy lives even though they are in rebellion to God. These are all misplaced hopes—hopes that are not founded and based in God. Life can be difficult and harsh, and there are times we may think that it will not get better.

However, there is hope, true hope, in Christ.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17, God gives us some instructions regarding hope.

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

In verse 15, "therefore" is pointing back to verse 13. Because we are beloved of the Lord and saved, we must stand fast and hang on. We love Him because He first loved us. God sent Jesus Christ to pay a terrible price for our sins and provide us a place in heaven. Your circumstances do not change God's love for you or what He did for you on the cross. Because of that, stand fast. The idea here is to hold your ground: don't retreat. These are present-tense imperatives. Keep on standing fast; keep on holding on.

What you hold on to matters, though. The word "traditions" here simply means "that which is handed down from one person to another." There is a different Greek word used to denote Jewish or human traditions. Here and in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, the word "tradition" has the idea of gospel teachings or truth.

I have the privilege of speaking at several camps each summer. Last summer I was doing a family camp that was located on a lake. A bunch of teens asked me to go tubing with them. If you have never been tubing, it is a fun water activity where a boat pulls a tube with riders on it, and the goal of every driver of the boat is to dump the people on the tube into the lake, especially if the rider is the guest speaker. Well, it came our turn, and a junior high boy and I got on the tube. He was a scrappy young man, and we both agreed that we were not going to be dislodged from the tube. The driver did everything he could, whipping us in a circle, doing a figure eight, etc., but he could not get us off. So he went at top speed across a passing boat's wake. We hit that swell and went straight up in the air and then were smacked down into the water. We hit so hard the handle of the towrope split my lip!

The idea of verse 15 is that we hang on to God's Word like that young man and myself hung on to the tube. In other words, when the trials and disappointments of life come your way, hold on to God's truth as though your life depends on it—because God's Word gives us hope. It is also what gives hope to a lost and dying world. To take the Word to the world, we must know the God of Hope and hang on to the promises of His Word.

If you have lost or are losing hope, go purchase a Bible Promise book and hold on to those promises. With God, there is always hope!

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 Reports

NYC REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Matthew Recker

Praise the Lord for a wonderful day of fellowship on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at Bethel Baptist Fellowship in Sheepshead Bay, New York. About sixty pastors, pastors' wives, and faithful followers of Christ joined in our fellowship, as Pastor and Nancy Bickel, along with the people of Bethel, shared their love and hearts with us. The breakfast was delicious, and members from Heritage also served in sharing a delicious Italian luncheon after the preaching time!

Bro. Jon Crocker, executive director of Gospel Fellowship Association Missions, challenged us to embrace our glorious gospel ministry and to experience glorious gratitude, glorious expectations, and God's glorious sufficiency from 2 Corinthians 2:12-17.

Pastor Doug Sexton of Hedstrom Baptist Church thoughtfully encouraged us to be wise to not provoke our children—or others to whom we minister—to anger. He gave some reasons this often happens and how to avoid it from Ephesians 6:4.

Debbie Recker led a women's session from Psalm 34 that was well received.

We had a powerful testimony and a special prayer for a missionary family serving in a restricted-access nation who shared with us of the trials of serving in such a land. We also prayed over Bro. Danniell Acosta and his family as he recently received a call to become the pastor of Liberty View Baptist Church in Staten Island.



CENTRAL REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Joe Willis

Psalm 27:8 says, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek." "Seeking the Face of God" was the theme of this past FBFI Central Regional Fellowship held in Salina, Kansas, on October 16-17. This year's event was hosted by Pastor J. J. Sexton, senior pastor of Village Bible Church in downtown Salina.

It was a wonderful blessing to see men and women of God meeting under one roof and exalting the name of our Lord in song, fel-

lowship, and solid Bible preaching. Over fifty pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and their wives gathered during this two-day event.

Guest speakers included Mike Herbster (director of Southland Christian Ministries) and Pastor Ben Heffernan (senior pastor of Bethel Community Baptist Church in Ft. Scott, Kansas). Special music was provided by the Southland Ministry Team from Southland Christian Camp.

Special thanks to Pastor David Byford, FBFI Central Regional Coordinator, for coordinating the event and to the congregation of Village Baptist Church for their amazing food and hospitality.





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Indiana Guard Reserve

It's a beautiful day for a parade. It starts with floats making their way down the street. Then come the military formations. The Army appears in their field uniforms. You see the American flags on their right shoulders, their names in black with the words "US Army" on their jackets on the left front side. As they march past, another unit makes its way, but there are some differences that stand out. Instead of the American flag on their jackets, the Indiana flag prominently appears; instead of "US Army" there is "INDIANA" in its place. What is this special unit? Who are these men and women in uniform? You head home and start your research.

The answer is simple. These men and women are part of a state defense force (State Guard). Specifically, a state defense force for the State of Indiana known as the Indiana Guard Reserve. The first question we must answer is what is a state defense force? In the United States, state defense forces are military units that operate under the sole authority of a state government. State defense forces are authorized by state and federal law. The governor of each state is commander-in-chief; the adjutant general acts as the senior military leader.

Members of state defense forces cannot be federalized as their counterparts of the National Guard can be. The federal government recognizes state defense forces, as per the Compact Clause of the U.S. Constitution, under 32 U.S.C. § 109 which provides that state defense forces as a whole may not be called, ordered, or drafted into the armed forces of the United States, thus preserving their separation from the National Guard. Individuals can still be drafted by the federal armed forces, but as a whole the state guard in each state

only serves in the capacity of that state. Nearly every state has laws authorizing state defense forces, and twenty-two states, plus the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, have active forces with different levels of activity, support, and strength.

The Indiana Guard Reserve's history starts with the Indiana Legion which was organized in 1861 by the Indiana General Assembly to serve as Indiana's active state militia. The Indiana Legion played an intricate role in the Civil War, most known for guarding the communities along the Ohio River against confederate raiders operating in Kentucky. But the Hoosier militia also participated in patriotic celebrations of parades, public drills, and flag presentations. Along with watching out for

subversive political activities, apprehending Union deserters, and guarding Confederate prisoners-of-war at Camp Morton, Hoosier militiamen aided the Union cause by protecting the home front from invasion and internal strife, along with providing recruits for the federal armies.

The Legion was renamed the Liberty Guard in 1903 and served in various functions in the state. The Liberty Guard was renamed the Indiana Guard Reserve in 1916 and given a more formal role in the state. The Indiana Guard Reserve is organized pursuant to Indiana Code IC 10-16-8. As of April 10, 2022, the Indiana Guard Reserve was reorganized into a brigade command structure by order of The Indiana Adjutant General. The Indiana





National Guard 81st Troop Command serves as the higher headquarters element for the Indiana Guard Reserve.

The Indiana Guard Reserve is designed to be a force multiplier and utilized wherever the Indiana National Guard needs a helping hand.

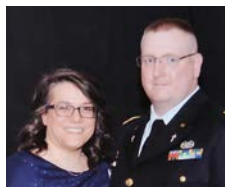
Historically the Indiana Guard Reserve has completed these missions:

- Provided logistical support for distribution of supplies for Afghan refugees at Camp Atterbury.
- Decontaminated and distributed medical equipment and supplies as a part of the COVID-19 pandemic response.
- Supplied trainers for Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps (JROTC) Camp.
- Assisted in mobilizing and demobilizing activated National Guard and Reserve troops for missions overseas at Camp Atterbury.
- Supported community events such as the American Veterans Traveling Tribute (the traveling Vietnam Wall) in Noblesville, Indiana. Took part in Operation Allies Welcome.

If you look hard enough you should be able find a state defense force right in your own state. If interested, see if there is

an opportunity to be commissioned as a Chaplain. Or just sign up and do your part to support your state.

Chaplain (Captain) Casey Stephens is the pastor of First Baptist Church in Knox, Indiana. He is a graduate of Indiana Baptist College and Antioch Baptist Seminary. He holds a BA in Pastoral Studies and a Masters of Theology. He is also an FBFI chaplain with the Indiana Guard Reserve. Casey is a professional clown and holds a black belt in Tae Kwon Do.



The Beauty of Our God-Given Identity

Continued from page 27

committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.

Before the end of his earthly journey the new Saul of Tarsus had proclaimed the name of Jesus Christ to Jews and Gentiles all around the shores of the Mediterranean. He addressed kings and proconsuls and saw many believe. It is highly likely that Paul's appeal to Caesar resulted in an audience before Nero himself. When Paul came to the end of his life, he entered eternity with the confidence that he had been faithful to his new identity and calling in Christ.

Getting our identity figured out is truly the path to peace, but it is not something that we choose for ourselves. Our Savior has and will do that for us.

So, who are you?

Kevin Schaal serves as the president of the FBFI and as pastor of Northwest Valley Baptist Church of Glendale, Arizona. He and his wife, Sandra, have seven children and seven grandchildren.



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The Story of Beauty in Church History

Continued from page 9

to do with the object *per se* but exists wholly in the mind of the subject.

Romanticism reacted to the Enlightenment's overemphasis on objective knowledge. Stressing the importance of beauty, feeling, intuition, and imagination, theologians such as Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) taught that religion was a matter of intuition and feeling. This only strengthened the view that beauty was an entirely internal and subjective experience.

At this very moment, revivalism began promoting a brand of Christianity saturated with populism. Populism has a general suspicion of things aesthetic, intellectual, and philosophical. Simultaneously, the rise of pop culture through mass media of newspapers, radio, and film meant that mass media were shaping the desires, attitudes and emotions of the average man. The mention of taste and beauty began to sound snobbish and elitist. Pragmatically minded Christians began absorbing and adopting the techniques of pop culture and the values of pop-

ulism. The secular view of beauty was coming to dominate the world and the church.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

As the loss of shared ultimate, objective values took its toll, the twentieth century slid towards nihilism, or meaninglessness. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) saw nothing of beauty in nature, writing that “nothing is so conditional . . . as our feeling for the beautiful.”

Protestant and Evangelical theologians were slow to build on Jonathan Edwards. The neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth wrote several times on the beauty of God but avoided beauty as a dominant theme in his view of God. Other significant theologians of beauty in the twentieth century include Patrick Sherry, John Navone, Paul Evdokimov, Richard Viladesau, Nicolas Wolterstoff, and Jeremy Begbie.

THE POSTMODERN HATRED OF BEAUTY

The work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche turned into the despairing philosophies of men such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Gabriel Marcel. In post-

modern philosophy beauty is simply no longer a useful or even meaningful idea. Beauty becomes an enemy, a relic from oppressive systems of thought from the past (such as Christianity) that believed truth, goodness, and beauty were real.

Contemporary society lives with a paradox: a kind of addiction to beauty, seen in its continual immersion in popular music and media images, alongside a hostility toward beauty itself by the cultural elite. Popular art gluts itself on the loud, garish, and kitsch, while simultaneously high art has created a cult of the ugly.

And whither the church? After a long winter, it seems some in the evangelical church are waking up to what we lost when we embraced Enlightenment secularism mediated through pop culture. A return to beauty as an absolute value is simply returning to what Scripture and the church have always believed.



Dr. David de Bruyn was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he now pastors New Covenant Baptist Church and resides with his wife and three children. He is a graduate of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minnesota and the University of South Africa (DTh).

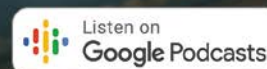
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Evangelist's Perspective

Jerry Sivnksty

Faithful in Responsibilities (Part 2)

In Luke 19:12–19 we see two servants who were dependable in what was entrusted to them by their master as he went away on a long journey. The first servant made ten more pounds with the pound he had been given; the second servant made five more pounds with his pound. These servants were commended by their master for their faithfulness and graciously rewarded. This parable should encourage the Lord's servants today to be faithful with the gifts, abilities, and opportunities He has entrusted to us.

But there is another observation that must take place from this passage. There was a third servant who was unfaithful to his master, just as in this present age there are many believers who are unfaithful to the Lord. This is what the servant said about his master in verses 20–21: “Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.”

Lenski, in his commentary on Luke, makes this statement about this servant. “What had he done with this capital that had been entrusted to him for trading? He had done nothing. ‘Here is your money,’ he says to his lord. He never had and now has no use for it. He despised his lord and was sorry for himself because he was the slave of such a lord.”

Lenski goes on to say,

We are shown how this fellow regarded the prince's order to his slave to do business for him: as a low-down, grasping scheme to get what did not rightfully belong to him, taking up what he did not lay down, sowing what he did not reap, making his slaves slave for him on order to enrich himself with their profits. Not for one moment did he feel the honor that he, a slave and nothing but a slave, should be entrusted with his great lord's wealth to handle it as if he were the lord himself. Not for one moment did he feel the nobleness of his lord in making him a trustee of his wealth and the still greater nobleness of his lord's intention by this means to raise these slaves to royal participation in his own reign. . . . This slave's falseness and selfishness are a true picture of all those in Christ's household who think that the Lord requires too much, that He will gain if they work for Him, that they will lose if they sacrifice their ease and pleasure. What does all such work bring them? And they are right in a way, it brings them nothing—there is nothing of worldly gain in spending and being spent for the Lord. (954–56)

This servant's example should be a solemn warning to those who serve the Lord with the wrong perspective. It should also

be a rebuke to any who think the Lord is too demanding when it comes to our responsibilities and opportunities. True, this world does not satisfy and offers little for those who toil for it. But when our devotion and dedication are given to what the Lord wants us to do, there are great spiritual blessings beyond our imagination! Lenski makes this clear when he writes, “The law in the kingdom of Christ is that everyone who has [by using the Word of God aright and by its getting gain for the Lord], to him shall be given more and more gain by the Lord Himself” (958). This profound truth is also expressed in Luke 6:38: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

Let us all be encouraged to be faithful, generous servants for the Lord. Invest your time, effort and spiritual gifts to your kind and loving Master. Give of your finances, your talents, your time and your abilities, and the Lord will bless you beyond measure!

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