

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

## Redeeming the Culture?

- ▶ Christian Responses to Culture
- ▶ The Church and Cultural Engagement
- ▶ Should We Be Redeeming the Culture?
- ▶ What is Worldliness?

















possible means) seek the success of the gospel. In their broadest expressions, these groups have routinely allowed the prevailing culture to influence both the structure of their worship and their presentation of the gospel far more heavily than the isolationists have. For them, culture is a neutral phenomenon (such as water or air) that may be massaged toward good or evil ends. Rather than creating a competing culture (as the isolationists do), cultural integrationists seek to “redeem” the common culture that they share with the world.

While the integrationist approach has historically been held by postmillennialists,<sup>1</sup> a majority of integrationists today embrace some form of *inaugurated* eschatology. This is the view that Christ’s kingdom has already begun, but it will not be realized in all its fulness until He returns.<sup>2</sup> For them, the “presence of the future” makes the church’s work into labor for the kingdom of God. As such, the church’s mission involves not only evangelism and discipleship but also reclaiming every sphere of culture in the name of King Jesus.

## THE TWO-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Between isolationism and integrationism lies the path in the middle. It is largely ignored at present, though it has been well represented in the history of the Christian church. Prolific fifth-century writer Pope Gelasius introduced seed forms of this middle approach via his “two swords” doctrine (variously adapted during the Middle Ages by Boniface, Thomas Aquinas, and others), and it appeared later in Calvin’s “two governments” and Luther’s “two kingdoms.” Southern Presbyterianism (including J. Gresham Machen) kept the approach alive in American life, and it has seen a revival of interest in pockets of modern Presbyterianism. This approach denies that the church has any institutional role in establishing a secular or material kingdom on earth.

Different theologies can lead to this position. Amillennialists who hold to this doctrine reject any notion of a future earthly kingdom, so they feel no responsibility to bring in the kingdom. Hard premillennialists do affirm a future earthly kingdom, but they do not believe that the church plays any role in establishing it (other than to populate it through evangelism). Instead, they believe that Christ alone will bring the kingdom into being by supernatural means in a great future millennium. Reformed Baptists, with their robust emphasis on the separation of church and state, often take a similar approach.

What unites these disparate groups is a shared and narrow vision of the church’s mission. They see the church as a distinctly *spiritual* institution. Its mission is captured in the Great Commission: evangelism, church planting, and instruction of believers for Christian obedience (Matt. 28:19–20). Strikingly absent from their understanding of the mission of the institutional church is any social or political mandate and any expectation of ethical progress in the world.

Despite its narrow mission for the *church as church*, however, this model does not require *individual* Christian isolation. Christians must never stop seeking the good of their world as long as it exists. The world may be in shambles, but God is still its King, and its human rulers continue to be His “ministers,” wielding “the sword” given to them by divine grant after

Noah’s Flood (Rom. 13:4). For this reason, believers must obey their governors as they obey God Himself (1 Pet. 2:13–17). Furthermore, God has placed individual believers *in* the world in every sphere, though He tasks them with not being *of* the world (John 17:13–19). They are not reclaiming the world *per se*, but living in it as the best possible citizens, laborers, professionals, artists, officials, neighbors, family members, students, and so forth. Doing these things is not the mission of the institutional church but the responsibility established in the Garden of Eden and given to all humanity. They carry their faith into the world, not merely to create a platform for gospel proclamation (though this can be an incidental benefit), but to fulfill what God has always intended for humans everywhere to do.

This model sometimes describes Christians as “dual citizens” within the two governments of God (that is, His *civil* and *ecclesiastical* governments). We have allegiances to two divinely authorized and non-overlapping spheres of government in the present age. These are not (as Augustine suggested) the city of God and the city of man. No, both are *God’s* governments.

This two-government approach to church and culture takes seriously all our diverse responsibilities to God our King. It allows us to be neither monastics who avoid the world, crusaders who savage the world, nor collaborators who love the

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**WE DO NEED THE CHURCH TO REMIND US THAT, HAVING BEEN FORGIVEN, WE ARE NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST. WE MUST BECOME SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT THE WORLD WANTS US TO BE. WE ARE PILGRIMS ON THE SAME DIFFICULT JOURNEY, PARTICIPANTS IN THE SAME MISSION, AND RECIPIENTS OF THE SAME MIGHTY HOPE.**



# Baptists, Dispensationalists, and Christian Nationalism

**D**iscussing Christian nationalism is impossible without defining Christian nationalism. Unfortunately, the expression resists easy definition. The words “Christian” and “nationalism” both have a variety of meanings. Pairing the words multiplies the confusion.

One can be a Christian and a nationalist without being a Christian nationalist. I take it that most readers of *FrontLine* are Christians. Are they also nationalists?

Government operates best when its power is kept to the most local level possible. That being so, we should be skeptical of any attempt to construct an international or global government. Nationalists recognize that nations should be autonomous and chiefly concerned with their own security and welfare. Given this definition, I see no theological objection to being both a Christian and a nationalist.

Further, anyone who advocates for morally conservative legislation or jurisprudence will be labeled a Christian nationalist. The question for us is not whether we will be called Christian nationalists, something that is probably unavoidable. Our question is whether Christian nationalism is a position that we should deliberately endorse.

Christian nationalism exists on a spectrum. A moderate form of Christian nationalism simply fosters gratitude for

the pervasive Christian influence on our nation’s founding and historical culture and hopes to see that “bottom up” influence continue. I endorse this understanding of Christian nationalism.

A stronger version of Christian nationalism advocates for an overtly Christian theocratic state. This version holds that the state should do all that it does—writing and executing laws, deciding cases, and establishing public policies—explicitly because those acts are required of it by the Christian God. At its root the foundational rationale for any action of a Christian nationalist government is, “Because the Triune God of the Bible says so.”

A Christian nation might be identified by specific policies, but its most defining characteristic is the *reason* for those policies. A government might either prohibit non-Christian religions or permit broad religious freedom. The former is an obvious expression of Christian nationalism. But the latter can be as well if the *government’s* rationale for the policy is that Christianity itself mandates a government to permit freedom of religion.

Not all theonomies look alike. It is the stronger version of Christian nationalism—and the theology accompanying it—that is my topic.

Advocacy of Christian nationalism sits uneasily with two aspects of our thought. First, as dispensationalists we are commit-

ted to the idea that the present Church Age is not an expression of the earthly kingdom of God. Second, as Baptists we are committed to the separation of church and state. These two commitments are related. While not all Baptists are dispensationalists or vice versa, there is a natural theological fit between dispensationalism and Baptist theology and practice.

I contend that Baptists and dispensationalists who embrace Christian nationalism are theologically at odds with themselves. Our ecclesiastical and eschatological convictions do not permit us to establish a Christian nation in this age. I will show how these positions are incompatible. Then I will outline some of our positive responsibilities toward our government.

## DISPENSATIONALISM AND CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Dispensationalism is a biblical theology of the kingdom of God on earth. From creation God’s purpose was to establish a kingdom on earth ruled through one of His image bearers. Adam’s sin disqualified him from this office and ruined the kingdom. The Pentateuch and Historical Books show how the kingdom of God was established on earth. Israel was constituted as a literal, physical, political kingdom, and David and his heirs were promised an unending reign.

# I CONTEND THAT BAPTISTS AND DISPENSATIONALISTS WHO EMBRACE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM ARE THEOLOGICALLY AT ODDS WITH THEMSELVES.

By the end of the Old Testament, that kingdom lay in shambles. Israel was divided, conquered, exiled, and restored. The return from exile was only a faint shadow of the glorious future that the prophets had foretold. In their vision, the Davidic throne would be reestablished, and Israel would be made the highest of the nations.

The Gospel accounts of our Lord's ministry are charged with these inspired expectations. When Jesus came announcing that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17), His words had to be understood against the backdrop of the prophetic promise. Nevertheless, He "came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The physical blessings of the kingdom cannot be separated from the full acceptance of its king. Following the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, He spent forty days with His disciples, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Yet the disciples' idea of the kingdom was not transformed into something other than the one that the prophets had foreseen. The disciples understood this connection when they asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Essential to dispensationalism is this answer: the kingdom will be established when the king returns and not before. During the present age we are ambassadors of the coming king, urging people to be "reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Those who are reconciled become present citizens of a future kingdom, "translated . . . into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). The people of God in this age are "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Pet. 2:11) who "desire a better country" (Heb. 11:16). The New Testament tells us to expect discomfort more than dominion. Dispensational theology does not allow for the establishment of a political, physical kingdom of God on earth during the present age.

## BAPTISTS AND CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Baptist theology and practice readily fit with this eschatological insight. To be sure, Baptists have had practical reasons to reject established churches, having often faced religious persecution at the hands of state authorities. But our theological convictions ought not be a matter of merely prudential self-preservation.

Baptists and dispensationalists together insist that one significant distinction between Israel and the Church is the absence of birthright citizenship during this Church Age. Children of Israelites were part of the covenant community by birth, and male children received the sign of that membership in infancy. Now, however, the kingdom is no longer on earth. Our own children, while occupying a place of providential spiritual privilege, are not included in the people of God merely because we parents are believers. Baptists do not extend to infants the sign of covenant membership.

These Baptist convictions do not suit the notion of a Christian nation. When state and church are joined, it is necessary to link citizenship in the nation and membership in the church. In a Christian nation, infant baptism becomes the sign and seal of both. Because believer baptism emphasizes the distinction between earthly and heavenly citizenships, state and church are necessarily distinct in Baptist theology.

If we as Baptists and dispensationalists are theologically blocked from endorsing full-fledged Christian nationalism, where does that leave us politically? Are we reduced to disengagement from all participation in government? No. The Baptist commitment to separation of church and state has never been understood to bar us from seeking to influence our governments toward righteousness.

But we should distinguish between *our own* reasons for advocating specific public policies (reasons that can and should often be overtly Christian) and the *government's* reasons for implementing them. In a nation such as ours, our elected officials act in response to their constituents (within the bounds of the Constitution). That means that as Christians we have liberty (and at least some obligation) to pursue righteous public policies by voting, petitioning our officials, and seeking to persuade our fellow citizens.

But what if our efforts at persuasion fail? What if the votes of the people result

in unrighteousness? Should we seek to use the state's monopoly on force to implement Christian righteousness against the popular will? This alternative—that our governing officials *impose* a theological vision of righteousness on the populace, regardless of the consent of the governed—is implied by those who currently advocate Christian nationalism.

If a Christian moral vision must be imposed, whose version of Christianity will it be? Consider the conflicts among the Throne-and-Altar Roman Catholics, the Seven-Mountain-Mandate charismatics, and the postmillennial Reformed theologians, all of whom wish to establish Christian nations. Whose religious and moral convictions should be established by the force of the state?

We are instructed to pray "for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1-3). As a matter of liberty we encounter many differences of opinion as to how our government might best be organized to promote its citizens' welfare. These diverging opinions involve issues where we would all agree on the *morality* of the matter while disagreeing about the role of the state in mandating righteousness. We must make room for disagreements among brothers on these matters.

## CONCLUSION

As churches our mission must be clear: we are preparing current citizens of a future kingdom. Our Lord has charged us to make disciples of "all nations"; we baptize and teach individuals worldwide, organizing them into churches "even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). And while "now we see not yet all things put under him" (Heb. 2:8), we continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

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# All Things to All Men

**F**or many American evangelicals, the call to cultural engagement is a call to “contextualize”<sup>1</sup> the gospel and its accompanying practices. While believers must communicate the gospel clearly (Col. 4:3–4), advocates of contextualized ministry will often add that evangelists and church planters must appropriate the latest cultural trends to make the gospel more palatable to unbelievers and “seekers.” Gurus of this approach have tried to defend their position from 1 Corinthians 9:22, where Paul states, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

Contextualization relativizes and minimizes the fact that cultures are laden with values, meaning, and even religious significance.<sup>2</sup> Cultural habits and customs have varying importance, but they always have meaning. In American culture, tennis shoes and dress shoes carry different meanings, as do eating with a fork and eating with fingers.

Was it Paul’s method to become a cultural shapeshifter for the sake of the gospel? Does 1 Corinthians 9:22 mean that the apostle abandoned the nascent “Christian culture” to assume the garb of whatever situation he found himself in? If Paul visited Los Angeles today, would he, like Rick Warren, say, “When in southern California I became like a southern Californian in order to win southern Californians”?<sup>3</sup> I suggest that hipster ministry was the

furthest thing from Paul’s mind in 1 Corinthians 9:22.

## THE PROBLEM OF RIGHTS IN CORINTH

Paul’s statement is part of a larger section of 1 Corinthians that begins in 8:1 and extends to 11:1. All three chapters deal with a question that the Corinthians asked Paul, namely, whether they could eat food offered to idols. Paul raised the topic in 8:1: “Now as touching things offered unto idols. . . .” In accord with the Jerusalem Council, Paul had told the Corinthian converts that they were to abstain “from pollutions of idols” (Acts 15:20). This apostolic policy brought unhappy consequences for the Corinthians, so they challenged Paul’s instruction. Paul remained unchanged: you may not knowingly eat food offered to idols (1 Cor. 10:25–30). After dealing with some slogans and misunderstandings of Christian doctrine, he argued that the Corinthian believers did not have “liberty” (8:9) to cause a “weak brother” to “perish” (8:11).

The final verse in chapter 8 is a hinge leading into chapter 9: “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” Paul resolved that he would willingly give up meat for another’s spiritual good. As chapter 9 begins, Paul shows that this statement is more than hypothetical: he had already given up his right to receive basic provisions for the sake of the gospel.

First, however, Paul had to show that, as an apostle (9:1, 2) who labored for the Corinthians’ spiritual good, he possessed certain prerogatives. These included the “power” (9:4, 5, 6; cf. 8:9, “liberty”) to receive food to “eat” (9:4) and to “forbear working” (9:6). Paul supported his assertion with arguments from nature (9:7), the Old Testament law (9:8–12), and the Levitical priesthood (9:13), demonstrating his right to be compensated for his ministerial work. Each of those arguments involved eating.

In spite of his rights, Paul insisted that “we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ” (9:12). He was drawing a contrast. While he was ready to relinquish a God-given right so he could help people know Christ, the Corinthians were eager to exercise a right or liberty they did not really possess (eating food offered to idols), that would harm a brother spiritually.

## A SERVANT TO ALL

In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul proclaimed, “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” In the previous verse Paul refused to exercise his right to receive food so he could preach Jesus Christ. Now he asserts that though he is a freeman, he has embraced the life of a slave for Christ to “gain” sinners for Christ.

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## All Things to All Men

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What follows is a powerful explanation of Paul's life of selfless abandonment for Christ. This passage is not about becoming a camouflage Christian who blends into whatever culture he is in. Rather, it is about becoming a servant by yielding rights to prevent obstacles to the gospel.

In 9:20, Paul explained how he lived among Jews to present Jesus to them as their Messiah. He became “as a Jew”—that is, “as under the law”—to win Jews to Christ. Paul did not consider himself to be under the Mosaic law (7:18–19), but he was willing to become a servant to Jews. He may have mentioned the Jews because they found eating food offered to idols especially offensive.

How did Paul become “as a Jew” to the Jews? Acts 21 is a good example. Some Jewish Christians misunderstood Paul's doctrine, so at the request of the Jerusalem pastors, Paul observed a purification rite with four other Jewish believers. This was a significant burden for Paul. He had no mandate to shave his head, pay the purification costs, or attend the temple. Yet he did these things—becoming “as a Jew”—to win Jews to their Messiah (Rom. 9:1–3).

Paul's ministry to Gentiles, “them that are without law,” was marked by a similar selflessness, as 1 Corinthians 9:21–22a describes. By coming to Gentiles “without law,” Paul does not mean he embraced lawlessness. Instead, though not under the Mosaic law, he nevertheless lived a life “under the law to Christ.”

How then did Paul become “as one outside the law” (9:21 ESV) to Gentiles? He certainly did not embrace a lifestyle of “when in Corinth, do as the Corinthians do.” He did not become more Epicurean (15:32). Rather, he came to the Corinthian Gentiles as a saint in Jesus Christ, doing all that Christ commands. His ethic was rooted in loving God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving his neighbor as himself. Later, in chapter 10, Paul

clearly says that eating food offered to idols will confuse Gentiles concerning the exclusive claims of Christ (10:28–29, 32–33).

In 9:20, “Jew” is parallel to “under the law.” In verses 21–22, “outside the law” is parallel to “weak.” The weak are guilty sinners helplessly broken before God. In 1:27, Paul said, “God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” In giving up his rights, especially the right to receive food and payment, Paul became weak, especially in the Corinthians' eyes. For Paul to become “weak” means that he refused to blend into Corinthian culture as a strategy for ministry success (4:10; 2 Cor. 12:10).

### ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22b reiterate the beginning of the paragraph and 9:19.<sup>4</sup> Paul began by calling himself the servant of all. The restatement in verse 22b reinforces this: “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” The key word is “all,” appearing three times.

In becoming “all things to all men,” Paul triumphantly proclaims his Christlike, sacrificial renunciation of his rights (9:19) as a servant of all people for the gospel's sake. His statement is sweeping and brims with zeal for his mission. Though free in Christ, he is a slave to all for Christ's sake. Paul bids farewell to his rights so that he can bring all people to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The English translation of 9:22c is tricky. On the one hand, translators rightly want to capture the emphasis on “all,” but the phrase “by all means” is ambiguous. Some take the expression “by all means” to indicate “by whatever means necessary.” They assume that whatever it takes to win a convert is justified. However, Paul is saying that, for those who believe his gospel—for those who are won and saved—they are *certainly* saved. The phrase “by all means” does not justify pragmatism in ministry but emphasizes that no saint will ever be lost when he is saved by faith in Christ's redeeming blood.

The word “win,” used throughout 9:19–21, shows that Paul was not willing to go to any conceivable length to “accommodate” unbelievers. He wanted sinners to repent. His goal was not to leave them bound to sin, but to win all people—Jews and Gentiles alike (Rom. 1:16–17)—as subjects of the Lord Jesus. Paul's self-emptying ministry was for the sake of the gospel, so that he might share in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:23).

First Corinthians 9:19–23 is Paul's explanation of the renunciation of his rights for the sake of gospel preaching. Paul gave up his freedom from the Mosaic law so that he could remove obstacles to the Jews. Paul gave up his rights as an apostle (including support from the churches) so that he could see Gentiles believe. He came as one under Christ's law, living a holy life, to see unbelievers won to Christ. In sum, he became a servant of all so that he might see some sinners saved (see 2 Cor. 6:3–10). He said “No” to the things he had a right to do so that sinners would say “Yes” to Jesus.

This passage is not about Paul embracing the mores or culturally subversive practices of the prevailing culture around him in ministerial pragmatism. In fact, it is about the opposite. Paul was willing to give up his rights, and he became a weak servant, so that he could bring sinners under Christ's saving authority. This is the approach he wanted the Corinthians to take concerning food offered to idols (1 Cor. 10:31–11:1).

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<sup>1</sup> “Contextualization” is a hotly debated term. For some, contextualization refers to all legitimate attempts to make Christianity more comprehensible to specific people. Others, however, target their ministry to a culture in such a way as to compromise basic biblical methods of church doctrine, practice, and communication. This article addresses these latter views of contextualization.

<sup>2</sup> Eliot, T. S., *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), 103.

<sup>3</sup> Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 171.

<sup>4</sup> Several commentaries argue for a chiasmic structure in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, including Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 423–24.

**PAUL GAVE UP HIS FREEDOM FROM THE MOSAIC LAW SO THAT HE COULD REMOVE OBSTACLES TO THE JEWS. PAUL GAVE UP HIS RIGHTS AS AN APOSTLE (INCLUDING SUPPORT FROM THE CHURCHES) SO THAT HE COULD SEE GENTILES BELIEVE.**



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**REDEEMING  
THE CULTURE?**

**David de Bruyn**

# Multiculturalism and the Local Church



**“O**ur church is proudly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-generational” says the “About Us” page on a church website. *That’s a lot of multis*, we think as we read it, though we know what they seem to be saying. They’re attempting to tell us that the makeup of their gathered assembly has plenty of variety in appearance, age, and background. Less obviously, they are telling us that their church’s makeup is a desirable mix, perhaps one that other churches should mimic.

Indeed, some voices have gone further and claimed that churches without a mix of ethnicities fall short of God’s plan for the church. They suggest churches should undertake a kind of religious affirmative action, actively courting people from a variety of races into membership, selecting leaders partly on skin color so as to reflect racial diversity, and even changing the music and preaching to reflect the backgrounds and preferences of attendees. As if many a pastor did not already feel his failures acutely, here is another weight for his rucksack of guilt: *Your church is not multicultural enough.*

Three questions can help us think rightly about this kind of ecclesiastical multiculturalism. First, what do we mean by “multicultural churches”? We need clear definitions, and an overused and ambiguous word such as “multicultural” needs much defining. Second, we need to ask whether Scripture commands the pursuit of multiculturalism. Third, we must consider how a pastor should lead a church in view of special situations that require special pastoral wisdom.

### WHAT IS “MULTICULTURALISM”?

As for definitions, Scripture does not contain or define the seventeenth-century word “culture,” but it does describe the action of culture-making. Humans are creatures who create meaning, fashioning their world after their values, religions, and worldviews. For example, the apostle Peter contrasts two forms of culture: one received by tradition and the other shaped by the new life in Christ (1 Pet. 1:14–19). He critiques the culture that his readers inherited in their unregenerate state. He insists that they cultivate a new culture based upon holiness. In fact, the old Latin word for religion is *cultus*. We could say

that culture is what people *cultivate* to express their *cultus*.

Here is the first misstep. Since “culture” refers to the outward expression of a religion, then “multicultural” really means “multireligious.” While no church means to communicate “We are a multireligious church” on its website, words do matter, because meanings matter. By referring to “culture” when it means “ethnicity,” a church opens the door to error and misunderstanding.

One sees the sad result of equating ethnicity and culture in South Africa where I minister. Here, untaught believers will still refer to “my culture” as a contrast to another believer’s culture. You will routinely hear people say that missionaries brought “their culture” and imposed it upon Africa. Some dear black believers are desperately trying to discover some pristine form of “African Christian culture” untouched by Western hands. Believers speak of certain ways of worship as belonging to one culture as opposed to another. All this comes from misunderstanding how culture relates to ethnicity, and perhaps from the misuse of the term “multicultural.”

I rejoice in the ethnic diversity of the country and the congregation in which I minister. I love the many colors of the faces that look back at me on a Sunday morning. I enjoy being called “Mfundisi” (Xhosa for “pastor”) by some of the members. I enjoy tasting, hearing, and seeing the varieties of foods, languages, and customs that mingle in our local church. A multiethnic church is a joy. Racism is an evil, and I will, as the occasion suggests, write and preach against it.

But my church is not “multicultural.” According to a proper definition of “culture,” that would be equivalent to saying it is multireligious. No, in the biblical sense, my church is “monocultural.” We have one culture: one that loves and honors Christ. Scripture is our final authority, and it shapes the loves, beliefs, and behavior of the congregation. However much melanin is contained in the skin of the various members, whichever of our country’s eleven national languages they speak, however varied some of our customs may be, we are actually bound and shaped by one culture: Christian culture.

We must draw a clear distinction between ethnicity and culture. If culture and ethnicity are synonymous, then no culture can be critiqued. One would then

be judging the value of a people based upon skin color, which is racism proper. Scripture does not judge our *ethnos* (nation, or ethno-linguistic background). It does, however, judge our culture. If the culture of a people has produced immorality, idolatry, or perversion, then Scripture condemns it.

Without the distinction between culture and ethnicity, we cannot distinguish sinful behavior from skin color, false beliefs from languages, or incorrect worldviews from harmless customs. We are restricted from dealing with all kinds of discipleship situations. Our churches should replace the term “multicultural” with “multiethnic” if they are trying to communicate the idea of a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and physical appearances.

### DOES SCRIPTURE REQUIRE MULTICULTURALISM?

With that said, is a multiethnic church something Scripture commands? Those who say so often turn to the beautiful scene in Revelation 7:9 describing “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” standing before the throne and the Lamb. We all long for this moment, but we must remember that biblical *descriptions* are not necessarily *prescriptions*. We can bind the conscience only with scriptural commands.

The New Testament, and particularly the Book of Acts, describes the reversal of Babel at Pentecost and the ingrafting of all nations into the olive tree (Rom. 11:17). Paul condemned the teaching that one needed to become a Jewish proselyte before receiving the Jewish Messiah. The conversion of Cornelius is a landmark moment demonstrating that access to salvation is now equally granted to all nations, something that Paul continually repeats in his epistles (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11–19; Col. 3:11). Yet this celebration of the destruction of ethnic barriers to salvation falls short of commanding pastors and evangelists to engineer the ethnic makeup of their churches. Ethnic diversity is clearly loved by God, and when it is present in a local church’s geographical area, no barrier or partiality should exclude any ethnicity from the church.

Still, is the pastor in a rural province of India sinning because his congregation consists of one ethnicity? Or should

the inner-city pastor resist the fact that socioeconomics has brought a principal ethnicity to his doorstep? Is the pastor of a church in rural Nebraska supposed to ensure that the demographics of his congregation match those of the nation at large? Nothing in Scripture says so. Instead, principles for ministering to a multiethnic church apply just about equally to ministry in an ethnically homogeneous area. We wish all nations to know that the church is for them.

### HOW SHOULD WE PASTOR A MULTICULTURAL CONGREGATION?

This principle implies the answer to our third question: how should one pastor a multiethnic church? First, pastors should preach Christ's preeminence. When Christ is all in all, ethnic differences matter less (Col. 3:11). Over time, these differences, when shared among members who have covenanted to love one another in Christ, become nothing more than curiosities and even enjoyable variations. Understanding that unholy traits are present in cultures (Titus 1:12) should give us compassion and understanding as we consider one another's backgrounds. Some traits belong to unbelieving cultures and will change with exposure to the gospel. Some traits belong to ethnic diversity and will add color and pleasurable diversity to the church. Submission to Christ as preeminent helps us to tell the difference.

Second, pastors should emphasize the loves and affections that Christian congregations share, uniting around sound exposition of Scripture and sober Christian worship. Consider how often Scripture exhorts believers to have "the same mind" (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:1-2; 3:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:8-9). Unity is not built by focusing on unity. It is maintained by setting our affections on the same object: the beauty of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:3). This focus helps pastors navigate the difficult waters of varied ethnic backgrounds and preferences.

Instead of getting mired in the swamp of "white culture vs. black culture" or "Western culture vs. ethnic culture," pastors can cut their way through the thicket by emphasizing the universality of Christian teaching and practices. Pastors should ask what doctrine, worship, and practice true Christians have united around across continents, languages, ethnicities, and eras. They should search for what is timeless and universally accepted. We cannot dismiss a hymnal as "white" if its hymns originate from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well as Europe and America. We cannot reject a doctrine or practice as "colonial" if it was believed and practiced for centuries in India, North Africa, and Syria.

Instead of seeking to be culturally relevant to subgroups within their churches, pastors should focus on those things that have become permanent and that evidence timeless, cross-ethnic value. By seeking

broad and timeless expressions of Christian culture, they encourage church members to defer to one another in the pursuit of one-mindedness (which is the point of Romans 14), rather than asserting selfish preferences. The pastor seeking to maintain Spirit-given unity should not be shy of the Providence-given Christian tradition.

Third, pastors should encourage healthy spiritual friendships in the church as they model hospitality toward all (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9; Heb. 13:2). Partiality can be conquered by working to overcome our discomfort with strangers, whether they seem strange to us because of language, background, or even economics. Friendships begin with shared interests, and pastors neither can nor should prevent the natural magnetism of similar people drawing together. Over time, however, Christ will become a more consuming and central interest to people than the less substantial realms of sports, food, hobbies, or occupations.

A multiethnic church is a beautiful thing if Providence has made such a thing geographically workable. Our primary pursuit, however, is not how our churches look outwardly. Our pursuit is preparing a Bride for her Wedding Day.

David de Bruyn, ThD, was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he pastors New Covenant Baptist Church.



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# Mailbag

Just writing in reference to the November/December issue of *FrontLine* magazine. It was amazing to revisit those wonderful truths in regard to the "The God of Beauty." To recount that we see God's beauty in every direction we look. Especially those believers that have been redeemed by the grace of God! The anticipation of being in glory to worship our Lord Jesus Christ in the beauty of His holiness. And the article by Jim Tillotson, "Holding on to Hope," was especially a blessing to me. Keep up the great work of encouragement!

*Dan Jeffery, CBM Missionary  
Palmer, Alaska*

Thank you for a great magazine.

*Pastor Edwin Anderson  
Yuma, CO*



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Please let the *FrontLine* office know your new address so we can update our records.

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# Regional Report

## NEW ENGLAND FELLOWSHIP MEETING

The New England FBFI Fellowship combined with the New England Foundations Conference and met on Saturday, October 14, 2023. We had a wonderful attendance of about 115 registrants. Dr. Chuck Phelps was our guest speaker for the day and spoke on the topic of God's faithfulness. The conference was a blessing to all who came as we listened to Dr. Phelps speak the truth of God's trustworthiness even in the midst of great difficulty. Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, NH, was delighted to host this event again under our New England Foundations Conference moniker. We look forward to our conference this year on Saturday, October 19, 2024, when we will feature five New England pastors as our keynote speakers throughout the day.



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# SOUND WORDS

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

## FIRST PARTAKER

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

### Preaching Christ

*If you’ve never read a book on the subject of preaching Christ, I’d like to recommend Preaching Christ: The Heart of Gospel Ministry by Charles P. McIlvaine. The book was originally a message delivered to an annual convention of ministers at Akron, Ohio, in June 1863.*

*McIlvaine had been chaplain of the West Point Military Academy. Under his prayers and preaching a revival broke out among the cadets. Later he pastored in New York City and still later was elected to the position of chief overseer (bishop) of the State of Ohio. He was a militant evangelical who opposed the elevation of sacraments and ceremonies at the expense of evangelical preaching. His preaching had an awakening effect upon sinners. When W. B. Sprague published his widely read Lectures on Revivals, he asked McIlvaine for the contribution of a letter that would clarify for the readers the nature of true revival, including dangers to be avoided. McIlvaine did so, testifying,*

*It has been my lot to witness the power of the Spirit in circumstances peculiarly unpropitious, overcoming obstacles of the most formidable kind, and effecting, in spite of them, conversions of a nature specially distinguished by the decision, force, and consistency of Christian character which they have since exhibited.*

*Here was a man well qualified to write about gospel preaching.*

*You may discover that McIlvaine, like James M. Gray (president of Moody Bible Institute and a contributor to*

*the Scofield Reference Bible), was an evangelical Episcopalian. Don’t let that deter you! There’s nothing in this particular book that has anything to do with Episcopalianism. It’s all about Christ. It’s all about gospel preaching. It’s all about preaching Christ more knowingly and intentionally.*

*I read McIlvaine’s book Preaching Christ this last summer in less than a day. I could scarcely put it down. Perhaps it was just that I needed the emphasis more than most, but I’m hopeful that others may profit as well. So in the interest of more and better preaching of Christ, I’ve excerpted and lightly edited certain portions. May they instruct and encourage all of us.*

#### HOW DID THE APOSTLES PREACH CHRIST?

It is now forty years since I was called of God, and in his Providence permitted and enabled to take part in this holy ministry. More and more I have learned the need that ministers should keep their teaching close to that one central and living theme if they would have it honored of God as his power unto salvation. I propose to you as our starting point, the question, *What is embraced in the work of preaching Christ according to the mind of the Spirit, as exhibited in the teaching of his Word, and in the practice of his Apostles?*

It is manifest from the Scriptures that the Apostles identified the gospel *with Christ*. In their view and practice, to preach the gospel was neither more nor less than to preach Christ. But we must here note the chief feature of their preaching Christ. They omitted nothing pertaining to him; but there was one thing on which more than anything else, they very particularly and emphatically dwelt. They said continually, like John the Baptist, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the*

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*sin of the world.* It was the Lamb slain—Christ in his death—bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, that they pointed to.

Thus we have our example. In the way the Apostles preached the gospel we must try to preach it. As they preached Christ, so must we. God forbid that we should glory in anything else as ministers of the Word. Preachers of Christ, according to the mind of Christ—ah, how all honors, all satisfaction in our work will perish but that!

*Human device would have said, as it has often said in substance, Make philosophy prepare the way. Clothe your teaching in robes of man's wisdom. Keep back the offence of the cross till you have first conciliated the respect of your hearers by a show of human learning and reasoning. And when your master must be preached directly, don't begin at his death. Speak of his life; its benevolence, its beauty. Compare his moral precepts with those of heathen sages. Christ as the example and the teacher is your great theme.*

### WHAT IS IT TO PREACH CHRIST?

We have a great example in our Lord's own teaching. When after his resurrection he met the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and found them in such darkness and doubt, it is written that *beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* Our office as Christian ministers, in expounding the Scriptures, is to bring forth all their teaching concerning that glorious One himself. St Paul, therefore, said that he was *separated unto the Gospel of God . . . concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 1:1-3).

In the Gospel concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, in the circle of doctrines and duties and promises and blessings which constitute the message of great salvation in him, there is a system of parts mutually related, and all in perfect harmony. None are so obscure as to be of no importance to the right representation of the whole. That system, like that of our sun, has a center by which all the parts are held in place, and from which all their light and life proceed, and around which all revolve. You cannot exhibit the system of truth and duty till you have made known that central light and power. Nor can you make known that power in all its truth, without exhibiting those surrounding and dependent

parts of doctrine and precept. That central sun of light and life is Christ. All gospel truth and duty of consolation and strength abides in Christ, derives from Christ, and glorifies Christ. It must be so presented or it is divorced from its only life and loses its gospel character. He is the True Vine, and all parts of gospel truth are branches in him. Let such truth be presented without that connection, and its character as truth may remain, but its character for truth as it is *in Jesus* is lost. Its vitality is gone. It cannot produce the fruit of life in Christ Jesus. It is just as true and important concerning truth as concerning men, that the branch cannot bring forth fruit except it abide in the vine.

### BEGIN WITH CHRIST.

Now what is the best mode of setting forth this system of grace? Where shall we begin? Shall we take up the outsides of the circle, reasoning upward from general truths to the more particular? Shall we explain and enforce ordinances and institutions of the Church as our road of approach to the Head and Life of the Church? Shall we thus gradually and after a long process of preparatory work arrive at last at the person and mission and sacrifice of Christ?

We must remember who they are whom we are thus keeping so long in the cold and in the dark. They are sinners under the condemnation of the law of God. They are dying sinners. How brief the time of some of them to learn you do not know. You have no time to spend on preliminaries before you have introduced them to the great salvation. What they need the most is to know he who came to seek and to save the lost, how they may find him, and what are the terms of his salvation.

Begin at once with Christ. *Behold the Lamb of God*, is the voice. There is no light till that light appears. The icy bondage of the sinner's heart yields not till that sun is risen.

Astronomers, when they teach the solar system, begin with the sun. Thence to the related and independent orbits is easy. So the apostles taught. See how, when they had the whole system of the Gospel as distinguished from that of the law to teach the Jews, the whole outward and visible of the Christian Church as well as all the inward and spiritual of the Christian life, all so new and strange and unpalatable to a people so unprepared, so entangled with traditionary aversions and deep-seated perversions—see how they leaped over all preliminaries and began at once with Christ and him crucified. They broke ground there at once, and set up the banner of their ministry. Just at the point where the pride of the sinner would most revolt, and the wisdom of man was most at fault, and the ignorance of Jew and Gentile was most complete, where the Jew saw only a stumbling block and the Greek only foolishness, there they opened

their message. *I delivered unto you first of all*, said St Paul, *that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*. They could not wait to root out prejudice, plant first principles, and approach by the strategy of man's wisdom the entrenched power that ruleth in the children of disobedience, when they knew that Christ was the great power of God unto salvation. To open the windows and let in the sun immediately was their way of giving light to them that sat in darkness.

Human device would have said, as it has often said in substance, *Make philosophy prepare the way*. Clothe your teaching in robes of man's wisdom. Keep back the offence of the cross till you have first conciliated the respect of your hearers by a show of human learning and reasoning. And when your master must be preached directly, don't begin at his death. Speak of his life; its benevolence, its beauty. Compare his moral precepts with those of heathen sages. Christ as the example and the teacher is your great theme.

*No*, said St Paul, *lest the cross should be of none effect . . . that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*. They remembered the words of their Lord: *I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me*. Lifted up on the cross, he had already been. Lifted up as Christ crucified for us, in the sight of the whole world by the ministry of the Gospel, he was now to be. Such was God's argument with sinful men. They believed, and therefore preached. God gave the increase, and wonderful was the harvest.

## CHRIST IN ALL HIS PERSON AND RELATIONS TO US

Thus, dear brethren, we have our lesson. We must begin as well as end with Christ, and always abide in him for the life and power of our ministry, just as we do for the peace and joy of our own souls. But having thus begun, what remains?

It is the revealed office of the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier and the Comforter to glorify Christ. *He shall glorify me*, said the Lord. But how? *He shall take of mine and show it unto you*. It is *our* office, also, under the power of the Holy Spirit, to glorify Christ in all his person and relations to us, and by the same method; namely, to take of what pertains to him and show it unto men. Whatever pertains to him we are to show. We must expound in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Of those things we will attempt a brief sketch and outline, but it must be only the merest outline, and that very imperfect.

We must preach Christ in regard to the glory of the Godhead which he had with the Father before the world was. In the same connection are the Incarnation and

Birth of our Lord. The one is as essential to the gospel as the other—the perfect man is the perfect God.

In preaching Christ crucified, let us take care that we avoid the mistake, not infrequently made, of terminating our representation almost entirely with the crucifixion—as if the slaying of the sacrifice completed the *oblation* of the sacrifice. We must not forget that the office of the High Priest was to enter within the veil with the blood of sprinkling. “Christ crucified” is not merely Christ on the cross, but Christ also *on the right hand of the throne of God*, as having, *endured the cross*. That throne is called *the throne of the Lamb*, and the redeemed in heaven are represented as praising the Lamb *that was slain*.

Thus, we must preach him as “Christ the continuing priest.”

Closely allied to our Lord's priesthood, offering the perpetual oblation of his sacrifice, is his office as the great Prophet and Teacher of his church. It is as the King of glory, that he freely receives every sinner who seeks his salvation, writing the law of his kingdom in his heart, giving him victory over the enemies of his soul, making him triumphant in death, and finally saying unto him from his throne, *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*.

## TRUTHS CONNECTED WITH PREACHING CHRIST

In the range of gospel truth there are subjects of instruction which, though not directly concerning his person and office, are so connected with all right appreciation of his saving grace that we cannot keep them out of view without affecting most injuriously our whole ministry. Be it remembered that while the cross with its immediate neighborhood is the metropolis of Christianity, all the region round about is Holy Land. It is more or less holy according to the nearness to that city of our God. It is a land of milk and honey, of brooks and fountains of water, intersected in all directions with highways by which pilgrims to Zion approach the desire of their hearts. It is the office of the gospel preacher to map out that land, to trace those converging roads, to set up the waymarks to the city of Refuge.

Christ is not fully preached when any truth which teaches the sinner's need of such a Savior is kept in obscurity. The wisdom of the scribe instructed unto the kingdom of God is found in his omitting nothing connected with the Gospel. This is true however remote from the great central truths and duties. He must give to each its portion in due season, as well as its place in due relation.

For example, Christ is our righteousness unto justification to everyone that believeth, so that in him there is no condemnation. But we shall preach him in vain in

that light unless we show the sinner's absolute need of such righteousness. We must seek, under the power of the Holy Ghost, so to convince him of sin that he shall see himself to be under the condemnation of God's law, without excuse and without hope, until he flees to that refuge. Blessed is he whose ministry the Spirit employs to teach that lesson of ruin and beggary. It is the threshold of the way of life.

The textbook in that teaching is the law—God's will however and wherever expressed. It must be preached in a spiritual application to the secrets of the heart; not only as the rule of obedience but as the condition of peace with God. It must be preached to everyone that is not in Christ Jesus. It is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to strip the sinner of self-reliance and self-justification, to humble him before God under a sense of guilt and ruin and as a schoolmaster to lead him to Christ. He that would preach a full justification in Christ without works must preach entire condemnation under the law by works. *By the law is the knowledge of sin*, and hence the knowledge, in part, of Christ. Clear, unequivocal statements of the divine law, and the full exhibition of the text, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them*, is the special basis of and preparation for all saving knowledge of Christ. The way of the Lord is prepared by that forerunner.

*Christ is not fully preached when any truth which teaches the sinner's need of such a Savior is kept in obscurity. The wisdom of the scribe instructed unto the kingdom of God is found in his omitting nothing connected with the Gospel. This is true however remote from the great central truths and duties. He must give to each its portion in due season, as well as its place in due relation.*

How many more consciences would cry out for relief under the load of sin, how much oftener would the careless heart be awakened to seek mercy through Christ, were there only a more searching comparison of all that is in man with all the holiness of the will of God.

Or to take another example; Christ is *made unto us sanctification*. But how can we do justice to so cardinal a truth of God's grace unless we do ample justice to that other great truth of man's nature, out of which arises all the need of a sanctifier? That great truth is the entire corruption that is the nature of every man who is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam. The beginning of sanctification is to be born again of

the Holy Spirit. According to men's views of the extent to which by nature they are corrupt and alienated from God, will be their views of the spiritual nature, necessity, and extent of that great change. Hence, to preach Christ in sanctification, we must preach man in his natural corruption. *The carnal mind is enmity against God and is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be*. Let us faithfully expound those words of St Paul. We need no stronger declaration as the basis of the whole superstructure of the need of an entire inward regeneration.

From all that has now been said it appears how mistaken is the idea that by confining our preaching to Christ and him crucified we have a very narrow range of truth to expound. In reality, we have the whole vast range of natural and revealed religion.

The difference between the man who confines himself to the preaching of Christ and the man who does not, need not be that the latter embraces any portion of divine truth of doctrine or duty of history or prophecy or precept which enters not into the range of the former. It may be wholly a difference in the mode of presenting precisely the same truth; a difference in the bearings, in the relations assigned to every part. You may take truth from the immediate neighborhood of the cross or from the farthest boundaries of the domain of Christianity and when its just relation to Christ and his redemption is exhibited, Christ is preached. Thus there is no reason why in the most faithful ministry there may not be abundant variety of topic and of instruction. The sermon may be always shining the light of our glorious Lord, either while receiving it by directly looking unto him or indirectly, from secondary objects which, as satellites of the sun, revolve around him and shine in his glory. The sermon in all its spirit and tendency may say, *Behold the Lamb of God*, and yet the view may be as changing as the positions from which it is taken.

In general, we may say that as no subject is legitimate in the preaching of a minister of Christ that does not admit of being presented in some important relation to Christ, so no sermon is evangelical that does not truly exhibit the same position to the whole discourse that he holds in the Scriptures to the whole body of truth therein. As some subjects have a much nearer and more vital relation to him than others, they will be much the most frequent and engrossing in the preaching of a faithful Christian minister.

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



## *Working with God Through Prayer*, D. Edmond Hiebert

Author D. Edmond Hiebert (1910–95) grew up in the Menonite Brethren tradition and taught at their seminaries. Although I have a couple commentaries by Dr. Hiebert, I had not read much of his writing until recently when I came across his book *Working with God Through Prayer* (BJU Press, 1991).

I started reading his book out of a longing to experience a more consistent and effectual prayer life. The first chapter, “Working by Prayer,” was deeply faith-building as he systematically explained the meaning of the statement, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” This verse becomes the central theme of the book: “Prayer unites puny man to Almighty God in miraculous partnership. It is the most noble and most essential ministry God gives to His children—but is the most neglected.” This theme was first impressed on him through a serious protracted illness some thirty years before, which ultimately left him completely deaf.

This first chapter is both exegetically sound and faith-building and sets the tone for the whole book: “Although [Elijah’s] work did not produce the spiritual revival that [he] had hoped for in the nation, it provided an undeniable display of the reality of working by prayer” (2). The righteous man’s prayer does produce great results when we work with God in prayer. “He who would work with God through prayer,” however, “cannot harbor unrighteousness in his life nor can his petition be designed to promote any unrighteousness.”

Hiebert occasionally includes nuances from the Greek language to undergird the truth. Regarding the term “effectual fervent” he writes, “The participle may be either in the middle or the passive voice. If passive, the meaning is that such prayer is so powerful because it is being empowered from above. . . . If in the middle voice, the meaning is that the prayer of a righteous individual keeps on putting forth its energy to get the petition answered. Under either view the term enforces the power of godly praying.” I found it refreshing to have an author state the simple naked truth of the text and not place on it multiple qualifiers that weaken its strength. James “cited the experiences of Elijah, not as unique and unrepeatable instances, but as encouragement for [his listeners] likewise to avail themselves of this divinely established privilege.”

In chapter 2, “The Power of Prayer,” Hiebert reminds us from Acts 6:4, “Prayer is the most powerful and effective means of service in the kingdom of God. God has given a primary place to prayer in the furthering of the gospel.” This is one of the longest chapters of the book, setting forth eight weighty outcomes that prayer accomplishes: workers are raised up and sent

forth, doors of opportunity are opened for the preaching of the gospel, workers are enabled to speak with boldness, conditions favorable for receiving the Word are brought about, the Word is spread and glorified, powers in opposition to God are broken, God’s servants are kept from harm, and mighty works are accomplished.

Although Hiebert does include encouraging illustrations, the strength of the book is his poignantly worded truths that come directly out of each biblical text. In this chapter the author reminds the reader that the order of the priorities of the apostles in Acts 6 (continual prayer and the ministry of the word) set forth prayer as the more important of the two. The natural inclination of most pastors is to reverse that order.

Chapter 3, “Prayer-Sent Laborers,” confronts readers with the pressing needs of a white harvest. He masterfully answers the objections with biblical insight. What do we see when we look at the teeming mass of people we pass every day? Are we even burdened for them? The fact that “the laborers are few” is “a sad admission.” The solution? “Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest fields.” He points out, “Whenever this consciousness of a pressing need is lacking, prayer tends to become formal and powerless. Prayer arises spontaneously from a burdened heart.”

Chapter 6, “The Prayer of Jabez,” was written well before the popular book by Bruce Wilkinson was and doesn’t smack of sensationalism. Surprisingly, however, Dr. Hiebert uses Mother Teresa as an example of leaning on God rather than her own strength (64). The final chapter of the book, “Learning to Pray from Daniel,” brings into focus our battle with the forces of darkness and a worldly culture. Dr. Hiebert argues from the purity of Daniel’s life that if we are personally polluted in our conscience by compromise with the world in “minor matters,” our spiritual life will be harmed, especially prayer.

The book has ten chapters, a bibliography, Scripture index, and subject index. Endnotes are included at the end of each chapter, and all the chapters end with topically chosen poems by various authors. Other chapter headings include “The Prayer Ministry of the Church,” “Empowerment Through Intercession,” “Ephraim—Man of Prayer,” “The Divine Astonishment,” and “Wanted—A Man!” The book is convicting, encouraging, uplifting, and well worth the read!

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Terry Hamilton has pastored Friendship Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for thirty-four years.

## Faith and Obedience: Casual Acquaintances or Best Friends?

In concluding his magnificent chapter on God's love for the world and universal offer of salvation (John 3:16), John restates the gracious offer and its effect: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (3:36a). Salvation is God's gift, received simply by faith. John does not stop with the promise, however; he also gives the negative side of the issue. We would expect him to use similar terminology, but instead he chooses a different word to contrast with believing: "The one who *believes* in the Son has eternal life; but the one who *does not obey* the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (3:36, NASB 2020, emphasis added).

John's use of the word "obey" to give the other side of the coin of faith is instructive. The word translated "does not obey" (*apeitheō*) inherently carries the "not" idea by adding the "a" at the beginning of the word. The rest of the word connotes being persuaded with the result of obedience. Vincent explains: "The verb *πειθω* [*peithō*] means to *persuade, to cause belief, to induce one to do something by persuading*, and so runs into the meaning of *to obey, properly as the result of persuasion*."<sup>1</sup> This word stresses that unbelief is culpable because it is disobedience, a refusal to be persuaded of the truth about Jesus. This refusal is exactly what happened with Rahab's compatriots: "By *faith* Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were *disobedient*" (Heb. 11:31, NASB 1995, emphasis added). Using the same basic Greek words as John does, the writer of Hebrews contrasts Rahab's "faith" with those who were "disobedient." Peter also connects unbelief and disobedience, commending those who "believe" and contrasting them with those who are "disobedient" (1 Pet. 2:7–8).

Several other New Testament passages connect faith and obedience (or unbelief and disobedience). Hebrews 3:18–19 warns professing believers to beware of the example of the Israelites in the wilderness. The author explains that God swore that they would not enter His rest because they "were disobedient" (*apeitheō*, 3:18, NASB 1995) and that, therefore, "they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (*apistia*, 3:19, NASB 1995). Were they excluded from entering God's rest of salvation because of disobedience or unbelief? Yes. In God's mind those two issues go together.

Peter obliquely references the dire end of those who "obey not (*apeitheō*) the gospel of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). Similarly, Paul states that those who "obey not (*apeitheō*) the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will experience the "flaming fire [of] . . . vengeance" and "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:7–9), in marked distinction from the destiny of all those who "believe" (*pisteuō*, 2 Thess. 1:10). This synergy between faith and obedience is also evident

in Paul's use of the phrase "the obedience to the/of faith" that bookends Romans. Paul introduces the goal of his ministry as "the *obedience to the faith* among all the Gentiles" (Rom. 1:5, emphasis added); likewise, he concludes that the gospel has been "made known to all nations for the *obedience of faith*" (16:26, emphasis added). True faith manifests itself in obedience. "So very closely are faith and obedience connected that they may be compared to inseparable identical twins. . . . A person cannot have genuine faith without having obedience, nor vice versa."<sup>2</sup>

Luke also connects faith and obedience when he describes what was happening as the gospel spread in Jerusalem: "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were *obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7, emphasis added). The verb "were obedient" (*hupakouō*) is different from that used in John 3:36, but it teaches the same truth: true followers of Christ show it by obeying the gospel message as these priests did. The writer of Hebrews makes the same case with this same Greek verb for "obey." Jesus "became the author of eternal salvation" to a certain group of people. Who are they? Believers? Yes, of course, but note how this text defines them: "he became the author of eternal salvation *unto all them that obey him*" (Heb. 5:9, emphasis added).

A final reason for the importance of noting John's choice of the word "do not obey" (John 3:36) is the ever-present danger of easy-believism. Some people are excited about following Jesus at first and even believe much of what they hear about Him. But as John points out just a few chapters later, many of those who appear to be "disciples" (6:66) in reality do not "believe" (6:64). Their refusal to continue following Christ shows that they were not genuinely believing in Him. They were not interested in a faith that obeys. James teaches the same truth when he stresses that those with true faith are "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

The answer, then, to the question posed in the title is that faith and obedience are indeed best friends. They complement one another perfectly in God's plan of redemption. As Patch the Pirate, Ron Hamilton got it right: "Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe."

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Alan Patterson is regional director for Europe, Africa, and the Middle East with Gospel Fellowship Association.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent, Marvin R., *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), II:109.

<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen, William, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 46.

## The Dangers of Infighting

I’m reading several biographies at the same time. I hadn’t planned it this way, but they work out to be about people from three successive centuries. Reading them concurrently, I was surprised by their similarity. Three different men from three different centuries faced the same sinful problem—infighting with other ministry leaders over minor issues. Every generation struggles with this problem.

This is fascinating because they are not all lengthy biographies. One is a two-volume set, so it’s understandable to have enough space to deal with ministry differences. Another is a small biography that I’m reading with my family. The third is a volume that handles an entire life in just one chapter. In each case significant attention is given to the problem of infighting over issues that the subject of choice should not fight over. And out of decades of an otherwise exemplary life to choose from, each biographer chooses to glimpse through this dirty window. Even the best of men can choose poorly in this area.

At the same time, during our elders’ meetings, we are working through all the imperatives of Paul in 2 Timothy, one command a week. Several of them have to do with not fighting—and encouraging others not to fight—about nonessentials. Just before Paul commands Timothy to be diligent to present himself as an approved workman who correctly handles God’s Word, he commands him not to be a “word wrangler”: “Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers” (2 Tim. 2:14, NASB 1995).

Don’t fight over minor issues. Why? Because fighting over words can lead “to the ruin of the hearers.” We all agree that *refraining* from fighting over major doctrinal issues leads to the ruin of hearers. In fact, correctly teaching these issues leads to the salvation of the hearers. But just as important (and often repeated in the Pastoral Epistles), fighting over minor issues can be catastrophic (the Greek word in 2 Timothy 2:14 is *katastrophē*).

### FIGHTING OVER MINISTRY METHODOLOGY AND PERSONALITY CAN BE CATASTROPHIC.

The short biography I’m reading with my family is *Heroes of the Faith: David Livingstone* (Barbour, 1995). One of our solid church families of many years just returned to Zambia after serving at the United Nations for a few years here in New York City, and we miss them so much. So, we’re reading about how the gospel began to bear lasting fruit in their homeland.

Livingstone was a nineteenth-century Scottish physician, faithful missionary, and an enthusiastic and daring explorer. But from the beginning of his missionary career, he was opposed not only by lions, warlords, and slave-traders, but also by fellow missionaries. He even saw infighting among missionaries as he prepared for the field, “differences of opinion . . . based on factors more complicated than he yet understood” (45). Still, it was disconcerting for him to hear brothers tear down brothers over areas of ministry that were not essential.

Interpersonal differences between Livingstone and the Ross family, with whom he sailed to Africa, stretched him more than did the difficulties and dangers of sailing to a new land. Along the way, he begged the Lord to let the Ross family go to another mission field or be stationed at a different outpost. Even the captain of the ship noticed this difference of personality and outlook: “Cheer up, Livingstone, Next time you disembark—at Port Elizabeth—you will see the real Africa. And certain people who irritate you will never leave the verandah” (47). The Lord answered his prayer, but he was tempted to wrangle about relational differences. Personality is not necessarily a “word” over which people “wrangle,” but it fits the no-wrangling category.

As he entered the first mission, an outpost of missionary families near an African tribe, Livingstone discovered that the other missionaries were waiting for Robert Moffat to return from England to expand or change their direction. They wanted his approval and were in a holding pattern until he returned. David couldn’t wait but charged ahead further into uncharted territory. Missionary families took offense at the zeal of the young missionary. That’s understandable, but it’s not a reason to fight.

In one venture David was attacked by a lion (not a “word wrangler,” a real lion!). Through quick action his life was spared when a native shot the lion, but David was laid up for months. He would wear this injury the rest of his life and had to learn to shoot left-handed because he could no longer hold a gun with his right arm. As he was brought bloody and racked with pain back to the village mission, he began to talk the fellow missionary through how to tend to his wounds. This interaction shows the difficult nature of their relationships:

“Wash out the wound first,” David instructed Edwards. “Lion bites give terrible infections. You’ll just have to do as I say.”

“Doesn’t he always?” muttered Mrs. Edwards as she stumbled out of the hut. (82)

Differences in personality, emphasis, and approach to the gospel

are always an issue, and there are times when it is good for brothers or sisters to separate from close partnership because of these factors. But they should not result in fights. When we fight over these issues, we reap catastrophic consequences in those who observe the fight but are not involved.

## **FIGHTING ABOUT DENOMINATIONAL DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES CAN BE CATASTROPHIC.**

The next biography goes back another hundred years, to the eighteenth century, and relates another sad example of infighting that shakes the faith of some as they observe good men fighting over denominational differences as if they are fighting the Devil himself. Of course, denominational differences are important, and it is good to hold these issues with a clear conscience and teach them faithfully to our people on a local church level. But we must not wrangle and battle. We may debate, but we must not be divisive over minor issues.

This infighting is highlighted over several chapters in Arnold Dallimore's two-volume biography *George Whitefield* (Banner of Truth, 1980). Both the Wesleys and Whitefield were greatly used of the Lord in an international "Great Awakening" of God's Spirit through their preaching and ministry. But they also fought publicly with words.

John and Charles Wesley took open and vehement opposition to Whitefield in what we could summarize as his Calvinistic theology. One account tells of Charles Wesley falling "into a violent passion and . . . [affrighting] all at the table. . . . He called Calvin the first-born son of the Devil and set all his people into a bitter hatred" (II:70).

The Wesleys openly forbade people from attending Whitefield's preaching sessions and turned many of those who were saved under Whitefield's preaching against him. John Wesley printed pamphlets criticizing Whitefield's position and had them circulated ahead of time in places where Whitefield went to preach. This grieved Whitefield. Even though he repeatedly asked Wesley not to make these disagreements a matter of public discourse, Wesley only increased his public resistance.

"As the division in the work became increasingly evident the people were faced with the decision as to which side they were on" (II:35). These divisions took the delight from God's spiritual work of revival. A husband recounts Whitefield and his wife speaking about the good old days when she had been born again under Whitefield's preaching, before all the divisive word-wrangling began. She said, "This was heaven on earth; no speaking evil of each other," and Whitefield responded, "Oh! What would I give, or suffer, or do, to see such times again! But oh! That division! That division! What slaughter it has made!" Denominational differences can wreak catastrophic consequences to Spirit-sent revival.

Whitefield loved Wesley and grieved over this break of fellowship. After several public letters back and forth, Whitefield chose again to be silent and leave the differences to the Lord: "I desire not only to do things for God, but to do them in the best manner. . . . While others are disputing, let us be growing. This will be the best way to convince those who

you find will not be convinced any other way. I lose nothing by being quiet and leaving all to Him" (II:75). Whitefield did this consistently, and the Lord blessed that position, although going through the wrangling was one of Whitefield's severest trials.

Wesley ended up preaching Whitefield's funeral: "Have we read or heard of any who has been a blessed instrument in the hands of God of bringing so many sinners from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God?"

But the period of infighting was catastrophic to families, newborn Christians, and the work of God's Spirit in the gospel field. It gave the enemy reason to boast. We can hold our denominational positions soundly and parse positions with precision down to the jot and tittle. But we must refrain from wrangling over these types of words.

## **FIGHTING ABOUT NATIONAL POLITICS AND MINISTRY ASSOCIATION CAN BE CATASTROPHIC.**

The third window is a century earlier still, and it opens on the life of another Scotsman (like Livingstone). In *Samuel Rutherford and His Friends* (Banner of Truth, 1992), Faith Cook summarizes some of the people Rutherford ministered to and with. She begins with a chapter that surveys Rutherford's entire life and ministry, and yet even in those few pages she takes time to glance through the window of ministry infighting.

The positions Rutherford passionately pursued seem good and right. But his spirit became one of wrangling. "It was during the 1650s that Samuel Rutherford became deeply involved in the sad dissension of the Resolutioners and Protesters that tore the Scottish Church apart for many years" (22). "Good men were found on both sides of the divide, though the majority were Resolutioners. Rutherford's friends Dickson and Wood were among them, while Rutherford, with all the vehemence of his intense nature, was a Protester. Bitter and hurtful things were said and written, especially by Rutherford, and a sad interlude in the life of so great a man" (23–24).

So, too, we must be careful to major on the majors and the majors only. We hold Baptist distinctives as a Fellowship proudly, but we must differ with dear brothers and sisters on these denominational issues with a humility that will not fight. When we encounter differences of personality and ministry philosophy—tools that differ in kind but not in principle—we agree to disagree, distancing ourselves with a gracious parting that continues to love the other gospel worker.

Why? Because when we wrangle, others suffer. The swing of the staff meant for wolves must never be used on sheep who differ in their walk. Other sheep that watch the fight will suffer the greatest harm. May the Lord give us grace to stand united with others in the areas that matter most and to be gracious with others in the areas that matter less.

---

Tim Richmond planted and pastors Grace Baptist Church in Queens, New York ([www.nycgrace.org](http://www.nycgrace.org)).

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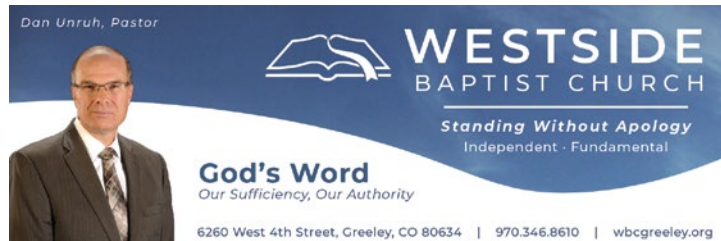
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Coordinator: Greg Kaminski

### March 11-13, 2024

#### South Regional Fellowship

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Coordinator: Tony Facenda

### April 12, 2024

#### New Mexico Regional Fellowship

Manzano Baptist Church  
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Albuquerque, NM 87123  
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

### April 18-19, 2024

#### Northern California Regional Fellowship

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Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

### April 29-30, 2024

#### Wyoming Regional Fellowship

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## News From All Over

### Pastor Bruce

Hamilton,  
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from the position of senior pastor on January 14, 2024. By approval of the church, he stepped into the position of missions pastor with an emphasis on China and the Chinese people.

Pastor Hamilton has

authored three books: *God of the Brooks*, *God of the Gold*, and *God of the Aurora: The Holy Spirit's Call to Asian People*. He and

his wife, Lena, will begin traveling across the USA on January 20, 2024, and are available for special services and/or meetings. For more information please visit [Godofalaska.com](http://Godofalaska.com).



BJU Press is now using a new Landa S10P digital sheet press to print *FrontLine* magazine. This past fall, the new press replaced a Heidelberg offset press that had faithfully done its job since 2000. The Landa press was built in and shipped from Israel (it was interesting to hear some of the Israeli installation crew members conversing in Hebrew!). The Landa uses cutting-edge digital technology to lay down a layer of ink 500 nanometers thick that is then transferred to paper. Digital printing does

not require printing plates, so changes can be made more efficiently, and we can be more flexible with print quantities. The Landa S10P uses seven colors of water-based ink to print beautiful, full-color images. Please pray that the Lord continues to bless BJU Press and our efforts to support Christian education!

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# What Is Worldliness?

**A** generation or two ago, Christians regularly heard warnings against something called “worldliness.” They also heard certain practices denounced as “worldly.” When we used that language, we thought we knew what we meant.

Now, however, to suggest that something is worldly is likely to provoke a shrug, an eye roll, or even a snicker. To express concern about worldliness is to mark oneself as an unrepentant legalist. Part of the problem is that we no longer share any sense of what worldliness is or whether such a thing is even possible.

This situation is aggravated by two factors. One is that the Bible never uses the noun “worldliness,” and it rarely uses the modifier “worldly.” The other is that some Christian leaders have tried to frontload the concept of worldliness with an ascetic suspicion of all enjoyments, whether natural, cultural, or bodily. These people seem to believe that any activity that is not directly devotional or that brings pleasure must somehow be worldly.

Enjoying a sunset or a mountain vista is not worldly. Listening to a symphony or spending an afternoon in an art gallery is not worldly. Feasting with friends is not worldly, nor is kissing one’s spouse. Such things might be done for worldly ends or in worldly ways, but they are not worldly in themselves.

We cannot stipulate which activities and attitudes are worldly until we understand what worldliness is, and we cannot define worldliness until we understand what the New Testament means by “the world.” The Bible has a general, non-ethical sense in which it mentions the world. Jesus was the lamb of God who takes away “the sin of the world” (John 1:29). God loved the world (John 3:16), and He sent His Son into the world “that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). In these passages the term “world” means “all kinds of people.” This use of the word carries no evil connotations. It does not affect our understanding of worldliness.

On the other hand, “world” is sometimes used in an ethical sense. The New Testament uses two words to refer to the world in this sense: *kosmos*, which speaks of an ordered system, and *aiōn*, which means an age. These words are used



almost interchangeably in the ethical sense. But what do they mean? I suggest that the writers of Scripture deploy the concept of “the world” at three levels, each of which draws it further into the ethical realm.

### THE PRESENT EARTHLY ORDER

At the first and most general level, “world” simply draws attention to the present, here-and-now, earthly order. This order stands in contrast to (but is not necessarily opposed to) the permanent heavenly order. For example, Jesus used the word in this sense to acknowledge that all believers are still “in the world” (John 13:1; 17:11).

Satan, tempting Jesus, showed Him “all the kingdoms of the world” (Matt. 4:8). Here, the kingdoms are political structures that exist on the earth. Satan evidently exercises some level of dominion even at this level.

Likewise, in the parable of the tares, Jesus identifies the field as the world (Matt. 13:38). Both the wheat and the tares are sown in the field. Here, “world” encompasses both children of the kingdom and children of the wicked one.

In John 18:36–37 Jesus tells Pilate that His kingdom is “not of this world.” In other words, Jesus’ kingdom does not find its source or power in the present order. Then Jesus adds that He came “into the world”—He has entered the present order—that He might bear witness to the truth. Through Jesus the heavenly order has invaded the earthly, with irreversible consequences.

The apostle Paul states that married people care about “the things of the world” (1 Cor. 7:33–34). He ties these things specifically to pleasing one’s spouse. He is not rebuking this attitude but recognizing that it is a natural and necessary consequence of marriage.

Understood simply as the present, here-and-now order, the world is not necessarily evil. Nevertheless, people can become so focused on present concerns that they leave God out of their reckoning. They think only about temporal things while failing to consider eternal concerns. If we neglect eternal concerns, then we begin to function as narrow, earthbound creatures who ignore whatever lies beyond the horizon.

At this point, we have become genuinely worldly, and we need to repent. We need to live out our lives deliberately before the

presence of God, recognizing His awareness, character, and promises. While we must take account of concerns within the present order, we must hold those concerns to be secondary to eternal realities. Should we persist in worldliness at this level, we shall soon feel the attraction of the second level.

### RESISTANCE TO THE HEAVENLY ORDER

If the first level of “the world” is the present order in contrast to the permanent, eternal, heavenly order, the second level involves actively resisting the intrusion of the permanent, eternal, and heavenly. At this level, spiritual matters are deliberately neglected in favor of the purely here-and-now. Resistance to the heavenly is hard-wired into fallen humanity, as Romans 1:18–23 makes clear. Depraved people do not like to think about God and His ways, so they push divine things out of their reckoning. They also develop substitutes for the eternal. The result is a skewed and deficient vision of reality.

An example comes from the parable of the sower. According to Jesus, seed sown among thorns is like people who hear the word but let the cares of the world choke it out (Matt. 13:22). For these people, temporal concerns actively choke out the spiritual and eternal until the present becomes the focus of life.

Part of Jesus’ teaching is that His followers should not obsess over temporal things such as food and clothing. Our Father knows our need (Luke 12:29–34). The kingdom of God, not temporal things, must be our goal. In contrast, the “nations of the world” pursue temporal things. People of the world are driven by a desire for the immediate, and they make it their main business.

Demas was one of Paul’s co-laborers in the gospel. Late in his ministry, however, Paul wrote that Demas had forsaken him, “having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). Like Demas, Christians can become so fascinated with the present order and its perspectives that they depart from spiritual priorities and become useless to God. The danger here is not merely of neglecting eternal things but of valuing temporal things above the eternal. This is the second level at which Christians can become worldly.

Continued on page 34

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# How Does God Parent?

While most Christians are familiar with God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, I wonder how many have given much thought to God *as* a Father. Family imagery is used throughout the Bible and, like the rest of God's words, its use was intentional on God's part and likely meant to teach us far more than we normally recognize.

I believe that such imagery, and especially that of God's fatherhood, yields a wealth of valuable information and instruction for parents about rearing children. When it comes to biblical instruction about child-rearing, only a few passages and isolated verses may come to mind, such as Exodus 20:12, Proverbs 1:8, Proverbs 22:6, Proverbs 29:17, and Ephesians 6:1–4.

However, when we begin to look at God *as* a Father—specifically, the way the Bible describes how He deals with His children—an entirely new outlook emerges. For instance, consider God's dealings with His first children, Adam and Eve. God provided a home for them, gave them basic instructions, and left them to accomplish their tasks—much like parents of children might do today. He checked on them regularly and had a warm and loving relationship with them—again, much like today's parents.

The difference between how God “parents” and how many of today's parents “parent” becomes apparent when we consider Adam and Eve's deliberate disobedience to the basic instructions God had given them. After they sinned God came to them as usual, but they hid, knowing their guilt. God gave them opportunity to confess their sin (repent), but they were full of excuses. As God's children, Adam and Eve are mirrored by today's children in their

response to confrontation for sin—excuses and blame-shifting are the norm. God dismissed Adam's and Eve's excuses and then provided what was needed to rectify the consequences of their sin. He killed an animal and used the animal's skin to clothe them, covering their nakedness and (by implication) their sin. But then He punished them in a manner that seems quite severe. He pronounced a lifelong curse upon them and banished them from the home He had provided.

By today's standards His punishment was draconian. In response to children's disobedience today's parent often simply gives the child “a talking to,” “a time out,” or the proverbial “slap on the wrist.” Such punishments are rarely effective in preventing or deterring future disobedience. However, a larger problem is that weak and ineffectual discipline may inadvertently give the child a wrong view of God.

Parents are God's representatives in the home, and their children are on loan from God Himself. He desires that parents raise those children to revere and love Him. If parents are weak in their discipline children may grow up expecting God to be equally weak and inconsequential as their authority.

If disobedience (sin) doesn't bring painful consequences, why would children choose obedience? Christian parents should know that sin does indeed bring horrible consequences. A child's disobedience gives parents an opportunity to teach the child by giving strong enough discipline to deter future disobedience.

We should remember that disobedience, in particular, was the sin God emphasized and punished severely throughout the Old Testament. We see this with Adam and Eve,

the first (but sadly not the last) of God's children to disobey and receive painful punishment. Consider Moses and David, the great characters of the Old Testament. Though beloved of God they still received stern punishment for disobedience. Many other figures in the Bible also suffered for disobedience. When Samuel, God's representative, pronounced God's punishment on Saul, he made a strong statement about the importance of obedience.

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (1 Sam. 15:22–23)

While most Christian parents know this passage, do they teach its application to their children by the way they deal with their children's disobedience?

“The fear of the Lord” is the *beginning* of wisdom. Children should be taught that if they are obedient, they have *nothing* to fear. If they disobey, however, they should have *much* to fear. That is the way God the Father operates with His children and that is also the way today's parents should operate . . . *if* they want to emulate their heavenly Father and hope to have their children grow to emulate Him also.

Debbi Johnson and her husband, Don, serve together in Victoria, British Columbia, where Don pastors Grace Baptist Church. They have five children and seven (and counting) grandchildren.





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The Book of Deuteronomy concludes the first major portion of Scripture (the Pentateuch), pulls together the threads of Israel's remarkable history, and weaves them into a rousing, albeit achingly unresolved, climax. The book leaves its readers expectantly poised on the summit of Mt. Pisgah, where Moses both literally and prophetically surveys the terrain that lies ahead for God's people. Before them are valleys of unimaginable tragedy, but they lead to peaks bright with hope. Deuteronomy contains the instructions that the people of Israel must follow as they travel the complex road ahead.

The book remains foundational even today. Quotations or allusions to Deuteronomy occur over forty times in the NT. Jesus made more use of it than anyone else, employing it to pinpoint the greatest of God's commandments and even to overcome personal temptation. Deuteronomy summarizes the great work of God in establishing a people for Himself and presses the claims of that history on its readers.

## INTRODUCTION

**Title.** In Hebrew the book is called *Devarim* (literally, "The Words"), a title taken from the first verse. The English title comes from the Greek *deuteronomion* ("second law"). This word appears in 7:18 (LXX) where Israel's future kings are instructed to keep a copy of the law for personal use. The book, however, is not truly a second law but a passionate recounting, expansion, and exposition of God's covenant with Israel.

**Authorship.** Deuteronomy strongly testifies to its own Mosaic authorship—not just that Moses spoke the words, but that he *wrote* them (1:1; 31:9; 31:22). This is later confirmed by both Christ and the apostles (Mark 10:5; Acts 3:22). The portions of the book that include Moses' death and burial were evidently the work of a final editor and compiler, plausibly Joshua.

**Genre.** Deuteronomy contains various kinds of literature, such as historical narrative (1:6–4:43) and poetry (chs. 32–33). However, the work is primarily a record of Moses' verbal address to Israel, a fusion of material that might be called "sermonic legislation." While both Leviticus and Deuteronomy contain legal matter, there is a clear difference in tone between the two. Here, the law is delivered in a passionate homily by Moses, an appeal to Israel to believe and adopt the way of the covenant. This is not merely instruction for the mind but exhortation for the heart.

A significant feature of Deuteronomy is its resemblance to ancient suzerain-vassal treaties. These documents codified the relationship between an overlord and a subordinate ruler, and they tended to share certain elements: (1) a historical review of the relationship between the two powers, (2) the terms imposed upon the vassal and the promises granted by the suzerain, (3) a call for divine witnesses, and (4) a litany of rewards and curses for either faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the covenant. All these elements are conspicuous in the structure of Deuteronomy. The use of this

form highlights the theocratic nature of Israel's identity. God had humbled Pharaoh and plundered Egypt not simply to set Israel free but to win her for Himself. The extraordinary favor shown by the Divine King grounds His call for their fealty and love. Israel is not just another vassal serving some despot; she is a kingdom of priests to God Himself. As Moses questions, "Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? . . . Has . . . a god ventured to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation . . . as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (4:32–34, NASB 1995).

## CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

**Fundamental Attitudes: Fear and Love.** In his general introduction to the covenant (4:44–11:32), Moses distills the relationship between Israel and God to two basic dispositions: fear and love. They are to fear God because they have been witnesses of His fiery glory (5:22–29). But they are also to love Him because He has been supremely loving. In this section we find the *shema*, chosen by Christ as the greatest of all commandments: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (6:4–5).

When properly exercised, fear and love are not mutually exclusive: they are sister virtues. There is, of course, a craven kind of fear that would call for the rocks to hide one from the presence of God. Such fear is cast out by perfect love. In truth, love motivates and nourishes our approach to God, while fear orders that approach rightly according to the terms He sets.

**A Prophet like Moses.** The promise of a prophet "like unto [Moses]" (18:15–19) was the source of a defining expectation for the Israelites. Moses acknowledged that he would eventually pass his mantle to another, someone who would speak with the full authority of God and could effectually bring God's word near to people. Later prophets would expand this prediction, testifying not just to a new leader but to an entirely new covenant by which sin would be cleansed (Jer. 31:31–34). So important is this promise that the book ends on this unresolved note: "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). Indeed, long after the great prophets had come and gone, John the Baptist, the final messenger of his dispensation, testified that even he was not "that prophet" (John 1:21). Not until the Book of Acts does the apostle Peter finally announce fulfillment of the promise in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22–26), who alone is able to usher in an effectual covenant of redemption in His blood.

**The Curse of the Law.** Moses directs that the covenant be renewed regularly after Israel has entered the land, first at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (27:1–13). There, the people will indicate their clear understanding of the blessings and curses by which they are bound to God. The blessings of the covenant are breathtaking; the curses are hair-raising. Israel will be a setting for God's power one

# The Heart of the Matter

way or the other: either the nations will marvel at her blessings and know that God is in her midst, or they will see her destruction and know that God *was* in her midst (29:24–28). Later in Scripture the curses of the law become a way of referring to God’s eschatological wrath against sin itself. Deuteronomy pronounces a curse on anyone hanged on a tree (21:23), a NT proof-text that Christ Himself became a “curse” to redeem us from “the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13).

**The Word Brought Near.** In an especially moving passage, Moses pleads with Israel to understand that God has taken initiative in bringing His word near to them (Deut. 30:11–14). In fact, God’s intention is that the covenant be so near that it be in their hearts and readily present on their lips. This is the ideal of the covenant. Knowing and following God is not a matter of scaling great heights or plumbing great depths; God takes initiative in both explicating and internalizing His word by a supernatural act (30:6).

This principle is quite literally fulfilled in the work of Christ, the incarnate Word. He is “God with us,” the Word *in* us, the Prophet like Moses who fully exegetes the Father and who has the power and authority to effect spiritual rebirth. Paul later applies this principle in a very picturesque way, asserting that because of Christ, righteousness before God is as simple as uniting heart and mouth in both conviction and confession (Rom. 10:6–10).

“The righteousness which is of faith” (Rom. 10:6), then, was actively and ardently preached by Moses, though of course the full mechanics of Christ’s atonement were not yet clear. Nevertheless, the plea was neither understood nor received by the Israelites, who to this day are lost in their attempts to climb the mountains of self-righteousness (Rom. 10:3–4).

**The Song of Moses.** The book takes a tragic turn toward the end. God assures Moses that, despite his passionate appeals, the people simply will not receive these words. They will disobey—an inclination already forming within them (31:16–21). They have not been given understanding (29:4), a judicial act of blinding that both explains and is explained by their incessant stubbornness (2 Cor. 3:14). The Lord therefore gives Moses a song (32:1–43) that will serve as a testimony against future generations of Israelites after they have been punished severely.

The song is tragic, full of both bitter accusation and disappointment. However, it is also pregnant with wondrous expectation, some of which still awaits fulfillment. After all the sorrow, the song resolves on a major chord: God will not abandon His wayward people. He will provoke Israel to jealousy (32:21) and eventually make atonement for them (32:43). The hope within these promises later grounds the ministry philosophy of the apostle Paul, who applies them quite literally to the ethnic Israelites of his own day (Rom. 11:11–14). God will one day remove their blindness and “circumcise [their] heart[s]” to love Him (Deut. 30:6).

## KEY WORDS AND THEMES

The unique focus of Deuteronomy is evident from a study of its key words. For example, words for “love” occur significantly more in Deuteronomy than in the rest of the Pentateuch (about 25x in Deuteronomy as opposed to a combined total of 19x in the rest of the books). Both God’s love for His people and the people’s love for God are discussed. God’s love is dispensed by pure grace, unmotivated by any righteousness or impressive features within Israel (7:7; 9:5; 10:14–15); Israel is commanded, multiple times, to “love God” (6:5; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:16, 19–20), a command which Jesus later selects as the very greatest summation of God’s directives. God does not desire a response of begrudging servitude from Israel but of affectionate devotion and delight.

Words for “heart” also occur significantly more in Deuteronomy (48x). Exodus has the second most references (34x), but about 20 of these refer to the hardening of Pharaoh; the rest of the books have less than 10 references each. In Deuteronomy, then, there is an explosion of references to the ethics and duties of the inner man. In several places the Lord refers to what the Israelites must or must not think or say “in their hearts,” referring to their general beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes. Multiple times God calls for Israel to love and obey Him with “all their heart” (4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 26:16; 30:2). In other places Israel is instructed to have the covenant “in” or “on” their hearts (4:9, 39; 6:6; 11:18; 30:14).

The heart of the matter is that the heart matters. This emphasis is summarized in the command to “circumcise your heart” (10:16), an act which must be performed by God Himself (30:6). By simple trust, the people of Israel could have the law inscribed on their hearts so that they could serve God from genuine internal motivation. They—and all who wish to be in covenant with God—must seek His help to properly order their affections.

## CONCLUSION

The book ends with Moses scaling Mt. Nebo to survey the land from which he has been excluded. With the song still ringing in his ears, he contemplates the complex future of the people he has shepherded. With covenant disaster on the horizon but the promise of a Prophet yet to come, Moses rests in hope of atonement and awaits the day when he will be raised to receive the promises. The next time Moses appears is on a mountain with Christ, speaking of a second exodus (Luke 9:30–31). The incarnation of Yahweh will effect a work of redemption that will result in thousands before the throne finally singing “the song of Moses” with understanding (Rev. 15:3). Until then, the Book of Deuteronomy continues to call its readers to a decision about God and quietly awaits its fulfillment.

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This column was guest-written by David Stephens, who graduated from BJU Seminary in 2017 and is currently serving with his family on the foreign field.

# Common Denominators of Evangelistic Churches

These past few months have been an unusually fruitful time of seeing people come to Christ. Our culture's greatest need is to see people come to know Christ as their Savior. I have had the privilege of being in several churches that are seeing people saved, and in this article I'll share some of their common denominators.

First, evangelistic churches are quite friendly. The people of the church come and talk to you; they don't wait for you to talk to them. They stay after the service and talk for half an hour to an hour. The church has a friendly greeter at the door to answer questions, give directions, and welcome visitors. The top reason lost people visit a church is that they are looking for a friend.

Secondly, evangelistic churches follow up. I am amazed at how often I hear of visitors who fill out a visitor card and never receive a follow-up phone call or visit. Churches who are seeing people saved are great at following up with visitors, usually by the Wednesday after a Sunday visit. Their systems are different, but effective churches have found one that works for them, and they follow it religiously (pardon my pun).

Third, evangelistic churches organize activities intentionally to reach lost people. I was privileged to speak at two large Wild Game Dinners recently. Both had over one hundred unsaved visitors in attendance. At one dinner, everyone in the church was involved. Some prepared the food, others set up tables and chairs, and still others

decorated. In addition, everyone was inviting their neighbors and coworkers to come. This church had secured a large number of giveaways, which were distributed after the message. It is exciting when a whole church is committed to the goal of sharing the gospel with the lost. The other Wild Game Dinner sold second tickets at a fifty-percent discount, with the goal of members giving that ticket to an unsaved friend. I have also seen churches do things such as golf tournaments, Christmas cantatas, picnics, and anniversary Sundays, with the goal of inviting lost people and giving them a clear presentation of the gospel. Strongly evangelistic churches are very creative at holding events targeted to their location and community.

Fourth, evangelistic churches move at the speed of relationships. Church members work hard to build relationships in their neighborhood and larger community, earning the right to be heard, and then they share the gospel. Even if those who hear do not get saved, they generally do not take offense at the gospel presentation because the relationship already in place lets them know that the church member cares. These churches also often have visitors because people in the community know and like the people who attend the church. This is in contrast to churches who rarely have a visitor because those in the church spend time only with each other. In order to be salt and light we must come in contact with the lost.

Fifth, churches that are seeing people saved have a pastor who is personally engaged in evangelism. This has been interesting to observe, and I cannot think of one exception. I was recently with a pastor of a large ministry who told me his personal goal was to witness or give a tract to at least one person a day. As we went to breakfast, he told our waitress of his goal and asked if he could give her a salvation tract, which had his church information on it. She accepted it and said she had gotten several of the same church tracts from other people she waited on. Evangelistic churches have a leader who leads by example in reaching out to the lost.

The last common denominator is that evangelistic churches share their passion from the pulpit. The need for salvation is frequently mentioned. The church is encouraged and equipped to reach lost people. A lot of great tools are available, and evangelistic churches make it a priority to train their people in this very important mission.

I trust all who are reading this understand we are all to be part of a local church. Beyond that, though, we should not go to church to sit; we should go to church to serve. May we all be doing something intentionally in our own local church to help take the Word to the world.

---

**Jim Tillotson** serves as the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.







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## What is Worldliness?

Continued from page 25

To avoid this kind of worldliness, believers must deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:12). Our manner of life must be directed by eternal and heavenly perspectives, assumptions, and concerns. In fact, our dispositions and behaviors should stand out among those whose perspectives and assumptions are shaped by the merely here-and-now.

### THE EARTHLY ORDER OPPOSED TO THE HEAVENLY ORDER

The third and most serious level of “the world” occurs when people try to co-opt the present order for perspectives that are opposed to God and His ways. They cannot invent the present order, for it already exists. But they weaponize it against God to protect their sinful interests. They use their influence to weave opposition to God into the very fabric of all present concerns.

When the world system becomes opposed to God, it also opposes His people who identify with Him and reflect His concerns and character (John 7:7; 15:18–19). In this sense, the world involves the kings and rulers banding together against the Lord and his anointed, saying, “Let us break their bands asunder, And cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2:2–3). This attitude of defiance toward God is the “corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4).

## THE OPPOSITE OF WORLDLINESS AT EVERY LEVEL IS THE LIFE OF FAITH, WHICH IS A LIFE LIVED ACCORDING TO GOD’S PROMISES—EVEN WHEN THOSE PROMISES SEEM TO CONTRADICT OUR PRESENT EXPERIENCE (HEB. 11:8–16).

In this strongest sense, the world is an ordered system opposed to God, His ways, and His people. It is constantly being manipulated by depraved people to protect their sinful commitments and their rejection of heavenly things. As such, it repeatedly forces believers to decide whether to seek approval from the world or from God. To angle for friendship with the world at this level is to choose enmity with God (James 4:4).

To be a friend of the world is to covet approval or even advancement from those who are manipulating the present order to protect their depravity and express their rebellion against God. When we crave approval from such people, we position ourselves as enemies of God. We become guilty of spiritual adultery.

John has this sense of “the world” in mind when he cautions, “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15–17). Loving the world is completely incompatible with loving God. Furthermore, John tells us that the world works through certain mechanisms. It appeals to our sinful disposition (“the lust of the flesh”). It appeals to our yearning for the spectacular (“the lust of the

eyes”). It appeals to our conceited craving for temporal recognition (“the pride of life”). To the extent that we are driven by these, we will unavoidably become worldly.

The opposite of worldliness at every level is the life of faith, which is a life lived according to God’s promises—even when those promises seem to contradict our present experience (Heb. 11:8–16). The antidote to worldliness is not primarily to reject or warn against certain practices but to desire a better, heavenly country. It is to live within and under the present order while refusing to allow it to press us into its mold (Rom. 12:1–2). It is to confess that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (the here-and-now, temporal order) because we look for the “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (the heavenly, eternal order). If we are such people, “God is not ashamed to be called [our] God.”

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Drew Paul

## Alaska Mission-100: Combating Military Suicide on the Last Frontier

Suicides among active duty and reserve Component service members and their families have been an ongoing issue for decades, especially since 9/11. Although we have seen an overall decrease in military suicides in recent years, there have also been pockets, bases, and regions where suicide rates have spiked. Historically, Alaska has had one of the highest military suicide rates worldwide, sometimes about four times higher than most other locations. Researchers and military officials have cited several contributing factors, including isolation, darkness, extreme weather, alcohol, leadership issues, and the high cost of living (housing, food, and fuel). Active-Duty Army suicides in Alaska

peaked in 2021 at seventeen for the year. Of these seventeen suicides, all had connections to relationship break-ups, and in all but one the victim was under the influence of alcohol.

### THE ARMY RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS

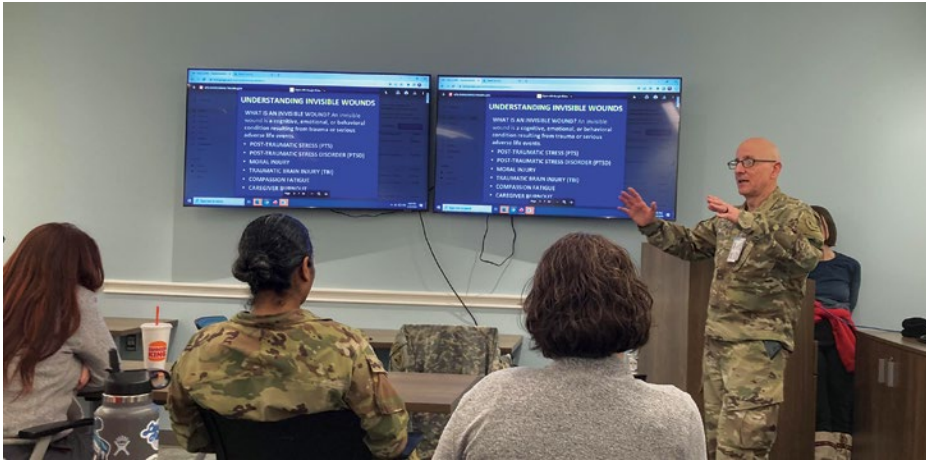
In response to this crisis, the US Army initiated the Alaska Mission-100 program in May 2022. AK M-100 is an initiative designed to connect 100% of our soldiers and their family members with 100% of the available resources for increasing their quality of life while decreasing the threat of suicide. Mission-100 personnel include Military Family Life Counselors (MFLC), Psychologists, and Chaplains and Religious Affairs NCOs. All the Chaplain Corps personnel on this mission are activated Army Reservists and Army National Guard Soldiers. Previously their commitment was for a six-month Temporary Duty Mission, but now the minimum is a one-year Personnel Change of Station (PCS) move.

The M-100 Chaplain positions augment active-duty shortfalls and capability gaps such as vacant battalion positions; Northern Warfare Training Center (Arctic Training) Chaplain; embedded Chaplains in the three US Army behavioral health clinics; and Chaplains to conduct barracks ministry, spiritual enhancement programs, and assisting the MFLCs with conducting wellness checks on all of the Soldiers assigned to Alaska's 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division.

### GOD WAS ALREADY AT WORK TO EQUIP ME FOR THIS MISSION

When our oldest son, Nathaniel, suffered a severe traumatic brain injury in November 2018, we were living in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and had been working at Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg (now Fort Liberty) for a little over two years. By fall of 2020, it had become quite evident that I would not be able to maintain the operational tempo at JSOC while providing adequate support to our family in facilitating Nat's recovery





from his injuries. God opened the door for me to go on active-duty orders at United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Headquarters, MacDill AFB, Tampa, Florida, in June 2021. To qualify for this position, I had to transfer from the Reserves to the Florida Army National Guard and drill monthly with a Guard unit while working at SOCOM. God had used hospital chaplains and their impact on my family and me to work in my heart to give me a desire to pursue Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) so that I could one day serve as a hospital or clinical Chaplain.

Shortly after our arrival in Florida the National Guard provided the opportunity for me to receive four units of CPE at no cost while continuing to work full-time at USSOCOM and drilling with Florida Army National Guard. I began CPE in September 2021 and completed all four units in September 2022. In April of that same year the USSOCOM Command Chaplain informed me that due to budget cuts, the funding for my position in their headquarters could only continue until 30 September and that I would have to find another job. This came as a surprise and a big disappointment, since I was originally supposed to have a position there for two or three years rather than just sixteen months. My wife, BethAnne, and I began praying about my next ministry position as I began filling out applications for full-time and part-time hospital, clinic, and hospice positions.

Over the next five months, nothing opened up, as our pastor, fellow church members, family, and friends continued to lift us up in prayer. During the first week of September 2022, when I was two weeks away from completing my fourth unit of CPE, three weeks away from my last paycheck on active duty, and had no

prospects for a full-time position, God opened the door for me to become a member of the Mission-100 Team. Although this position would take me away from home, God would use it to provide for our financial needs and for me to receive additional training as a Clinical Chaplain. I arrived in Alaska on 6 October 2022 and was assigned to work as the Embedded Chaplain at the Fort Wainwright Behavioral Health Clinic because of my qualification in Clinical Pastoral Education.

### MY EXPERIENCE AS AN ALASKA MISSION-100 CHAPLAIN

The one-year tour with Alaska Mission-100 provided me many ministry opportunities in the Fort Wainwright community and outstanding clinical training in an active-duty behavioral health setting. In the clinic I counseled an average of ten patients per week, taught two classes (Moral Injury and Spirituality) for their five-week Intensive Outpatient Therapy Class, counseled staff members, provided a Caregiver's Bible Study, taught Suicide Awareness and Prevention classes for Soldiers and government employees newly assigned to Medical Department Activity (MEDDAC) Alaska. This experience also counted toward my receiving the Army's Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) 7R (Trauma/Hospital Chaplain).

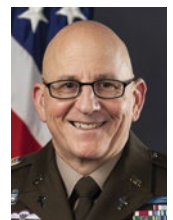
I also had the opportunity to be involved in ministries and outreaches outside the clinic. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening I was able to lead the Arctic Warrior Spiritual Fitness Workout, where we would have a CrossFit workout and devotions for seven to fifteen Soldiers. On Friday nights, with the help of another Chaplain, we hosted a Single-Soldier Dinner and Resiliency

Bible Study in which anywhere from five to fifteen Soldiers would come for physical and spiritual food. It was a blessing to serve with my good friend, Chaplain Phil McBroom, a former active-duty Chaplain, now US Army Reserve Chaplain and local pastor in North Pole, Alaska, who is also on active-duty orders as the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the AK M-100 Chaplain Program. I was also able to be a part of his congregation and work with him in launching a Sunday evening chapel service, the Arctic Fortress. During my time in Alaska we saw over a dozen Soldiers profess faith in Christ, and many of these became members of Phil's church.

### THE IMPACTS OF ALASKA MISSION-100

The work that the team members—especially the Chaplains—of AK M-100 have accomplished since its inception in May 2022 has been highly effective. In April 2023, Fort Wainwright experienced a tragedy and traumatic event when two Apache helicopters crashed in a midair collision that resulted in the deaths of three pilots and serious injury to a fourth. All the Mission-100 Chaplains were instrumental in providing ministry at the hospital and at the Critical Incident Stress-Management (CISM) Debrief for the unit members. At the clinic I had the opportunity to provide ministry to Soldiers and a family member directly affected by this tragedy.

The number of Active Duty Army suicides in Alaska during calendar year 2021 was seventeen; in calendar year 2022 it was six; and the total for 2023 (as of 1 December) is four. This accounts for a 77% reduction in Army suicides in Alaska since 2021. I count it a privilege to have been part of this effort to reduce military suicides, increase the quality of life for Soldiers and their family members, and present the gospel as God allowed.



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## Should We Be Redeeming the Culture?

Continued from page 9

world. We are pilgrim-sojourners in the present age, living quietly and faithfully in it until our citizenship in Christ's glorious kingdom is suddenly realized. Often, we must live and speak antithetically in our world, and that can be hard. We must do so consistently and with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), neither raging against the world nor retreating from it. That can be even harder.

What is the function of the church in this two-government approach? It is to instruct believers for the outworking of these tasks, teaching us to obey everything Christ has commanded us, with the warning and confidence that He is surely with us always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:19–20). What we need from the church is not an overwhelming and unachievable mission of cultural reclamation. Neither do we need an endless stream of complaints to fuel smoldering contempt for our neighbors. Nor do we need “come as you are” accommodations to secular culture that

## BETWEEN ISOLATIONISM AND INTEGRATIONISM LIES THE PATH IN THE MIDDLE. IT IS LARGELY IGNORED AT PRESENT, THOUGH IT HAS BEEN WELL REPRESENTED IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

allow us to love the world and remain comfortably “of” it as well as “in” it.

We do need the church to remind us that, having been forgiven, we are new creatures in Christ. We must become something other than what the world wants us to be. We are pilgrims on the same difficult journey, participants in the same mission, and recipients of the same mighty hope. By gathering weekly with other pilgrims, we receive the grace and inner strength necessary to live godly, courageous, and antithetical lives in a world that neither accepts, understands, nor likes us.

To provide for our institutional and individual missions, the historical church has at different times offered crusades, monasteries, social hubs, and even cultural accommodation. But what we need, now more than ever, are the ordinary means by which God strengthens His people through the regular gatherings and activities of

faithful church communities. These give us the nourishment to carry out our mission, both individually and collectively, in the presence of God.

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<sup>1</sup> From the editors: To clarify, postmillennialism is a position on eschatology asserting that Christ will return at the end of the millennium rather than the beginning, and that it is the responsibility of the organized church to bring the world into submission to Him in anticipation of that return. The FBFI doctrinal statement is premillennial, holding that Christ will return at the beginning of the millennium and will reign personally and visibly on earth over His kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Inaugurated eschatology is held by representatives of historical premillennialism, progressive dispensationalism, and progressive covenantalism.

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# Discerning in Decisions We Make

**T**he *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines discernment as the “mental power of discerning; keenness of judgment; insight.” If a person lacks discernment, he will make decisions that have grave consequences. We see this demonstrated throughout the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament we have the account of King Solomon's death and his son Rehoboam's taking over the kingship of Israel. As he began his reign he asked the older men for their counsel on how to deal with the people. These older men were very wise and said to Rehoboam in 1 Kings 12:7, “If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.” Then Rehoboam consulted the younger men on the same matter and sought their counsel. The younger men said in verses 10–11, “Thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.”

We read that all the people of Israel rebelled against Rehoboam because he lacked discernment in that he heeded the advice of the younger men instead of the older men. How different Rehoboam was from his father Solomon! When Solomon

became king, he prayed to the Lord in 1 Kings 3:9, “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” When he prayed this prayer, the Lord responded in verses 11–12, “Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.”

Just as Solomon asked for the Lord to give him discernment, so every born-again believer should also pray for discernment. Discernment does not happen overnight. It will develop in a person's life as he rigorously exercises himself unto godliness. Hebrews 5:14 states, “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” You don't expect a small baby to consume meat because he isn't ready for it yet. But as he develops and grows, one day he will be able to digest it.

I like the way Matthew Henry commented on this passage by stating, “It is by use and exercise that these senses are

improved, made more quick and strong to taste the sweetness of what is good and true, and the bitterness of what is false and evil. Not only reason and faith but spiritual sense will teach men to distinguish between what is pleasing and what is provoking to God, between what is helpful and what is hurtful to our own souls” (*Commentary*, VI: 911).

It is imperative for the Lord's people to heed the admonition of 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” As a believer carefully studies the Scriptures, he will become more and more discerning in its truth. And this will cause him to draw closer to the Lord's law, statutes, and precepts. He will experience the same joy of the psalmist who said in Psalm 119:97–100, “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.” Let it be the desire of your heart for the Lord to grant you discernment in all the decisions you make.

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