

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



God, the Christian, and Human Government

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- ▶ A Christian Approach to Political Change
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Our sincere thanks to Steve Hankins for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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Introduction

In the Scriptures, God describes three institutions He established for the good of humankind—the family, the church, and human government. The order of this listing presents the order of their importance as taught biblically, though each is significant and essential for the prospering of the Christian in this life before heaven. This issue of FrontLine focuses on the third of these institutions, human government.

The actions of local, state, and national leaders loom large in public discourse and in private conversations with family and friends. Many moral and spiritual issues are woven into the fabric of the exercise of governmental power. In the United States, humanly speaking, there is no richer, larger, or more powerful source of influence than our governmental institutions, especially those of our national government. Yet all the power of government is exercised only because God has allowed it. This principle was stated by Jesus Himself during His own trial when Pilate was deciding whether to free Him or crucify Him.

The seven major articles in this issue of FrontLine offer important scriptural insight into subjects important for understanding the Christian's right relationship to human government. They provide moral and spiritual guidance about how to respond to human government despite the form it takes and the place it is found in the world.

In the first article, lifelong pastor and author Gordon Dickson discusses “Heaven’s Citizens Under Human Government.” This insightful essay concisely explains the most essential scriptural concepts about how the Christian is to view and behave toward human government.

Next, building on Pastor Dickson’s article, Dr. Brian Collins, theologian and biblical worldview specialist, offers penetrating ideas and helpful biblical guidance about “A Christian Approach to Political Change” in his instructive article.

Third, Mike Ascher, experienced pastor and police department chaplain, addresses how believers can serve those governmental officials closest to their communities—police officers—in “Mutual Aid: The Christian and Law Enforcement.”

The fourth piece begins a collection of articles on specific applications of governmental authority—what government is charged to do and what the Bible says about

these prerogatives. In the initial article of the four, Dr. David Saxon, professor, church historian, and assistant college dean, addresses the critical topic “Pacifism vs. Violence: Which Is the Way of Christ?”

In the fifth article, Army Chaplain (COL) Gary Fisher presents “War and the Just War: A Christian Perspective.” In this essay, he explains the theory of justice in warfare, based on biblical precepts, as opposed to geographical conquest, the acquisition of wealth, and merciless brutality.

Article six, “Christian Service Through the Military: A Baptist Perspective from Church History,” is authored by Michael Sproul, a senior pastor and Chaplain, Brigadier General, assistant to the Air Force Chief of Chaplains. Pastor Sproul explains the history of Baptists in military service and the compelling reasons for honoring those who serve in the military forces of the United States.

The seventh and final article, “Vengeance, Justice, and the New Testament Believer,” presents the biblical rationale for capital punishment as the ultimate demonstration of governmental authority, based on righteous retribution and justice rather than vengeance. This contribution is authored by Dr. Kevin Schaal, the president of the FBFI.

We hope this issue of FrontLine will help you and your family gain a better grasp on how to think and respond rightly to “the powers that be” as ministers of God, placed by Him over us for our good and His glory.

Steve Hankins

Gordon A. Dickson



Heaven's Citizens Under Human Government

On most major highways, you will find distance markers, milestones to help you measure the progress of your journey. From history we learn that it was the Romans who first placed these markers at every thousand paces—the precursor to the English mile. Jesus used these markers to teach His followers to “go the extra mile” (Matt. 5:41). So, when governmental

or military leaders coerce or compel believers, the Lord tells His disciples to go beyond their expectations. Doing so helps us testify about Christ as we demonstrate that we love the Lord and love our neighbors. Over time, men such as Benjamin Franklin (postmaster of Philadelphia) put these roadway markers to effective use to organize regional maps. Today we give directions with interstate exit numbers and even rural bridges are marked with a sign indicating their exact distance from a given point in a county. In the pages of Scripture, we find mile markers to show us where we have been and where we are going. We could think of these as ancient landmarks erected by saints of God whom the Lord has used throughout the ages. According to Philippians 3:20, believers are citizens of heaven. So how should citizens of heaven respond to elected and appointed officials? As heavenly citizens who live under human government, it is important for us to remember our

scriptural landmarks, mile markers for the journey ahead.

WHY DO NATIONS EXIST?

When discussing human government, believers should first answer this question: For what reason do nations exist? Paul's landmark statement in Acts 17:26–27 assures us that God the Creator appointed the timing and boundaries of nations; He did so in order that men “should seek the Lord.” (According to Genesis 11:6–8, this began with the division of languages at Babel.) And to enable men to seek Him, God promised Abraham that his descendant (the Messiah) would bless all the nations of the earth (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). Acting on these landmark principles, Christians have the privilege of helping others seek the Lord. Yes, there are those who try to depict this emphasis as “Christian nationalism” in the United States. But these principles apply to every nation, wherever the gospel may be preached.

HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS LOOK UPON HUMAN GOVERNMENT?

When it comes to understanding human governance, our mile markers must include the right view of government: “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:17). The sovereign God still reigns today.

HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS RESPOND TO HUMAN GOVERNMENT?

Our first response should be prayer. Understanding that the Lord reigns supreme over the nations helps us to understand the right response to governmental officials in this way. Paul appealed for believers to pray for kings and all who are in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–2) as a top spiritual priority. If you are not praying for your elected and appointed leaders, what do you expect to happen? The Lord pointed out to the prophet Jeremiah that he was trusting in the land of peace (Jer. 12:5),

when all was well in the land of Judah. Is this where your trust is placed, in a calm, prosperous national environment? That can change overnight, just as it did in Judah, and you can be in social and civic upheaval. What will you do then? Citizens of heaven must know how to make their appeals to the Lord. By doing so, they are like Nehemiah, who used prayer to usher his human king into the presence of his heavenly King (Neh. 2:1–4).

Next, our response should be submission. In his letter to the local congregation at Rome, Paul commanded, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). At the time Paul wrote those words, the debauched emperor Nero reigned over them. Was Nero the legitimate governmental authority? Yes, and we can be confident that even the most corrupt political leaders have been put in place by God to accomplish His purposes. The members

of that congregation at Rome undoubtedly remembered the counsel given to the pagan kings of Babylon to remind themselves that the Most High God still reigned (Dan. 4:17; 5:21, 23). And they probably used the words of Daniel to make the earnest appeal to their corrupt officials, “O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness” (Dan. 4:27). These mile markers still guide us in our approach to governmental officials.

These principles came to mind years ago when I sat in a meeting of pastors and legislators in our state capital. While discussing a new state ordinance that affected our churches and schools, one pastor blurted out, “I don’t care what the law says, we are going to do what we want to do!” I immediately turned to our state representative and said, “That pastor does not represent me or my viewpoint.”

Even when we are dealing with an arrogant “Nebuchad-nezzar” (Dan. 3–4) or an indiffer-

ent “Pharaoh” who turns his back on national problems (Exod. 7:20–23), believers must respond in a God-honoring manner. And this must be no mere outward compliance. Solomon advised us not to curse governmental authorities, even in our thoughts (Ecc. 10:20). So do not speak evil of the ruler of your people even when you are mistreated for conscientiously doing good (as Paul illustrates in Acts 23:1–5). In fact, you can count on God’s bountiful blessings when you are persecuted for doing right for the Lord’s sake (Matt. 5:11–12). Even when dangers are imminent, the believer can remember Paul’s landmark statement, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself” (Acts 20:24), or Esther’s famous proclamation, “If I perish, I perish” (Esth. 4:16).

WHICH RIGHTS SHOULD BELIEVERS INSIST UPON?

The discussion of why nations exist, who is reigning over them, and the believer’s right

response brings us to another important question: how should we use our rights as citizens of nations? Here too we have ancient landmarks. Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra have shown us how to respond to captors. That was a lesson that Moses had to learn the hard way. But the apostle Paul demonstrated how believers could use their rights with discernment. To be clear, we cannot be vengeful people, but must be willing “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:38–39). But there are times when each of us should use his or her rights as a national citizen. When the chief captain at Jerusalem ordered that the apostle be whipped, Paul inquired, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?” (Acts 22:24–28). That question brought them up short. Paul used his rights as a freeborn citizen of Rome. In Acts 16:36–40, Paul raised the same question after he and his fellow Roman citizen were beaten at Philippi. That question made the local officials realize that they had made a serious mistake, and

they made a humble appeal to Paul. So rather than exact the full penalty of the law (to cause his persecutors to be beaten), the apostle left them in peace. By doing so, he left believers with a landmark example of how to respond when we face similar circumstances. Yes, according to the laws of their nations, believers have citizenship rights. But they must use those rights with care, always remembering that they are citizens of heaven who function as ambassadors here on the earth (2 Cor. 5:19–21). Our goal is to reconcile every man to the Lord, knowing that Jesus Christ is the blessing for every nation. Will there be times to “turn the other cheek” and “go the extra mile”? Yes. But will there be times when we must insist upon our rights with discernment? Yes, but always with a view toward reconciling lost souls to the sovereign Lord who died for their sins and rose again.

As heavenly citizens who live under human government, it is important for us to remem-

ber our scriptural landmarks, mile markers for the journey ahead. By remembering the reason nations exist, the reign of the sovereign God, the believer's prayerful submissive response, and the way to use our rights, citizens of heaven can honor God in their daily walk among the nations of earth.

Gordon A. Dickson blogs at LiveServeLead.com. His newest book is *12 Ways You Can Make a Difference in This Crazy, Mixed-up World*. He continues to serve Christ in writing and conference speaking after thirty-nine years of pastoral ministry.





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A photograph showing a diverse group of people at what appears to be a voting station. In the foreground, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red beanie and a light blue shirt, is looking down at something in his hands. Next to him, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue cardigan, is holding and looking at a white piece of paper. In the background, there are other people, including a man in a green shirt and a woman in a blue hijab. American flags are visible in the background, and a sign with the word "VOTE" and a small American flag is visible on the right.

Brian Collins

A Christian Approach to Political Change

Christians today are often distressed by the increasing sinfulness of their society and by the fact that governing authorities often side with the sin and the sinner against Christian morality. Christians are right to mourn the sinfulness of their nation. However, some Christians argue that extreme times call for extreme measures. Some are urging Christians to work to put in place an

explicitly Christian government—even if violent revolution is the means to this end. Others would not go to this extent. But they are willing to speak and act like the world to promote a politics that they think will advance their interests as Christians. How does the Bible instruct the Christian to think about how to engage in politics?

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER GOVERNMENT DURING POLITICAL CHANGE

First, the Christian must believe that *God is the ultimate sovereign who has created the institution of government and who providentially determines who holds governmental power*. When Pilate asked Jesus, “Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?,” Jesus replied, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:10–11).¹ Earlier, Jesus told the scribes and chief priests to “render to Caesar the things

that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25). Thus, the people were to pay their taxes to Caesar, and Caesar should have rendered his obedience to God (since he bore God's image). When faced with persecution, the early Christians recognized that the same rulers who were arrayed against the Lord and His Messiah could only "do whatever [God's] hand and [God's] purpose predestined to occur" (Acts 4:28). Thus, Paul could say, "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom. 13:1).

THE CHRISTIAN'S SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT IN SPITE OF EVIL IN POLITICS

Second, *because God has ordained the institution of government and the authorities "that exist," the general Christian posture toward government should be submission.* This is true regardless of the evil of those engaged in politics and government. Paul taught, "For there

is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Rom. 13:1). Douglas Moo notes, “It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of Rom. 13:1–7 is the history of attempts to avoid what seems to be its plain meaning.”² Some, for instance, claim that it is only those rulers who acknowledge Christ who are to be submitted to, while others claim that if the government does not live up to its duties as laid out in verses 3–4, Christians are no longer obliged to obey it.³ These evasions neglect that Paul wrote as one subject to the Roman government under Nero. Nor will it do to say that Paul was speaking of submission to Nero only during the earlier, more

THE BIBLE NOT ONLY PRESENTS MOSES, JOSHUA, DAVID, HEZEKIAH, AND JOSIAH AS RIGHTEOUS RULERS OF ISRAEL, IT ALSO PRESENTS JOSEPH AND DANIEL AS RIGHTEOUSLY PARTICIPATING IN PAGAN GOVERNMENTS.

benign part of his reign, for later in his ministry Paul would write much the same to Titus: “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient” (Titus 3:1).

However, a Christian may distinguish between a usurper and a legitimate ruler (2 Kings 11:1–16). Romans 13 also contains an implicit condition. If people are to obey government because rulers are God’s ministers, then government should not be obeyed in anything contrary to God’s law. Peter made this explicit when he told the Jewish rulers, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; cf. Acts 4:19–21).

THE CHRISTIAN’S RESPECTFUL ATTITUDE AND SPEECH TOWARD POLITICIANS

An important third consideration is that *Christians are to speak of those in government with respect and consideration*. One of God’s laws for Israel was, “You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people” (Exod.

22:28). Once, Paul objected to an unlawful command to strike him while he stood trial: “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?” (Acts 23:3). When challenged, Paul confessed, “I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’” (Acts 23:5). Later Paul would instruct Titus to remind his congregation “to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men” (Titus 3:2). How contrary this is to the talk radio and cable news infotainment industry. Fundamentalist Christians who are careful about the entertainment they consume and opposed to creeping worldliness within the church are sometimes less aware of how their thinking and speaking about political matters have been shaped by the world. In fact, they may have convinced themselves that they are “taking a stand”—unlike those Christians whose very gentleness marks them

out as compromisers. Dr. Edward Panosian wisely observed, “In their blustering, in their rush toward confrontation—while calling it ‘standing firm’—a few Christians have earned a bad name for the majority. It is possible to stand firm gently. Does the person get his purpose across best who yells, or who says quietly, ‘One step more and you have gone too far’?”⁴

THE CHRISTIAN’S PRAYERS FOR THOSE ENGAGED IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

People often try to avoid the plain meaning of these biblical texts just mentioned because obedience to them may seem like resignation to live under wicked governments. Is there nothing that Christians can do? Indeed, there is. An essential fourth consideration is that *Christians should engage in politics through prayer*. Paul makes this a priority for Christians: “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all

men, for kings and all who are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1–2). To pray about political matters is to appeal beyond all lesser authorities to the Supreme Ruler. Perhaps Christians are tempted to think little of prayer because they want to see results that are more immediate and sweeping than they expect prayer will bring. This may be a subtle admission that our goals are different from God’s. Christ will return one day to subdue all His enemies, but right now He rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2).

THE CHRISTIAN’S WILLINGNESS TO SUFFER GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL PERSECUTION

An important fifth biblical idea is that *Christians should be willing to suffer for the truth, if necessary*. Christians should not be afraid to speak biblical truth to those in authority. Like many of the prophets before him, John the Baptist was an example of this: “For John had been saying to [Herod], ‘It is

not lawful for you to have her” (Matt. 14:3–4), speaking of Herod Antipas’ adulterous relationship with the wife of his own brother, also a political ruler. The Bible’s teaching about speaking respectfully does not contradict its examples of speaking forthrightly. Of course, Herod put John in prison for his preaching. He did lose his life through his boldness and the murderous act of Herod. This was the price he was willing to pay for speaking the truth boldly.

Further, Jesus taught that the principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” which in its original context placed an upper limit on judicial sentences, should not be repurposed by private individuals to justify taking vengeance on those who did them wrong. Even if a Roman soldier unjustly compelled a believer to carry a burden for a mile, the response was not to be reprisal or refusal but going the extra mile (Matt. 5:38, 41). How much more does this teaching bar any

kind of violent revolution? Jesus also specifically addressed the issue of persecution: “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:11; cf. 1 Pet. 3:13–17). Though the Christian may be tempted to create a kingdom of heaven on earth by means of revolutionary or governmental force, Jesus taught, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3) and “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Inevitably, there are times when believers may unjustly suffer persecution, as Scripture and church history reveal. Fortunately, at times, the law may protect the believer, as in the case of Paul when sent to Rome for trial before Caesar when accused falsely by the Jews (Acts 25:10–12).

THE CHRISTIAN’S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

A sixth essential concept taught in Scripture is that *believers may participate in*

government and seek to shape the law and its administration so that it is moral and just.

The Bible not only presents Moses, Joshua, David, Hezekiah, and Josiah as righteous rulers of Israel, it also presents Joseph and Daniel as righteously participating in pagan governments. If believers can serve in government, how much more can they vote, petition, organize, and otherwise participate in democratic society? Christians, out of love for God and neighbor, should advocate for laws that honor God and will be beneficial to their fellow citizens.

CONCLUSION

Allowing the Bible to shape our thinking in these six areas will do much to guard us against political worldliness and to protect our churches and institutions from dissension about political matters.

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¹ Scripture quotations are from the NASB (1995), unless otherwise noted.

² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 806.

³ Moo, 808.

⁴ Edward M. Panosian, “A Church Historical View of a Christian’s Responsibility Before Caesar,” in *The Providence of God in History* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 1996), 33.



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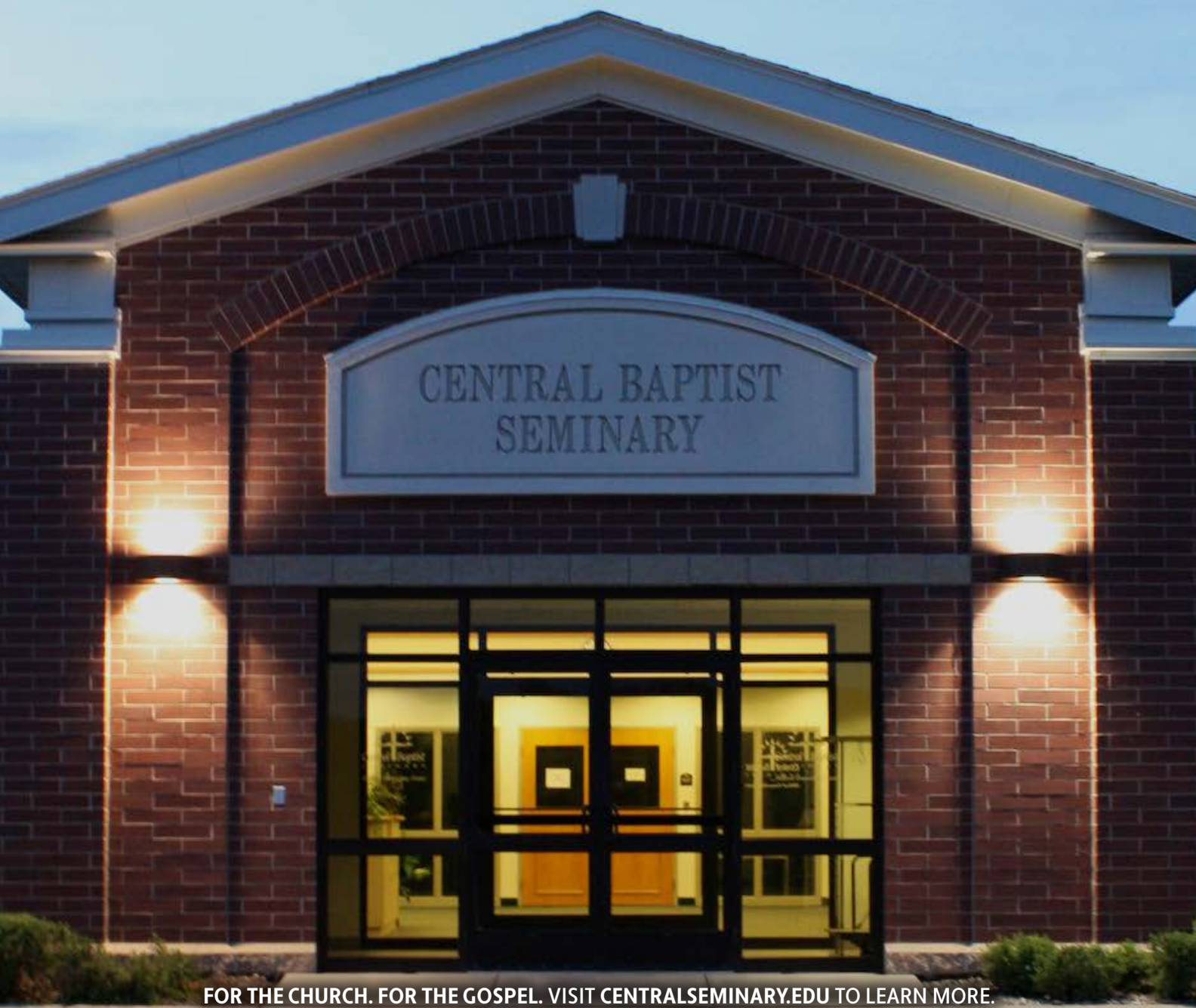




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Mike Ascher

Mutual Aid

The Christian and Law Enforcement

Every first responder knows what is meant by the words “mutual aid.” State and federal agencies, along with other organizations, join forces to assist each other in a time of crisis. The law enforcement community in America is in a time of crisis, as this article will explain. I believe Christians should rise up to provide mutual aid to police officers, who are always available to assist us.

I hope that those reading this article understand already the biblical basis for law enforcement. Romans 13 instructs us that governmental authority is from God (v. 1),

and those who resist government are directly resisting His authority (v. 2). Because sinners are lawbreakers, God authorized government to appoint “rulers” to enforce the law (v. 3). This is a broad term referring to an official “whose power included paramilitary and police affairs as well as administrative and political functions.”¹ These rulers are also called “ministers” (government’s “deacons”) whose job is to encourage good and punish evil. The purpose of the “sword” in Romans 13:4 is twofold. First, it is a reminder. “The sword is the symbol . . . of the power for punishing [evil] inherent in the government.”² Second, the sword is “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The weapons carried by law enforcement are the instruments by which God provides protection and exacts justice by lethal force, when necessary, against those who break the law.

Although the biblical basis for having police officers is clear, my burden is to answer this

question: How should God's people aid those who protect and serve our communities? I answer the question with two words: interaction and intercession. God's people need to interact with officers by showing honor and then communicating their support for what God has called them to do. Christians must also intercede for officers by communicating the needs of those officers to God. This is directly commanded in 1 Timothy 2:2. As a police chaplain for twenty-six years in three states, I have witnessed firsthand the greatest needs of officers. Let me share these needs with you so you can better pray for and support these officers. Their greatest needs include evangelism, enlightenment, encouragement, and explanation of how the Scriptures can meet their deepest pressures, fears, anxieties, sorrows, and regrets.

EVANGELISM IS NEEDED BECAUSE SOME OFFICERS FACE ETERNAL SPIRITUAL CONDEMNATION.

A discussion of law enforcement must begin with the gospel. Although the police often deal with society's lawbreakers, they are also condemned in heaven's court if they have "not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Like the officiating officer overseeing events at Calvary, each man or woman wearing a police uniform must declare in dependent faith, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54; cf. Luke 23:47).

The police departments of America represent a field "white already to harvest" (John 4:35). The federal government reports that there are 18,000 federal and state law enforcement agencies in the United States employing nearly 700,000 sworn officers.³ Although they are called to "keep the peace," many desperately need the Prince of Peace that they might have "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). Believers

should not hold back in sharing the news of salvation with these civil servants of God. The Lord of the harvest is using what they experience daily to prepare their hearts.

ENLIGHTENMENT IS NEEDED BECAUSE OFFICERS ARE DIVINELY CALLED.

Along with evangelism, America's police officers have a great need for enlightenment. Officer Michael Williams is a police officer and chaplain with a vocal testimony for Christ. In an op-ed entitled, "Understanding Your Calling," he expressed, "Most of us entered the law enforcement profession in response to a 'calling' on our lives even if we didn't understand its source." He went on to explain how this lack of understanding can lead to significant complications in an officer's life.⁴ In a sense, God Himself has deputized the police officer, and no one is better qualified to encourage him in his role than a Christian who knows the Bible.

This knowledge becomes especially important when an officer is required to use deadly force and take another human life. My goal through years of chaplaincy has been to share the truths in Romans 13:1–5 with every officer I can, as God gives opportunity. One afternoon I was stopped by an officer in a hallway at the police station. “Chap, what was that Scripture you told me about that says we are ministers of God?” He went on to explain he wanted to use the verses to help a close friend in another department who had been forced to shoot a man who had pointed a gun at him. His friend was devastated. The need was great for this officer to be enlightened about God’s calling on his life, including the right to use deadly force to stop an aggressor. As a Christian, be aware of what is happening in your community with the police. You too can share truth from God’s Word that will help an officer understand he is doing God’s work. Prayerfully write a kind note, include Scripture, and leave it with a police supervisor

at a station. Today's peace officers need evangelism, enlightenment, and encouragement.

ENCOURAGEMENT IS NEEDED BECAUSE OFFICERS ARE OFTEN UNJUSTLY CRITICIZED.

As social norms deteriorate in America, police officers are severely criticized in their efforts to maintain order, and they have lost much of the respect that was once common. This has contributed to other factors that make modern policing extremely difficult.

Violent crime rates have increased in many major cities. Immigration concerns have grown more complex. Agency budgets have tightened. At the same time, hostile narratives have emerged in mainstream and social media, which encourage antipathy toward police and paint American law enforcement as “systemically racist.” The result is that the police have few allies. City officials have often been quick to give in to political pressure,

blaming officers and calling for prosecutions before investigations are complete and facts are known. Fearing for their careers and reputations, many police officers are hesitating or ceasing to engage in discretionary enforcement activities, although this is not common to all departments. Some are leaving the force altogether, while potential recruits are opting not to join, contributing to staffing shortfalls.⁵

Compounding the problem is the fact that there are bad police officers who make wrong decisions, and sometimes terrible decisions. The caring Christians of a community can encourage God's ministers in law enforcement and counter the culture's toxic attitude toward police. Every time you have the chance, thank officers for what they do. Host a special law enforcement Sunday at your church. This will go a long way in honoring and encouraging your local police.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATION IS NEEDED BECAUSE MANY OFFICERS ARE EMOTIONALLY CRUSHED.

Police work has been accurately described as “hours and hours of boredom interrupted by moments of sheer terror.”⁶ The fact that officers must interact with the most volatile and vulnerable in our society puts them at higher risk for suicide and depression.⁷ In the United States in 2019 alone, 228 police officers took their own lives. By comparison, there were 132 line-of-duty deaths in the same year. Police suicides in 2019 were almost double that of the previous year.⁸

The extraordinary stress on law enforcement personnel must be met by Christians (including law enforcement chaplains) who can rightly divide the truth of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). The word translated “rightly dividing” means literally “to cut along a straight line, to cut a straight road,” such as a farmer “plowing a straight furrow” or “a road

maker driving his road straight.”⁹ If an officer is struggling emotionally, a caring Christian who knows how to accurately exposit God’s Word can cut a straight path to the biblical answers that officer needs.

Mike, a police officer in our church, sent me an e-mail about a fellow officer in his department who was contemplating suicide. I responded immediately, knowing that the man’s life was in danger and that his occupation made him especially vulnerable. Mike knows the Lord and is also a student of Scripture. He took the material and shared it with his colleague. The literature explained God’s perspective on suicide and offered hope. Not only did biblical truth change the man’s thinking, but Mike was also able to lead his fellow officer to faith in Jesus Christ.

Terry, an officer who retired from the department where I serve as chaplain, was invited with his wife to a grief counseling Bible study at our church. The sessions

also addressed the subject of post-traumatic stress from a biblical perspective. The weekly instruction applied God's answers to his deep spiritual needs. As a result, Terry and his wife began attending our church, and he gave his heart to Christ. The clear application of Scripture to the wounds left by his twenty-eight-year career has brought lasting change.

In conclusion, let us return to those two important words that will enable you to provide mutual aid to the law enforcement community where you live. Interaction is essential. As a servant of Jesus Christ, do all you can to encourage His servants who wear a police badge. As we do God's work we are on the same team! Also remember that intercession is a must. I have challenged our church family to pray every time they hear a siren and to pray consistently for those who protect and serve us. There is a "thin blue line" of men and women who are maintaining a fragile peace in our communities and our nation.

They need mutual aid from the church of Jesus Christ.

Mike Ascher is the senior pastor at Good News Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Virginia. He is also the chairman of the chaplain commission of the FBFI and serves as a police chaplain with the Chesapeake Police Department.



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- ¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1976), 4:38.
- ² Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 378.
- ³ “Agencies,” *United States Department of Justice*, <https://www.justice.gov/agencies/chart>; “Law Enforcement Facts,” *National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund*, <https://nleomf.org/memorial/facts-figures/law-enforcement-facts/>.
- ⁴ Michael Williams, “Understanding Your Calling,” *Law Officer*, March 6, 2016, <https://www.lawofficer.com/understanding-your-calling/>.
- ⁵ Edwin Meese III and John Malcolm, “Policing in America: Lessons from the Past, Opportunities for the Future,” *The Heritage Foundation*, September 18, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/crime-and-justice/report/policing-america-lessons-the-past-opportunities-the-future>.
- ⁶ Tim Sherman, “Chapter 7: Ministry to the Law Enforcement

Community” (Detroit Lakes, MI: In PURSUIT Ministries, 2015), 11.

⁷ “On average, police officers witness 188 ‘critical incidents’ during their careers. This exposure to horrific accidents can lead to multiple mental health issues that often get untreated. For example, the rates for PTSD and depression among police officers is *five times higher* than that of the civilian population.” Jena Hilliard, “New Study Shows Police at Highest Risk for Suicide of Any Profession,” September 14, 2019, <https://www.addictioncenter.com/news/2019/09/police-at-highest-risk>.

⁸ “Report: 228 American Police Officers Died By Suicide in 2019,” *Police Law Enforcement Solutions*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.policemag.com/patrol/news/15313420/report-228-american-police-officers-died-by-suicide-in-2019>.

⁹ Rienecker and Rogers, 641–42.

David Saxon

Pacifism vs. Violence



Which Is the Way of Christ?

**THE PRIMARY QUESTION THAT MUST BE
ANSWERED**

“They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” These are Jesus’ famous words as

Peter begins to launch a one-man military exercise against the “great multitude with swords and staves” that had come to arrest the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:47, 52). Coupled with Christ’s equally famous command to present our left cheek to the person who has struck us on the right (Matt. 5:39), this teaching has led believers in every era of the church to reject violence of all kinds. Interpreting both passages as referring to self-defense, Christian pacifists have formulated the following argument: self-defense would appear to be the most justifiable use of violence; Christ forbids self-defense; nonviolently facing violent aggressors who hate Christ and His followers is the glory of Christian pacifism. Worldly people can trust to their brawn, bullets, and bombs, so the argument goes; the way of Christ is the way of the peacemaker. If such a path leads to suffering, we can be even more certain that it is the Christian path. “If the world hate you,” Christ said shortly before correcting Peter in

the Garden, “ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). If we want to be “godly in Christ Jesus,” we should embrace opportunities to suffer rather than defend ourselves or, worse, use force against others.

Most Christians, however, have not embraced this pacifist vision of the Christian life and testimony. They have believed in the occasional necessity of violence and have developed arguments to justify it. From personal self-defense, which includes defense of one’s family and friends, to capital punishment for some crimes, to just war theory, which justifies self-defense on a national scale, most Christians have argued that violence is not only permissible at times but a duty. They have further argued that failure to exercise violence at the right times is itself sinful.

Both sides appeal to Scripture, and, of course, this author believes one side has a much more successful appeal than the other. If one were to grant, however, that Scripture

could be interpreted either way, what would be the fundamental issue separating the two positions? It would appear to be this: how best can a believer value the God-given gift of life?

THE PACIFIST TRADITION THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY

The pacifist tradition has roots in early church history. Athenagoras, Tertullian, Origen, and Lactantius condemned participation in war and thus military service for Christians. However, the Roman military, like every other ancient political regime, combined idolatrous worship into its fighting code, so it is not easy to discern whether the fathers are opposing violence per se or involvement in compromising occupations. That the early church did not adopt a universal pacifist stance appears evident when we note that Christians began showing up in the Roman armies of the third century despite all the challenges that the idol worship created for them. Later, in the Middle Ages, some

voices, such as Francis of Assisi and John Wyclif, spoke out against war, but it is again hard to prove a full-blown pacifism.

When the Reformation erupted in the sixteenth century, most Protestants seamlessly adopted the church-state model that had reigned in Europe for over a millennium. That model accepted warfare as a necessary political corollary to personal self-defense, and it was not seriously questioned by the mainline reformers, such as Zwingli (who died on a field of battle), Luther, Cranmer, and Calvin. Some, however, began to perceive the inevitable corruption of the church that was entailed in its alliance with political power. These radicals saw the state using violence to solve all manner of problems—including maintaining religious uniformity at the radicals' expense—and concluded that the sword has no place in the life of a believer. The most biblical of these radicals—the early Anabaptists—clearly enunciated this view in the Schleithem Confession of 1527. The

confession acknowledges that the magistrate uses the sword to punish and defend, but this use “is outside the perfection of Christ.” As a result, these Anabaptists rejected the possibility of holding civil office or participating in the military. Their rationale is that Christ is their Model and Exemplar of not defending Himself; furthermore, He forbade the use of the sword: “The worldly princes lord it over them, . . . but not so shall it be with you.”

PRIMARY MODERN ADHERENTS OF PACIFISM

The modern adherents of the pacifist view are the Amish, the Mennonites, and the Hutterian Brethren. The key to this more modern religious pacifism is that these religious persuasions view themselves as radically different from the world. They cannot help living in secular societies, and they hope their governments will avoid war if possible. But pacifism is a specifically *Christian* way of life, and the violence engaged in by the world

makes it essential that believers live like Christ and reject such behavior. Some modern Mennonites call this their “peace witness.”

In the seventeenth century, another anti-war group emerged through the teachings of George Fox: the Friends, known popularly as Quakers. Because they are less other-worldly than the Anabaptist tradition, Quakers have been leaders in what they call “peacemaking,” participating in the political processes of their native lands and urging their governments to pursue nonviolent solutions to problems often solved through war.

OTHER MODERN PROPONENTS OF PACIFISM

In addition to these substantial witnesses to pacifism, modern times have seen the rise of influential thinkers who have espoused a similar approach, although not always applying their insights to individual self-defense in the same way. Notable among these is the Russian

novelist Leo Tolstoy. His study of the Gospels convinced him that Jesus rejected violence as the solution to problems, and he criticized both the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church on this basis. He was expelled from the latter and persecuted by the former for urging his fellow Russians to use nonviolence to protest existing policies, no matter the personal cost.

The Indian reformer Mahatma Gandhi, during a few years in South Africa protesting apartheid (1910–1913), operated an educational commune called Tolstoy Farm. He clearly noticed Tolstoy's nonviolence, even accepting the influence of Jesus on it, without embracing Christianity. The influence came full circle when Baptist pastor Martin Luther King Jr., visited India and saw firsthand the successful results of Gandhi's nonviolence. King reported in 1960 that his own version of nonviolence was a fusion of "the Sermon on the Mount and the Gandhian method of

nonviolent resistance. This principle became the guiding light of our movement. Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method.” King suggests that he saw little relevance of such a principle to international affairs at first because it seemed to him that violence might sometimes be necessary in the face of “totalitarian evil.” Nevertheless, by 1960 he had become convinced that one cannot meet fire with fire but must overcome evil with good. Nonviolence is the only sane approach in the nuclear age, and the only appropriate response for Christians.

Clearly, some of the logic represented in the pacifist tradition is pragmatic. Using violence to overcome violence can obviously never work. Furthermore, violence is dehumanizing, so that one attempting righteously to use violence becomes corrupted by it, trusting in his own power rather than in the power of God. The best forms of pacifism, however, include a fundamental commitment to the

value of life. Peace is right and to be pursued at all costs because it places the right value on life, something God esteems highly. Violence diminishes the value of life, establishing some other ends as more precious; that is, if someone will sacrifice life for something, that something must be worth more. Only eternal things qualify. But almost all uses of violence are for protecting temporal values.

Most, if not all, pacifists employ similar logic to rule out capital punishment. The evil of killing is not vanquished by using killing against it. Further investigation of capital punishment is not possible in this short article, but opposition to it is the majority view among pacifists (although many non-pacifists oppose it, and some pacifists are in favor of it).

THE COMPELLING REASONS MOST CHRISTIANS ARE NOT PACIFISTS

In the face of this witness, why have most Christians throughout church history rejected

the pacifist position? The answer is simple but profoundly important. This does not seem to be the way God Himself values life.

The Old Testament testimony is that God demanded the taking of life for murder (Genesis 9:6 and numerous instances in the Mosaic law), that God ordered Israel's execution of the Canaanites for their idolatry and perversions, and that God endorsed warfare in self-defense (so that David could praise God for "teaching my hands to war" in Psalm 144:1). This testimony means that one must either (1) set Jesus and the New Testament God of love against the Old Testament god of wrath and vengeance, or (2) so strongly set aside the Old Testament as an inferior dispensation that one's modern sensibilities appear morally superior to those of the Old Testament God. Either solution has been repugnant to most Christians, and rightly so. The New Testament witness—including Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount—can

easily be interpreted as a rejection of retaliation rather than a condemnation of the righteous use of force.

Finally, Christian sensibilities recoil from the thought that one is employing godlike love if he stands by without intervening and watches his wife and children suffer violence, and the same principle applies to his neighbor. The measure by which we are to determine such care of others is our innate love for ourselves (per the Golden Rule), which suggests the duty of self-defense, at least in non-persecution contexts. The right to defend oneself, once established, becomes the basis for nations defending themselves as well. Indeed, the right to fight back is the main way nations can prevent aggressors from prosecuting unjust wars.

In short, value for life is indeed the driving force in one's ethics regarding violence, but one must not propose a position that makes one more righteous than God Himself.

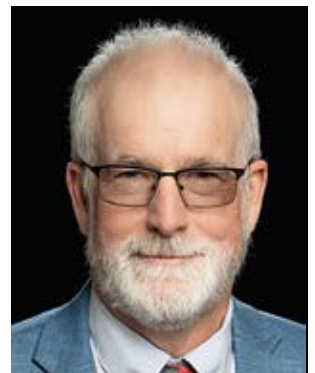
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¹ See <https://themennonite.org/feature/mennonite-peace-witness-across-spectrum/>.

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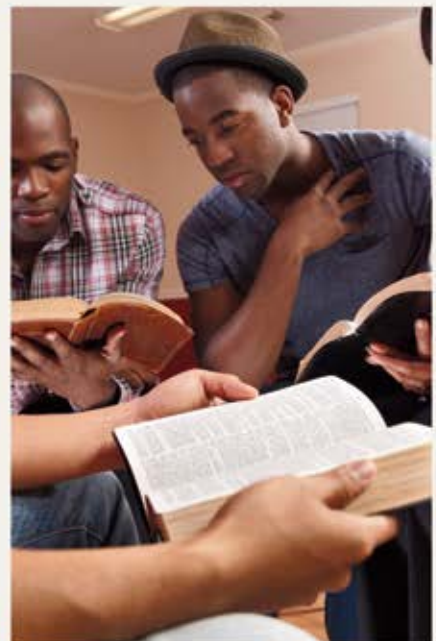
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Gary T. Fisher

War and the Just War

A Christian Perspective

Revelation 6 describes war as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come!” And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that people would kill one another; and a large sword was given to him. (Rev. 6:3–4, NASB)

This rider described in Revelation does not bring death, destruction, and war with him. All that is needed is for him to remove peace from the earth. This peace is a gift of God and once it is removed, humanity quickly rushes in with war and destruction. Peace with other peoples and nations is not the natural state of nations and politics. My entire career has been shaped by conflict and the preparation for conflict. I am through and through a combat chaplain. I have served for thirty years since my oath of commission on the Bridge of Nations at Bob Jones University, and my service has taken me from the conflict in Bosnia/Kosovo through Iraq and Afghanistan to the nearly global conflicts that we have today.

The modern age has been significantly shaped by war and conflict. Since World War II there have been very few days without war. The nations of the world spend 2.24 trillion dollars on war each year, as of 2022.

War brings devastation. We all have been

watching what is happening with the war in Ukraine and most recently the conflict in the Middle East with Israel and Hamas in Gaza. According to widely broadcast reports, thirty-one thousand people have died in the conflict in the Middle East. I have spent my career as an Army Chaplain in a mighty war machine whose mission is to fight and win our nation's wars. I have been sought out to be the moral voice for the conduct of just war principles to my commands throughout the years and during deployments in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. I serve now in the U.S. Army of the Pacific (USARPAC) whose mission is to avoid war by preparing for war. If we are to avoid war, we must present a complicated, robust, and overwhelming problem set to our adversaries, so they choose not to achieve their strategic ends by armed conflict.

In a world so shaped and fraught with conflicts and moral dilemmas, the concept of a just war has been debated for centuries. Rooted in

Christian theology, the just war theory seeks to provide ethical guidelines for determining when it is right to use force in warfare, that is, when it is morally justified. For the United States Army, I would say this theory is better described as the “just war tradition.” It is a theory extensively used and refined over many years. It is not explicitly outlined in Scripture, but it draws upon biblical principles and teachings to establish its framework. When was the last time you and I heard a pulpit message on just war theory? Cathal Nolan, in his book *The Allure of Battle*, says, “War remains the most expensive, complex, physically, emotionally and morally demanding enterprise that humans collectively undertake.” If that is true and we were to experience World War III in our time, when do we prepare ourselves and the church to meet and to understand this most morally demanding enterprise?

UNDERSTANDING JUST WAR THEORY

Just war theory consists of two main con-

cepts: *jus ad bellum* (the justice of going to war) and *jus in bello* (the justice of conducting war). These concepts respectively aim to address the reasons for initiating war and ethical conduct during warfare. From a Christian perspective, the decision to engage in war must align with the principles of justice, defense, and the protection and preservation of innocent life.

The justice of going to war. Jus ad bellum, the justice of going to war, is undergirded by two biblical concepts. The first is self-defense against attackers, that is, aggressor forces. A nation's self-defense involves protecting itself, its life-supporting resources, and its individual citizens. At its very core, this dimension of the just war tradition establishes the rightness of the stewardship that the armed forces of a nation have to protect it. The righteousness of the principles and practice of a just war is established clearly in the statement found in Exodus 22:2: "If the thief is caught while breaking in

and is stuck so that he dies, there will be no guilt for bloodshed on his account.” This may be a “thief” who steals from an individual, a family, or a nation, whether that thief invades as a foreign hostile hoard or a small terrorist cell. The Old Testament is replete with examples of the just wars of Israel fought against corrupt aggressor nations, employing both offensive and defensive strategies. While it is true that Israel as a political entity was uniquely related to God in the Old Testament era and enjoyed special divine guidance through prophets and prophet-kings about the wars in which it engaged, the example of the just defense of the nation and righteousness is clearly set for all nations. In the New Testament, Romans 13:1-4 affirms this Old Testament statement and these examples by emphasizing the role of government in maintaining order and punishing wrongdoers, foreign or domestic. Christians believe that governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens and may engage in war to fulfill this duty today.

The justice of conducting war. Jus in bello, justice in war once it has started, is undergirded by the central biblical principles of mercy and compassion. Christ's teachings emphasize love and forgiveness in all circumstances, even the worst ones such as war. This love and forgiveness are manifested through mercy and compassion. While engaging in warfare, Christian warriors and citizens are called to adhere to these principles even toward their enemies. Matthew 5:44 states, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This underscores the importance of treating adversaries with dignity and compassion, even in the midst of conflict. It governs behavior toward wounded enemies, the extraction of information from prisoners, the imprisonment of captured adversaries, and the civilians caught in the conflict perpetrated by their government.

My soldiers and I were once caught in an ambush in 2004 in Iraq. We were attacked and

ROOTED IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, THE JUST WAR THEORY SEEKS TO PROVIDE ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING WHEN IT IS RIGHT TO USE FORCE IN WARFARE, THAT IS, WHEN IT IS MORALLY JUSTIFIED.

pinned down by IEDs and small arms fire. I was positioned in front of a vehicle, tending to the wounded from our formation, the attack still raging. We had an insurgent nearby, himself wounded and incapacitated. Out of the blue, a young American specialist came over to the insurgent and began to assault him with all his might, though the enemy was secured and unable to fight. I was shocked, but I knew tempers were short; we had been out for a long while in a threatened position. We all were spent, near exhaustion. I left the wounded, pulled the specialist away from the insurgent, hugged him, and told him to return to his defensive position, which was more important at that time than killing a wound-

ed, defenseless enemy. This was the just war tradition at work on the battlefield, treating our enemy with an appropriate measure of dignity and compassion while not abandoning our mission of defeating the enemy. The specialist returned to his appointed defensive position and continued to protect me and others that day.

Proportionality is another concept central to the execution of justice in war. It requires that the means used in war be proportional to the ends desired. The concept is echoed in Proverbs 20:18: “Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance” (NASB). To ensure that a response is proportionate, we are encouraged to exercise prudence and seek wise counsel before resorting to warfare. This may result in the establishment of restrictive “rules of engagement” with the enemy, which are strategic and demonstrate justice and compassion in warfare. The “rules of engagement” are established by the

President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Combatant Command for any armed conflict and named operation our forces may find themselves engaged in. These rules of engagement may mean, for example, that only defensive actions are allowed, or firing only if fired upon. I have always told my soldiers that the rules of engagement are there for their protection. If they stay within them, their conscience will be protected when in the future they are rethinking their behavior in combat, which all soldiers do.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS

In modern times, the application of just war theory remains highly relevant in assessing the morality of military interventions, preemptive strikes, and response to aggression. Christians grapple with questions of moral responsibility, the protection of human rights, and the pursuit of peace. War planners and warriors especially bear the burden of applying just war theory.

The Christian perspective of just war theory offers a framework grounded in biblical principles for navigating the morality of warfare. While Scripture does not provide a comprehensive doctrine of war, it does offer insights on justice, mercy, and the sanctity of life. By integrating these principles with contemporary ethical considerations, Christians strive to navigate the complexities of conflict while upholding moral integrity and pursuing peace.

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Brigadier General Michael Sproul

Christian Service Through the Military

A Baptist Perspective from Church History

Understanding Baptist views of military service and patriotism is valuable in giving Baptists a deep and rich history. Serving in the military does have a long history among Baptists, beginning with the connection with and influence of the Anabaptists of sixteenth-century Europe.



THE INFLUENCE OF PACIFISM BY THE ANABAPTISTS

Some in the German and Swiss Anabaptist movement of the 1520s were pacifistic, while the noted German pastor and scholar Balthasar Hubmaier was not. Consistent with most in the evangelical wing of the continental Anabaptist movement in Europe, the Schleithem Confession was pacifist, opposing wars, violence, and all military action. Some attempt to dismiss the Anabaptists from our lineage by claiming their pacifism disqualifies them. This is historically inaccurate, since Baptists have never asserted pacifism as a core tenant of their self-identification. Thomas Armitage, the favorite Baptist historian of Charles Spurgeon, did not believe that the continental Anabaptists should be removed from our ecclesiastical family tree because of their theological, ecclesiastical, and civic views.¹ Neither did the New England Baptists of 1640, who defended the continental

Anabaptists of a century before, even though they held to pacifism. Dr. Ernest Pickering, in his seminal book *Biblical Separation*, identifies numerous separatist Anabaptist groups through the ages as part of our heritage, despite their pacifistic perspectives about military service and war.²

The pacifist wing of the continental Anabaptists wrestled with pacifism and military service in a European civic culture in which both Protestants and Catholics espoused a strident Christian nationalist view. In that era of Christian nationalism, where civil servants and the military were called on to execute or torture Anabaptists, it is understandable that godly Anabaptists like Michael Sattler, the author of the Schleithem Confession, would be unlikely to accept judicial or military appointments. The continental Anabaptists also argued that Christ's kingdom was not of this world and that the early church never sought an earthly kingdom.

They were attempting to reassert a primitive church view after what was, in their view, 1,200 years of decline. These views certainly would not push them out of the “Baptist genealogical tree.” Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor, openly asserted that Anabaptists should be martyred by the Protestants, just as Zwingli had done.³ These Christian nationalist views in Europe would have naturally pushed godly Baptists, as well as Anabaptists, away from military or judicial service.

THE BAPTIST CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIGHT FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

The English Civil War one hundred years later changed this mindset as Baptists flocked to Cromwell’s colors to fight for religious toleration. (A little-known fact is that John Bunyan came to Christ as a soldier in Cromwell’s army.) Cromwell won, but his Protectorate brought only limited religious freedom for Baptists. After Charles II came back to power in 1660, Baptists felt even less

freedom. In 1661, for preaching without a license from the Church of England, Bunyan was put in prison for twelve years, where he penned both *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War*.

Most colonies still had an established state church at the time of the Revolutionary War. The citizens of the state were required to fund the salaries of the ministers of the preferred church of that colony. This resulted in tremendous persecution of Baptists, who often refused to pay the required religious tax. John Adams was not pleased at the First Continental Congress when Baptist pastor Isaac Backus pled for religious toleration.⁴

Pastor John Leland of Orange County, Virginia, wrote later that every Baptist church in Virginia sided with Washington, with only one church maintaining a neutral stance.⁵ The early chaplains in Washington's army had an outsized representation of Baptist pastors. Among the most famous was New York Baptist pastor John Gano, chaplain to General

Clinton, a leading general in the Continental Army. Baptists of the 1770s and 1780s nearly unanimously endorsed and participated in the cause of the American Revolution.

What had changed regarding service in the military, a clearly non-pacifist perspective, from the Schleithem Confession written by continental Anabaptist Michael Sattler, to the Baptists of Cromwell's army, and then to an even greater unanimity of opinion among Baptists at the time of the American Revolution? It is telling that Leland did not know of one Baptist church in Virginia that opposed the Revolutionary War. The dominant view changed because of a greater understanding of Scripture, the hope for religious toleration, and the ability of Baptists to swear allegiance to an idea expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and then the US Constitution, rather than to a king. They had also come to the belief that there was a social con-

tract between those ruled and the rulers, so that when the rulers broke their contractual agreement, as Jefferson enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, good men would set aside that government, even by military force. They had also suffered severe persecution at the hands of the Anglicans in both England and America, as well as by the Puritans. They further believed that siding with a wicked crown that persecuted Baptists would violate their conscience.⁶

THE CALL TO HONOR OUR MILITARY AND OUR NATION TODAY

America has from her beginning as a nation been a constitutional republic, supported and defended by our military, which has included wholehearted Baptist participation from the Revolutionary War to the present. Those who serve in the military, many of them Baptist Christians, take an oath to preserve and protect the Constitution of the United States, the most significant document in history in sup-

port of religious tolerance and freedom.

I have an American flag on our church platform and yearly honor our military veterans who fulfill that oath, not because I worship America or because America is an idol, as some accuse, but rather to simply say “thank you” to America as the first nation which has ever placed a biblical understanding of religious freedom in its Constitution. America then became that “shining light on a hill” for other nations to emulate its Baptist ideal. It does not seem coincidental that after religious freedom was written into our Constitution, the world experienced the greatest Christian missionary century since the early church. We show simple gratitude to our country, not idolatrous worship, by honoring the great ideal of our nation as well as by thanking those who sacrificed so much so we can worship as God would have us to worship.

By lauding our veterans every year and thanking them, I found out that I had a mem-

ber who had been part of the first wave at the battle of Guadalcanal in World War II, another who completed twenty-five bombing missions over Germany, and another who was in the first frogman class (precursor to the SEALs) of ninety members. He participated in numerous beach invasions, and he was the only one in his class to survive the war. Another year, an unbeliever brought by his granddaughter to our Veterans Day service said it was the first time anyone had ever said “thank you” to him for Vietnam. His sister spit on him when he returned. Later, he accepted Christ at one of our services. These were older men, heroes who defended our freedoms, whom no one in our church knew about until we honored all our veterans.

In 1940, at the dawn of World War II, America’s population was 132 million. By 1944 we had 13 million in uniform, or approximately ten percent of the total population. I had multiple uncles and aunts

in uniform as well as a cousin who died at Normandy. Today, with 340 million living in the US, we have 2.1 million in the military in all branches and in all statuses, active, guard, or reserve. This places our military at less than one percent to protect us all. It seems many no longer understand the devotion it takes to defend our freedoms because many people in our nation no longer know anyone in uniform. In the middle of the night and in the middle of nowhere, I have had the privilege of overseeing around seventy-five dignified transfers of our heroes who gave their lives so we could have ours. Those in our younger generation have often been taught to despise their own country and its founders, and we help their understanding when we take time to honor our veterans and thank our nation.

We support our military members and veterans, and we open doors to bring them to Christ when we thank them for their service,

honor the country they serve(d), listen to their stories, and let them know our eternal gratitude for the freedom that America gives Baptists to practice our faith as our conscience dictates.

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- ¹ See Thomas Armitage, *The History of the Baptists* (Watertown, WI: Maranatha Baptist Bible College, 1980), 327–424.
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 - ³ Harold Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 3–10.
 - ⁴ Isaac Backus, *A History of New England: With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* (Newton, MA: The Backus Historical Society, 1871), 296–97.
 - ⁵ John Leland, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland* (repr., Dayton, OH: Church History Research and Archives, 1986), 103.
 - ⁶ Backus, 295–96.

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS

2 TIMOTHY 1:13

FIRST PARTAKER

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

“Neglect Not the Gift”: A Message from J. C. Ryle

*Neglect not the gift that is in thee,
which was given thee by prophecy,
with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.*

1 Timothy 4:14

Who could possibly overstate the value of the writings of J. C. Ryle? Someone has said that great books are the life-blood of master spirits. Was not Ryle just such a spirit? Though C. H. Spurgeon differed decidedly on many things from his Church of England contemporary, he nevertheless called him *an*

evangelical champion and one of the bravest and best of men. Ryle's own successor described him as *that man of granite with the heart of a child.* Iain Murray titled his recent biography of Ryle, *Prepared to Stand Alone.* He took the description from an appeal which Ryle himself made on one occasion,

We want more boldness among the friends of truth. There is far too much tendency to sit still, and wait for committees, and number our adherents. We want more men who are not afraid to stand alone. It is truth, not numbers, which shall always in the end prevail. We have the truth, and we need not be ashamed to say so. The judgment day will prove who is right, and to that day we boldly appeal.

J. C. Ryle was first of all a rural minister. In later life he repeated the old adage, *A house-going minister is one secret of a church-going people.* When the country people came to church, they were confronted immediately with the gospel. Ryle lettered Acts 16:31 in large, bold type above the arch over one of his pulpits: *Believe on the Lord Jesus*

Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Other texts were painted on roof trusses or metal plates screwed into the walls.

The last ten years of Ryle's ministry (1880–1890) were spent in Liverpool, one of England's largest, busiest cities. Appointed to the office of bishop (1 Tim. 3:1) at the recommendation of Benjamin Disraeli, the prime minister, Ryle worked and fought tirelessly against worldliness, liberalism, and the growing Anglo-Catholic movement within the Church of England. His classic, *Holiness*, preserves samples of his stout, no-nonsense admonitions and warnings challenging both church members and the lost without regard for either fear or favor. These messages were originally stand-alone tracts. Ryle wrote some two hundred such tracts. Their combined circulation was eventually estimated to be something like twelve million copies. It was through these that he exercised a growing national ministry of sowing salt and shining light. Nearly twenty of these addressed one of Ryle's greatest concerns: the growing desecration of the Lord's Day by professing Christians.

Ryle used his considerable influence to populate the churches of his diocese with sound, dedicated, evangelical pastors and lay workers. He ordained over five hundred men to the ministry and contributed to the establishing of forty-four new churches and fifty-one halls and rooms for worship.

But long before he had such prominence, Ryle's single-eyed devotion to his ministerial calling gave him a respected voice with his fellow pastors. The following message was delivered to a gathering of them in 1853 and was subsequently included in one of the several bound volumes (*Home Truths*) that combined various of his tracts.

Brethren, the leading topics of the subject committed to me appear to be the ministerial office, and the imperative duty of not neglecting it. Paul speaks to Timothy of his office, as "a gift." And he says of this gift, "neglect it not." In opening the subject I trust I may be allowed to remind my brethren that the orders of Timothy

and Titus ought to be specially interesting to them.

I consider that, strictly speaking, no minister of the Gospel of the present day, whatever may be his church or denomination, has any right to regard himself as a “successor of the apostles.” I believe that, in strict accuracy, the apostles had no successors at all. Their *office* was a peculiar office. Their *order* was a peculiar order. Both office and order ceased at their death. The apostles were specially called, and immediately set apart by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. They had the power of speaking with other languages. They were enabled to confirm the doctrines they preached by miracles and signs. They had the power of infallibly declaring God’s truth, and expounding His mind to the world. They were commissioned to bind and loose sins with authority. They could confer gifts upon others. In all these respects they stood alone. We are not their *successors*. They never had *any* successors! They were an order intended to continue until the Canon of Scripture was concluded, and

no longer. The ministers of the present day are the successors of Timothy and Titus, but not of Paul, Peter, James, and John. I feel that this is a digression, but the importance of the subject must be my apology.

AN OFFICE BUILT ON PLAIN WARRANT OF SCRIPTURE

I. With regard to the ministerial office, the first thing I would notice is the importance of regarding it as an office which is built on plain warrant of Holy Scripture.

It is "a gift," solemnly and publicly conferred with "the laying on of hands." There is great danger of forgetting this in the present day. On one side the reaction and rebound from Romish error, and the natural tendency of our minds to fly from one extreme to another, are calculated to make us underrate the value of a regular ministry. On the other side the bold assertion of the Plymouth Brethren, and others, that all forms, ministry, and systems are wrong, is likely to make us undervalue the importance of having

an order of men specially called and set apart to preach the word, and attend to holy things.

I abhor the idea of setting up ministers as mediators between Christ and the soul. I believe it was never intended that the outward government of Christian churches should be always one and the same. But notwithstanding all this, I firmly hold the opinion that the Christian ministry is of divine appointment. I am satisfied from examination of Scripture, that in every visible church there should be an order of men called and set apart for preaching and pastoral work. And with every feeling of respect for Christians who think otherwise, I must declare my own firm conviction, that the Christian ministry is plainly set forth in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, as an institution of God.

I would remark, in the next place, that although the Christian ministry is a Scriptural institution, we must be careful not to attach a *superstitious value* to what are commonly called "ordination" and the ministerial office. There is always danger of doing this. The human mind is so weak

that it is constantly inclined to extremes. It is very common to see ministers taking an extravagant view of the benefits, powers, and privileges conferred on themselves by their ordination. Let it be a settled principle in our minds, that *ordination is no magic charm*. It does no one good automatically. It conveys no necessary accompaniments of grace or gifts. It endows a man with no infallibility. It does not invest him with any special capacity for expounding, explaining, and interpreting the Word of God without danger of mistake. It does not give him any power of conferring grace upon others. Above all, it does not make him a sacrificing priest, and a mediator between God and man.

All this should be well remembered. No doubt the man who offers himself for ordination with an honest and good heart, inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit, and sincerely desirous to preach not himself, but Christ—such a one may reasonably expect a special blessing on his ordination—a greater blessing than if he undertook to preach the Gospel of his own will, without

any outward call. But the chief danger in the present day is that of *attaching an extravagant value to ordination*. Let us be on our guard.

The next remark I will make is one near akin to the last. We should beware of resting our claim to the people's attention on our *outward* call only. It will never do to tell our people, *We are your ordained ministers, and therefore you must believe and follow whatever we tell you*. On the contrary, we must tell them to prove our teaching by Scripture, and not to receive it unless it is scriptural. That man has no right to expect the attention of his people, who does not preach the Gospel and live the Gospel. The rule of Paul is clear on this point. He told the Thessalonians to esteem their ministers very highly "for their *work's sake*" (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

When there is no "work" done, it is vain to expect the people's esteem. It should never be forgotten, that men have often received the outward call, and been regularly set apart and ordained—and yet been rather a *curse* to the Church of Christ than a blessing! Hophni and

Phineas were in the regular succession from Aaron, and yet they made men abhor the offering of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:17). Annas and Caiaphas were in the right line from Aaron, and yet delivered our Lord to Pontius Pilate. Councils of regularly ordained and consecrated bishops have frequently sanctioned and decreed great heresies!

At the same time, it is notorious that God has frequently granted large blessings to the labors of men who were never ordained at all. I need hardly remind you of the Quakers, of Howell Harris, of Robert Haldane, and many others. After all, I will take leave to remind my brethren that the servant's message is of far more importance than his livery; and the physician's skill in using medicines more valued by the patient, than his diploma. It is honorable to be sent as an ambassador from the King of kings on so important a matter as that of offering the peace of God to a sinful world. But the title of ambassador is of no value at all, if we carry no message of peace, and have no tidings to tell about the King.

NEGLECT NOT THE GIFT

II. With regard to the other main part of my subject, viz., the imperative duty of “not neglecting the gift given to us,” I deeply feel my own need of exhortation from others. I trust that in speaking of it, you will believe I am addressing myself as well as others. Let Paul’s words ring in our ears this day: “neglect not the gift.”

All ministers of the Gospel are in danger of neglecting their duty. There is a risk of getting into a state of melancholy and depression, when the first excitement and novelty of our office are worn off. Many, perhaps, expect what they have no right to expect, and then relapse into despondency, under the idea that they can do nothing, when they see sin and unbelief abounding around them. Against this desponding frame of mind all ministers need to be on their guard. Above all men they need patience. He who cannot “wait” for fruit, as well as “work,” never ought to be ordained. But I may be allowed to say that of all ministers, none are in such peculiar danger of “neglecting

their gift," as the ministers of the Established Church of England. Their position, no doubt, has its special advantages. But it has also its special perils. About the nature of these perils I beg leave to offer a few suggestions.

I would suggest, for one thing, to my brethren, that we all need to beware of ***ministerial indolence***. It is painful to observe how easy it is for a watchman of souls to go back from his "first love," and subside into a cold, apathetic, torpid frame of mind. No one is more liable to this, perhaps, than the rector of a parish in a rural district. I speak feelingly on this point. It is my own position. I am persuaded that we have certain peculiar temptations, from which our brethren in towns are very much exempt. The rector of a rural parish has frequently a sufficient income, a good house, and a small population. Very often he has no neighbors to hold communion with. His parishioners are probably farmers and laborers—people of little or no reading, or mental cultivation. The field for exercising his talents is naturally excessively small. It is difficult to fill

up his time with ministerial work. The range of subjects he can handle in the pulpit is necessarily confined. I describe a common case, I believe. I declare my own conviction, that no state of things can be conceived more likely to bring over a man's mind, insensibly almost to himself, stagnation and rust. In fact, I firmly believe, that many a young minister, who at college distinguished himself, and took a good degree, has been lost, engulfed, and buried—so far as usefulness goes—by unhappily giving way to the habits of indolence, which such a position is calculated to engender. Many a clergyman who, at one time, did run well and bade fair to be an ornament to the Church of Christ, winds up with the “lame, and impotent conclusion” of being nothing more than a clerical farmer, gardener, musician, or painter. I implore my rural brethren to remember this. I feel the approach of this plague often myself. I am sure we have special need to beware of indolence.

I suggest, for another thing, that we ought to beware of ***neglecting the habit of reading.***

I do not wish to make an idol of learning and book knowledge; but I am satisfied that an unlearned ministry, in these days of progress and wide-spread education, will never command a people's respect. Men must read, if their ministry is not to become threadbare, thin, and a mere repetition of hackneyed commonplaces. Always taking out of their minds, and never putting in—they must naturally come to the bottom. Reading will alone make a full man. And here I will just remark, that to meet the evils of the day, ministers must read books they do not agree with. They must show that they know the false doctrines they have to combat. Just as a doctor must be familiar with morbid anatomy and poisons, so must a minister be acquainted with the writings of the foremost teachers of error in his present day.

I would suggest, for another thing, that we must beware of ***neglecting the preparation of our sermons***. I am sorry to say there seems to me great need for this caution. I fear that many are apt to spend their whole time in their schools,

in visiting their people, in attending to the sick, or in contriving and working the church's "machinery," and so to leave themselves little or no time for preparation of their sermons. I deeply regret this. It is a great mistake. No possible labor of a practical kind can ever compensate for inadequate preparation for the pulpit. A minister's sermons should be incomparably the first and chief thing in his thoughts every week that he lives. He must ever recollect that he is not ordained to be a schoolmaster, a relieving officer, or a doctor—but to preach the Word of God. The minister who slurs over his preaching under the excuse of other work, has no right to expect God's blessing.

Men talk of "the foolishness of preaching," as if that was a reason for neglecting their sermons. It should be remembered that the foolishness of preaching is one thing, and foolish preaching quite another. It is impossible that a sermon which costs neither time nor thought, can, as a general rule, be good. What costs nothing—is generally worth nothing.

As to the idea of some, that preaching is not of so much importance now as formerly, I believe it to be wholly fallacious. On the contrary, I believe there never was a time when the pulpit had such power as it has now. Education has not made sermons useless. On the contrary, education has made men better judges of what sermons ought to be, and less likely to be satisfied with a weak and ill-digested sermon than they were fifty years ago.

I cannot help remarking before I leave this part of my subject, how much it is to be regretted that the preparation of young men for the ministerial office, is so thoroughly inadequate as it is at present. Is there a single theological college at this day, to which anyone could, with entire satisfaction, recommend a young man to go? I believe in my conscience, that there is none. I regard this as one of the gloomiest points in the position of the Church of England. The sources from which the ministry is supplied are not trustworthy. I consider one of the great wants of the day to be a new theological college, in

some central position, for training young men for the ministry, at a moderate expense, on a thoroughly sound Protestant and evangelical basis. I earnestly hope the day may come when such a college may be called into being.

I would suggest, in the next place, that we must beware of ***conformity to the world***. The ministers of the Church of England are in special danger of this. Their position in society lays them open to many temptations. But worldliness is destructive to usefulness. The clergyman whose own life and family give a handle for remark on this score will find exhortations against worldliness go for very little with his people.

I would suggest, in the last place, that we must beware of ***formality***. Familiarity with sacred things is very dangerous. Unless a minister watches his own spirit, he may get into the habit of doing the most spiritual acts in a mere perfunctory way. It is possible to preach the truth forcibly, and yet to have a heart wandering away into the ends of the earth. This is a point on which the utmost vigilance is needed.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude all I have said, by reminding you that the secret of our strength must be daily communion with the Lord Jesus. To be safe, we must be watchful, humble, self-denying, prayerful, and given to much private meditation.

I am satisfied that the happiest minister is the man who most diligently discharges the office committed to him. None, I am sure, is so miserable as the minister, who, from indolence, or any other motive, lives below his light, and neglects his work. After all, no work is so satisfactory, and so lasting as the work of a faithful preacher of the Gospel. None have so good a Master. None will receive such wages. A missionary who had labored for the Wesleyan Society, and died at the age of ninety-five, heard his friends round his deathbed saying one to another, *What would our old friend do, if he had to live his life over again?* He rose on his pillow, and said, *The very best thing that a man can do is to preach the Gospel!*

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BRING...THE BOOKS

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

Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*

Rolland McCune was professor of systematic theology at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan, president of the seminary for ten years, and dean of the faculty for six years. Prior to that he was on the faculty of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Plymouth, Minnesota, serving in the capacities of professor, registrar, and dean. I personally studied under McCune at DBTS for eleven years.

McCune grew up in Byrne, Indiana. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at Taylor University (Fort Wayne, Indiana), and his Bachelor of Divinity (MDiv), Master of Theology (ThM), and Doctor of Theology (ThD) degrees at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana. McCune also wrote *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*

(2004), another vital tool for the pastor's library. McCune's *Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* is Baptist, dispensational, Calvinistic, and fundamentalist. As such, it stands apart from the vast majority of theologies written in the past decade or more. The writing is clear and concise. McCune places a strong emphasis on the scriptural basis for each doctrine and teaching. His writing style is engaging and understandable. This three-volume work is available in print format from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and Amazon, and in digital format from Logos Bible Software.

The first volume covers prolegomena, bibliology, theology proper, and angelology. While his prolegomena is concise, it is a very helpful read with clear underlying presuppositions—a fundamentalist/biblical worldview, Baptist ecclesiology, a VanTillian presuppositionalism, and a moderately Calvinistic soteriology (four points). His high view of the sovereignty of God is refreshing, biblical, and balanced, with a proper emphasis on personal responsibility and

enthusiastic participation. In his prolegomena, McCune defines systematic theology as “the correlation of the various teachings or doctrines found in the Bible” (1:5).

He uses exegetical theology and biblical theology as the foundation for systematic theology, which McCune calls the “the queen of the sciences.” The only source for theology is “God’s self-disclosure in the Bible” (1:13); he thus considers nature, rationalism, mysticism, and experience to be “false sources of theology” (1:17). McCune recognizes the reality of general revelation: “While this revelation is restrictive in content, it is nevertheless absolutely clear and divinely authoritative” (1:40). He later asserts that “God’s stamp is on everything he has planned, created, presently sustains and controls. In short, every aspect of the universe bears testimony or witness concerning God” (1:40).

McCune rejects progressive dispensationalism as “an unwelcome aberration and wholly unsatisfactory as an approach to understanding Scripture” (1:106) and advocates the literal view of the kingdom of God as outlined by Alva

McClain in his classic treatment, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. McCune's view of inspiration, inerrancy, and the preservation of Scripture is thoroughly biblical, and his hermeneutic is clearly dispensational. He argues against King James Onlyism and cites the NASB (1995 update) throughout the three volumes.

In the second volume, McCune discusses anthropology, hamartiology, Christology, and pneumatology. As a young earth creationist, he accepts the Genesis account of man's creation and fall as a history of actual events in six twenty-four-hour days. He argues for traducianism and a federal view of the headship of Adam. In his section on the doctrine of sin, he takes a strong view of total depravity and the imputation of Adam's sin. "The animal kingdom was cursed with carnivorous instincts. The ground was cursed with thistles and thorns (Gen 3:17–18). And, the entire creation was cursed, being made subject to the 'slavery of corruption' (Rom 8:19–22)" (2:41). McCune ably defends the preexistence of Christ, the virgin birth, the humanity and deity of Christ, and

the work of Christ in the atonement. This volume concludes with a solid discussion of the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit and His work in the believer.

The third volume discusses soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. McCune's God-centered theology is most evident in his explanation of the doctrine of salvation. Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficient only for repentant believers. Salvation is wholly of God. Regeneration or illumination produces faith theologically but occurs simultaneously in the life of the believer from a chronological standpoint. The saved will be infallibly preserved by God's power and thus will inevitably persevere until the end via God's power. In his doctrine of the church, McCune draws a clear distinction between Israel and the church, based on differences in their origin, purpose, and destiny. McCune defends a distinction between Israel and the church as the "first essential tenet of dispensationalism" (1:113). He distinguishes the mission of the church from that of Israel with his assertion that Israel had no

missionary mandate. He argues for a pretribulational rapture, the great tribulation with Israel as its focus, the premillennial return of Christ, and a literal millennial/mediatorial kingdom centered on Christ as the true and righteous King ruling from David's throne in Jerusalem.

McCune's *Systematic Theology* is direct, clear, articulate, text-driven, and systematically harmonious. He abhors a "brush-pile" theology with all kinds of loose ends and vague inferences. This three-volume set is an essential tool for the pastor, Bible teacher, layman, or professor.

Mike Harding pastors First Baptist Church of Troy in Troy, Michigan.



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STRAIGHT CUTS

“Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)

Remembering God from the Summit of Mizar

“O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.” (Ps. 42:6)

Book II of the five divisions of the Psalms (Psalms 42–72) introduces a significant shift in the name of God. In Book I (Psalms 1–41), the focus is on the name Yahweh (272 times), highlighting His sovereign beginnings and reinforcing themes from the book of Genesis. In Book II, the divine name Elohim appears 164 times—the God of the exodus, highlighting His ability to deliver His people. In Psalm 42:6, the inspired writer begins by addressing “Elohim” and describing his own spiritual depression. He is “cast down” and

in need of consolation. He feels far from his home in Jerusalem and the familiar corporate worship with his people. He is on the north-east fringe of the Promised Land in the upper region of the Jordan. Mount Hermon looms above him. He stands in its shadows on the small knob called “Hill Mizar.” *Mizar* means “little”; it is a petite version of its neighboring counterpart, Mount Hermon. Hermon is the nation’s behemoth, standing 9,232 feet above the Mediterranean Sea’s surf. This mountain marks the border between Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The psalmist needed to climb this mount to escape the depths of despair—no easy task! “This hill though high I covet to ascend; the difficulty will not me offend; for I perceive the way of life lies here. Come, pluck up, heart; let’s neither faint nor fear” (John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*).

The reality is that the author is “cast down.” His world had been turned upside down and he was completely overwhelmed. Discouragement was working its downward pathway to depression;

and depression was carving a gorge to bondage; and bondage was caving into to the abyss of hopelessness and possibly even death. He too, needed to say, “Come, pluck up, heart; let’s neither faint nor fear.”

The psalmist is joined by others on the road that passes over the “little hill” Mizar who are likely being exiled east in the direction of Babylon. This trade route was the road that an Israelite did not want to be on, especially wearing chains and being guided by the GPS of a Babylonian spear. The composer could not afford to go any further down this road. He had to stop and climb to higher ground. He is in desperate need of revival. If the nation continued down this road with him they would need a second exodus, another demonstration of God’s omnipotence to deliver.

The Hill Mizar would be his last elevated vantage point to look back over the Promised Land before exiting his country. To get an even greater view of the situation he could climb to the heights of Mount Hermon. It

is here on these mounts, Hill Mizar the low beam and Mount Hermon the high beam, where he could see near and far the blessings of the Lord. Thankfully, it is on these mounts that he will “remember” the faithfulness of Elohim and the footholds of Scripture. These exalted thoughts were critical to escape the death zone of depression.

For one of the “sons of Korah” or the “chief musician” to be found nearing the Hill Mizar meant that they were temporarily out of the ministry that they had in Jerusalem. For them, this is the day that the music stopped. This would be devastating and would help explain part of the extreme discouragement of the psalmist. He feels cut off from God and sidelined from service. No wonder the author of Psalm 42 repeats three times that his soul is “cast down.” He is pouring his soul out to the Triune God for help. His enemies escalate his fears by their taunting, probing, and repeated question, “Where is thy God?” The hymn writer was already asking that question himself

when he records, “Why hast Thou forgotten me?” Doubts had fueled discouragement.

It is now from the heights of Hermon, “from the Hill Mizar,” that the psalmist gets perspective and seeks revival. It is here where the meadows are green and where he sees the deer that “panteth after the water brooks.” It is here where he thirsts for God. He is reminded on the Hill Mizar what life used to be, but also what life could be again through the “lovingkindness” of the Lord. It is here where he prays to the God of his “life.” It is here where he praises the One who is “the health” of his “countenance.” It is here where his “hope . . . in God” is renewed! It is here that His “song” shall be heard again!

Are you discouraged? Are you “cast down”? Do you need revival? Then summit the little hill Mizar and “remember” the Lord. Cry out, “Come, pluck up, heart”—“Hope thou in God!”

The chief musician’s heart needed to sing out. Will you join his antiphonal choir and sing, “I’m pressing on the upward way, new heights I’m gaining every day; still praying as I onward

bound, ‘Lord, plant my feet on higher ground’”
(Johnson Oatman Jr.)?

This devotional is excerpted from *Summiting the Psalms*, by Will Senn, senior pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado.

WINDOWS

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

Keeping the Unity of the Spirit

Sin has rendered the world a broken and chaotic place. The farther we move from Eden the less there is of unified order. Governments of the world seek common causes, which often are common enemies, around which to build a coalition. These alliances are short-lived because their foundation is flawed. Believers living in this broken system long for the order that absolute truth produces, and its resulting peace that comes only from a relationship with the Prince of Peace.

I will focus on three texts that call us to this union with Christ and to His truth, which result in peace in the midst of chaos. John 17 establishes the basis for this union that man can have with God through the sanctifying work of Christ. Ephesians 4 is the Spirit of God's call to the church to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. First Corinthians 12

gives the practical outworking of this unity that we have through the Spirit of God. This text highlights the diversity within the body that finds its function through the unity of the triune God. This backdrop of order, built on absolute truth and the immutable God, is the stage God chooses on which to display the beautiful union of Christ and His church to a world in chaos. This scene displays God's glory as He brings order and peace out of chaos.

Unity can be illustrated by negative example. Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab (1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18–19) is rebuked by the prophet of God. This false unity teaches that the basis for union is truth and belief in the true God. Union and unity are possible only with those who share a common faith and have a commitment to truth. A more positive example would be Nehemiah's refusal to join with Sanballat, Tobiah, and the rest of the enemies of God in his efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This results in a beautiful display of God's power and blessing on those who understand and honor God's truth. The book of Jude emphasizes the union we have with believers

through this common faith, while cautioning us to beware of fake faith.

THE POWER OF UNITY

Our call to be one with and in Christ is a beautiful reflection of the nature of God. He exists in perfect unity as three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A powerful peace results when His church reflects that unity. All power comes from God and He is honored when His power is displayed through unity.

In April 1831, a brigade of soldiers marched in step across England's Broughton Suspension Bridge. According to accounts of the time, the bridge broke apart beneath the soldiers, throwing dozens of men into the water. After this happened, the British Army reportedly sent new orders: Soldiers crossing a long bridge must "break stride," or not march in unison, to stop such a situation from occurring again.

Structures like bridges and buildings, although they appear to be solid and immovable, have a natural frequency of vibration within them. A force that's applied to an object at the same

frequency as the object's natural frequency will amplify the vibration of the object in an occurrence called mechanical resonance. . . .

If soldiers march in unison across the structure, they apply a force at the frequency of their step. If their frequency is closely matched to the bridge's frequency, the soldiers' rhythmic marching will amplify the vibrational frequency of the bridge. If the mechanical resonance is strong enough, the bridge can vibrate until it collapses from the movement.

A potent reminder of this was seen in June 2000, when London's Millennium Bridge opened to great fanfare. As crowds packed the bridge, their footfalls made the bridge vibrate slightly. "Many pedestrians fell spontaneously into step with the bridge's vibrations, inadvertently amplifying them," according to a 2005 report in *Nature*.

Though engineers insist the Millennium Bridge was never in danger of collapse, the bridge was closed for about a year while construction crews installed energy-dissipating dampers to minimize the vibration caused by pedestrians.

(Source: <https://www.livescience.com/34608-break-stride-frequency-of-vibration.html>)

THE GROWTH OF UNITY

Ephesians 4 instructs us to give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That comes about through the edification of the church by gifted men. The ultimate goal of this discipleship is the church coming to a perfected status or maturity to do ministry. The church body is built up and we all come to this unity of the faith, the knowledge of Christ, and a maturity that reflects His fullness.

On the coast of California are great forests of redwoods—*sequoia sempervirens*. The manner in which these trees grow is unlike that of any other tree. Two trees of this species may grow up year after year, a few feet from each other. Finally, sometimes after fifty or a hundred years, the trees touch, and the bark begins to overlap and fill out, so that the two trees ultimately become one. There have been cases where a dozen trees, springing up from the outer roots of a tree that has fallen, have formed a perfect circle. After a century or two, all have

grown together so that one may walk between two trees into the empty heart of a great tree, and the ultimate outward appearance will be that of a single giant tree. Near Santa Cruz are two trees: one grows at an angle to the other, yet contact has been made a hundred feet in the air, and from that point upward two trees become one—a single top growing from two totally different trunks.

God, looking down into time from His eternal vantage point, saw us in Christ—grown into Him, one plant with Him. We had been of the root of Adam, and Christ, in becoming sin for us grew into us so that our death became His death, and His death become the death of our death. (Donald Barnhouse, *Let Me Illustrate*, 335)

THE FUNCTION OF UNITY

First Corinthians 12 speaks of the diversity of gifts, administrations, and operations. All these unique gifts are given by the Spirit of God for the function and edification of the whole. When one gift does not function properly, the whole body of believers is affected. This text also compares the church to a

body and its many parts—each part contributing to the good of the whole.

A car museum in Sarasota, Florida, traces the history of transportation from the horse age to the automobile. It contains a display of an internal combustion engine with several of its covers cut away to show its function. We take these motors for granted because they are everywhere and have been around so long. It is impressive to see all the systems working in unison. You have the electrical, fuel, exhaust, cooling, and lubrication systems all functioning to produce thousands of controlled explosions that are converted into motion—and that is just the engine. Each part must function in unison with the rest, or the engine fails.

APPRECIATION OF UNITY

First Corinthians 12 says that the triune God is responsible for diversities of gifts, administrations, and operations. Believers sometimes struggle with the diversities of gracing that the Spirit of God bestows. This diversity of gifts brings great beauty and usefulness to the body of Christ.

At a meeting of the American Psychological Association, Jack Lipton, a psychologist at Union College, and R. Scott Builione, a graduate student at Columbia University, presented their findings on how members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestra perceived each other. The percussionists were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard-of-hearing, yet fun-loving. String players were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and unathletic. The orchestra members overwhelmingly chose “loud” as the primary adjective to describe the brass players. Woodwind players seemed to be held in the highest esteem, described as quiet and meticulous, though a bit egotistical. Interesting findings, to say the least! With such widely divergent personalities and perceptions, how could an orchestra ever come together to make such wonderful music? The answer is simple: regardless of how those musicians view each other, they subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership of the conductor. Under his guidance, they play beautiful music. (*Today in the Word*, June 22, 1992)

Donald Barnhouse writes,

I once had the privilege of going backstage just before a performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Before the curtain went up, dozens of individuals walked about in the wings, doing vocal exercises. Completely oblivious of others, each singer concentrated on his own voice; the result was piercing discord. We are all familiar with a similar effect in the tuning-up of orchestra instruments before a concert.

Too often the bystander in the world looks upon the church as a group of frivolous amateurs, each concerned only with his little part. But the Lord Jesus Christ prayed, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). (*Let Me Illustrate*, 335)

The second verse of the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" says:

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the
earth,

Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one
faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses, partakes one
holy food,
And to one hope she presses, with every
grace endued.

A. W. Tozer wrote,

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become “unity” conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. (*The Pursuit of God*, 96)

Every Christian wrestles with balances in life. To keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is essential to the heart health of any church. Holding a passionate commitment to truth, discipling people at all stages of growth, and seeking to honor God

in every aspect of ministry life are essential to the blessing of God. This chaotic world needs to see the heart of our Savior as He prays—“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:20–23).

Ron Ehmann is the pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church in Grantsville, Utah, and director of Northwest Baptist Missions.



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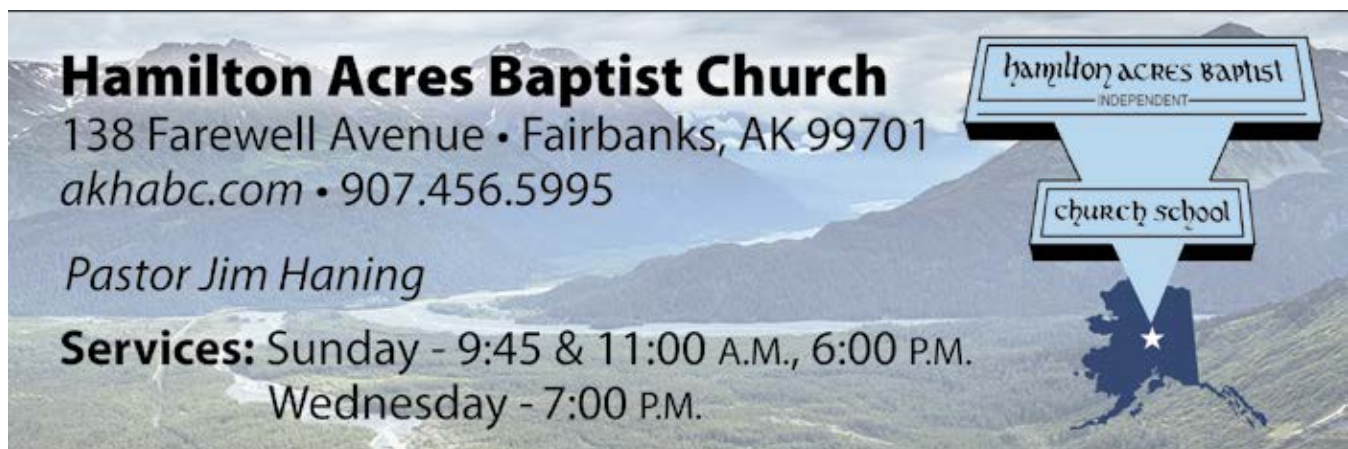
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Brooklyn, NY 11235
Coordinator: Matthew Recker

October 18, 2024

New Mexico Regional Fellowship

Manzano Baptist Church
12411 Linn Ave. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87123
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

October 19, 2024

New England Regional Fellowship

(Meeting with the New England Foundations Conference)
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Dover, NH 03820

Coordinator: Taigen Joos

October 21-22, 2024

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News From All Over



On July 31, 2024, FBFI CH (LTC) **Brian Palmer** will officially retire from the US Army Chaplain Corps after twenty-two years of active-duty military service. He and his wife, Ivey, have faithfully served soldiers

and their families through ten military assignments and two combat deployments. Brian has served in unique assignments and locations, and in the last of these he was privileged to serve as a Division Chief within the Army Chief of Chaplains Office. There, he had the incredible opportunity to influence Army Chaplain policy and training, and he was awarded the Legion of Merit for the impact his work had on the entire military Chaplaincy. Brian and his family have settled in Ivey's home state of North Carolina.



Steve and Debbie Snavelly served the Lord at Grace Baptist Church in Highland Falls, New York, for over twenty-four years. Their ministry included outreach to first responders, primarily because Steve was

the chaplain with the local fire department, and also to the West Point Military Academy cadets and faculty. In June 2024, the Snavelys officially retired and will be caring for Steve's mother in Maryville, Tennessee. The Lord has led the church to call the Snavelys' oldest son, Andrew, to serve as pastor.



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Kevin Schaal

Vengeance, Justice, and the New Testament Believer



There is a reason that Arizona is the 48th state, and it is not a good one. Many believe that the violence that characterized the Arizona Territory during the late

1800s delayed statehood by as much as two decades. At the center of that violence was the [Pleasant Valley War](#)¹—a feud between two families, the Grahams and the Tewksburys. It was the classic Western conflict that included accusations of cattle rustling and the conflict between shepherders and cattlemen. Others joined in on each side. There were multiple shootings, ambushes, lynchings, stabbings, and at least one beheading, occurring throughout central Arizona. Over ten years, as many as fifty men were killed as the repeating cycles of revenge grew broader and more violent. The feud finally ended on August 2, 1892, when the last living Tewksbury killed the last living Graham in Tempe, Arizona.

I often imagine that the world before the flood looked much like Arizona in those years before statehood—only the flood era was much worse. It was for that violence and injustice that God destroyed the world with the great flood (Gen. 6:13). It was an epoch characterized by

individualism and lawlessness, and it revealed the horrible sinfulness of humanity in its lost condition estranged from God.

THE INSTITUTION OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT (GEN. 9:1-6)

God used the flood to remove the violence and corruption that had gone before. At the same time, He decreed to humanity the responsibilities of human government and the protection of human life. Some argue that capital punishment is not truly biblical. However, not only is it biblical, but it is also commanded in Genesis 9 and is built on the foundational principle of human government—the sanctity of human life. Human life is so sacred that the person who takes another's life should forfeit his own. This is not a principle bound only in the Mosaic code but was instituted long before Abraham as God's expected practice for all humanity in all ages.

However, capital punishment and all acts

of justice are not intended to be acts of vengeance—at least in our modern understanding of the word. Further revelation clarifies how the administration of justice should be carried out and how the accused should be protected.

While the Old Testament recognized the natural inclination for vengeance on the part of family members or friends of someone slain, sanctuary cities were established to protect the accused until the truth could be determined and just consequences administered (Josh. 20:1–9). Appropriate evidence against the accused had to be considered (Num. 35:30–31).

The Old Testament acknowledges mitigating circumstances. The Scriptures recognize the right to self-defense and the defense of personal property, even to the point of using deadly force (Exod. 22:2–3). They differentiate between premeditated murder and manslaughter (Deut. 19:4–6). The Bible also

addresses the difference between truly accidental and negligent homicide, and it makes provision for damages to be paid instead of execution in some cases (Exod. 21:28–36). All reasonable justice systems today do the same things that were accomplished in the Old Testament law. They all preclude the idea of vengeance or vigilantism as justice.

VENGEANCE

So, is there a place for vengeance? That depends on what you mean by the word. According to *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, vengeance is “an injured party’s desire for retribution or repayment from those who harmed him or to demonstrate his innocence against false accusations.”²

The Bible recognizes that a desire for vengeance naturally exists and even gives the avenger of blood the responsibility for executing the murderer (Num. 35:19–21). In Scripture, the idea of vengeance is usually

used in the sense of meting out legally appropriate punishments for crimes. However, the Bible also provides escape routes and methods of protection for those who might be falsely accused.

Our modern understanding of vengeance is more extreme. We equate vengeance with vigilante justice. It is characterized by anger, rash choices, and excessive responses. The result is escalating violence, which is exactly opposite the outcome intended by Genesis 9:1–9. War is often a result of escalating cycles of vengeance.

JUSTICE

Our understanding of justice differs from that of vengeance. Justice is careful to verify facts, administer appropriate consequences, and avoid personal agendas.

Paul places the responsibility for justice on human government (Rom. 13:1–7) and churches as governing bodies (Matt. 18:15–

17; 1 Cor. 6:1–8). Christians who are damaged by others have a right to appeal to these governing bodies for redress. Paul urges believers to take civil issues before the church rather than parade their conflicts before heathen courts. Most Bible scholars do not believe Paul is referring here to criminal issues such as murder, assault, theft, or abuse. The established governmental authorities should exert jurisdiction in those instances.

What about vengeance for Christians? Paul forbids believers from seeking personal vengeance against their enemies. The flow of Romans 13 is not about forbidding believers from falsely accusing an enemy or using excessive force. It refers to situations when common sensibilities would consider vengeance reasonable. Paul's remedy is that believers must instead love their enemies and trust God to administer personal vengeance in their stead. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," the Lord says.

Believers can trust God in this way because of the nature of God. God will always get it exactly right. Divine vengeance is never wrong or sinful. God cannot and will not sin. He will never punish the wrong person. There will never be a misunderstanding. He knows all the facts, and He will always respond appropriately.

God *will* repay. This is an often-overlooked promise. God will and without exception repay. Human justice systems will fail. Those worthy of punishment sometimes get away with what they have done. But no one will escape the vengeance of God. The only way to escape the wrath of the Almighty is through genuine repentance and dependence on the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sin. But even that does not guarantee deliverance from human justice.

On August 2, 1892, John Graham, the last living male member of the feuding Graham

family, was shot in the back as he was unloading a wagon. Before he died, he identified his shooters as Ed Tewksbury and John Rhodes. During the trial that followed, three eyewitnesses testified that Ed Tewksbury was the murderer. But other witnesses convinced the jury that Ed Tewksbury could not have been present when the murder took place. Just before his death, Ed confessed to a family member that he was, indeed, the murderer and that he had made it look like he could not have been present by stringing up horses along his escape route so that he could make his getaway faster than anyone deemed possible.

As in many other cases, justice was not served in the murder of John Graham. But it now has been. God says that vengeance belongs to Him and He will repay. He always keeps His promise.

Kevin Schaal is the senior pastor of the Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Phoenix, Arizona, and serves as president of the Foundations Baptist



Fellowship International.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasant_Valley_War

² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/vengeance>



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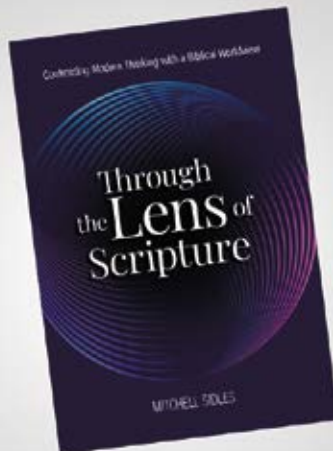
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Meeting the Spiritual Needs of the Elderly

Twenty-one years ago, our family and my parents moved to Greenville, South Carolina. After my father died, God provided the perfect house so that my mother could live with us. At 38, I had five children (ages eleven and under), and I needed her help. At 75, she was healthy and could help me. Growing up, I had always been closer

to my dad, who was a teacher and had the same schedule that I had. Meanwhile, my mom worked a factory job and was often very stressed when she got home. The Lord gave me over twenty years to get to know her, the parent whom I knew less. He also grew me and stretched me as I interacted with her on *many* levels, including the spiritual. She helped me in so many ways during those twenty-one years, and it eventually became my responsibility to help and encourage her.

First Thessalonians 5:14 tells us, “Comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.” The relationship with people we are trying to encourage and help in their old age should be more than just a surface-level one if we are going to have a positive impact on them. They will listen better if they trust you and if you make time for them. It’s important to understand the struggles they face at this point in their life, to always be honest with them, and to speak the truth in love.

What are some spiritual struggles the elderly face? **Discouragement** often comes with the increasing burdens of old age. Solomon gives a vivid description of aging in Ecclesiastes 12—hearing loss, failing eyesight, and many reasons to fear. The Bible does not sugarcoat the problem. My mom said she felt like an old car, getting one thing fixed, then noticing a different problem. Our response to this needs to be to show love, patience, and understanding, and to offer help as much as possible.

Another struggle the aged often face is **lack of purpose**. An older person may have worked for years in a job, raising children, going places, doing things, and now life has slowed them down. They don't feel like they fit in with the working world. They don't have nearly as many places to go or people to see. My mom would often ask, "Why am I still here?" She was not able to move as quickly as before. Everything hurt.

Psalm 71 is written as a prayer of an aging person. In verse 18, the psalmist prays, “Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.” Because of the experiences God has given elderly people and the work He has done in their lives, they need to show His strength and His power to everyone. We can encourage them by listening to what they have learned and by bringing our children along to listen to their stories of God’s grace. My mom prayed for my family and me every day, which was something she could still do until her last day.

Another struggle may be **bitterness**. My mom had lived over ninety years, yet she still struggled with painful memories of what others had done to her in her childhood. It colored her view of life. It was easy for her to get into a negative mindset. At first, I thought I needed to confront her about it,

but that approach never ended well.

God showed me some important things from the book of Ruth. Naomi had lost her husband and both of her sons while living in Moab. After she and Ruth travelled back to Bethlehem, she said, “Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:20–21).

In the Bible, we’re not told that Ruth confronted Naomi or reminded her that she, too, was a widow. Instead, she responded in love. She met her physical needs and her need of friendship. She let God work in Naomi’s life and in her own life.

The fourth struggle that the elderly often have is with **fear**. While it is common at any age, this is an especially uncertain time. My mom’s body was not cooperating, and

she was fearful of falling. She was especially afraid of losing her faculties. There were many nights that she feared going to bed because of the frequent times she would be getting up to use the restroom. We would pray together. Before she went into her last surgery, I read Psalm 37 to her. I thought she had dozed off, but after I finished, she quoted one of the verses back to me.

The following helpful quote was shared with me by a friend who also cared for her parents into their 90s. Octavius Winslow, a Baptist preacher of the 1800s, said, “Let us who have . . . aged parents . . . be very tender and gentle towards them. . . . it will be but a little while that the privilege and honor will be given of comforting and soothing their trembling descent to the tomb . . . and God will bless you for it when they are gathered to their fathers” (*The Fullness of Christ* [Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books], 150).

When you love, pray for, listen to, and

honor the elderly in your life, you will then have a platform to minister to their spiritual needs.

Rosa Myers is a member of Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina. She works part time as a Spanish teacher at Hidden Treasure Christian School. For the past twenty years she and her husband, Lloyd hosted her mother, Ofelia Pérez, in their home until her final days in July 2023.





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At A Glance

Layton Talbert

Hebrews 11: What It Looks Like to “Live by Faith”

The Old Testament (and intertestamental!) believers pedestaled by the Spirit of God in Hebrews 11 are noteworthy not because they were exceptionally holy (Jacob? Samson?). Nor were they all extraordinarily influential (Sarah? Rahab?). They are singled out for one reason only: they acted on the sole basis of a word from God, even when it seemed not just unlikely but impossible. They are memorialized in Hebrews 11 not because they were exceptional individuals. Each of them had lapses, sins, failures, flaws, and other times of unbelief and unfaithfulness. But in *God’s estimation they stand out*

because of ordinary trust in the words of an extraordinary God.

After a series of both warm encouragements and candid warnings, the anonymous writer of this letter to professing Hebrew believers reminds them that “the just shall live by faith” (10:38). Paul cites those words from God (in Habakkuk) to argue that the righteousness that results in eternal life is obtained only on the basis of faith, not the works of the law (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). The writer of Hebrews (whether or not that was also Paul is beyond the scope of this article and irrelevant to the point) cites the same words to emphasize a different but related point: faith is also the means by which the righteous are to live (cf. Col. 2:6–7). But what does that look like? Hebrews 11 is a casebook designed to demonstrate the kind of faith-governed life choices that evoke God’s pleasure and approval.

Hebrews 11 reinforces the exhortation of 10:38 with examples, drawn from the readers’

own family tree, who “by faith” made counter-cultural decisions on the sole basis of a promise from God. It’s as if the writer takes his readers by the lapels and says, “Look at your own fathers and mothers! You have a family history of living by trust in God’s words in spite of the consequences. Follow their example!”

THE BASIS OF FAITH: GOD’S WORDS

That this is all about *faith* is clear when you follow the trail of that word in the letter. The word appears only sparsely in the earlier chapters of Hebrews (4:2; 6:1, 12). Reintroduced in chapter 10 (10:22, 38), this subject becomes *the* topic of conversation in chapter 11, where the word occurs twenty-four times (more than in any entire NT book except for Romans)!

That this is all about faith *in a word from God* is clear when you pay attention to the explicit mention of a word from God.

- 11:7—Noah was “**warned**” by God.

- 11:8—Abraham was “**called**” by God.
- 11:9—Abraham “sojourned in the land of **promise**.”
- 11:9—Isaac and Jacob were “heirs . . . of the same **promise**.”
- 11:11—Sarah judged God “faithful who had **promised**.”
- 11:13—The patriarchs died with faith in God’s **promises**.
- 11:17–18—Abraham “had received the **promises**” centered in Isaac.
- 11:33—Many OT believers “obtained **promises**.”
- 11:39—Still others obtained God’s approval for a life of faith in a “**promise**” they did not receive in their lifetime.

In other examples, the linkage of one’s actions and a word from God is stated more indirectly and implicitly.

- 11:22—Joseph’s “by faith” expectation of Israel’s departure from Egypt can be traced back only to God’s promise (Gen. 15:13).

- 11:28—Moses’ “by faith” observance of the Passover was motivated by God’s warning and instruction (Exod. 12).
- 11:29—Israel’s “by faith” passage through the Red Sea was based on God’s command (Exod. 14:15–18).
- 11:30—Israel’s “by faith” tumbling of Jericho’s walls was grounded on God’s direction (Josh. 6:1–5).
- 11:31—Rahab’s “by faith” deliverance from destruction was rooted in her faith in God’s promise to Israel (Josh. 2:9).

Why is this kind of faith in God’s words so important—to God and to us? Hebrews 11:1–3 answers those questions, setting the stage for the examples offered in the rest of the chapter.

THE VALUE OF FAITH IN GOD’S WORDS

Faith in God’s words is the only way we know about the invisible and the future. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1). The opening

two words (“Faith is”) do not signal a definition, but a description. What’s the difference? Take the word “book.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines a “book” as “a portable volume consisting of a series of written, printed, or illustrated pages bound together [between protective covers] for ease of reading.” But if I say, *a book is an adventure, an escape, a treasury of information, a mine of amusement, a museum of experiences*, I’m not defining what a book is; I’m describing what a book *does*. That’s what Hebrews 11:1 is doing with faith.

For the Christian, faith is the *basis* of our confidence in future realities and our certainty of even present realities that we cannot see. That doesn’t mean things become real if we will just believe in them hard enough. It simply means that the reason believers expect certain things to happen in the future is because God has said they will; and the reason we are confident about the reality of things that we admit we cannot see is because

God has said they are so. Faith in God's words grounds our assurance of the reality of what we cannot yet see (because it is invisible) or experience (because it is future).

The rest of Hebrews 11 illustrates the fact that faith is the basis on which God's people have always hoped for future things and been certain of unseen things. Noah acted on faith in God's warning "of things *not seen as yet*" (11:7). Abraham (11:8) acted on faith in God's promise of a place "which he *should after receive for an inheritance*" (future), and he went out "*not knowing whither he went*" (unseen). By faith, Isaac (11:20) blessed Jacob and Esau "*concerning things to come*" (future).

Faith in God's words is the only way we know about the past that we have not seen.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (11:3, NKJV). The writer takes us back to the beginning of everything, linking

creation not merely to the power of God but to a word from God, and linking our ability to understand how everything began to faith in God's record of it.

Biblical faith is not optimistic thinking, a positive outlook, self-persuasion, vivid imagination, or a kind of hopeful uncertainty. Biblical faith is believing what God says, and is *always* rooted ultimately in a word from God. In Scripture, "faith always presupposes a divine revelation to which it is a response" (W. H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*).

Faith in God's words is necessary to obtain God's pleasure and approval. It was by faith that "the elders obtained a good testimony" (11:2, NKJV). That's not talking about having "a good testimony" with their neighbors; usually their faith in God's words brought only the derision of their contemporaries. As 11:4 explains, the "good testimony" in view is with God: Abel "obtained the *testimony*

that he was righteous, *God testifying* about his gifts” (NASB 1995). God is ultimately the only one whose testimony about you matters. Whatever other failures plagued the men and women in this chapter, they all “obtained a good *testimony*” from God because of their faith (11:39, NKJV). One might even think of Hebrews 11 as God’s positive “testimonial” to these believers. Indeed, without this kind of faith in God’s words, “it is impossible to please him” (11:6).

C. S. Lewis expressed surprise at finding so many historical Christian writers

taking heavenly glory in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation” by God. And then, when I thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine accolade, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” . . . I suddenly remembered that no one can enter

heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child . . . as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. . . . And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. (*The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*)

The Holy Spirit reveals that this divine pleasure and approval comes through trusting God's words over those of anyone else.

THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH IN GOD'S WORDS: ACTIONS

Hebrews 11 exhibits from the lives of real people what it looks like for the just to live by faith, by acting on a trusted word from God, come what may. Biblical faith is not purely private and internal; it inevitably manifests itself in how we live life. It drives our decisions, feeds our expectations, and animates

our actions. Just scan down through the chapter and listen to the verbs that grow out of the faith of these ordinary people.

- By faith Abel *offered a better sacrifice* (11:4)
- By faith Enoch *pleased God* (11:5)
- By faith Noah *prepared an ark* (11:7)
- By faith Abraham *obeyed and sojourned* (11:8–9)
- By faith Sarah *received strength* (11:11)
- By faith Abraham *offered Isaac* (11:17)
- By faith Isaac *blessed* (11:20)
- By faith Jacob *blessed* (11:21)
- By faith Joseph *made mention and gave commandment* (11:22)
- By faith Moses' parents *hid him* (11:23)
- By faith Moses *refused* (11:24), *forsook* (11:27), and *kept* (11:28)
- By faith Israel *passed through the Red Sea* (11:29) and *felled the walls of Jericho* (11:30)
- By faith Rahab *perished not* (11:31)

The list continues with more verbs piled on top of each other, describing all the things that people accomplished and endured, conquered

and suffered *by faith*—that is, all because of their trust in a word from God (see 11:32–37). Hebrews 11 showcases far too many examples of faith to explore in detail. This brief series will survey only a few of those who model what it looks like to live by trust in God’s words.

Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of theology and Bible exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. This series is adapted from chapter 10 of *The Trustworthiness of God’s Words: Why the Reliability of Every Word from God Matters* (Christian Focus, 2022).

With the Word to the World

Jim Tillotson

Priorities

Someone once said that in our efforts to reach our neighborhood with the gospel, we should be the least opinionated people on the block. As election season gets into full swing, it can be easy to get so passionate about a candidate or a political party that we alienate people who need to hear about who Jesus is and what He has done for them. If our neighbors know who we love politically, but they do not know we love God, our priorities are out of line.

I was recently invited over to watch the men's NCAA championship game with about fifteen other guys from my neighborhood. As far as I know, I was the only Christian there and the only person not drinking beer. I was struck by what an advantage I and other pastors have because as we meet new peo-

ple, especially guys, eventually the question will be asked, “What do you do?” Telling them you are a pastor or, in my case, the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, always produces interesting results. However, it is assumed that you are a Christian. Now you will be observed for the rest of the evening. You will come across either as weird or as different. Not drinking is different; ripping into everyone who is drinking comes across as weird. Some may choose to leave. I personally found it to be a great opportunity to get to know my neighbors. I had many great conversations throughout the evening—as well as cheering on UConn, whom I had picked to win in my bracket. I received two texts the next day from two different neighbors saying they enjoyed spending time together and wanted to get together again in the future.

I have found that I am often so busy in my job and with my family that long periods of

time can go by without interacting with any unsaved folks. I find that I must be very intentional to even spend time with lost people, let alone build a relationship with the goal of sharing the gospel. This is where those who work in a secular environment have an advantage; they are rubbing shoulders with lost people every day. However, I found that when I worked in a secular environment I still had to be very intentional in building relationships to share the gospel. It was easy to go to work every day and just do my job and talk about all kinds of things without trying to steer the conversation toward eternal things.

So why would anyone do something that seems unnatural and a little awkward at first, like witnessing? I think 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 gives us that answer. Verses 14–15 state, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live

unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” Verses 20–21 state, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

The text makes it clear that because of what Jesus did for us on the cross we have an obligation to live for Him and not for ourselves. We also have an obligation to share the gospel with others. First Corinthians 6:20 reminds us, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” I feel the weight of this obligation when I realize that my sin deserves death and hell, and that before I trusted in Christ as my Savior, I was headed to a place the Bible describes as a lake of fire and eternal torment, a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and a place that I would suffer in for

all eternity. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus was mocked, spit upon, whipped, beaten in the face, tortured, and forced to carry His own cross. Almost no one would allow that to happen if they had the power to stop it. One angel in one night killed 185,000 Assyrians in the Old Testament. Jesus could have called ten thousand angels, but He died alone for you and me. As He was on the cross, His Father turned His back on His Son and Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The reason was because He took our sin and paid for it. As we read in 1 Corinthians 5:21, He took our sin and gave us His righteousness, which is the only way anyone can get into heaven.

If you are a Christian, you will never go to hell. You will spend all eternity in heaven with the Trinity and fellow believers and angels. This incredible truth should be a motivating truth,

as 1 Corinthians 5:14–15 tells us. The joy of Easter should motivate us to tell others who Jesus is and what He has done for them. Every time we take communion should be a reminder that we need to share the gospel. James 4:17 says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” One of the problems with witnessing is that many Christians see it as optional. However, I think the case can be made that if we are not witnessing we are sinning. If it is a sin, we must change. If we see it as optional, we will never change.

In a world that desperately needs Jesus, may we be the ambassadors that God has called us to be. The greater the darkness, the brighter the light shines. May we be committed to taking the Word to the world.

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





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Regional Reports

WYOMING REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Jay Sprecher

The Wyoming FBFI / Northwest Baptist Missions regional fellowship meeting was hosted by Grace Baptist Church in Kemmerer, Wyoming, on April 29–30. Pastor Richard Hartman and the church family were wonderful hosts, and the auditorium was filled with several ministries represented for the first time this year. The theme was “Building the Kingdom, One Relationship at a Time.”

Pastor Bryce Richardson of Baptist Community Church in Afton, Wyoming, opened the conference, and the second session was led by Pastor Barry Layne, executive board member of NBM. Pastor Kevin Smith (Howe, Idaho), Pastor Mike Holmes (Sinclair, Wyoming), and Pastor Doug Sondergaard

(Shelly, Idaho) each gave a challenge from the Word on the importance of personal relationships in discipleship. A ladies' session and craft was led by Mrs. Stephany Smith of Legacy Trade College. Pastors Jonathan Edwards and Ron Ehmann led a church planting discussion time that explored better ways to share the needs of church planting in the West with pastors. It was a blessing to fellowship with some new ministries and to pray for needs of churches throughout the West.

Next year's fellowship meeting will be held on May 12–13, 2025, at Friendship Baptist Church in Thayne, Wyoming. The theme will be “The Primacy of the Visible, Local Church,” and special effort will be made to encourage interest in church planting in the inter-Mountain West.



FBFI ANNUAL FELLOWSHIP

Don Johnson

“Developing Leadership in the Local Church” was the theme for the FBFI’s 103rd Annual Fellowship, which convened at Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado. Ministry teams of young people from International Baptist College and Seminary, Faith Baptist Bible College, Appalachian Bible College, Bob Jones University, and Baptist College of Ministry provided special music throughout the fellowship, and they joined together as a combined choir for the concluding service. The enthusiasm of these young people, not only in ministering to us but also in fellowshiping and singing with one another, was one of the highlights of the week. A “cowboy quartet” also represented the Ironwood Family of Christian Camps.

Our host pastor, Dr. Will Senn, and the team at Tri-City Baptist Church made us

feel welcome and truly loved. The theme of “Developing Leadership” was expressed by Pastor Senn as being “Called to Summit.”

The plan for the preaching was to have the men who mentored the preachers introduce them and discuss the leadership development process that has produced succeeding generations of preachers.

In keeping with this theme, Dr. Bruce McAllister was introduced by Bob Jones III and preached a gospel message as he considered the importance of Mount Calvary in the Gospels.



Pastor Roland Kassales was introduced by Pastor Jim Welch and delivered a tremendous message about the Sermon on the Mount, presenting our Lord as a Spirit-filled man, guiding men and women like us who need the Spirit in our lives.

Pastor Stephen Van Gelderen was introduced by Wayne Van Gelderen and preached about the Mount of Transfiguration, leading us to consider how that euphoric moment on the mountaintop contrasted with human neediness and incompetence as the Lord interacted at the foot of the mountain with His disciples who were unable to heal a demon-possessed boy. We, too, need to depend on the Lord for our ministry.

Pastor Kristopher Schaal was introduced by Kevin Schaal and challenged us to learn from the ordeal our Lord endured in the wilderness when He was on the Mount of Temptation. As our Lord did, we must trust God for daily provision, for any recognition or credit for

our ministries, and for any success we may have as we serve Him.

Chuck Phelps introduced Pastor Caleb Phelps, who preached a stirring message on the Mountains of the Gadarenes, where the Lord healed a demon-possessed man and allowed his tormenters to afflict a nearby herd of pigs. Pastor Phelps showed how demons oppose the Lord's work by leading people to engage in destructive behavior, to exert self-will against Christ, and to destroy lives as a



means of attacking God, the Creator of all.

Pastor Nathan Steadman was introduced by Bud Steadman and considered the Mount of Ascension, looking at Acts 1:1–11, where he challenged us again with the Great Commission and the necessity of bringing the gospel to our needy generation.

Dr. Will Senn closed our meeting by taking us to the Mount of Olives and reminding us of the importance of the second coming and the plan God has for Israel in the end times.

Pastor Mike Harding was honored with the Torchbearer Award for his outstanding faithfulness in the cause of Christ over forty years of ministry at First Baptist Church of Troy, Michigan. It was our small way of thanking him for his long history of consistent and determined leadership both in his local ministry and outside his local church for the cause of biblical fundamentalism.

Malinda Duvall was honored for her six-

teen years as FBFI Home Office Manager and *FrontLine* magazine managing editor, and Suzanne Fell was introduced as the new FBFI Home Office Manager.

Christian Torres was awarded the John C. Vaughn Award for Outstanding Military Chaplain, and Larry Robbins was presented with the John C. Vaughn Award for Outstanding Community Chaplain. Each of these men has represented their Lord and the



FBFI commendably over time and through great trials. In doing so they have impacted many for the cause of Christ.

You had to be there. Reading this report or listening to messages does not adequately reflect the impact of the meeting upon those who attended. We had precious fellowship among attendees as we interacted with one another, developed friendships, shared ministry ideas, and challenged one another to increased effectiveness in our service for our Lord.

Join us next year on June 9–11, 2025, on the campus of Maranatha Baptist University in Watertown, Wisconsin.

Chaplain's Report

Joe Willis

Welcome to Our Newest Chaplains and Candidates

The first part of this year has been very exciting for the FBFI Commission on Chaplains. We have taken on seven new chaplains and/or chaplain candidates. Currently, we endorse eighty chaplains either in the military or local community chaplaincy.

Rick and Cindy Bahr

currently live in Delta, Pennsylvania, and attend New Freedom Baptist Church. Rick attended BJU for three semesters and then graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in medical and research technology. He then



completed his master's degree at Maryland Baptist Bible College. Rick and his wife have three grown children. He desires to become a local community chaplain with the Harford County Detention Center. Rick was interviewed on February 9, 2024.

Tim and Rophe Hryniewicz reside in Norfolk, Virginia. Tim attends Grace Baptist Church where Don Karnes (another FBFI chaplain) pastors. Tim served in the Army for a few years and then switched to the Navy. He currently serves on the USS Leyte Gulf, CG-55, and is working on his master's degree at Virginia Beach Theological Seminary. He and his wife have one small child. Tim desires to go Active-Duty military in the future. He was interviewed on February 24, 2024, while out at sea.



Matt and Rizza

Miles reside in Eastvale, California, where Matt is currently the senior pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church. He has an undergraduate degree from West Coast Baptist College and an MDiv from Liberty. Matt is friends with both Ladron



Thomas and Christian Torres (also FBFI chaplains). He and his wife have three younger children. Matt desires to stay in the reserves as a chaplain but is also considering the possibility of Active-Duty in the future. Matt and Rizza were interviewed April 5, 2024

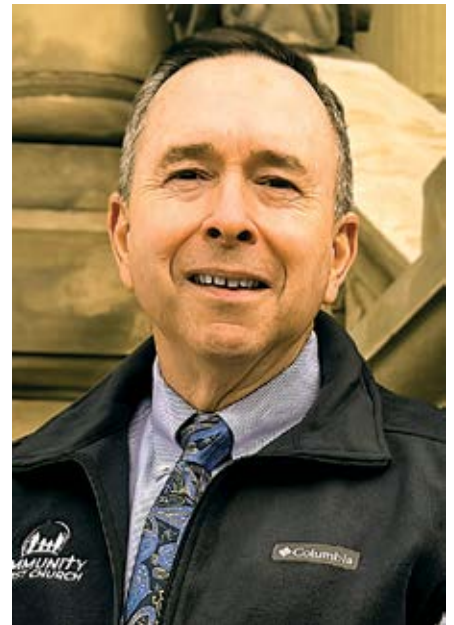
Malachi and Rebekah

Kauffman currently live in Pensacola, Florida, where Malachi works at Pensacola Christian College while finishing up his MDiv. He



and his family attend Bible Baptist Church in Spanish Fort, Alabama. He applied as a chaplain candidate with a desire to become an active-duty Navy chaplain in the future. Malachi and Rebekah have an infant daughter. They interviewed with us on March 22, 2024.

Our next two chaplains are a father-son duo. **Pastor Tim Jackson**, from Lansing, Michigan, is the senior pastor at Community Baptist Church. Tim graduated from Trinity Baptist College in 1982. He also has a honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Faithway Baptist College. Tim has been in the ministry for forty-three years and has two adult children. One of those adult children is **Joe Jackson**, who works on staff as the administrative



pastor with Tim at Community Baptist Church in Lansing. Joe has a bachelor's and master's degree from West Coast Baptist College and a PhD from Louisiana Baptist University. He and his wife, Kyla, have 3 young children. Pastor Tim and Pastor Joe desire to be local community chaplains in the hospital and hospice field of ministry. Tim was interviewed March 28, 2024, and Joe was interviewed on April 4. They are also next-door neighbors.

Greg Kaminski is another one of our latest additions to the FBFI chaplaincy. He has been with the FBFI for several years and is currently the FBFI



regional coordinator for the Northwest region in Eugene, Oregon. Greg is the senior pastor of Westside Baptist Church, which he founded in 1979. He is a graduate of BJU with BA and MA degrees, and he has an honorary doctorate

from IBCS in Chandler, Arizona. He and his wife, Janie, have been married since 1977. Greg desires to become a military chaplain with the Coast Guard Auxiliary in Eugene, Oregon. Greg became an FBFI chaplain on March 26, 2024.

We are so excited that God has brought these wonderful families to us, and we look forward to serving together for many years to come. Welcome aboard!

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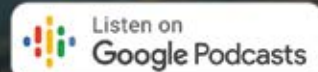
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Evangelist's Perspective

Jerry Sivnksty

Living in Light of the Lord's Return

The Scriptures state in Romans 14:12, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” It is a wonderful yet solemn exhortation to all of the Lord's people. Whether we are in full-time ministry or in another vocation, we are all going to give an account of how we lived our lives for God. No one should take this

lightly, because the Lord Jesus could return at any time. Heed what 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 says: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” What a grand occasion this will be! Those believers who have already died shall precede those who are alive when Christ returns. May I say that He may be coming sooner than we think? In Luke 12:40, Jesus said, “Be ye therefore ready also, for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” We cannot set dates for our Lord’s return. We do not know the time or year, but we do know it will definitely happen according to the Lord’s timing.

The first thing I want to observe from Romans 14:12 is the **singleness** of this event.

It states, “So then every one of us . . .” It is a deep and profound truth that each of us will stand before the Lord as an individual. Ponder that statement of reality! Second Corinthians 5:10 also emphasizes the singleness of the Lord’s return. We read, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done.” You should seriously weigh this truth as an individual believer. We will not hide in a crowd of saints. It will be you and you alone standing before the Lord.

Second, I want to point out the **seriousness** of this occasion. Romans 14:12 says, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself.” Each individual will give an account of how he lived for God. Again, the latter part of 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “. . . according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” The word “bad” in this passage does not refer to sin, because sin was

already judged once and for all when Christ died on the cross. The word “bad” here refers to works we did for the Lord after He saved us. First Corinthians 3:12 says, “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.” Notice there are two kinds of works mentioned. First, what do the gold, silver, and precious stones refer to? These signify serving the Lord in obedience to His Word and laboring for Him with the heart of a servant because you deeply love Him. I was with a pastor who once was a missionary in Africa. He and his wife had two daughters. While they were on the mission field, one of their daughters contracted malaria and died. I asked the pastor’s wife, “What kept you in Africa after losing your daughter?” She said to me, “Jerry, the love of Christ constrained me.” I was deeply touched by her response. She was serving the Lord with love and devotion in spite of her loss. In God’s eyes, that is gold, silver, and pre-

cious stones. Second, what do the wood, hay, and stubble refer to? These signify doing works for the Lord out of pride and desiring man's recognition, man's praise, and man's applause. When someone serves with this motive, this is what will happen according to 1 Corinthians 3:15: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Like wood, hay, and stubble, our worthless works will be burned up. So let us build upon our foundation and serve our Savior with the right motive!

Finally, from Romans 14:12, I want to emphasize the **sovereignty** of the Person we will stand before. The end of the verse says that we will give account of ourselves "to God." For those who serve Him faithfully, it will be a joyful occasion. First Peter 1:8 says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Let each of us be serving the Lord with the right motive in light of His return.

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



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