

# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

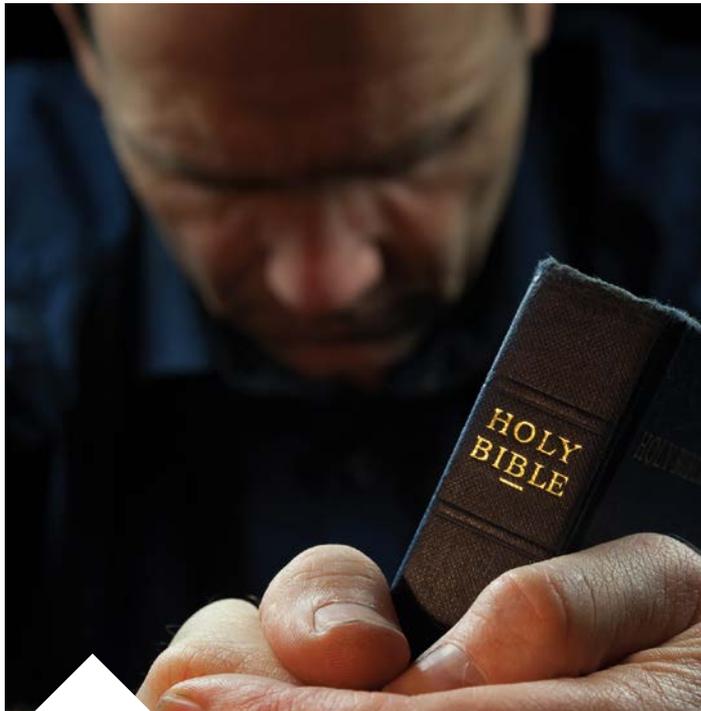


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# FRONTLINE

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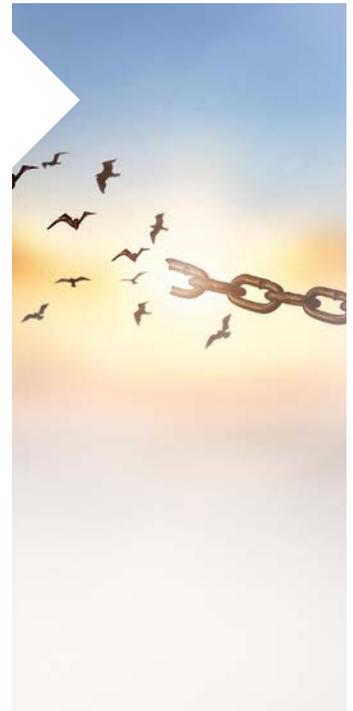
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Our sincere thanks to Gordon Dickson for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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# The Self-Deception of Substance Abuse

One of the saddest stories I have ever heard was from a man who told me about his adult son who was a drunkard. Why had he started drinking? As a teenager, he had gotten a girl pregnant, so he wanted to marry her and take on his responsibilities as a father. She refused and insisted that he take her to an abortion clinic. But the entire time that the procedure was going on, the young man said that it was as if he could hear his baby in the womb screaming, "Help me, Daddy, help me!" To try to silence his screaming conscience and forget those memories, he had been hitting the bottle for decades.

Why are we devoting this issue of *FrontLine* to the issue of substance abuse? It is an enormous problem worldwide. As people try to escape their problems, their hearts mislead them into believing that substance abuse will help them endure harsh realities. But the idols of their hearts are only deceiving them, according to Ezekiel 14. Their self-deception, described in passages such as Jeremiah 17:9-10 and James 1:22, is only amplified and aggravated by substance abuse. And it's important to remember that we are all fellow strugglers.

I was reminded of this as I picked up an acquaintance in a nearby town. His wife had asked me to pick him up (again) after yet another cocaine binge. As we drove home, he said, "I'll bet you really look down on me because I use cocaine," he said.

"No, I don't," I replied.

"How can you not look down on me?" he inquired.

"Because I'm tempted to do the same thing with peanut butter and cracker that you do with cocaine," I responded.

He blurted out, "Peanut butter and cracker! That's not illegal!"

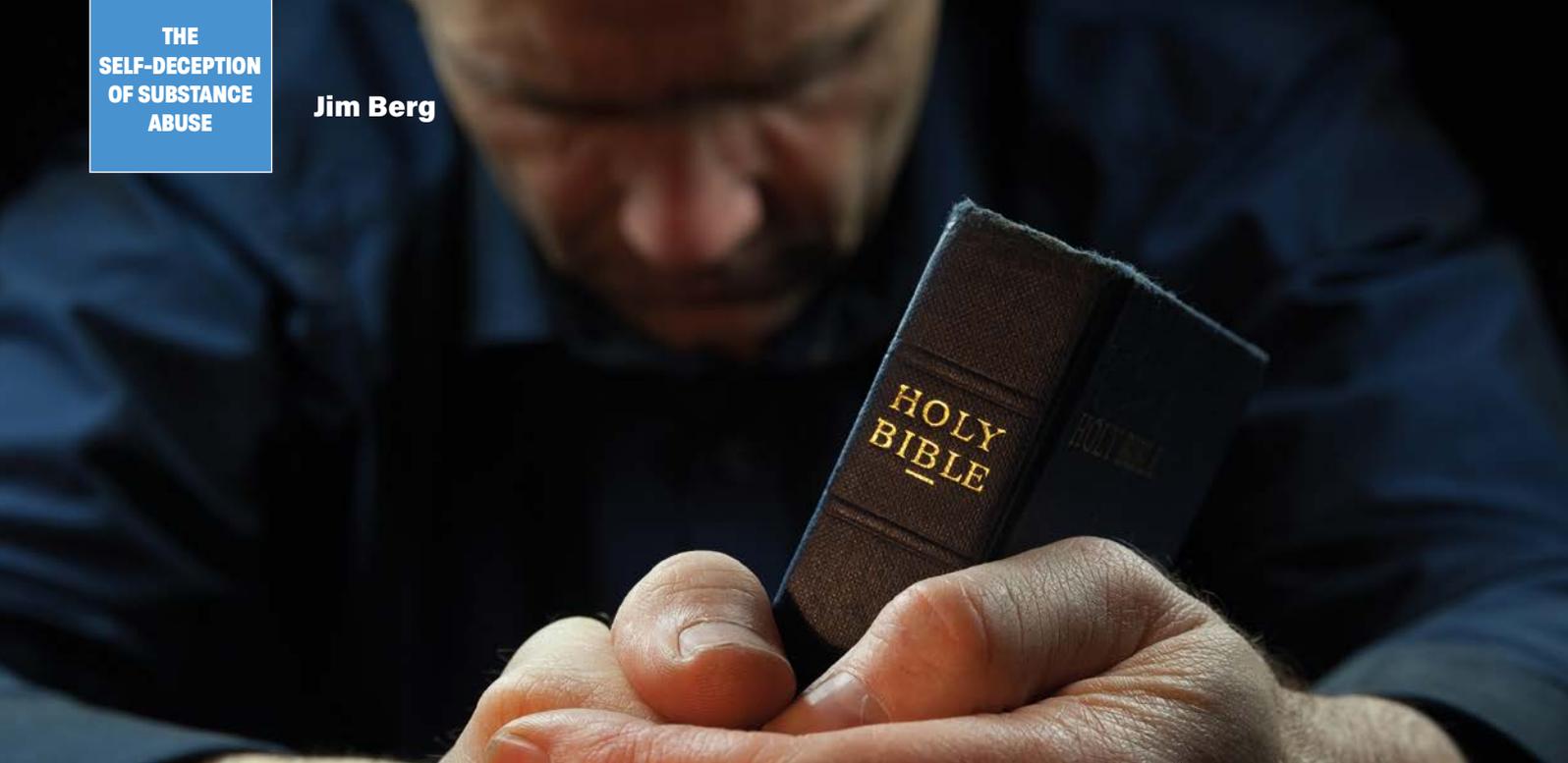
"That's not the issue," I said. "I'm tempted to use peanut butter and cracker to get a sense of satisfaction and take the edge off problems and harsh realities.

I'll grant you that it is not illegal, nor is it highly addictive like cocaine. But food can nevertheless become an idol of my heart and that's wrong."

Over the next few months, he repeated that back to me many times. I was trying to assure him that we are all fellow strugglers and that we can find biblical principles to apply together. We do so in the midst of a culture which is eager to deceive and defile us with substance abuse (Hab. 2:15).

In this issue of *FrontLine*, we will attempt to share biblical answers with fellow strugglers. Jim Berg will show us God's way to overcome addictions. Ben Hicks will help us see how some people insist on Christian liberty in a way that leads to substance abuse. David Shumate's article alerts us to the dangers of using marijuana. Mike Harding tackles the issue of using beverage alcohol, explaining why believers should abstain. As you ponder the issue of substance abuse, Robert Condict's review of *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* by Edward Welch is worthy of your careful consideration. Our prayer is that this edition of *FrontLine* will equip you with the information you need to turn to the Lord from substance abuse and to help others turn as well.

Gordon Dickson, Associate Editor



# God's Way to Overcome Your Addictions

*This article contains excerpts from Jim Berg's new book, *Overcoming Your Addictions God's Way: A Struggler's Guide to Freedom That Lasts* (Shepherd Press, 2025).*

**A**s I write this in late 2024, massive rescue operations are underway in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The storm became the deadliest hurricane since Katrina in 2005, leaving a 500-mile path of destruction from Florida through Georgia, the Carolinas, and the Southern Appalachian areas. We lost trees and a few days of power, but we experienced only minor losses compared to our neighbors in the mountains to the north of us. The hurricane floods swept away entire towns along with highways and bridges. Tornadoes demolished power grids and communication towers. Hundreds of people were killed in the catastrophe, and thousands of others remain isolated without food, water, power, or any means to communicate or leave their position. Stories of harrowing rescue attempts are beginning to surface as neighbors help each other dig out of the rubble, mudslides, and log-jammed swollen rivers. Hundreds are still unaccounted for. Neighbors, first responders, and utility company personnel

are risking their lives to rescue people from debris piles, collapsed buildings, rooftops, mudslides, and overflowing creek and river beds. Some died as they sought to help others. Rescues are risky. But these disasters across our land remind us of the even greater disasters going on in the lives of the people we love. Many of those personal catastrophes involve addictions and substance abuse. It's time to seek God's way to overcome addictions.

## **GOD'S RESCUE PLAN**

A person stranded on the edge of a disintegrating cliff overlooking the waters of a raging river would be a fool to reject rescue by a helicopter pilot offering to take him to safety. Anyone rejecting rescue because he does not want to leave behind what little still remains on his property will experience catastrophic consequences due to dehydration, disease, contaminated water, untreated injuries, starvation, and exposure. Rare would be the case where a stranded hurricane survivor facing certain death would refuse rescue. However, even more sad is the refusal of most people in the world to accept the rescue operation of Jesus Christ on the cross to save them from eventual eternal destruction and from enslaving sin now.

No rescue has been more needed than the one God planned and carried out for His fallen race of humans. We were being swept along by the "course of this world" living in the "desires of the flesh" and were "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1–3). Jesus willingly entered our perishing world, exposing Himself to all the perils we faced. He gave His all and died in the rescue plan. Paul says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

## **HAVE YOU REALLY BEEN RESCUED?**

If you have not yet been personally rescued by God, you are facing certain, eternal death. There is only one "helicopter" to take you out of your dangerous position. You must be sure you are on it. There is no other way out, and it is the only way out.

If you think you have been rescued from eternal death by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but are still living in your sinful practices, you need to look again at what it means to be a child of God. Almost every addiction struggler my wife and I have worked with had doubts about whether he or she was, indeed, a child of God.

Those we worked with fell into three categories. Some definitely were not new creations in Christ and continued to reject God's rescue. Others repented and believed the gospel and became disciples of Jesus Christ. Still others realized that, though they had come to Christ for salvation at some time, their sin had placed significant barriers between them and God. They were "double minded" and "unstable in all [their] ways" (James 1:6–8).

We learn from what the apostle Peter says to this last group that when your Christian growth has stalled, you have "forgotten that [you were] purged from [your] old sins" (2 Pet. 1:9). If you truly have been rescued from eternal death, you must live for the One who rescued you. Your life does not belong to you anymore.

### MY FRIEND'S STRUGGLE

Let me introduce you to Sam, a friend of mine. Sam was twenty-two years old when he was arrested again for driving under the influence and for possessing narcotics. He had used a variety of street drugs and had been using something most of the time for several years. While he had always liked trying new adventures, having a jail cell door slam shut in his face one night had not been on his bucket list.

As a young boy, he had occasionally attended a small brick church in his neighborhood. He had heard the gospel message about how Christ came to save sinners—and he now had no doubt that he was one (Rom. 3:23). That night in his cell, he remembered the pastor's words that Christ died to pay the penalty for his sin (Rom. 5:8) and that God would accept sinners who would repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ as their only Savior (Rom. 6:23). Sin had carried him farther than he had ever expected. He fell on his face on the cold concrete floor of his cell and cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness (Rom. 10:9). God heard his prayer, and Sam became a child of God (John 1:12).

That's when Sam's new life began. Before long he was spending hours a day in his cell reading a Bible that he found on a bookshelf in the study room next to the canteen. He detoxed in jail, completed his ninety-day sentence, was released on probation, and awaited another trial for previous offences. He knew that he really needed to be in a Bible-based residential

program so that he could learn more about his new Savior, Jesus Christ, who could rescue him from the destructive paths of his past.

Six months later, Sam graduated from a residential addiction-recovery discipleship program. The Bible-saturated schedule, one-on-one discipleship, preaching services, Christian community, and strict accountability gave him the head start he needed on the path to victory over his stubborn, sinful habits.

He joined a Bible-preaching church and began attending their Friday night addiction recovery discipleship program, Freedom That Lasts (see [FreedomThatLasts.com](http://FreedomThatLasts.com)). There he gained a whole new "family" of fellow believers who accepted him, loved him, helped him find a job, disciplined him, and prayed for him—all within the context of God's "support group," the brothers and sisters of a local church.

But one day Sam received word that a close relative had unexpectedly died. Sam relapsed into his old ways of handling trouble—he did drugs to mask his pain. Under the influence of heroin that night, he wrecked his car and was arrested for driving under the influence. He was released on bail and within a few weeks was again standing before a judge who placed him on house arrest until his other cases could come before the court. This time he knew he had to develop a deeper commitment to handle pain God's way in the future.

He still faced an uncertain future legally and had incurred some very difficult relational and financial responsibilities due to his previous choices. Yet by placing himself back under the instruction, preaching, accountability, and community of his church, he began developing a consistent walk with God, sharing his testimony with others, and becoming a responsible employee.

His house-arrest restrictions allowed him to go only to work, church, and home again to the faith-based transition house he shared with several other men. The GPS in his ankle bracelet would betray him to the monitoring agency if he were to veer off that course. Since he could not run around as he did before, he had plenty of time to devote to reading and studying his Bible, listening to sermon podcasts, and reading books on Christian growth.

Every day his ankle bracelet reminded him that he must deny himself and remain under the limitations that God (through the court system) had placed upon him in order to develop godly wisdom and the character of Christ. He began learning to handle hurts and hardships in a far different manner than he had before, though he encountered occasional setbacks over the following years.

### HOW ABOUT YOU?

Before a plumber can fix a pipe, he has to know the composition of the pipe material—whether copper, PVC plastic, or something else. Copper joints must be sweat together with a blow torch, solder, and flux. If the torch's heat were applied to plastic PVC pipes, however, it would melt the joint. Each kind of pipe requires a different remedy when it leaks.

Similarly, you must know your basic makeup as a human being if you are to apply the right remedies to your addiction problems. Your problems are more than physical, though your body is involved. Your problems are not mental illnesses, though your mind is involved. Your problems go much deeper.

It's time to seek God's way to overcome addictions. The issues of the heart that drive enslaving sins can be permanently remedied only by a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, followed by the application of biblical truth to the problems of living. As you read this edition of *FrontLine* magazine, I hope that you will address your own problems with glorious biblical truth.

**Jim Berg**, DMin, is a professor of biblical counseling at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. He is certified with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), from which he also received addictions specialization training. He is a commissioned addiction biblical counselor (CABC) with The Addiction Connection. Jim is founder of Freedom That Lasts Ministries and has authored numerous books, including *Changed into His Image: God's Plan for Transforming Your Life, Essential Virtues: Marks of the Christ-Centered Life*, and the personal counseling program *Quieting a Noisy Soul: Overcoming Guilt, Anger, Anxiety, and Despair*. He and his wife, Patty, live in Taylors, South Carolina. They have three married daughters and eleven grandchildren. For more information, visit [JimBerg.com](http://JimBerg.com).



David Shumate

**F**or much of the twentieth century, marijuana was illegal in the United States under both federal and state law, and marijuana use, although often tolerated, was viewed as part of the counterculture. Recently, however, a significant shift has occurred both in public attitudes and in the legal landscape. Although marijuana is still illegal under federal law, thirty-nine states allow medical marijuana, and twenty-four states have legalized recreational use.<sup>1</sup> Not only is marijuana increasingly tolerated but, in many places, it is advertised and promoted. Unless trends reverse, marijuana is well on the way to becoming mainstream. How should Christians respond?

### CHRISTIANS SHOULD UNDERSTAND WHY MARIJUANA USE IS WRONG

The first issue is whether marijuana use is wrong. To answer this question, we will look first at what marijuana and related substances are and how they operate on the nervous system. We will then examine the relevant biblical teachings.

**What is marijuana?** Marijuana is the pressed stems, leaves, flowers, and seeds of the *Cannabis sativa* plant. Originating in Central Asia, with evidence of cultivation dating back thousands of years, cannabis is now found around the world. Historically, the most important use of this fibrous plant, also known as hemp, undoubtedly has been the manufacture of rope, sailcloth, and other products.

For the purposes of this article, the two important chemicals found in cannabis are 9-delta tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). Both compounds have multiple effects on the nervous system. They act on neural receptors, which are abundant in many regions of the brain that affect various mental functions, including memory, concentration, thinking, pleasure, movement, fine-motor coordination, and sensory and time perception.<sup>2</sup> However, only THC is psychoactive, that is, mind-altering. It is the THC in cannabis that produces the high.

THC and CBD are found in the leaves and flowers of the cannabis plant. The greatest concentration is in the trichomes, tiny hairs that cover the flowers and buds of the plant. Sometimes, these trichomes are compressed into blocks or balls to make hashish. In modern times, both cultivation practices and processing have increased the THC content of cannabis-derived products. In addition, many forms of synthetic cannabinoids are also available.

**The Bible condemns intoxication.** The Bible does not speak specifically of the use of cannabis. However, it does say a great deal about the most common psychoactive drug in human history, alcohol. There is a debate over whether Christians should abstain from beverage alcohol or have the liberty to consume it in moderation. For compelling arguments in favor of abstinence, see Michael Harding's "Is Today's Wine the Wine of the Bible?" in this issue of *FrontLine*.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of this debate, however, there is no doubt that the Bible



# Why Marijuana

condemns drunkenness (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:7–8; Rom. 13:13–14).

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul characterizes drunkenness as “excess” (*asōtia*). This noun belongs to a word group that means wasteful or prodigal. Christ uses it to refer to the wasteful living of the prodigal son (Luke 15:13). It could also mean reckless abandon, debauchery, or dissipation (Titus 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:4).<sup>4</sup>

The Old Testament clearly outlines specific ways in which alcohol can lead to excess. **First**, drunkenness is contrary to sound reason and judgment. Proverbs 20:1 calls wine a “mock-er,” that is, one who is disdainful of spiritual truth. When drunk, people forget God’s law, fail to exercise sound judgment, and go astray from the truth (Prov. 31:4–5; Isa. 28:7).

**Second**, alcohol leads to a loss of self-control. Wine is not only a “mock-er” but also a “brawler” (Prov. 20:1 NASB). This term means to make a noise or tumult or to be turbulent. Proverbs 23:33 says, “Your eyes will see strange things and your mind will say perverse things” (NASB).

**Third**, alcohol interferes with sensory processing and motor coordination. Proverbs poetically describes the reeling of the drunkard, who is like one who lies down in the sea or on the top of a mast (23:34). He is beaten and does not feel it (23:35). This result is hazardous in modern times, when



Some of these effects of chronic marijuana use can last for decades. A forty-five-year study concluded that long-term cannabis users showed an IQ decline of an average of 5.5 points from childhood to midlife.<sup>8</sup> In another study, relatives and friends reported that long-term users suffered from poorer memory and attention.<sup>9</sup>

**Second**, marijuana has been shown to damage mental health.<sup>10</sup> The most pronounced and dangerous cognitive problem with cannabis use is the risk of psychosis and psychotic behavior.<sup>11</sup>

[An analysis of multiple studies] found a 4-fold increase in the risk of psychotic outcomes (based on both a broad definition of psychosis or a narrow diagnosis of a psychotic disorder) for the heaviest users and a 2-fold increase for average users compared to nonusers (Marconi et al. 2016).<sup>12</sup>

Symptoms of cannabis-induced psychosis include “hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized thinking.”<sup>13</sup> Even short of these more severe outcomes, marijuana use can lead to negative or hostile emotions<sup>14</sup> and heightened anxiety.<sup>15</sup>

Subjecting oneself to mind-altering drugs like THC runs directly counter to New Testament injunctions to clear thinking and self-control. Self-control is central to the Christian life and is expressed by at least three word groups in the New Testament. First, as Paul teaches, God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, love, and a “sound mind” (*sōphronismos*) (2 Tim 1:7). This term refers to prudence or moderation.<sup>16</sup> Believers in all stations of life are told to be sober (*sōphron*) (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 2:2,5).

Proper Christian thinking and living also include the exercise of self-control (*enkrateia*), that is, the “restraint of one’s emotions, impulses, or desires.”<sup>17</sup> It is both the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and an indispensable step in Christian growth (2 Pet. 1:6). Believers are also repeatedly enjoined to “be sober-minded” (*nēphō*) (1 Thess. 5:6, 8; 1 Pet. 1:13; cf. 1 Tim. 3:2, 11). This word means to “be free from every form of mental and spiritual ‘drunkenness,’ from excess, passion, rashness, [and] confusion.”<sup>18</sup> The sober, watchful, self-controlled life is the opposite of a life of intoxication and substance abuse.

**Third**, like alcohol, marijuana is addictive. Based on data from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, one group of researchers found that about eighteen percent of adults said that they had used cannabis in the past year and that twenty-eight percent of cannabis users could be classified as having cannabis use disorder (CUD).<sup>19</sup> This is twice the percentage of drinkers who display alcohol use disorder, which has been estimated to be fourteen percent.<sup>20</sup>

It has been reported that 9% of those who experiment with marijuana will become addicted; 17% of those who start using marijuana as teenagers will become addicted; and 25–50% of those who use daily will become addicted.<sup>21</sup>

Paul makes it plain that believers should not be controlled by anything besides the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:12; Eph. 5:18).

drunk driving causes over ten thousand traffic deaths in the United States every year.<sup>5</sup>

**Finally**, alcohol can be highly addictive. Proverbs describes the drunkard who cannot wait to rouse himself from his stupor and seek another drink (23:35).

**Getting high is wrong, just like getting drunk.** Intoxication is wrong, whether it is through alcohol or marijuana. This common-sense inference is supported by Paul’s discussion of the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5. At the end of his list, which includes drunkenness, he adds, “and such like” (v. 21), making it clear that he is not giving an exhaustive catalog. Behavior of the same character as those listed is also carnal and incompatible with Christian living. A study of the effect of cannabis use demonstrates that it falls squarely within this scriptural condemnation.

**First**, it has many adverse effects on thinking and behavior. Cannabis use may impair cognitive functions on several levels—from essential motor coordination to more complex executive function tasks, such as the ability to plan, organize, solve problems, make decisions, remember, and control emotions and behavior.<sup>6</sup>

Rational faculties harmed by THC include working memory, verbal learning, recall of events, attention, information processing, decision-making, and impulse control.<sup>7</sup>

## SUBJECTING ONESELF TO MIND-ALTERING DRUGS LIKE THC RUNS DIRECTLY COUNTER TO NEW TESTAMENT INJUNCTIONS TO CLEAR THINKING AND SELF-CONTROL. SELF-CONTROL IS CENTRAL TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND IS EXPRESSED BY AT LEAST THREE WORD GROUPS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Regardless of what human laws or social mores allow, the recreational use of marijuana is unbiblical and has no legitimate place in life, especially in the life of believers.

### CHRISTIANS SHOULD OPPOSE THE EXPANSION OF MARIJUANA

As cannabis has become more accessible, it has also become more potent. The National Institute on Drug Abuse reported an increase of THC in cannabis samples seized by the Drug Enforcement Agency from just under four percent in 1995 to over sixteen percent in 2022, a fourfold increase.<sup>22</sup> Europe has also seen increases in cannabis potency. “These trends in the last decade suggest that cannabis is becoming an increasingly harmful product in the USA and Europe.”<sup>23</sup> As one would expect, higher doses of THC produce worse outcomes, including increased risk of psychosis, greater loss of cognitive function, and increased incidence of CUD.<sup>24</sup>

As we have seen, marijuana poses significant societal risks. For example, cannabis, like alcohol, hinders the ability to drive. According to the CDC, marijuana has adverse effects on perception, reaction time, and coordination.<sup>25</sup> However, no commonly available sobriety test exists for THC.<sup>26</sup> Further, the problems caused by marijuana use are not limited to the individual. Like alcoholism, CUD leads to many other social harms.

Research has also shown that CUD is similar to alcohol use disorder in its associations with interpersonal, financial, and legal problems, emergency treatment, and suicide attempts and that those with both disorders had higher odds of certain problems than those with one disorder (Gutkind et al. 2021).<sup>27</sup>

One study found that CUD was linked to greater suicide risk in teenagers, especially those experiencing other mental health problems such as depression.<sup>28</sup>

A common argument for legalizing marijuana is the claim that it is not as harmful as alcohol. While superficially appealing, this argument is flawed. Even if its premise is true, the inability or unwillingness of society to prevent one source of harm does not justify introducing an additional source of harm. As the dangers of alcohol become more widely known, the proper response is for fewer people to drink rather than for more people to use pot.

### WHAT ABOUT MEDICAL MARIJUANA?

Drinking alcohol for “medicinal purposes” has been a longstanding source of jokes. However, the question of medical marijuana is a serious one. Cannabis has many different compounds, with THC being the main psychoactive one.<sup>29</sup> There is nothing wrong in principle with using non-psychoactive derivatives of cannabis medically.

However, the clinical merits of THC have engendered a robust debate. There is some evidence that THC can be helpful for pain and other conditions, but there is also evidence for potential harms.<sup>30</sup> Federal law still lists marijuana as a Schedule I drug, easily abused and not medically beneficial.<sup>31</sup> Assuming for the moment, however, that THC has genuinely beneficial medical uses, medical use of THC could be morally justifiable, provided that the benefits outweigh the dangers and suitable non-psychoactive, non-addictive substitutes are lacking. It would also require diligence to mitigate the risks.

Nevertheless, there are severe warnings to be heeded. One comes from the modern opioid crisis. As Summer Bryant notes, through much of the twentieth century, opioids were heavily regulated, and their use was discouraged. However, from the 1980s into the twenty-first century, pharmaceutical companies and medical practitioners increasingly promoted and used opioids to treat pain. This overuse of these painkillers led to a twenty-year-long opioid epidemic, which is estimated to have claimed over one hundred thousand

lives per year and resulted in liability settlements by pharmaceutical companies of tens of billions of dollars.<sup>32</sup>

There are similar warning signs about medical marijuana. One is the association between supporting medical marijuana and accepting its general use, although it is not possible to prove that the one caused the other.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, cannabis is a burgeoning market for big business, with alcohol, tobacco, and pharmaceutical companies having made significant investments in cannabis.<sup>34</sup> As in the case of opioids, the combination of a claim of medical usefulness, an immense profit motive, and an addictive substance makes a deadly cocktail.

### CONCLUSION

We live in a society that is increasingly giving itself over to dissipation—so much so that indulgence is considered our birthright. In such a world, believers must continue to stand for righteousness. We must be exceedingly zealous to be sober and vigilant because our adversary is like a lion seeking those he can devour. In such a spiritual battle, mind-altering drugs are the last thing we should be tolerating.

**David Shumate** holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament Interpretation from BJU Seminary. He is the Academic Dean of International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.



<sup>1</sup> “Marijuana Legality by State - Updated January 1, 2025,” DISA, <https://disa.com/marijuana-legality-by-state>.

<sup>2</sup> M. Herkenham et al., “Cannabinoid Receptor Localization in Brain,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 87, no. 5 (1990): 1932–36, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.87.5.1932>.

<sup>3</sup> See Randy Jaeggli, *Christians and Alcohol: A Scriptural Case for Abstinence* (BJU Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 148 (BDAG).

<sup>5</sup> “Drunk Driving,” NHTSA, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving>.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca D. Crean, Natania A. Crane, and

Continued on page 36



# Mentoring for Ministry

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Michael Harding



# Is Today's Wine the Wine of the Bible?

*Editor's note: As you know, the issue of believers drinking alcoholic beverages has now become prominent and problematic. Some argue that wine usage was common in the Bible and is therefore completely acceptable today. But is today's wine the same wine as it was thousands of years ago in Jewish or pagan cultures? It's important to examine this part of the larger discussion to understand that a significant difference does exist. You will find that the historical and scriptural information below gives you good answers to share with others. Pastor Harding has graciously given us permission to reprint this excerpt from his larger article, "The Wrath of Grapes."<sup>1</sup> As you will see, he provides excellent historical and scriptural resources to help explain why believers would be wise to avoid drinking alcoholic beverages.*

**W**ine in the New Testament era and wine today are not identical. The Hebrew word *yayin* and the Greek word *oinos* usually refer to wine in some state of fermentation, beginning with fresh, sweet juice available immediately after grape harvest (Isa. 16:10; Jer. 48:33) that quickly starts the fermentation process in the absence of refrigeration or pressurized bottling. Fermentation is a natural process that takes place when the grape juice comes into contact with the yeast released from broken grape skins during the treading of grapes. "New wine" in Hebrew (*ti-rosh*) and Greek (*gleukos*) respectively may refer to the juice of the grape that was fresh or in the first year of fermentation. *Mixed wine* in the Old Testament was wine flavored with herbs and quite intoxicating (Prov. 23:30). *Undiluted wine* in the New Testament era was approximately seven to ten percent alcohol and usually not taken as a beverage without proper dilution. On account of extra yeast and controlled heating conditions, some standard table wines today by comparison are as much as fourteen percent alcohol!

Fermented wine in the Greek and New Testament eras was regularly diluted with water.<sup>2</sup> The Talmud (200 BC—AD 200) records the Jewish practice of regularly reducing the effects of wine by diluting it at a three-to-one or two-to-one ratio of water to wine. In the rabbinic period, "'yayin' is to be distinguished from 'shekar' [strong drink]; the former is diluted with water . . . ; the latter is undiluted."<sup>3</sup> The Jewish Mishnah said, "They do not say the Benediction over the wine until water has been added to it."<sup>4</sup> The normal mixture for the Jews was three parts water to one part wine (Shabbath 77a). In the Passover ritual during New Testament times the four cups every Jew was to drink during the ceremony had to be mixed three parts water to one part wine (Pesahim 108b). In 2 Maccabees 15:39, this practice is reflected as common during the intertestamental period: "It is harmful to drink wine alone, or again, to drink water alone [bacteria issues], while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment."<sup>5</sup>

This dilution process reduced the alcoholic content of the wine down to approximately 2.25–2.75%. In contrast to the ancient world, the modern world does not dilute the effects of alcohol. Beer is 3.5% to 4.5% alcohol and typically served in twelve- to sixteen-ounce containers; table wines

are as much as 14%; fortified wines are 18–24%; hard liquor is 40% (80 proof).

A *diluted wine* would reduce the risks of drunkenness from that of an undiluted wine. Peter argued that the Christians at Pentecost were not drunk since it was only the third hour (9:00 AM). Normally, one had to linger with the wine or be “beside wine” (1 Tim. 3:3) in order to be intoxicated.

- “In NT times the practice of dilution seems to have been usual.”<sup>6</sup>
- “The wine of classical antiquity was very different from modern wine. They . . . always diluted it with water before consumption. . . . Only barbarians drank undiluted wine.”<sup>7</sup>
- “In all these countries [Syria, Palestine, Egypt], wine was always diluted with water, a long-standing custom in Mediterranean regions, where pure potable water is not very common.”<sup>8</sup>
- “At a later period, however, the Gr[ee]k use of diluted wines had attained such sway that the writer of 2 Macc[abees] speaks (15:39) of undiluted wine as ‘distasteful’ (*polémion*). This dilution is so normal in the following centuries that the Mish[nah] can take it for granted and, indeed, R[abbi] Eliezer even forbade saying the table-blessing over undiluted wine. . . . The proportion of water was large, only one-third or one-fourth of the total mixture being wine. . . . The wine of the Last Supper, accordingly, may be described in modern terms as a sweet, red, fermented wine, *rather highly diluted*.”<sup>9</sup> The reference in Isaiah 1:22 to diluted wine as bad should not be taken as a proof that Jews did not dilute wine, but as a metaphor of spiritual adulteration (cf. Isa. 1:21).
- “The use of wine at the paschal feast . . . had become an established custom at all events in the post-Babylonian period. The wine was mixed with warm water on these occasions. . . . Hence in the early Christian church it was usual to mix the sacramental wine with water.”<sup>10</sup> Don’t forget this reference in Revelation 14:10a: “He, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury,

which has been poured full strength [*akratou*, from *akratos*, meaning “undiluted”] into the cup of his wrath.”<sup>11</sup>

The Greeks practiced dilution, and it eventually spread throughout the Roman world, including Palestine. Pliny’s work titled *Natural History* mentions an eight-to-one ratio of water to wine. Other classical Greek writers mention similar ratios: Hesiod, three to one; Alexis, four to one; Diocles, two to one. Mnesitheus of Athens said,

The gods [have] revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. For it gives food to them that take it and strength in mind and body. In medicine it is most beneficial. . . . In daily intercourse, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse.<sup>12</sup>

According to Stein, dilution was practiced in the early centuries of the church. Justin Martyr (AD 150) described the Lord’s Supper this way: “Bread is brought, wine and water, and the elder sends up prayers and thanksgiving.”<sup>13</sup> Cyprian (AD 250) said,

Thus, therefore, in consecrating the cup of the Lord, water alone cannot be offered, even as wine alone cannot be offered. For if anyone offers wine only, the blood of Christ is dissociated from us; but if the water be alone, the people are dissociated from Christ. . . . Thus the cup of the Lord is not indeed water alone nor wine alone, unless each be mingled with the other.

Clement of Alexandria (late second century) said, “It is best for the wine to be mixed with as much water as possible. . . . For both are works of God, and the mixing of the two, both of water and wine, produces health. . . . To the necessary element, the water, which is in the greatest quantity, there is to be mixed in some of the useful element.”<sup>14</sup> It appears that Paul sets the standard for the early church as “not beside wine” (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7), not “much wine” (1 Tim. 3:8), and not drinking water exclusively but using a little wine for one’s

stomach (1 Tim. 5:23). “Strong drink” (*sikera*) seems to be completely off limits in the New Testament; it is only mentioned once in the New Testament in reference to the abstention of John the Baptist. John was a Nazarite, a term which comes from a Hebrew verb which means to “separate” or “abstain.” Amos chastised Israel for their treatment of the Nazarites in forcing them to drink wine (Amos 2:12). On the other hand, God commended the Rechabites for their abstinence and held this tribe in high regard for their faithfulness (Jer. 35:1–19).<sup>15</sup>

**Editor’s note:** *So this raises a question: Should believers insist on drinking wine today even for “medicinal benefit”?*

The use of diluted wine is no longer necessary today in modern society. In the New Testament era there was little else to drink. It would have been quite difficult not to drink wine in those times and under those conditions. The alcohol content made wine one of the safest liquids to drink, because the water supplies were often contaminated. Alcohol had a medicinal effect in that case. With modern purification of water and a host of alternatives that are completely safe, it is not necessary today to drink diluted wine for one’s health. The American Heart Association does not normally recommend alcoholic beverages as a treatment for heart conditions. Whatever minimal health benefits are offered by a moderate drinking of wine can be obtained by the use of pasteurized grape juice.

**Editor’s note:** *It’s clear that alcohol usage is devastating our society. What does the Bible say about drunkenness and sobriety? And how should we answer fellow believers who insist that using today’s alcoholic beverages is totally acceptable?*

Drunkenness is clearly forbidden as it has the potential to replace the influence of the Spirit in a believer’s life (Eph. 5:18–20). Christians are not to associate with so-called Christians who get drunk (1 Cor. 5:11). Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21). Many New Testament passages call Christians to sobriety (*nēphō*; 1 Thess. 5:1–11; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8) and temperance (*nēphalios*; 1 Tim. 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2); both these terms arguably include a literal as well as a figurative sobriety.<sup>16</sup>

In the New Testament era, Christians used diluted wine. First Timothy 5:23 says, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (NIV; cf. Luke 10:33–34). Timothy was avoiding the use of diluted wine perhaps out of motivation to be pure (1 Tim. 5:22). It is clear here that diluted wine had a necessary medicinal value to Timothy for his digestive system. God’s people could use it as such. In verse 22, *hudropoteo* means “to drink water without wine mixed in.”<sup>17</sup> Paul commands Timothy to drink diluted wine as a medical necessity and to stop drinking plain water. For this reason, pastors and deacons were not to be “beside wine” or partakers of “much wine.” These men could drink diluted wine as long as it did not impair their judgment.

**Editor’s note:** As you can see, even ancient pagans would have warned us about the wine and strong drink that is so common today. The Scriptures call believers to an even higher standard. We hope that you can arm yourself with the historical and scriptural information in this article to avoid the dangers of alcoholic beverages and help others do so as well.

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- <sup>1</sup> The article content is available in a series of blog posts at our website, Proclaim & Defend: <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2017/11/17/best-of-pd-mike-harding-writes-on-alcohol/>. It has been lightly edited for its presentation here.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert H. Stein, “Wine Drinking in New Testament Times,” *Christianity Today*, June 20, 1975, 9–11.
- <sup>3</sup> Judah David Eisenstein, “Wine,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906), 12:533.
- <sup>4</sup> Berakhot 7.5. Quoted from Herbert Danby, ed., *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford, 1893), 8.
- <sup>5</sup> The quotation is from the RSV. See “Wine,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (New York University Press, 2002), 798–99.
- <sup>6</sup> A. R. S. Kennedy, “Wine and Strong Drink,” in *Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. ed. (Scribner’s, 1963), 1039.

- <sup>7</sup> Maynard A. Amerine, “Wine,” in *Collier’s Encyclopedia* (Collier, 1994), 23:518.
- <sup>8</sup> R. J. Forbes, “Wine: History,” in *Encyclopedia Americana* (Grolier, 1989), 29:44–45.
- <sup>9</sup> Burton S. Easton, “Wine, Wine Press,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Howard-Severance, 1915), 5:3087, emphasis added.
- <sup>10</sup> Merrill Unger, “Wine,” *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Moody, 1981), 1169.
- <sup>11</sup> Quotation is from the NIV (modified).
- <sup>12</sup> Stein, “Wine Drinking,” p. 9. Stein is quoting Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* 2.2. Translation from Charles Burton Gulick, *Athenaeus: The Deipnosophists*, LCL (Harvard University Press, 1961), 155–57.
- <sup>13</sup> Quoted from Stein, “Wine Drinking,” 9, with “elder” replacing Stein’s “president.” The quotation is from Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67.5.
- <sup>14</sup> Quoted from Stein, “Wine Drinking,” 10–11. Stein is quoting Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 2.2.
- <sup>15</sup> See John MacArthur’s excellent treatment of wine and strong drink in his *Ephesians* (Moody, 1986), 229–44.
- <sup>16</sup> See Otto Bauernfeind, “νήφω, νηφάλιος, ἐκνήφω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1964), 4:936–41.
- <sup>17</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 1992), 240.

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# Alcohol as a Beverage: What Does the Science Say?

In early January 2025, the Surgeon General of the United States urged Congress to enact legislation requiring a cancer warning label on all alcoholic beverages. His warning was a direct result of recent scientific studies that reveal the dangers of consuming any alcohol as a beverage. He issued this report as he prepared to leave office. Observers pointed out that the Surgeon General did so as he faced tremendous resistance from the beverage alcohol lobby. But his warning reiterates recent scientific findings. These recent findings give fresh encouragement to those who appeal for abstinence from the consumption of alcohol.

The Surgeon General's recommendation corresponds to recent scientific consensus. For instance, Dr. Rosario Ortola (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) noted that the use of alcohol as a beverage "probably raises the risk of cancer 'from the first drop.'"<sup>1</sup> About alcohol consumption, the World Health Organization stated that "when it comes to alcohol consumption, there is no safe amount that does not affect health."<sup>2</sup> According to a CNN article, Dr. Timothy Niemi, the director of the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria, put it bluntly: "Alcohol is a carcinogen and contributes to about 50 different types of death. Overall, alcohol is a health hazard."<sup>3</sup>

The US Surgeon General's warning matches the warnings from many other nations. About forty-eight nations require warning labels on alcohol containers. Ireland, well-known for its alcohol

consumption, was the first nation to mandate that cancer warnings be placed on alcoholic beverages. South Korea requires a specific label connecting alcohol use to liver cancer. In Canada and Britain, recent efforts to warn the public have met with stiff opposition from alcohol trade groups. But in Canada, cancer is the leading cause of death. In a January 2023 report, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction stated that alcohol is a known carcinogen, producing seven different kinds of cancer. The report stated, "The risk of negative outcomes begins to increase with any alcohol use and consuming more than 2 standard drinks per occasion is associated with a significant increased risk of harms to self and others."<sup>4</sup>

The Surgeon General's warning contradicts previous flawed studies. The authors of the British study noted that their findings contradicted earlier analyses that indicated that some alcohol consumption is good for the heart. To explain the contradiction, they pointed out that other studies had failed to distinguish between former drinkers and those who had never consumed alcohol. By lumping lifelong non-drinkers with former drinkers (many of whom had to give up alcohol for health reasons) those flawed studies had concluded that alcoholic beverages could be beneficial.<sup>5</sup>

The US Surgeon General's recent warning gives fresh encouragement to those who appeal for abstinence from beverage alcohol. Currently, an average of six out of every ten US adults drink alcohol. But

some polling data indicates that the younger generation is awakening to the dangers of alcohol use, especially in light of recent scientific consensus.

After more than four decades of ministry, **Gordon Dickson** continues to serve as a writer, editor, and conference speaker. His newest book is *TRUST: What Religions Don't Tell You but You Can Find Out for Yourself*. He blogs at [www.LiveServeLead.com](http://www.LiveServeLead.com).



<sup>1</sup> Roni Caryn Rabin, "Older Adults Do Not Benefit from Moderate Drinking, Large Study Finds," DNYUZ, August 12, 2024, <https://dnyuz.com/2024/08/12/older-adults-do-not-benefit-from-moderate-drinking-large-study-finds/>.

<sup>2</sup> "No level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health," WHO: Newsroom, December 28, 2022, <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/04-01-2023-no-level-of-alcohol-consumption-is-safe-for-our-health>.

<sup>3</sup> Brenda Goodman, "Alcohol's Healthy Halo Dims as Study Finds Drinking May Be Harmful for Older Adults, Even at Low Levels," CNN Health, August 14, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/14/health/alcohol-drinking-health-wellness/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> The CCSA report was accessed at [https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA\\_Canadas\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Alcohol\\_and\\_Health\\_Final\\_Report\\_en.pdf](https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA_Canadas_Guidance_on_Alcohol_and_Health_Final_Report_en.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Rosario Ortola et al, "Alcohol Consumption Patterns and Mortality Among Older Adults with Health-Related or Socioeconomic Risk Factors" *JAMA Network Open* 7.8 (2024): e2424495, August 12, 2024, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2822215>.

Ben Hicks

For years, most Christians didn't seriously consider using drugs. American culture as a whole strongly opposed them through both legislation and resistance programs like DARE. In such an environment, most Christians were happy to follow the trajectory of culture. But things are changing. In 2014, Colorado became the first state where recreational marijuana was legal. As of today, it is now legal in twenty-four states, and a 2024 study found the majority of Americans live in a state where they can legally buy the drug.<sup>1</sup> Within one decade marijuana went from being illegal everywhere in the US to being legal for over half of Americans.

Suddenly the question of whether a young believer can light up a joint and take a puff has become a live issue. Yet in some ways this is merely a new angle on an old debate. Before drugs was the question of alcohol. Coming out of the Prohibition era, churches almost universally agreed that alcohol was evil and no one should touch it. Now churches have "Beer and Bible Studies." The argument that was used then is the argument some would no doubt like to use now: "I have the Christian liberty to do this."

Does the Bible teach this? Of course, the Bible teaches that we have liberty in Christ, but what does that mean? Does my freedom in Christ mean that I can down a glass of wine or smoke weed? Wouldn't forbidding other Christians to use drugs or alcohol be legalism? To answer these questions, we need to look at what the Bible says about Christian liberty. Once we have a better understanding of what Christian liberty is and what it is not, then we can look at the specific question of how Christians should think about such substances.

### WHAT CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS

When we talk about Christian liberty, we need to start with this question: "What are we free from?" Scripture answers this question in two ways. First, we are free from the law as a means of salvation. In the first century, false teachers had come to newly converted Gentiles and told them they needed to start living like Jews if they

wanted to follow the Jewish Messiah. They argued that salvation meant trusting in Jesus and following the Old Testament law. But Paul was adamant that salvation was only through faith in Jesus. Adding anything to Jesus results in a different gospel entirely (Gal. 1:6–9).

Second, and more relevant for our discussion, we are free from standards of holiness that others might seek to impose on us. We call this individual soul liberty, the doctrine that all of us will give an account before God for our own actions. Paul dealt with this issue in Romans 14:1–15:7, where Christians disagreed about whether they should eat meat and whether they should observe certain holy days. Here Paul is once again clear that we are free in Christ, and that freedom should be exercised in a way that leads to greater unity in the church. Those with stricter convictions should not judge those with freer consciences, and those who have fewer convictions should not look down on those who are more careful. This liberty is a great gift to believers, and one that should be guarded carefully and used well.

### WHAT CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS NOT

When talking about Christian liberty, we need to note carefully that this does not merely mean we can do whatever we want. Paul told the Corinthians that when he was with Gentiles he did not observe the Jewish laws, but he quickly clarified that statement: "To them that are without law, [I became] as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)" (1 Cor. 9:21). Put simply, Christian liberty does not mean you can disobey God's Word. As a somewhat obvious example, you cannot have an affair and then tell your pastor, "What? Am I not free in Christ to do what I want?" Before we enter into a discussion about drugs and alcohol, then, we must first ask if there are any clear, unambiguous commands from Scripture about this issue that we must obey.

Ephesians 5:18 gives us one such command. Here we are told, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess [debauchery]; but be filled with the Spirit." This verse gives us a straightforward command—do not get drunk. Following this simple command are two reasons behind the

# Christian Liberty, Drugs, and Alcohol

command. First, drunkenness leads to sinful living, or debauchery. Those who drink will have their inhibitions lowered, and as a result they will be more likely to break God's laws and say and do foolish, sinful, harmful things. But the second reason is that being drunk means the alcohol is in control, and as believers we are supposed to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. According to Scripture, either the alcohol is in control, or God is in control, but it can't be both at the same time.

This is why drunkenness is different from gluttony. Both gluttony and drunkenness are the result of a lack of self-control. But fathers don't go home and hit their wives and children after eating too much cake. For this reason, the debate over drugs is different from the debate over alcohol. Christians will sometimes argue, "I drink but not enough to get drunk." It's hard to see someone saying, "I smoke pot but not enough to get high." Since the entire point of taking drugs is to alter the mind, this would be a pretty clear violation of Ephesians 5:18. On that basis we can say that Christians do not have the liberty to use mind-altering drugs for fun.

## HOW I SHOULD USE CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

But what about alcohol? And what if someone wants to be stubborn and argue that they are still in control when high or that Ephesians 5:18 doesn't apply for some reason? Does the Bible say anything else about our Christian liberty, or does it merely instruct us not to break direct commands of Scripture while leaving us free to do what we want otherwise? When it comes to the Bible's teaching on Christian liberty, we find both a warning and a goal. One verse that includes both of these is Galatians 5:13: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." This verse includes a warning that we should not use our Christian liberty to feed our sinful flesh, but rather that we make it our goal to serve other Christians.

The warning we find here contains a truth that perhaps seems paradoxical:

"liberty in Christ" can be disastrous for your spiritual health. Unfortunately, much that goes under the guise of Christian liberty is simply rebellion against God's laws, yet this is nothing new. Paul here describes it as using liberty as an opportunity to indulge the flesh. Jude called it twisting the grace of God into sensuality (Jude 4). There is a real danger that Christians engage in harmful behaviors that feed their flesh and destroy their spiritual walk, all the while insisting on and parading their freedom in Christ.

How do we keep this from happening? Three principles from 1 Corinthians can help guide our thinking in this area. Paul was writing to Christians who were arguing they could visit prostitutes and eat sacred meat that had been offered to an idol. While Paul would go on to clearly forbid both activities (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14), he also tried to help the Corinthians think rightly about the whole concept of Christian liberty. In 6:12 and 10:23 he uses the brief expression "all things are lawful for me." Likely this was the attitude of the Corinthians—"I can do what I want!" But Paul teaches that while there is freedom in Christ, we need to ask some serious questions before we participate in something. In these two verses we find three statements that help us think carefully about our freedom in Christ: "not all things are expedient," "I will not be brought under the power of any," and "all things edify not."

These three brief qualifications to the general Corinthian attitude are very insightful. First, not everything is personally helpful. There is nothing in Scripture that says I cannot stay up until three in the morning scrolling through social media on my phone, but that isn't going to be helpful in my Christian walk. Next we see that Scripture warns against addictive behaviors. While this principle is broader than just the use of drugs or alcohol, it certainly applies to this issue. According to the Bible, if you can't stop, you shouldn't start. Finally, we are reminded that we need to consider the impact our actions will have on others. Not everything builds up other Christians. And that brings us back to the goal of Christian liberty: to serve others. Paul had said not to

use liberty as an occasion for the flesh, but this will naturally happen when we forget why we are given liberty in the first place. Our freedom in Christ should help us better love and serve God and others. Many people think of Christian liberty as the freedom to do what they want. What they fail to realize is that your Christian liberty isn't about you, it's about you better serving others!

These considerations lead to hard questions. Would drinking or using recreational drugs show love to my neighbor? Would it lead to greater Christlikeness in my life and help other Christians love and serve Christ better? It is true that the Bible warns in the harshest terms against adding to Christ's explicit commands, and we must take these warnings incredibly seriously. But the Bible also clarifies that Christian liberty doesn't allow us to disobey God's Word, such as the command to avoid having our thinking hijacked by chemicals. The Bible warns us that if we aren't careful, our "freedom" could actually feed our flesh, and it teaches that our liberty is given to us for a reason: to better love God and others. And, of course, there is the principle we find at the end of Paul's discussion of immorality and idolatry in 1 Corinthians: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The real question, then, is not "Can I smoke weed or drink?" The real questions are these: "What best serves others?," "What best sets me up for spiritual success?," and "What best brings God glory?"

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<sup>1</sup> Athena Chapekis and Sono Shah, "Most Americans Now Live in a Legal Marijuana State—and Most Have at Least One Dispensary in Their County," Pew Research Center, February 29, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/29/most-americans-now-live-in-a-legal-marijuana-state-and-most-have-at-least-one-dispensary-in-their-county/>.

## BOOK REVIEW: Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave

**A**ddictions are primarily a worship disorder. As Welch puts it, “Will we worship ourselves and our own desires, or will we worship the true God?”

*Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* is part of the series Resources for Changing Lives prepared by The Christian Counseling and Education Foundation and has been published by P&R Publishing. Edward T. Welch is a licensed counselor and faculty member at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation. He has a PhD from the University of Utah and an MDiv from Biblical Theological Seminary. Dr. Welch has been in the counseling ministry for over thirty-five years and has written several books and articles on biblical counseling.

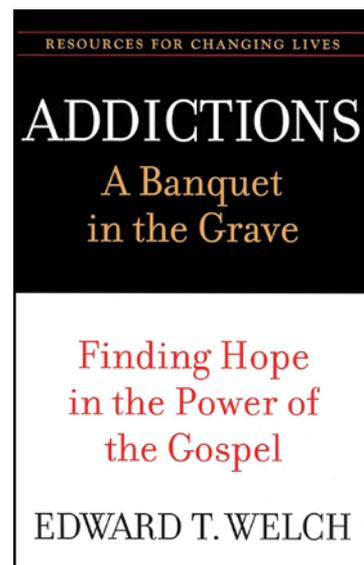
This book is written for people struggling with addictions and for those who help them. Dr. Welch encourages his readers to start by thinking about themselves. “Preachers must preach to themselves before preaching to others. Counselors are always counselees.” He acknowledges that this book will focus on drugs and alcohol, which he calls the “prototypic addictions,” yet will also illustrate using other sins that are not so easily cast off. In contrast to the standard disease model, the book finds the ultimate cause of addiction to be a soul/sin issue, not primarily a body issue. While Dr. Welch is not alone in championing a more biblically based view, his work is valuable in striving toward an exegetically based counseling model. The conclusion of each chapter includes help for the reader’s own addictive patterns and suggestions for helping others.

Dr. Welch presents his work in two sections: Thinking Theologically and Essential Theological Themes. The first part covers approximately one quarter of the book. The first chapter covers the disjunction between what people think they believe and what their actions reveal about what they believe. Describing a hypothetical counselee, Welch

summarizes, “His real beliefs—the ones that were the actual moral rudder of his life—preferred to stay hidden below the surface.” When this happens, the struggling sinner thinks he believes one thing but is actually controlled by a different belief system. Participating in any pattern of sin teaches us to believe a lie. The cumulative effect of believing the lie and practicing self-indulgent behavior results in the feeling that we are out of control—the feelings and patterns of addiction.

In his next chapter, Dr. Welch carefully discusses addictions as they relate to sin, sickness, or both. Sin, he insists, is our deepest problem. “If sin is not our primary problem, then the gospel of Jesus is no longer the most important event in human history.” Using drunkenness as a case study, Welch demonstrates that in Scripture, drunkenness is always called sin and never called a sickness.<sup>1</sup> “Drunkenness,” he insists, “is a lordship problem. Who is your master, God or your desires? Do you desire God above all else, or do you desire something in creation more than you desire the Creator?” He skillfully answers objections raised by people who struggle with addictions, acknowledging that we can be influenced differently from within but denying that this influence implies determination. He helpfully notes distinctions in the cravings people experience at different stages of temptation. At the same time, he refuses to minimize the addict’s struggle, acknowledging that addiction is simultaneously a “pitiably slavery and overt rebelliousness and selfishness.”

In his third chapter, “New Ways of Seeing,” Dr. Welch presents pictures of the addiction experience: idolatry, adultery, foolishness, being attacked by a beast, and disease. Most of the chapter is dedicated to the picture of idolatry—desiring something in the creation more than we desire the Creator. The purpose of our idolatry is to serve something that will ultimately serve



our desires. When these desires serve the body, they provide some benefit that keeps us returning for more. Welch goes on to illustrate that the desire is initially fulfilled, but as we continue to meet the dictates of our desires, we are left increasingly unsatisfied and driven to fulfill those desires in more significant ways. The final picture, disease, is presented not in terms of the current disease model but by appealing to the Scriptures that picture the enslavement and infection of the whole man.

The final chapter in part 1 demonstrates in practical ways the descent into addiction and idolatry. This chapter also provides help for family members of those traveling the downward path.

The second part of the book presents eight relevant theological themes. While the book’s first part is intentionally exegetical, the second is deliberately practical. Welch begins by helping the reader speak the truth in love. Since people struggling with addictive behaviors rarely self-confess, Dr. Welch provides practical, seasoned counsel to help evaluate the changes that occur in work, relationships, health, and spiritual vitality. He also describes some drug paraphernalia for those who have minimal background with illegal drugs. After encouraging us to prepare spiritually, he offers practical guidance for confronting—even differentiating between spouse and child. The chapter concludes with a helpful understanding of proper interventions, giving practical help on how to conduct an intervention with suggestions of consequences should the intervention be rejected.

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From there, he moves the discussion to the practical ways we should engage in conversation. Dr. Welch contrasts the counselee's environment (the external circumstances that may have led to certain life choices) with the desires from within. He suggests several questions that help people see what is inside them: (1) What do you want? (2) What is your purpose in life? (3) What or whom do you really love? (4) When do you get most sad and depressed? (5) When do you get hopeless? (6) What brings you the most pleasure? (7) What is your dream? (8) What do you want to be remembered for? (9) What do you especially want to avoid?

The following two chapters focus on knowing the Lord and the fear of the Lord. "Here is where a biblical approach to addiction must radically depart from all other recovery strategies. . . . Change starts, proceeds, and ends with Jesus. We look to Jesus and away from ourselves." He addresses how common it is to recreate God in the image of our imaginations. Welch contrasts God's unconditional love with today's replacement, unconditional acceptance. A helpful recommendation is to insert the word *holy* before any discussion of the attributes of God. God's love is holy love. God's justice is holy justice. Another helpful insight addresses the desire for instant change: "But notice the one practical advantage of the daily battle. It teaches us to cry out to him and rely on him instead of ourselves—or our addictive substance." As he changes the focus to the fear of the Lord, Dr. Welch observes, "Imagine having temptations lose their allure because there is more pleasure in walking humbly with our God." The sinner's experience of forgiveness relates directly to his understanding of the fear of the Lord. Dr. Welch lists nine practical reasons that people struggling with sin do not comprehend forgiveness. While acknowledging that there is no one all-encompassing definition of the fear of the Lord, Welch offers the following three elements that should appear in every definition: (1) The fear of the Lord is a son or daughter's response to the divine Father's holiness. (2) The fear of the Lord is our total response to God, going further than intellectual understanding. (3) The fear of the Lord expresses itself in responsive, reverential, and joyful action.

Addictive sin is usually accompanied by and encouraged through deception. Satan

wants us to think that everything is okay. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5b). Yet "men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19b). Dr. Welch lists behaviors that we or our brother may exhibit that reflect deception.<sup>2</sup> Before focusing on specific lies, he highlights two areas of special note: blame-shifting and self-deception. The three common lies he discusses are (1) God is not good; (2) I am good but occasionally do bad things; (3) Idols are harmless.

Because sin is pleasurable and the fleeting nature of pleasure demands the need for more, we must cultivate self-control. Cravings are spiritual problems, even though they possess physical ramifications. His chapter on self-control skillfully defines what it is and how to develop it. "The basic idea," he writes, "is that we must cultivate the skill of living a thoughtful, careful life in which we do what is right despite our desire." Yet Welch does not expect self-control to be cultivated apart from grace. "Scripture never expects us to hear God's command *to* us in isolation from serious contemplation of God's work *for* us in Christ."<sup>3</sup>

The final chapters cover seeing progressive sanctification as warfare and the necessity of immersing oneself in the church. Instead of offering the false hope of immediate victory, Welch presents the honest path of progressive sanctification.

Whatever the types of sin struggles you face, this work will help you engage in warfare against persistent sins. As a resource for helping you help others fight addictive sins, this book will help you think clearly, biblically, and practically to aid you in the work.

**Robert Condict** pastors Heartland Baptist Church in Marysville, Ohio. God has graciously given him thirty-three years of pastoral ministry.



<sup>1</sup> He also makes the same case for thievery, greed, sexual immorality, and selfish ambition (p. 23).

<sup>2</sup> Hiding, sneaking, blaming, manipulating, avoiding, being silent, changing the subject, rationalizing, and giving your word but not doing it. This list is not exhaustive but does help us recognize deception in ourselves and others.

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis belongs to the author.

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## News From All Over



On July 28, 2024, **Randy David** stepped down as senior pastor of Pear Park Baptist Church in Grand Junction, Colorado. Pastor David served at the same church for forty-two years. The church has been left

in the capable hands of interim pastor Glenn Gardner, who oversees the ministries of the church, school, and radio station KCIC 88.5 FM. The Davids have relocated to Taylors, South Carolina. Pastor David has been filling the pulpit for Lighthouse Baptist Church in Newberry, South Carolina.

On Sunday, August 18, 2024, **Terry Hamilton** transitioned from Senior Pastor to Pastor Emeritus of Friendship Baptist Church. His assistant for the last seventeen years was unanimously called by the church as the new senior pastor. Terry and his wife Nancy have been at Friendship for thirty-five years. In his new position, Terry directs all the music, preaches on Wednesday nights, and substitutes for the new senior pastor when he is gone. Both Terry and Nancy are discipling numerous couples in marriage and parenting. Nancy is continuing as church secretary indefinitely, teaching a parenting class for young mothers on Wednesday nights, and counseling young teen girls and college-age women. At this time, they are praying about what God would have them do in the future. They are very thankful for the opportunity to continue ministering at their church. They are blessed to have six wonderful adult children and fourteen amazing grandchildren.



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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)*

### A Lifting Up in the Case of Great Sins

As we continue on into the early months of the new year, I want to alert you to a book of comfort and wonderful reassurance. To arouse some hopefulness in someone who may be struggling with chronic discouragement, let me urge you to pause for a long minute to reflect upon the wording of the title: *A Lifting Up for the Downcast*.

Are you *downcast*? Is your wife *downcast*? Are people in your church? What do the words, *a lifting up*, suggest? Do you need one? Is it even possible in a case like yours? Or your wife’s? Or your church’s?

If the answers to those questions expose despondency or feelings of hopelessness, I want to strongly encourage you to read this column and then to order your own copy of *A Lifting Up for the Downcast* from Amazon or from Reformation Heritage Books. Be sure that you’re ordering the Banner of Truth edition. The cover picture itself may recalibrate your perspective if you’ll reflect upon it for a moment, comparing it with your own circumstances.

This title is by William Bridge (1600–1671), one of an upper echelon of really skillful Puritan “physicians of the soul.” Let me give you a sampling of topics in the five volumes of his *Works*, reprinted by both Soli Deo Gloria (1989) and Banner of Truth (2022).

- Satan’s Power to Tempt and Christ’s Love to and Care of His People Under Temptation
- The Spiritual Life and In-being of Christ in All Believers

- The Spiritual Actings of Faith Through Natural Impossibilities
- The Great Things Faith Can Suffer
- Seasonable Truths in Evil Times
- The Sinfulness of Sin and the Fulness of Christ
- The Wounded Conscience Cured and the Weak One Strengthened

The title that I’m highlighting here consists of thirteen sermons Bridge preached on Psalm 42:11—*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God*. True to normative Puritan homiletics, Bridge explicated the text within its context, though he delayed expanding upon it until the opening of chapter 3.

He assumes that David has written the psalm for the Sons of Korah, and then he notes the various factors which David describes as having the effect of weighing down even a true believer’s soul. Bridge observes that even though one might no longer be able to gather with God’s people for worship (4), and though his enemies taunt him that his God is nowhere to be found (3, 10), and though he himself has sunk so low that he questions whether God remembers him (9)—though all these things may be true—yet still David chides himself, *Why art thou cast down?* Bridge concludes, *The words speak plainly this truth: a godly, gracious man has no Scripture reason for his discouragements, whatever his condition be* (48). He goes on: *I dare boldly challenge all men to shew me any one condition for which God has not provided a promise of comfort, mercy and succour suitable unto it* (51).

Well, actually, almost any believer in Old Testament times or living today can think of many possible reasons

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for sometimes being almost completely destabilized spiritually. Bridge anticipated nine of those, and he preached nine messages in order to answer each one scripturally, methodically, and conclusively. The first he titled, “A Lifting up in the Case of Great Sins.” It’s over twenty-five pages long in the Banner of Truth paperback, but I trust that the edited section that I’ll include here may be sufficient for a bracing “lifting up” of some dispirited minister today.

Bridge begins his argument by recognizing that *sometimes the discouragements of the saints and people of God are drawn from their sins, their greater and grosser sins, so that the peace and quiet of the saints and people of God is many times interrupted.* He voices the despairing perspective of such Christians: *Were my heart good, my life good, my conversation good, I would not be discouraged. But as for me, I have committed and do commit such and such great sins. Don’t I have reason, and just reason for now being discouraged?* Bridge responds with a long series of heartening, scriptural considerations, beginning with an emphatic denial.

*Well, actually, almost any believer in Old Testament times or living today can think of many possible reasons for sometimes being almost completely destabilized spiritually. Bridge anticipated nine of those, and he preached nine messages in order to answer each one scripturally, methodically, and conclusively.*

No, for discouragement itself is a sin, another sin, a gospel sin. My sin against the law is no just reason that I should sin against the gospel.

I confess, indeed, that there is much evil in every sin. The least sin is worse than the greatest affliction. In some respects the sins of the godly are worse than the sins of others. They grieve the Spirit more, they dishonor Christ more, they grieve the saints more, they wound the name of God more, they are more against the love and grace and favor of God than other men’s sins are. And yet, though there be so much evil in the sins of God’s people, they have no reason, no just cause or scriptural reason to be cast down and to be discouraged. But how may this be shown?

First, God’s people know that they will never be condemned for their sin, whatever it be. *There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). Christ was made sin for them. If Christ was made sin for

me, then my sin will never hurt me. It does not agree with the justice of God to exact the payment of one debt twice. The Lord Jesus Christ has not only been arrested, but has been in jail for the debt of the saints. And He has paid it to the utmost penny. He has paid it better than they could have paid it themselves if they had gone to Hell. For if a man had gone to Hell and been damned forever, he would have been always paying. Yet the payment would never have been completed. But Christ paid it all at once. And if you look into Scripture you will find that the Lord does not condemn a man, no not even a wicked man, barely for the act of his former sin, but because he will not turn from it (Psalm 7:11–12). Now there is always in the saints a turning disposition. Although they do sin against God, there is always, I say, a turning disposition in them. Therefore the Lord will not discharge the instruments of death upon them.

Second, just as godly men will never be condemned for their sins, so their sins will never part God from them. Their sins may hide God’s face. But as their sins did not hinder God and them from coming together at the first, so their sins shall never part God from them. Their sins may cause a strangeness between God and them, but they will never cause an enmity. The people of God are in covenant with Him. They are under His gracious covenant. Therefore, though the mountains may be removed, God’s mercy will never be removed from them.

Thirdly, the very sins of God’s people, through the overruling hand of grace, will be an occasion for more grace and comfort for them than they ever had in all their lives before. God never permits his people to fall into any sin except that He intends to make that sin an inlet for further grace and comfort. You can see this in the very first great sin that ever was committed: Adam’s fall. It was after this that the Lord Himself came and preached the gospel. He preached Christ unto this fallen man.

Sin does not gain, but is a loser by every fall of the godly. God never permits any of His people to fall into any sin, but that He has a design that by that fall He may break the back of that sin.

But you may say, *What if a man’s sins be such as were never pardoned before? Truly that is my case. I have sinned a great sin, and I do not read in all the Word of God of any example to show than ever such a sin as mine has been pardoned?*

I ask, *What do you think of Adam?* Adam sinned a great sin. The Lord Himself came and preached the gospel to him: *The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.* Should Adam then have said, *Oh, but there is no hope for me, for I have no example or precedent of pardon?* Adam could not have an example of any who had been pardoned before him, because he was the first man, and the first who had sinned. Should he have sat down and been discouraged because he could not find any example for the pardon of a similar sin?

You know what our Savior, Christ, said. *Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost.* Does not your sin come within the compass of these words? Surely it does.

But you may say, *Suppose that a man has sinned greatly against his conscience, or against his light, or against his knowledge? Does he not then have a just reason to be cast down and quite discouraged?*

No, not if there is a sacrifice for such a sin as this. He has cause to be humbled, but no reason to be discouraged. In the times of the Old Testament there was sacrifice, not only for sin committed ignorantly, but also for sin committed against light and against conscience. And I appeal to you, whoever you are that make this objection, do you not think that Peter, in denying his Lord and Master, sinned against his conscience, against his light, and against his knowledge? Surely then there is no reason that a man should be thoroughly discouraged.

But you may say, *Suppose that a man's sins be exceedingly great, gross, and heinous?*

Though your sin is great, is not God's mercy great? Is not the satisfaction made by Christ great? Are the merits of Christ blood small? Is not God, the great God of heaven and earth, able to do great things? Will you rob God of His almightiness in pardoning? You say your sin is great, but is it infinite? Is not God alone infinite? Is your sin as big as God, as big as Christ? Is Jesus Christ a mediator for only small sins? Will you bring down the satisfaction of Christ and the mercy of God to your own small model? Has not the Lord said concerning pardoning mercy, that His thoughts are not as our thoughts, but as the heavens are greater than the earth, so are His thoughts (in this respect) beyond our thoughts? Look at what David says in Psalm 25:11. *For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my*

*iniquity, for it is great.* If David used this reason, then you may also.

But suppose you say, *I have sinned greatly, and now I cannot be humbled enough, I cannot repent enough.*

But what if the Lord wills for your humiliation to come by degrees? If you were greatly humbled at present, it might be with you as it has been with others; that you would never think of your sins afterward. But it may be that the Lord wishes for this work of humiliation to work long upon your soul. He does not give it to you all at once. Or it may be that if you had great humiliation now you would think in the future that it was for your humiliation that you have been accepted by God. If you are kept from this danger by your lack of a high degree of humiliation, and so are trained to prize the Lord's free grace, do you have any cause to complain?

Also, it may be that if you had great humiliation at present you would have less fear in your heart. Gracious fear is as good as humiliation. God is not pleased with grief for grief's sake. The purpose of all of our sorrow and grief is to embitter our sin to us and to make us prize Jesus Christ. In the language of the New Testament, repentance is called an "after-wisdom," an "after-mind." Now though you be not humbled unto the degree which you desire, has not the Lord given you an after-wisdom? Do you not say concerning your sin, *Oh, I would not repeat that sin for all the world?* This is the way it is with the servants and people of God. Though they may not be as humbled as they desire, yet notwithstanding they are to a degree humbled, to a degree grieved; enough that their sins are embittering. Thereby they are weaned from the delights and pleasures of the world, and also convinced of the evil of their sin.

*But should not a godly, gracious man be fully grieved and humbled for his sin?*

Grieved, humbled for his sin? Yes, surely. Though the Lord, through the overruling hand of His grace, works ever so much good out of my sin and to me, yet I am to be humbled for it; especially because he works good out of it. Many poor ignorant souls, when they see how the Lord by His overruling hand works good unto them out of their sin, do not repent of their sin, but rather justify themselves in it. But now take a godly man, a gracious soul; the more he sees the Lord working good out of his sin, the more he is humbled for it.

You will say, then, *But what is the difference between a man's being humbled and his*

*being discouraged?* It is a profitable question, and worth our time.

When a man is truly humbled the object of his grief or sorrow is sin itself as a dishonor done unto God. But the object of discouragement is a man's own condition. When the man is discouraged, you will always find that his trouble is all about his own condition. But when a man is grieved and truly humbled, his trouble is about sin itself.

To clear this by Scripture, you know that Cain was discouraged. But Cain was not humbled. He was just troubled about his condition. *Ah, says he, my punishment is greater than I can bear.* On the other side, the poor prodigal was humbled, but not discouraged. His trouble was about his sin. *I will return unto my father (says he), and I will say unto him, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of the hired servants."*

If you look into the 51st Psalm, you will find David humbled but not discouraged. All the time his eye is upon his sin, and not upon his condition only.

True humiliation is no enemy, but a real friend and a spiritual joy. The more a man is humbled for sin committed, the more he will rejoice in God, and rejoice that he can grieve for sin. He grieves, and rejoices that he can grieve for sin.

Let Christians carry this rule always up and down with them: namely, that a man is to be humbled for his sin, although it be ever so small, but he is not to be discouraged for his sin, though it be ever so great. Both these parts are true. A man is not to be discouraged under his sin though it be ever so great. Discouragement itself is a sin, and it cannot help against sin. On the other hand, a man is to be humbled for his sin though it be ever so small, for it is a dishonor to God, and little sins make way to great sins. So then, if you would be humbled and not discouraged, carry this rule up and down with you, and remember it upon all occasions: *It is my duty, and I have reason to be humbled for my sin, although it be ever so small. But I have no reason to be discouraged under my sin, though it be ever so great.*

In all your humiliation be sure that you never part or separate those things that God has joined together. God has joined commandment and promise together. The promise and the commandment are born twins.

If you look upon the commandment itself without the promise then you will despair. If

you look upon the promise without the commandment, then you will presume. But look upon promise and commandment together, then you will be humbled if you have sinned, but you will not be discouraged.

The Lord, you know, has given two eyes to man. If a man should put out one and say, *I can see well enough with the other. What need have I of two?* he would be greatly mistaken. So for the soul, the Lord has given two eyes, if I may so speak. The eye of conscience, which is to look upon God's commandment; and the eye of faith, which is to look upon God's promise. If any man says, *I will put out the eye of faith. I can see God's commandment well enough with the eye of conscience,* he does ill; very ill. And if a man says, *I will put out the eye of conscience, for I can see well enough with the eye of faith,* he does very ill.

Whenever you find you have sinned against any commandment, immediately ask, *Where is the promise? I may not look upon the commandment without the promise.* Join both together, and you will not be discouraged, even though you will be humbled.

In all your humiliation take heed that you do not mourn for your sin only in order to remedy your condition. But rather, mourn over your condition in order to remedy your sin.

When you come to humiliation, how do you present God to your soul? Do you present him as a Judge only, or as a Father also? Do you present the Lord into your soul only under the notion or attribute of His greatness, or under the notion and attribute of His goodness also? I know that you will say that you cannot always present the Lord unto your soul under the notion of a Father, because you have no assurance of His love. Yet you may consider the Lord as gracious in Himself, as good in Himself, and loving in Himself. And although you have thus and thus sinned against Him as a gracious God, and have no assurance of His love to you in particular, yet if you can present God to your soul under the notion of His general goodness, as good in Himself, you will never be discouraged, though you be humbled.

Now what is the great sin, the fountain sin, the head sin of all your sins? It is unbelief. But he is never far from faith who is humbled for his unbelief, and he will never be discouraged who is not far from faith.

---

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

## More Books for a Deserted Island

*Note: Contributors were asked to identify five books they would choose if they were marooned on a deserted island.*

I read for both my own spiritual enrichment and the enrichment of the sheep the Lord has entrusted to me. The deserted island scenario seems to take those sheep out of the equation. However, I know very well that a minister can feel as if he is stranded on an island even while serving in a very busy and demanding ministry. A servant of the Lord can sometimes feel emotionally and spiritually stranded. So, for those on a desert island in an ocean of ministry, I would like to introduce five books that can serve as an oasis of encouragement and blessing.

***The Suffering Letters of C. H. Spurgeon.*** Even the “Prince of Preachers” was not immune to hardships. This small book is an anthology of letters that Spurgeon wrote during years of great struggle. The book’s first entry begins, “Mysterious are the visitations of sickness. When the Lord is using a man for his glory it is remarkable that he should suddenly smite him down and suspend his usefulness. It must be right, but the reason for it does not lie near the surface.” He concludes, “‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him’ shall be our one unvarying determination, and may the eternal Spirit work in us a perfect acquiescence in the whole will of God, whatever that may be.” The book is divided into groups of letters to his congregation from three periods of great struggle for Spurgeon. During the first period (1876–1883) he made repeated trips to the European continent in the hope that the coastal climates of France and Italy would improve his condition. From 1884–1890 his physical suffering was exacerbated by a controversy within the Baptist Union where many were denying major tenants of orthodoxy. The stress of these years seemed to intensify his physical ailments. The last year of his life (1891–1892) features letters that display how a suffering, weak servant sought to minister faithfully and tenderly to those the Lord had entrusted to him. They call the reader to contemplate his response to the suffering the Lord allows his servants to experience.

***The Trellis and the Vine,*** by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne. The trellis in this book refers to those tasks in a ministry that are not actually directly related to discipleship ministry. Vine work, on the other hand, refers to the tasks of working with people, evangelizing and discipling them. The book exposes the problem of allowing the trellis work to distract the minister from tending to the vine itself. In a day when programs, buildings, and media are tools often used in ministry, there is a danger that the Lord’s laborers become so overwhelmed with “trellis work”

that no time or energy is left for “vine work.” This book calls for a necessary change of mindset in several areas of ministry. It encourages one to focus on the “vines” in the Lord’s vineyard and to spend energy on that which will have eternal fruit.

***Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions,*** by John Piper. Romans 15:9 declares the ultimate purpose for Christ’s coming as a servant: “that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” John Piper presents this ultimate purpose as the fuel that drives ministry. He writes, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. . . . Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions.” He then calls us to a life of consecrated worship that drives us to remain faithful in our ministering. Although this book is written with global missions in mind, it is very encouraging for all in ministry to remember the ultimate goal. This goal is accomplished through the salvation of lost souls and discipleship, but the ultimate goal is not solely to provide a “fire escape” for lost people. The ultimate goal is the glory of God. And this passion to glorify God will keep the flame of ministry kindled.

***An Earnest Ministry: The Want of the Times,*** by John Angell James. The title of this book may lead one to believe that the writer is a contemporary author. However, the book was first published in 1847. This book is a fountain from which the minister should drink. *An Earnest Ministry* calls for a revitalization of those ministering, both in their own lives and in their service to the Lord. James references such giants of ministry as Baxter, Whitefield, and Edwards to exemplify what earnest ministry looks like. The book reminds us of the necessity of fighting against lethargy and being superficial in our work.

***Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry,*** by Paul David Tripp. Discouragement can often be rooted in the minister’s private life and his skewed view of the God he is serving. Tripp’s book helps the reader recognize and avoid pitfalls in ministry. The book is divided into three parts. In part 1, the culture of pastoral work is examined. Next, two critical dangers for the minister are addressed: (1) forgetting who God is (the danger of losing your awe), and (2) forgetting who you are (the danger of arriving). The book is written by a pastor to pastors. But it is profitable for anyone who is facing discouragement and disenchantment while striving to serve the Lord. It is a helpful challenge for faithful servants to evaluate their mindset and adjust their thinking.

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Stephen King is a missionary church planter in Gotha, Germany.

## 1 Corinthians 12:13—Who Baptized You?

Does the Holy Spirit baptize believers into Christ? The key proof text is 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*—implying that the Spirit is the one doing the baptizing. This translation is shared by the KJV, NKJV, HCSB, NASB, and NIV (but not ESV or NET).

John the Baptist drew an analogy between his baptizing in/with water and Messiah’s baptizing in/with the Holy Spirit: *I indeed baptize you with [en] water unto [eis] repentance: but . . . he shall baptize you with [en] the Holy Ghost* (Matt. 3:11; cf. Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). According to John, (a) Christ would be the baptizer, not the Spirit; and (b) the element in which Christ will baptize will not be water but the Spirit. John the Baptist also explained the sign by which he would recognize the Christ as *he which baptizeth with [en] the Holy Ghost* (John 1:33). All four Gospels create an explicit expectation of Christ as the coming baptizer, and the element in which He baptizes is not water but the Spirit.

Jesus confirms that expectation in Acts 1:5—*For John truly baptized with water [hudati]; but ye shall be baptized with [en] the Holy Ghost not many days hence*. In this statement, Jesus leaves the baptizer unspecified; but He echoes John’s statement that the element paralleling the water in John’s baptism is the Spirit. If the element of baptism is the Spirit, then the baptizer is not the Spirit but Christ—exactly as John the Baptist predicted.

Peter echoes the same conception in Acts 2:17 and 33: *And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out [ekcheō] of my Spirit upon all flesh: . . . Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he [Christ] hath shed forth [ekcheō] this, which ye now see and hear*. Whatever else you do with the “pouring out” of the Spirit, and whether you make this identical to or simultaneous with the baptism prophesied by John (Matt. 3:11) and promised by Christ (Acts 1:5), Peter insists that Christ was the one doing the baptizing.

Peter later confirms this linkage in relating the conversion of Gentile believers at Cornelius’s house: *And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord [Acts 1:5], how that he said, John indeed baptized with water [hudati]; but ye shall be baptized with [en] the Holy Ghost* (Acts 11:15–16).

This is the understanding that Paul confirms in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The only translation that is consistent with John the Baptist (Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1) and Jesus (Acts 1) and Peter (Acts 3, 11) is: “For in/with [en] one

Spirit were we all baptized [by Christ] into [eis] one body.” If one interprets the Spirit as the baptizer here, then what do we do with John’s prediction and Jesus’s own confirmation that Christ Himself would be the baptizer? If the Spirit is the baptizer in this passage, then we have an entirely new and unpredicted teaching while, at the same time, a repeated prediction and expectation about Jesus as the baptizer is left unexplained and unfulfilled.

Doesn’t the *into one body* signify the element? First, *eis* is not the preposition used to designate the element in any of the above references that predict this spiritual reality; the element is always designated by the preposition *en* (or the dative of “water”). Second, Friberg’s *Analytical Greek Lexicon* lists a use of *eis* that best fits all the other data we have: it denotes “a specific goal, the direction of an action to an intended end *to, unto, for, with a view to*.” The *into* in 1 Corinthians 12:13 signifies our resulting identification or association with the body of Christ. In light of the background context for this statement in the Gospels and Acts, this verse indicates that the baptizer is Christ and the element is the Spirit, with the resulting identification that we are now part of one body (cf. 12:12, 20).

Other pertinent passages are consistent with this sense of identification as well. Paul says that we who *were baptized into [eis] Jesus Christ were baptized into [eis] his death* (Rom. 6:3). Again, the *into* signifies not the element but our *identification* or *union* with Christ in His death. A consistent exegetical hermeneutic would imply that *into Jesus Christ* is shorthand for the body of Christ. Likewise, in Galatians 3:27 (*For as many of you as have been baptized into [eis] Christ have put on Christ*), *into Christ* is shorthand for the body of Christ; the *into* signifies identification or union with Christ.

Baptist and dispensationalist theologian Gregg Allison states that “Jesus Christ baptizes . . . new believers with the Holy Spirit, thereby incorporating them into the body of Christ” (*Sojourners and Strangers*, 117). I would define “Spirit baptism” as the act in regeneration of Christ baptizing believers in/with the Holy Spirit thereby identifying and placing us in union with the body of Christ. Based on the exegetical data above, the textual and theological basis for holding that the Spirit baptizes believers into the body of Christ may be worth reexamining.

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**Layton Talbert** is professor of theology and biblical exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

## Forgiveness: The Oil of Life

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter’s night. He said, “The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth’s winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness.”<sup>1</sup>



None of us are exempt from the uncomfortable pokes of others. In our broken world there is no shortage of harsh words, insensitive actions, or the outright unkindness of others. Pokes by other human beings, even those closest to you, are a part of life. How do you live in such a world? You can choose frigid isolation in an attempt to insulate yourself from the harm of others or you can choose forgiveness!

It is widely recognized that the presence or absence of forgiveness has a major impact on our physical health. “Practicing forgiveness can have powerful health benefits. Observational studies, and even some randomized trials, suggest that forgiveness is associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and hostility, reduced substance abuse, higher self-esteem, and greater life satisfaction.”<sup>2</sup>



Aside from the physical benefits, forgiveness is essential for life together; it is the oil that keeps life’s relationships from breaking down entirely. My father was an auto mechanic, so I grew up around cars and spent a good amount of time under cars. One thing he drilled into me was the importance of clean oil in an engine. Without clean oil the engine could seize up, leading to a major repair. Oil is essential to the proper function of an engine. Forgiveness is essential in any relationship; it is the oil of life that keeps it running smoothly. Without forgiveness life will seize up, as it did for two Scottish sisters who lived in Edinburgh.

Robert Louis Stevenson, in his *Picturesque Notes of Edinburgh*, tells the story of two unmarried sisters who shared a single room. As people are apt to do who live in close quarters, the sisters had a falling out, which Stevenson says was “on some point of controversial divinity.” In other words, they disagreed over some aspect of theology. The controversy was so bitter that they never spoke again (ever!). There were no words, either kind or spiteful—just silence. Nevertheless, possibly because of a lack of means, or because of the innate Scottish fear of scandal, they continued to keep house together in the single room. A chalk-line was drawn across the floor to separate their two domains. For years they coexisted in hateful silence. Each woman’s meals, baths, and family visitors were exposed

to the other’s unfriendly silence. At night each went to bed listening to the heavy breathing of her enemy. Thus, the two sisters (ostensibly daughters of the Church!) continued the rest of their miserable lives.<sup>3</sup>



An unwillingness to forgive has devastating effects. It has been said that bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Roma Wade from the WLS talk show in the Chicago area summarized it well when she wrote the following about resentment.

Do you harbor resentment? Then you are poisoning your own meal at life’s banquet table. Imagine your mind as a little shop of horrors, a kind of museum filled with relics of all of the injustices and harm you have ever endured. Each exhibit depicts your memory of what someone did or didn’t do that hurt you. Brightly illuminated by your resentment, every exhibit has a soundtrack echoing with loud, angry, accusing voices. The walls are covered with horrible instruments of punishment and long lists of penalties to be inflicted on your wrong-doers. And coating everything is a thick, clinging residue of self-pity that keeps you from moving along to the New Futures wing of your museum, where exhibits are filled with pleasure and joy and possibilities. Can you imagine what it would be like to be locked permanently inside such a chamber of horrors? Of hate and resentment? If you are unable to forgive others for real or imagined wrongs, then your own horror chamber exists within you. That chamber of ill-will is your mind. And what a price you pay for maintaining such a museum of resentment. The negative reliving of your past stokes anger, resentment and seething hostility. It also turns your mind against itself. It’s like a poison to your soul. The simple profound truth is that the entire horror shop crumbles if you simply forgive.<sup>4</sup>



On a similar note, Frederick Buechner has written on the emotional expression of bitterness, which is anger.

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontation to come—to savor that last toothsome morsel of both the pain you are getting and the pain you are giving back. In many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.<sup>5</sup>



Bitterness and resentment lodge deep in the human heart and must be uprooted.

In his book *Lee: The Last Years*, Charles Bracelen Flood reports that after the Civil War, Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky lady who took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. There she bitterly cried that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Federal artillery fire. She looked to Lee for a word condemning the North or at least sympathizing with her loss. After a brief silence, Lee said, “Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it. It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to remain, let bitterness take root, and poison the rest of our life.”<sup>6</sup>



Instead of holding on to actual or perceived wrongs, we must choose forgiveness and avoid the cancer of bitterness. Corrie ten Boom is an excellent example of how a believer can experience the grace of God to forgive others. In this story from a meeting in the fall of 1972, Corrie recalls forgiving a guard who worked under the Nazi regime at the concentration camp where her sister died.

It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie’s pain-blanching face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, *Fräulein*,” he said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!” His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. . . . Forgiveness is an act of will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.<sup>7</sup>



Forgiveness is an act of will because it is a promise to release one from a debt that is owed. Our willingness to forgive is also an indicator that we rightly view our own forgiveness from God. Phillip Ryken says, “The ability to forgive is one of the surest signs of having been forgiven. It is part of the proof that we have received God’s grace. . . . Those who are truly forgiven, truly forgive. The sins they commit are of greater impor-

tance to them than the sins they suffer.”<sup>8</sup> Oswald Chambers comments, “Forgiveness is the divine miracle of grace; it cost God the Cross of Jesus Christ before He could forgive sin and remain a holy God. . . . When once you realize all that it cost God to forgive you, you will be held as in a vise, constrained by the love of God.”<sup>9</sup>



Forgiveness is not easy but it something that God enables us to do by His grace. Cindy Hess Kasper tells of her experience of God’s grace to forgive.

One summer I was at a gathering of old high school acquaintances when someone behind me tapped me on my shoulder. As my eyes drifted over the woman’s name tag, my mind drifted back in time. I remembered a tightly folded note that had been shoved through the slot on my locker. It had contained cruel words of rejection that had shamed me and crushed my spirit. I remember thinking, “Somebody needs to teach you a lesson on how to treat people!” Although I felt as if I were reliving my adolescent pain, I mustered up my best fake smile; and insincere words began coming out of my mouth. We began to converse. A sad story of a difficult upbringing and of an unhappy marriage began to pour out of her. As it did, the words “root of bitterness” from Hebrews 12:15 popped into my head. That’s what I’m feeling, I thought. After all these years, I still had a deep root of bitterness hidden within me, twisting around and strangling my heart. Then these words came to my mind: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). We talked. We even shared some tears. Neither of us mentioned the long-ago incident. God taught someone a lesson that afternoon—a lesson of forgiveness and of letting go of bitterness. He taught it to me.<sup>10</sup>

Forgiveness is a difficult lesson to learn, yet there are few better ways to properly image God than by practicing biblical forgiveness (Eph. 4:32).

**Matt Fagan** planted and pastors Heritage Baptist Church in Windham, New Hampshire.

<sup>1</sup> <https://bible.org/illustration/porcupines>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/the-power-of-forgiveness>

<sup>3</sup> R. K. Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Crossway, 1990), 94.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.moodymedia.org/sermons/you-cant-redo-life/getting-forgiveness-right/>

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Robert Jeffress, *Choose Your Attitudes, Change Your Life* (Victor, 1992), 107.

<sup>6</sup> <https://bible.org/illustration/robert-e-lee>

<sup>7</sup> Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (Bantam, 1974), 238.

<sup>8</sup> Phillip Graham Ryken, *When You Pray: Making the Lord’s Prayer Your Own* (P&R, 2000), 138.

<sup>9</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, reading for November 20.

<sup>10</sup> Cindy Hess Kasper, *Our Daily Bread*.

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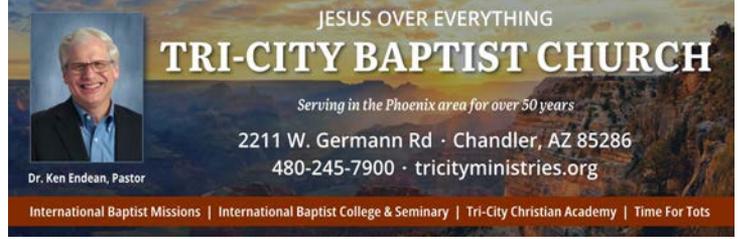


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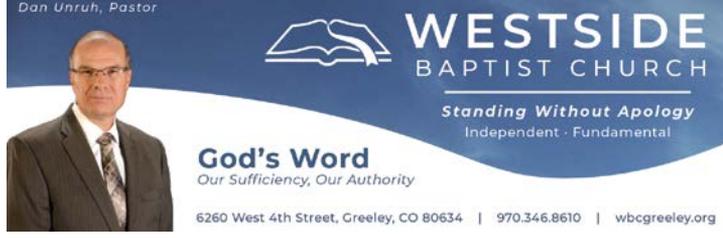
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# On the Home Front

## 2025

### March 17-19, 2025

#### South Regional Fellowship

Swan Creek Baptist Church  
2501 Swan Creek Rd.  
Swan Creek, NC 28642  
Coordinator: Tony Facenda

### March 24-25, 2025

#### Northern California Regional Fellowship

Calvary Baptist Church  
160 Seaside Court  
Marina, CA 93933  
Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

### April 14-17, 2025

#### Northwest Regional Fellowship

Grace Baptist Church  
2731 Matson Road  
Victoria, BC V9B 4M5  
CANADA  
Coordinator: Don Johnson

### May 12-13, 2025

#### Wyoming Regional Fellowship

Friendship Baptist Church  
265 Vannoy Parkway  
Thayne, WY 83127  
Coordinator: Jay Sprecher

### May 19, 2025

#### Mid-America Regional Fellowship

First Baptist Church  
5304 Charles St.  
Rockford, IL 61108  
Coordinator: David Huffstutler

### June 9-11, 2025

#### FBFI Annual Fellowship

(Combined with New Testament Association)  
Calvary Baptist Church and  
Maranatha Baptist University  
745 W. Main St.  
Watertown, WI 53094  
Coordinators: Robert Loggans,  
David Anderson

### September 9, 2025

#### New York City Regional Fellowship

Bethel Baptist Fellowship  
2304 Voorhies Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11235  
Coordinator: Matt Recker

### October 20-22, 2025

#### Central Regional Fellowship

Midland Baptist Church  
4200 N Church Circle  
Wichita, KS 67205

### October 25, 2025

#### New England Regional Fellowship

Heritage Baptist Church  
186 Dover Point Rd  
Dover, NH 03820  
Coordinator: Taigen Joos

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## BEST OF PROCLAIM & DEFEND

### SEPTEMBER 15-DECEMBER 15, 2024

- Users: 23,176
- Sessions: 30,958
- Pageviews: 41,278

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM PROCLAIM & DEFEND

(Published September 15–December 15, 2024)

- “Train Up a Child” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5w0>)
- “The Biblical Role of a Pastor’s Wife” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-4ZX>)
- “Serious Ministry” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5Bf>)
- “Design: Does Evolution Care About You?” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5zu>)
- “Why Did Peter Live and James Die? Trusting Our Sovereign God” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-2Wm>)
- “The Law of the Firstborn: Failure” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-59C>)
- “Purposes of Predictive Prophecy (Part 3)” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5yT>)

We publish thoughtful articles each weekday. These posts ranked in the top ten during the last quarter, but some were posted a year and more ago.

Check out the latest at [www.proclaimanddefend.org](http://www.proclaimanddefend.org) (or follow us on Facebook where we post daily links).

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PROCLAIM & DEFEND PODCAST

We feature interviews with our *FrontLine* authors as the main attraction on the podcast. This allows us to go into a bit more depth than we can do in the articles themselves, enhancing what we produce in the magazine. We have other features as well, so please check out *Proclaim & Defend* at <https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/>.

- “The Word Is Jesus! Should You Let Jordan Peterson Preach the Word to You?” (Kevin Schaal) (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/the-word-is-jesus-should-you-let>)
- “Interview 53: Revelation: When Does God’s Wrath Begin?” (Mark Swedberg) (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/interview-53-revelation-when-does>)
- “Holding Pastors Accountable” (Kevin Schaal) (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/holding-pastors-accountable>)
- “Interview 51: The Rapture in Matthew 24” (Michael Riley) (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/interview-51-the-rapture-in-matthew>)

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# Regional Report

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by David Thorin

About 55 people from Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming attended the January 28, 2025, Rocky Mountain FBFI regional fellowship hosted by Pastor Dan Unruh and the people of Westside Baptist Church of Greeley, Colorado. The God-honoring conference music was led and powerfully presented by the ministry team from Southland Camp of Ringgold, Louisiana.

The conference speaker, Dr. Gordon Dickson, retired pastor of Calvary Baptist Church of Findlay, Ohio, had three sessions addressing the theme: *The Unique Excellence of the True and Living God*.

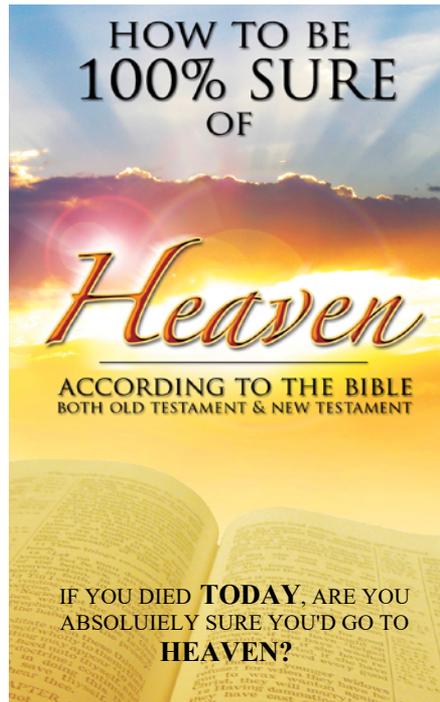
The first session was a split session for men and women. Dr. Dickson, speaking on *The Glory of God in Sharing the Gospel*, challenged his listeners to consider emphasizing God's glory as a way to open the door in their gospel witnessing. Mrs. Juanita Unruh, meanwhile, spoke to the ladies on the topic of *The Biblical Role of a Pastor's Wife*.

The second session, entitled *The Glory of God in Salty, Light-bearing Believers*, was from Matthew 5 and enlightened each hearer to a better understanding of their calling in the progressive context of the Beatitudes to be salt and light.

The final session from 2 Chronicles 19-20, *The Glory of God in Learning to Lead*, encouraged all to learn from the example of King Jehoshaphat on how to "take hold of God" despite past failures and thereby lead others with confidence in our glorious God to victory in the face of challenging circumstances.

The conference ended with a catered BBQ lunch and encouraging fellowship at each table.

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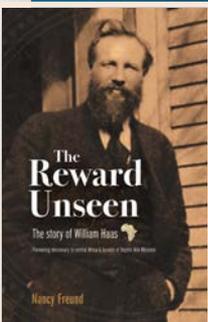


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Susan Elliott Hughes and Janet Clark Shay

# From a Daughter's Heart

*This Side of Heaven, authored by Janet Clark Shay, is a memoir of the life and ministry of pastor and evangelist Charles Elliot, who became blind before starting his ministry. His daughter Susan Elliott Hughes contributed the book's epilogue, an excerpt of which is given here.*

For some reason, I knew at an early age that my dad was going blind. My parents didn't discuss it at home, at least not in front of me, but I must have heard something that caused me to know. Once at around four years old, I sat on a church pew between my parents and stared up at my dad while the preacher gave his message. I watched Dad try to focus by various movements he'd make with his eyes. He sometimes twirled his eyes or opened them wide and raised his eyebrows. I recall distinctly feeling sorry for him. One time during a service, I lay down on the pew while everybody else stood to sing. When the singing was over, Dad sat on my head. Even though I was mortified, he was gentle with me.

I recall an instance in 1978 when I understood that my dad's eye disease had progressed. He had experienced difficulty reading for quite a while, so he experimented with something new. He sat on the couch with a lamp up close to him and his Bible resting on his lap, as he bent over using a lighted magnifying glass to try to see. I felt so sad for him as I watched him raise and lower the glass, trying to focus in on the words. We prayed wholeheartedly for years that the Lord would restore Dad's eyesight. I opened Mom's Bible once and saw her prayer list, and Dad's eyes were at the top. I know my

dad had prayed, too. Then one day he told his family he had settled it. Dad said that the Lord had allowed this disability and was not going to heal him. That's when I stopped praying, too.

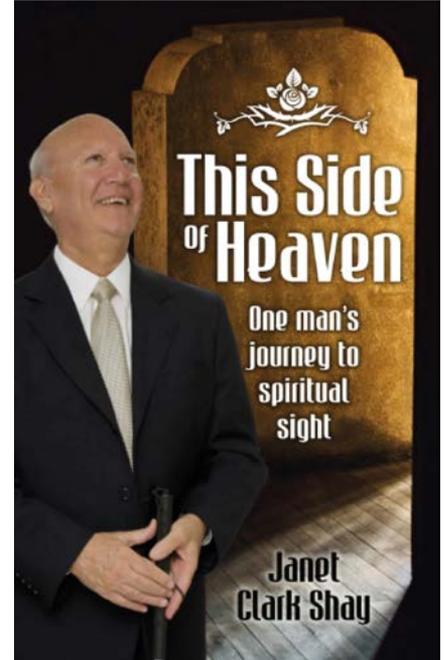
Even when Dad's vision began to wane, he carried on as if he could see. I believed this was all a part of God's grace in preparing him to live without his sight. Dad was extremely organized. He despised clutter, and sometimes it drove my mom crazy. Time after time he got after the staff members at church for leaving things out of place. Dad didn't even want things left on the coffee table or kitchen counters. A pretty knick-knack here and there was fine, but nothing should be out of place. To this day, he keeps an immaculate house.

I never saw Dad angry about losing his sight. Never! There were so many times that he'd run into an open cupboard or a door left ajar that there is no way I could number them. He grimaced and rubbed his forehead, but he never yelled at us for leaving them open. There were also numerous times that he'd be talking to someone only to find out, after a long silence with no reply, that he was alone in the room.

We went everywhere as a family. Even though he could not see anything, Dad wanted his children to experience life. When I was about fourteen years

old, my dad took me and my best friend to Six Flags. He rode all of the rides with us exactly as a sighted person would have done. We tried to describe the surroundings or objects to him, and I could tell he was picturing things in his mind.

After Mom died in 2009, I planned to help organize Dad's closet once my mom's



clothes had been removed. When I arrived, he already had it done! I quizzed him as to how he had accomplished this task and found out that he rubbed each article of clothing between his thumb and forefinger for a second or two. *Ah, that's my red polo or that's the yellow dress shirt I don't like,* and he arranged his clothes by himself. Ties were hard for him though. He sometimes safety pinned a small piece of Braille paper to the back of a tie with a description of the pattern and color. For the most part, he kept several ties wrapped around the suits that matched, and I've learned *never* to move the ties!

When our son was born in 1987, he was the first grandbaby on both sides of the family. Dad came into the room and asked to hold his new grandson. Once he had cradled little Nathan in his arms, Dad walked to the window and held our baby close to try to see him. Of course, he could not.

Up until about ten years ago, people had difficulty believing that Dad was totally blind. I'll never understand how he did it, but as he visited with someone, he appeared to look directly into their eyes. If you didn't see his cane or watch him holding the arm of someone as he walked, you wouldn't know. People often asked Dad how he could look into their eyes, and he'd explain how he made a habit of looking in the direction of their voice. It's pretty neat, and he could absolutely tell if he was talking to an adult, a child, or an elderly person, for example.

Dad was extremely friendly and welcoming as a pastor. He walked up and down the

Continued on page 35



Susan and Charles Elliot



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## The Preservation of Scripture:

In part 1 of this discussion, we explored four theological arguments for preservation: (1) the *fact* of Scripture implies it; (2) the *purpose* of Scripture necessitates it; (3) the *authority* of Scripture entails it; and (4) the *glory of God* requires it. Those four points are logical implications of larger theological truths—God’s character, God’s authority, God’s purpose, God’s glory—and they are important arguments as far as they go. But another question remains to be explored: *Does the Bible itself teach a doctrine of preservation?* Even though Bible-believing scholars agree that God *has* preserved His word, they don’t all agree on whether the Bible specifically teaches that God *would* preserve His word.

Is an explicit doctrine of preservation necessary? After all, no explicit biblical doctrine states which books are part of the inspired canon. Nevertheless, the church has come to a conclusion on that issue based on the testimony of the providence of God over the facts of history. So, it is not imperative that we have an explicit biblical statement of preservation in order to justify holding to the truth of preservation. The theological arguments presented previously, along with all the historical evidences, justify our confidence that God, in His providence, has preserved an accurate and reliable record of His self-revelation. So, we don’t need an explicit doctrine of preservation to believe in preservation. But I think we have one.

### THE TEXT OF SCRIPTURE EXPECTS PRESERVATION

A number of verses are commonly set forth to demonstrate a biblical doctrine of preservation: Psalm 12:6–7; 119:89, 152, 160; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:17–18; 24:35; Luke 16:17; John 10:35; 1 Peter 1:23–25.

But even those who believe in a biblical doctrine of preservation differ with each other on how directly or indirectly some of these verses contribute to that doctrine—or whether all of them teach preservation. But some of them, at least, really do seem to create the expectation that God preserves His written word. I will concentrate on just three verses that give the most credible, contextual, exegetical ground for a biblical doctrine of preservation.

**Psalm 119:152.** The Psalmist is not talking about God’s theoretical speech in the abstract. According to Deuteronomy 17, every king was commanded to write out his own personal copy of the Torah. The subject of Psalm 119 is the Psalmist’s relationship to the *written* word of God that he can read, and reread, and memorize, and meditate on. That’s what the whole psalm is about. “Testimonies” is a very broad term for one aspect of God’s words. God’s *testimonies* are whatever He bears witness to . . . about *anything*—history, prophecy, instruction, promises. Those *testimonies* are established forever because He is forever, and He does not change.

**Isaiah 40:8.** What makes this Old Testament statement doubly significant is that it’s corroborated by a citation in the New Testament. Peter describes the word of God, which lives and remains forever, and then quotes Isaiah 40 as corroboration (1 Pet. 1:24–25). Some think these

statements do not *necessarily* refer to *Scripture*, God’s written word, but only to His *spoken* promises. If you read Peter’s letters attentively, however, you discover that he speaks interchangeably about God’s words and the Scriptures. He exhorts his readers to desire the milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2)—where are you going to find that if it’s not located anywhere? He quotes the written words of the *Scripture* (1 Pet. 2:6). He says the prophetic word has been confirmed (2 Pet. 1:19), asserts that no prophecy of the *Scripture* is of human origin (2 Pet. 1:20), and describes how those prophecies in the Scripture came from the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). He cites the words spoken by the holy prophets and by the apostles (2 Pet. 3:2). He identifies Paul’s letters as part of the rest of the *Scriptures* (2 Pet. 3:16). When Peter talks about the words of God, he’s talking about the Scriptures, and vice versa.

**Matthew 5:18.** In Matthew 5:17 Jesus says He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets; He’s talking about the written—and therefore *de facto* the preserved—word of God. Jesus’ primary point is the absolutely certain fulfillment of every statement in Scripture. But He *underscores* that primary point with a secondary point. A *jot* refers to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. A *tittle* refers to the minutest scratch of the pen that distinguishes two very similar-looking letters from each other. In short, *jots and tittles are the stuff of written words*. However indirectly or secondarily, Jesus is guaranteeing that God’s written words will outlast the present heaven and earth, until everything God said has been fulfilled.

Given the collective testimony of these and other passages, it seems clear to most Bible-believing interpreters that the Bible *does* teach its own preservation. Again, it’s not imperative that we have an explicit doctrine of preservation to believe and expect it; other theological arguments support it. But it helps.

### THE HISTORY OF SCRIPTURE DISPLAYS THE MEANS OF PRESERVATION

The doctrine of *inspiration* refers to the original *inscripturation* of God’s words in what scholars refer to as the *autographs*—Paul’s original letter to the Romans, or Moses’ original inscription of Deuteronomy. That is, the *inspiration* process does not extend to copies, but to whatever degree the copies are accurate representations of the originals, they carry the same authority as the originals.

The problem is that we no longer possess any of those original manuscripts. All we have is copies. So how is it meaningful to say what I just said—that to whatever degree a copy is accurate it is as authoritative as the original—if *we no longer have access to the originals to compare and see how accurate the copies are?*

Before I answer that, we need to back up in our thinking to a much bigger question: *Why don’t we have the original manuscripts?* Would it not have been a very simple thing for an omnipotent God to miraculously preserve the original manuscripts of the entire Bible? And yet, He chose not to. That’s not a mere accident of history. *God chose not to preserve the original manuscripts.*

# Do We Still Have God's Words? (Part 2)

Instead, He chose to preserve His word through His providence over finite and fallen people. So, *in the wisdom and will of God* we do not have the original documents. That's a really important reality to recognize—and to rest in.

The Bible teaches us to expect that God will preserve His word for His people. But it never says anything about *how* God would do that. So, let me return to the previous question: what good are the copies if we don't have the originals for comparison? To begin with, we don't have just a few old copies here and there; we have thousands and thousands of copies, and we can read and compare all those copies over a whole history of transmission and translation—copies that go back not just five hundred years, or one thousand years, but some over two thousand years.

That means we can trace the history of transmission which, as it turns out, doesn't display numerous and wild divergences all over the place. What we find in that history of transmission is a stunning record of remarkably accurate consistency. *That's providential preservation in action.* In *delivering* the words He wanted us to have, God chose the *supernatural* means of divine *inspiration* and *inspiration*. In *preserving* the words He wanted us to have, God chose the *providential* means of human *transmission* and *translation*.

The Bible's preservation is a historical reality that is traceable to the providence of God, and verifiable through the accurate transmission of the Scriptures over thirty-five centuries. What does that process look like? Here's just one snapshot. For centuries, the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were kept and hand-copied by Jewish scribes called the Masoretes. We knew their work was incredibly painstaking, because they would count and record the number of paragraphs, words, and letters in their copies—to make sure nothing was missing or added. For a long time the oldest Hebrew manuscripts we had dated back only to about AD 1000. That's a big gap from when they were originally given! We had no idea just how accurate the work of the Masoretes was . . . until 1947, and the "accidental" providential discovery of a previously unknown stash of over 225 Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts dating back over a thousand years before the earliest Masoretic manuscripts—all the way back to a century or more before Christ! There they sat, untouched and unknown to anyone but God, preserved in clay jars tucked away in caves in the dry climate near the Dead Sea. They are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. When compared with the Masoretic manuscripts—despite a thousand-year gap between them—the Dead Sea Scrolls validated the astonishing precision with which the Masoretic text, in the providence of God, had been copied for a thousand years.

## CONCLUSION

In the providence of God, we have a *huge* reservoir of thousands of Old Testament and New Testament manuscripts. Are there *any* variations or differences among all these? Of course! Apart from a supernatural, miraculous, interventional process of preservation, that's to be expected.

Think about it this way: has God promised to keep all preachers of His word free from error? If only! He has committed the preaching of His word to a fallible human process that He sovereignly oversees and overrules in His providence. Likewise, God has committed the copying and preservation of His word to a fallible human process that He sovereignly oversees and overrules in His providence. What is stunning about the manuscript record is that the number of those differences is so miniscule and the nature of those differences so minor that no doctrine is brought into question. (To test that assertion, visit [kjvparallelbible.org](http://kjvparallelbible.org), which highlights every difference between the two major New Testament manuscript families.)

In his book *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, John Frame observes that God chose not to record or preserve many things that He said. For example, take all the words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament, and you have a grand total of about five hours of speech—from a ministry that lasted over three years! That's a lot of infallible truth that God chose not to include for us in Scripture. Why? God decided that we didn't need it, and that what He has given us is enough—because God is absolutely sovereign over His own communication and what becomes of His own communication.

[God] has determined that we will have all the personal words he intends to speak to us today. In that theological sense, we have lost nothing through the process of textual transmission. . . . Because of God's 'singular care and providence' over the process of transmission [i.e., preservation], we now have in Scripture all the personal words that God intends to say to us today. (*The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 252)

To return to the two realities established in Jeremiah 36 (see part 1 of this column topic): (1) God has a vested interest in preserving His word, and (2) God has no difficulty in preserving His word. In that, the people of God can rest, and rest assured.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Richard Brash, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to How God Preserved the Bible*

John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, chapter 19

John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, chapter 33  
[KJVParallelBible.org](http://KJVParallelBible.org)

James B. Williams and Randolph Shaylor, eds., *God's Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us*

*The ESV Study Bible*, Articles and Resources, "The Reliability of the Bible Manuscripts"

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**Layton Talbert** is professor of theology and biblical exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. For copies of this article in booklet form, contact [eneal@mountcalvarybaptistchurch.org](mailto:eneal@mountcalvarybaptistchurch.org).



## How to Prepare for Ministry

Often, one of the greatest hindrances to taking the Word to the world can be our character. As Nathan confronts David about his sin in 2 Samuel 12:14, Nathan states, “Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surly die.” As David cries out to the Lord in repentance in Psalm 51, he states in verses 10–13,

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

It seems David had no desire to witness while he was hiding major sin. Recently another well-known pastor had to resign his ministry due to moral failure, which he had been hiding for over four years. Something similar could be said of one of the world’s leading apologists. These are men who taught God’s Word and helped many. However, when their secret life came out, many rejected the message along with the messenger. The old adage is so true: “What you are doing is so loud I can’t hear what you are saying.”

It would seem that in both witnessing and preparing for ministry, character is crucial. Every time I hear of such failures, I am reminded how important it is to finish well.

If you want to prepare to minister or share the gospel, you must develop godly character. The pastoral requirements that Paul gave to Timothy and Titus are far more about character than they are about giftedness and doctrine. Most ordination councils in which I have taken part have been heavy on questions about doctrine and have had few to none about character. However, far more pastors leave the min-

istry due to a character failure than to a change of doctrine or beliefs.

So, what are some of the character qualifications for ministry? One is being “blameless” or “above reproach.” It is helpful to understand that the word Paul uses here does not refer to perfection but to a pattern. A pastor does not have to be perfect, but he does have to be demonstrating a pattern of godly living. He must pursue this pattern of holiness because his life is a pattern for all who follow him. Leaders are intended by God to be followed and believed. As Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”

A second quality of a pastor is that he is to be the husband of one wife—literally a one-woman man. Paul isn’t saying a single man or a widower cannot be a pastor; he is simply setting the standard for the man who is married. Young men and women need victory over pornography before they get married or go into ministry. America is currently facing a crisis regarding the massive shortage of ministry leaders: pastors, assistant pastors, youth pastors, missionaries, and Christian school teachers. I believe Satan is effective in getting young people caught in pornography, so they aren’t responding to the call of God on their life for ministry. In preparation for the ministry, young people must be committed to moral purity. Malachi 2:13–16 warns married men not to deal treacherously with their wives. The Trojan horse is a great example of treachery. The Greeks presented the city of Troy with a large wooden horse inside of which were hidden Greek soldiers who snuck out at night and opened the gate to allow the city of Troy to be defeated. A husband involved in pornography is dealing treacherously with his wife, and a pastor hiding moral failure is dealing treacherously with his church. The marriages of pastors and their wives seem to be a special target of Satan. Pastors have the third highest divorce rate behind medical doctors and

policemen. Moral failure will hurt our marriages and our ministries and discredit the gospel message we are trying to share.

Thirdly, arrogance or being self-willed hurts the ministry and the proclamation of the gospel. A proud, arrogant person is a huge turnoff. This type of person doesn’t walk, they strut. Humility is far more engaging and attractive.

Fourthly, a pastor is not to be “soon angry,” or quick-tempered. This type of person has a short fuse and is easily provoked. You cannot be like the Hulk and always angry. When you work with people, you will have many opportunities to lose your temper. If responding in anger is your default setting, everyone loses. As a young person preparing for ministry, you must learn to control your temper.

Fifth, a pastor must not be given to wine. Much could be said about this, but I will make only a few observations. First, the wine of today is much stronger than the wine of biblical times. Second, Romans 14:13–23 and 1 Corinthians 8:9 are clear that we are not to cause a weaker brother to stumble. If you are seeing people saved, you will certainly have some who struggle with alcohol. If you feel you can drink, it is a shame that you don’t have any new believers in your life who would cause you not to drink. To young people—who should not be drinking anyway—it is always easier to stop if you never even start. Many people have lost their memories, their ministry, or their testimony to lost people due to being under the influence of alcohol.

God saves us to make us like Himself, not to mimic the world in any of these areas. Character matters as we seek to take the Word to the world.

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





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## Financial Stewardship by the Christian Family: Taxes and Debt

**T**he young man made a huge blunder. He co-signed a car loan for his girlfriend—I mean, *former* girlfriend. Could he write off on his tax return the payments he was forced to make on her behalf? Unfortunately, my answer was—plain and simple—“no.” Mistakes were made; there was no going back.

Stewardship matters. It matters to God. It matters to us. This first in a series of columns on financial stewardship by the Christian family addresses Bible teaching and applications regarding taxes and debt.

### WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT TAXES

Taxes were burdensome in Bible times as well. Leaders impounded taxes from their citizens to cover their own failures (2 Kings 23:35), even requiring people to mortgage their homes or indenture their children (Neh. 5:4–5). Citizens grumbled about taxes, some viewing taxes as an irreligious subjugation by the government. The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus into agreement with their false piety, asking, “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar?” (Matt. 22:17). Jesus, of course, had the right answer: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21).

Peter was cornered by tax collectors from the Capernaum office. “Do you people pay your taxes?” Jesus submitted to the payment of taxes as a matter of principle and conscience, thus teaching Peter that burdensome taxes could not exhaust God’s wealth (Matt. 17:24–27). And let’s not forget the apostle Paul’s view of taxes as God-honoring submission to human government (Rom. 13:6–7).

### THE TRUTH ABOUT TAXES THAT CHRISTIAN FAMILIES NEED TO KNOW

What does it look like for us to be good stewards when it comes to our taxes? It may be tempting to look for the latest and greatest tax “loophole” to get out of paying taxes or even to make one up (“I was paid in cash” is *not* a loophole at all.) The truth? All income is taxable, unless authority specifies otherwise.

Spending decisions motivated entirely by the avoidance of tax are often out of balance or shortsighted. *Not* paying off a high-interest rate home mortgage to “preserve” a tax write-off doesn’t make sense. Business expenditures that make little *economic* sense except to produce tax write-offs are short on *math* sense.

The tax system does not have the great loopholes some people present; however, there is a whole tax system that encourages us to participate in certain behaviors to lower our taxes (e.g., charitable giving, business investment). Tax *avoidance* is enabled, but tax *evasion* is prohibited.

### WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DEBT (AND SAVING)

Debt can be a tool, leveraged at times for growth or to secure long-term assets for financial stewardship in retirement. This tool, however, can be turned into a weapon of self-destruction if wielded without prudent Biblical wisdom.

It is a fact of life that “the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7). It is true that if someone never borrows, he never becomes enslaved in debt. But this fact of life for most Christians requires a stewardship of counting the costs. First, taking

on debt requires us to pay more than we borrow—it’s called *interest*. Second, debt requires servitude. In exchange for the immediate use of our future earnings, we limit our options for the use of our paychecks, perhaps for many years.

The alternative to borrowing is saving. Prudent people foresee a need for spending in the future and hide themselves from the costs of borrowing (Prov. 22:3). They can avoid debt on many large purchases, in part or in whole, by saving.

Visit a school classroom with me: The students wait in great anticipation for the guest speaker to share his secret. He has promised to share *the secret to saving*. The moment comes. The classroom gets quiet. The speaker scans the room making eye contact with each student: “The secret to saving (dramatic pause) is *spending less than you make*.” In other words, it’s the hard work and patience of living within one’s means.

Back to our blundering young man. If he had known his Bible and obeyed it, he would not have co-signed the loan with his girlfriend. “A person lacking in sense shakes hands and becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor” (Prov. 17:18, NASB). Lenders are trained to evaluate borrowers’ creditworthiness. He was no expert. Biblical wisdom says to avoid lending money to friends. Instead, simply give, if you are able (Rom. 12:10–13).

Debt is a scalpel to be used carefully and precisely, not a bludgeon to temporarily knock back each new problem that pops up. If you keep using the bludgeon, eventually you will be overwhelmed by the debt that was used to temporarily solve each problem.

Continued on page 36

## From a Daughter's Heart

Continued from page 28

aisles and personally greeted the members before and after church services. At the end of each service, he stood at the door and shook people's hands as they left. I'm not exaggerating because I witnessed it myself for years. A man would shake his hand and say, "Good sermon, Pastor," and Dad would answer, "Well, hello, Bill! Good to see you!"

When it came to trusting people, Dad had a solid perception about them. For instance, he talked to a man who wanted to do his yard work, and he told me that

the guy seemed *shady*. Dad had certain instincts about people in the same way that sighted people do, and he often discerned when something was not quite right. Most of all, it was Dad's testimony that amazes me. My dad was and still is VERY trustworthy, and over the years he has remained firm on doctrinal positions and in his love and commitment for the Lord. I know the Lord has given him abundant grace to be able to travel all over the world. He's been in some sticky situations, but God has always watched over him. Dad's heart's desire was to give all glory to Christ.

My dad had a wonderful ministry as a pastor and as an evangelist. And I could never have asked for a better father!

Charles Elliot's story, *This Side of Heaven: One Man's Journey to Spiritual Sight*, by Janet Clark Shay, is available on Amazon. **Janet Shay** is a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She is the author of *The Prayer That Makes a Difference* and *This Side of Heaven*, among other works written from a Christian perspective.



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## Why Marijuana Is (Still) Wrong

Continued from page 8

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## Stewardship Matters

Continued from page 34

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR DEBT RECOVERY

Christian authors and speakers help many to re-examine their family finances. Both Dave Ramsey (“The Total Money Makeover”) and Howard Dayton (Crown Financial Ministries’ “Your Money Map”) offer structures to recover from debt trouble. Goal #1—save \$1,000 in an emergency fund. Hopefully, a good track to recovery will then not be derailed by a financial surprise. A more recent favorite of mine is a book by Russ Crosson (Ron Blue Trust), “Your Money Made Simple.” Crosson’s advice: “You need to do whatever is necessary to come up with some savings. It is impossible to make any budget system work without a cash cushion” (p. 81).

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**Corey Pfafe** serves as the CEO of MinistryCPA, a Certified Public Accounting firm based in Watertown, Wisconsin. The firm works with ministry clients in virtually every US state and every continent. He and his wife Laurie have served in various lay capacities as members of Calvary Baptist Church of Watertown for more than thirty-five years.





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## Meet the Newest FBFI Chaplains

### NEW FBFI CHAPLAIN APPLICANTS

The FBFI Commission on Chaplains recently interviewed and accepted two additional chaplain applicants.

**Dylan Gerred** and his wife Hope currently reside in Edmond, Oklahoma. Dylan is working toward his Master of Divinity degree through Liberty University. He and his family have been members of Edmond Road Baptist Church where Dylan has served in the music ministry for over four years and as a youth minister for the past three months. Hope has been serving in the ladies' ministry, nursery ministry, and children's church ministry for the past four years as well. Dylan works part time as a paramedic in rural Oklahoma and full time as a residential construction apprentice in trade work. Dylan also serves as a Captain in the Oklahoma Army National Guard. After his MDiv, he desires to serve the Oklahoma Army National Guard as a Chaplain. Dylan was interviewed by the FBFI Chaplain Commission on August 30, 2024. Hope and Dylan have four children, aged 9, 7, 4, and 2.



pastors are FBFI Chaplains and minister in the community. Tim Jackson accepted the invitation to perform the invocation for the cutting of the Michigan State Christmas tree in November. Reportedly, over two thousand spectators and local television news reporters, along with two public high school choirs singing Christmas carols, attended the annual State of Michigan Tree Cutting ceremony. The sixty-foot spruce tree was cut and then transported by the State Lumberjack division to adorn the capitol building in Lansing.



**Dan Hester** is currently a Chaplain with the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department. Dan and his wife Rhonda, along with their five children, live in Carmel, Indiana, an Indianapolis suburb. The Hester family attends Colonial Hills Baptist Church, pastored by Chuck Phelps. Dan was interviewed and accepted into the FBFI Chaplain family on September 26, 2024.

### FBFI CHAPLAINS IN THE NEWS

Community Baptist Church of Lansing, Michigan, celebrated their 34-year anniversary in 2024, with special recognition going to **Pastor Timothy Jackson**, the founding pastor. **Pastor Joseph Jackson**, administrative pastor, was also recognized for his service of fifteen years. Joe had the recent honor of baptizing three ladies whom his wife had led to the Lord. Both



**CH Daniel Roland** accepted an official promotion to Major on November 12, 2024, and received orders to relocate to Italy for his next duty assignment. Joe Willis had the opportunity to travel to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to be a part of Daniel's promotion ceremony. For the past few years, Daniel has been a chaplain with a basic training battalion at Fort Sill. On average, they had seven hundred to one thousand in attendance each Sunday chapel service. They have seen several saved and baptized over the past few months. Best wishes to Daniel and family in their new assignment.





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