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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

AS YE SEE
THE DAY
A P P R O A C H I N G

HEBREWS 10:25

WHY PROPHECY STILL MATTERS



As Ye See the Day Approaching



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We would like to thank Dr. Larry Oats for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

Why Prophecy Still Matters

Things Soon to Come

Not too long ago we heard more preaching on the imminent return of Christ. Of course, there were excesses. Popular preachers made some dogmatic claims about (then) current events as clear evidence that the Rapture was certain to come within days or weeks. At times it seemed that date-setting schemes were being legitimized by giving a very close, possible time—with the caveat, “of course, date-setting schemes are never legitimate.” Perhaps in reaction to that tendency, there has been too little preaching on prophecy recently. Young preachers during the Carter administration (this editor among them) wondered how the Lord could tarry long. We were told by older ministry veterans that they had heard sermons

in their youth naming Hitler as the Antichrist and Mussolini as the False Prophet. In a sense, in today’s perilous times, some may think, “Here we are again.”

We very well may be. But for those of us who live in the confident expectation of the Lord’s soon return, it is never wrong to strengthen our hearts with that blessed hope when the outlook looks bleak. Our confidence is rooted not in current events but in the promises of God. Eternal truth is ever our anchor—Christ alone is the Solid Rock. It is not an anxious sigh but a confident claim for the Christian to cry, “He is coming soon—at any moment.”

—John C. Vaughn

Things Yet to Come

Eschatology is one of the most interesting and, at the same time, most difficult areas of theological study. In every other field of theology we tend to look to the past or the present, with an occasional view to the future. In this issue of *FrontLine* the faculty of Maranatha Baptist University presents some things yet to come.

Dr. Andy Hudson begins with the Olivet Discourse and describes for us the events foretold by the Messiah in Matthew 24 and 25—the coming Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the kingdom. Dave Hockman addresses the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2, focusing his attention on whether or not the passage teaches that those who have heard the gospel but are not saved at the time of the Rapture can be converted. While Dave looks at part of what will be happen-

ing on earth during the tribulation, Tim Miller looks at one event that will happen in heaven during that same time—the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will examine whether this is a time of reward or of judgment. Dr. Preston Mayes looks at the prophecy of the kingdom found in Zechariah 14, demonstrating that the Old Testament clearly argues for a premillennial return of the Messiah. Dr. Dave Saxon concludes our articles as he examines the final judgment of the lost at the Great White Throne Judgment.

We trust that these articles will enhance your understanding of a few of the events that humanity has yet to face, that they will encourage you to greater faithfulness, and that they will help you comprehend the greatness of our God.

— Larry Oats

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Most of our readers are very complimentary, and we frequently receive letters of appreciation and praise for FrontLine. However, all letters are welcome, and when possible, will be shared with our readers. Of course, space is limited, and letters are subject to editing for publication, but we will try to share the main point.

Let us hear from you!

Dr. John C. Vaughn, Editor, FrontLine

I received the February release of FrontLine and was happy to see it dedicated to Biblical separation. Thank you for your editorial and article as well as the other articles. God bless you for continuing to hold the torch high. . . .

Edgard Traboulsi
Lebanon

Wow! Tremendous article by Dr. Vaughn in this month’s FrontLine, “‘Perform or Provide’—The Chaplain’s Guide”!

Please let him know!

CH (CPT) Mike Barnette
3-321 FAR (HIMARS)
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CH (LtCol) Gregory Distad

has served in the Army Reserves for twenty-three years. He is currently serving at Fort Totten in Queens (New York City), with previous assignments to Fort Drum, New York; Fort Dix, New Jersey; and Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.



He resides with his wife, Elaine, and daughter, Ashley, in Montrose, Pennsylvania, and is working on a DMin dissertation on assessing the retirement preparedness of pastors of independent churches. Gregory is seeking the Lord’s will regarding pastoral ministry.



Chris Brown is the director of Maranatha Baptist Mission. MBM was established in 1982 to allow Maranatha Bible Church (located in Zanesville, Ohio) to support and help missionaries at home and around the world. MBM currently has a ministry in the island of Palawan in the Philippines, a ministry in Uruguay, and a missionary to Arab-speaking people in Pennsylvania. In addition, MBM is involved in a church-planting ministry in Ohio that is pastored by Pastor Dale McCallister.

Jake and Joy DeWald

are now on full-time deputation after a three-month stay in their field of the Dominican Republic. While their meeting schedule has not filled up quickly, they are staying very busy building relationships with pastors and churches through personal visits and attending conferences. They are seeing their support steadily rise.



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An Overview of the Olivet Discourse

As with most prophetic passages, the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse has generated a great deal of debate, but it is not possible to address all of those interpretive issues in this short article. I will assume a premillennial and pretribulational position as a starting point from which I will provide an overview of the Olivet Discourse as it appears in Matthew 24 and 25. I have two goals for this overview: first, to summarize Christ's teaching in the Olivet Discourse; second, to suggest that the Olivet Discourse addresses the second coming of Christ, not the Rapture of the church.

Context of the Discourse

The disciples' questions. Jesus' lesson on end-time events was given in response to His disciples' questions. They asked, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world [i.e., age]?" (Matt. 24:3). The disciples' questions were prompted by Jesus' prediction that the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1–2). Why would the disciples, when hearing that the temple would be destroyed, ask Jesus when He would come, marking the end of the age?

It appears that Jesus' Jewish disciples connected the destruction of the temple with the Old Testament prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem. Further, those same Old Testament prophecies connected the destruction of Jerusalem with the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Therefore, when the disciples heard Jesus predict the destruction of the temple, they thought Jesus was referring to prophecy that connects the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of Messiah, and the beginning of the millennial age.

Was the disciples' connection of these three events warranted? Stanley Toussaint says, "They had good scriptural

ground for this since Zechariah 14:1–2 describes the razing of Jerusalem. The same passage goes on to describe the coming of the Lord to destroy the nations which warred against Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:3–8). Following this the millennial kingdom is established (Zechariah 14:9–11).¹ Basically, upon hearing the prediction of the destruction of the temple, the disciples were prompted to inquire about the fulfillment of the entirety of this prophecy given to national Israel. “In other words, the disciples understood the destruction of Jerusalem to indicate Messiah coming to reign in the Millennium.”² It is important to note here that the disciples were asking about the future of national Israel. They were not asking about the future of the church. As a result one should not expect Jesus to teach about the Rapture of the church when answering a question about the future of ethnic Israel. The context of the Olivet Discourse is thoroughly Jewish.

The disciples’ mindset. The disciples accepted Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and King. He was standing in their presence. What, then, would cause them to ask about Jesus’ coming to establish the millennial kingdom when He was already with them? A survey of the events leading up to Matthew 24 answers this question. Jesus came to earth and took on human form in order to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews (Matt. 4:23). He authenticated who He was and what He preached by performing many miracles. The gospel of the kingdom was a message of repentance. (Matt. 4:17, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”) In Matthew 10 Jesus sends out His disciples with the same message and same authenticating signs. Jesus instructs them to go only to Jews with the message.

The repentance of the nation of Israel was a prerequisite for the establishment of the kingdom.³ Matthew makes clear, however, that Israel, for the most part, refused to repent. This rejection of Jesus and refusal to repent is illustrated in the account of the unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:22–37) and the request for a sign. Jesus then compares the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ refusal to repent with the repentance of Gentiles (Matt. 12:38–45). This refusal to repent prompted Jesus to give the kingdom parables (Matt. 13) in order to explain what would happen to the kingdom.

After continued rejection, Jesus began to prophesy His crucifixion to His disciples (Matt. 16:21). Eventually, Jesus pronounced seven woes on the unrepentant scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23). This pronouncement of judgment ended with a prophecy of Jesus’ departure. Jesus said, “For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:39).

Thus the disciples learned that the kingdom would not be established during Jesus’ first coming. It could not be established because Israel refused to repent. Instead, Jesus would be crucified and depart for a time. They would have understood that Jesus would come a second time at which point He would establish the millennial kingdom. As this realization was settling into their minds, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple. This prediction reminded the disciples of the Old Testament prophecies connecting the destruction of Jerusalem with the coming of Messiah

and the establishment of the kingdom. Therefore, they ask Jesus when the prophecy will be fulfilled and what signs will indicate the time.

Content of the Discourse

Jesus anticipated that there was the possibility of confusion on the part of His disciples. They were assuming that the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age would occur simultaneously. Jesus knew that Jerusalem (and the temple) would be destroyed in AD 70. The end of the age, however, would not follow immediately after that destruction as the disciples seemed to think. Jesus clarifies the timing so that they will not fall prey to those who want to deceive them about the time of the end of the age (Matt. 24:4, 26).

There are three main sections to Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ questions. First, in Matthew 24:4–26 Jesus explains that the time of His return to establish the millennial kingdom would be preceded by the seventieth week of Daniel (i.e., the Tribulation). Second, in Matthew 24:27–31 Jesus describes His Second Coming. Third, in Matthew 24:32–25:46 Jesus identifies who will enter the kingdom and who will not.

Tribulation. Jesus tells the disciples that His Second Coming to establish the millennial kingdom would not immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem as they thought. The Tribulation would precede the end.

Matthew 24:15 clearly marks the midpoint of the Tribulation. This quotation of Daniel 9:27, which states that the abomination of desolation would be at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation, confirms this. There is general agreement that Matthew 24:16–26 describes the second half of the Tribulation, but there is debate about Matthew 24:4–14. Walvoord says these verses are not signs of the end, but only signs of progress.⁴ These signs occur throughout the church age but may become more intensified as the age “moves on to its conclusion.” Pettegrew claims 24:4–14 describe events that occur from the time of Christ through the first half of the tribulation.⁵ Bigalke argues that 24:4–14 only describes events in the first half of the Tribulation by comparing 24:4–14 with the first six seal judgments in Revelation 6.⁶

No matter what your view of Matthew 24:4–14, Jesus’ point is the same. There will be a series of events between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. Christ will return only after the Tribulation. The disciples were not to fall prey to deceivers who would suggest otherwise.

Second Coming. Jesus states that His return to establish the millennial kingdom will immediately follow the Tribulation (Matt. 24:27–31). The description of the events prior to Christ’s coming in this passage are parallel to the final events of the Tribulation: lightning (24:27; Rev. 16:18), birds eating the flesh of the defeated (24:28; Rev. 19:17–18), and darkness (24:29; Rev. 16:10). After these final Tribulation events take place, Jesus will return to judge the wicked and establish His kingdom for the righteous. Given this chronology, it would be a mistake to interpret the trumpet sound in 24:31 as a reference to the Rapture. The “elect” gathered in 24:31 are the believing remnant of the nation of Israel at the end of the Tribulation, not the church before the Rapture (see 24:22, 24).

(Continued on page 28)

Salvation after the

Whenever eschatological events are discussed, a door is opened for contrary opinions. One such topic for pretribulationists is the possibility of salvation after the Rapture. Does 2 Thessalonians 2 negate an individual's opportunity to accept Christ after the Rapture if he heard the gospel prior to the Rapture? What is the "strong delusion" Paul mentions that God will send, and when in the Tribulation will this occur? Do the Book of Revelation and other Scriptures provide any insights? This article will seek to provide a biblical response to such questions.

The Antichrist and the Restrainer

The context of 2 Thessalonians 2 deals with the Rapture and some of the events of the Tribulation. The "gathering together" in verse 1 is a reference to the Rapture.¹ Paul writes to encourage the believers not to be alarmed, because the Tribulation had not yet begun. The Day of the Lord (the Tribulation) will not occur, Paul notes, until there is a "falling away" (v. 3) and the revelation of the Antichrist (vv. 3–4). In other words, the beginning of the Tribulation will be marked by great apostasy and the signing of the peace treaty between the Antichrist and Israel (Dan. 9:24–27).

The Antichrist will then break his treaty with Israel at the midpoint of the Tribulation and desecrate the temple; all will worship the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 13:12). Second Thessalonians 2:4 goes on to point out a notable exploit of the Antichrist—he "sitteth in the temple of God." No longer will the Antichrist be at peace with Israel, and there is no greater method of demonstrating this than by desecrating the Jewish temple.

Verses 1 through 5 move from a reference to the Rapture in verse 1 to clear references to the Tribulation in verses 2 through 5. Verse 6 then references the Restrainer; many views exist as to his identity. The three most common views are as follows.² First, the early church believed the Restrainer was the Roman Empire. Second, some believe that the Restrainer is human government (cf. Rom. 13:1–7). (However, human government exists in the Tribulation in the form of the confederacy of nations along with the ruling powers of the harlot and the Antichrist.) Third, some teach that the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit. There is a sense of removal during the Tribulation in that the Holy Spirit does not restrain iniquity as He presently does. Although omnipresent, His presence in the Tribulation will be similar to that of the Old Testament. Gerald Stanton states,

The work of empowering and convicting during the Tribulation is still that of the Holy Spirit. Because He is God, the Spirit is omnipresent, and in that sense He is

present among men and operative in every age. When, He, as restrainer, is removed, there will be a reversal of Pentecost, which will mean that the Spirit will minister from heaven as during the OT economy. He will be present, but not resident, operating, but no longer indwelling. He will save souls, but no longer baptize them into the body of Christ, for the church will be complete in heaven.³

Once the Holy Spirit is removed, the restraining influence on iniquity is detached and the conditions are prime for the apostasy. It is the apostasy along with the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and the Antichrist that mark the beginning of the Tribulation period. With the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit removed and the rise of the Antichrist and his false system, it is evident that many will follow the Antichrist in what Paul describes as the apostasy in verse 3.

After the removal of the Holy Spirit, the Antichrist is revealed (v. 8). The Antichrist's coming is in accordance to "the working of Satan" (v. 9). Christ's coming is described in verse 8, and now the coming of the Antichrist is described. The Antichrist will come deceiving with all power, signs, and false wonders. Satan will use the Antichrist to attempt to deceive the nations. Satan's program has always consisted of counterfeiting God's program. In the Tribulation, as Satan's time draws to a close and with the removal of the Restrainer, Satan will intensify his efforts through the use of counterfeit miracles. The timing here is important. The Day of the Lord has already begun and refers to individuals in the Tribulation. These individuals reject the truth and follow the Antichrist, and verse 11 indicates that God will send them a strong delusion.

Just when the delusion comes from God is impossible to say from the context of 2 Thessalonians 2. The context of the passage places this refusal in the time frame of the Tribulation. One must always be careful of rejecting the truth of God's Word. This is truth in any age. One who rejects the love of the truth will not find another way of salvation, and therefore these individuals are eternally damned. Because of this refusal, God sends a delusion that they believe a lie. This says nothing in regard to those who heard the gospel before the Rapture (vv. 11–12).

Rejection, Delusion, and Salvation

So, what can one conclude from 2 Thessalonians 2? The start of the Tribulation is marked by the apostasy, which is promoted through the removal of the restraining work of the Holy Spirit in regard to sin. The Antichrist makes peace with Israel by means of a peace treaty, which he breaks at the midpoint of the Tribulation and then desecrates the

Rapture

Jewish temple. Individuals will reject the truth of the gospel and believe the lies of Satan. God sends these individuals a powerful delusion resulting in the fact that they will have no hope. The passage in 2 Thessalonians is not clear as to when this rejection takes place. This is where a look at biblical theology helps in understanding the timing of the rejection and delusion.

Scripture is clear that some individuals will come to a saving knowledge of Christ in the Tribulation. Revelation indicates this salvation is widespread and includes both Jews and Gentiles (Rev. 7:1–8; 11:4–6; 14:1–5). Paul declares that “all Israel” will be saved (Rom. 11:26). In Romans 9–11 Paul refers to Gentiles and Jews as collective wholes on numerous occasions. Doug Moo states,

Paul writes “all Israel,” not “every Israelite”—and the difference is an important one. “All Israel,” as the OT and Jewish sources demonstrate, has a corporate significance, referring to the nation as a whole and not to every single individual who is a part of that nation.⁴

Zechariah refers to the salvation of Israel in the Tribulation and states that one-third of Israel will be saved (Zech. 13:9). So Zechariah aids in understanding the corporate nature of the “all Israel” in Romans as one-third of the Jews. In addition to Jews, a multitude of Gentiles comes to Christ in the Tribulation, a multitude that no one can number from every tribe, tongue, and nation. In addition to this group that is pictured as having been martyred and in heaven, a group of believers survive the Tribulation and are present at the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25:31–46).

From this brief survey one may note that many will come to know the Lord in the Tribulation, and they come from every tongue and nation. It would seem difficult to limit these individuals to those “who have never heard the gospel before the Rapture.” Moreover, the context of the Tribulation does indicate a clear point when individuals will no longer be able to repent. It is at the midpoint of the Tribulation that the Antichrist institutes the mark of the beast. Individuals must choose to accept or reject this mark (Rev. 13:16–17; 14:9–10; 19:20; 20:4).

Whatever the mark of the beast is, the certainty rests in the eternal damnation of those who accept it. This willful rejection of Christ ensures that those who receive it will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20). Some Gentiles will choose not to accept the mark. This is demonstrated by the Gentiles present at the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46). Jews will not be inclined to follow the Antichrist as he has broken his treaty with the nation and desecrated the most sacred site of the Jews, the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the Jews will be in a position to accept the truth of the gospel.

Revelation, then, teaches that the point of no return referred to in 2 Thessalonians is the acceptance of the mark of the beast. In this writer’s opinion, the mark of the beast is the “working to delusion” and the point after which there is clearly no hope for an individual to accept Christ as Savior. God sends the delusion in response to an individual’s choice to follow the deceptive methods of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:10–12). The individual makes a choice to accept the mark of the beast (the lie of 2 Thess. 2:11). They also worship Antichrist as God, as promoted by the False Prophet (Rev. 13:11–18; cf. 2 Thess. 2:4). Therefore, in response to the individual’s choice, God sends the delusion, and all that accept the mark of the beast are damned.

It is always dangerous to reject the truth. Is there any reason for an unbeliever who has rejected the truth prior to the Rapture to automatically turn to Christ after the Rapture? No, but, improbable does not mean impossible. The Rapture will not necessarily be a sign for an unbeliever to automatically accept Christ. In hell the rich man requested that one be sent to warn his loved ones. Christ responded that even if one from the dead warned them, they would not repent (Luke 16:27–31). Eschatology is a proper motivation for witnessing. However, one must be careful not to go beyond the text of Scripture. In this author’s opinion, to state that one has no chance of accepting Christ after the Rapture if he previously heard the gospel moves beyond the text.

As with many aspects of Christianity, one can get caught up in nuances and arguments and forget the big picture. God has called us to share the gospel with a lost and dying world. May a look at God’s grace in saving individuals in the Tribulation never detract from our duty to share His love prior to the Rapture. Believers know the end of human history. May eschatology be an impetus of our need to share God’s love with others.



David Hockman serves as an associate professor at Maranatha Baptist University.

¹ Paul D. Feinberg, “2 Thessalonians and the Rapture,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 301.

² The three views presented here are not the only views. For a more complete list see the article by Charles E. Powell, “The Identity of the ‘Restrainer’ in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (July–September 1997): 328–29.

³ Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 105.

⁴ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 722.

Judgment Seat of Christ



Powerful sermon illustrations remain with you years after hearing a sermon. I once had a professor suggest that a pastor could, without his congregants noticing, preach the same message for a month straight if he changed the illustrations every week. On the other hand, if the pastor were to use the same illustration twice in a year, most congregants would notice. While the professor was jesting, he clearly understood the impression that illustrations have on listeners. In my own experience, the sermons from my childhood that remain vivid involved rich illustrations. One such illustration concerns the Judgment Seat of Christ, and I fear I am not the only one who recalls this illustration. The preacher suggested that one day all of humanity would stand before a great white screen where my sins (even my thoughts!) would be displayed for all to see.¹ The application was quite clear—did I want Jimmy knowing what I thought of him, or did I want Kelly to know what I said about her in secret? In this article, we will discover why the *projector illustration* mischaracterizes the Judgment Seat of Christ. Ultimately, the illustration fails because it encourages the believer to understand the Bema Seat with a wrong focus on judgment, a wrong motivation for godliness, and a wrong audience in perspective.

Focus

To understand why the illustration fails, we must first understand the purpose of the judgment. There are many passages that refer to the judgment of believers (Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 3:10ff; 4:5), but let's consider 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."² In context, Paul is referring to believers. Unbelievers will not be at the Judgment Seat of Christ; instead, they will be present at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). But if this passage refers to believers, what is the judgment? Romans 8:1 promises "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." So what could Paul mean by being judged concerning both good *and bad*?

In response, note that the word in 2 Corinthians 5:10 referring to the "Judgment Seat" is the Greek word *bema*. The word can simply be translated *step* or *raised platform*, but in biblical usage it most often refers to a judicial setting where a magistrate punishes wrongdoing (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 12:21; 18:12, 16, 17; 25:6, 10, 17). Perhaps, however, Paul is using the term in another sense that also has precedent in ancient Greek.³ Just as the judge would sit on a raised platform in order to pass judgment on wrongdoers, so also the judge/referee of the Greek athletic games would sit upon a raised platform to hand out rewards. So how should we interpret the word *bema* here? Should we view the Judgment Seat of Christ as a reward ceremony or as a judicial courtroom?

The doctrine of justification indicates that the Christian's sin—past, present, or future—is forgiven by Christ. If the Judgment Seat of Christ is a judicial courtroom, what sin could be judged? In light of this problem, Hoyt suggests the athletic imagery of the word *bema*: "Paul was picturing

the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the *Bema* to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's *Bema* to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the *Bema* bestowed rewards to the victors. *He did not whip the losers.*"⁴ The athletic imagery is also appropriate in light of Paul's use of such imagery elsewhere (1 Cor. 9:24–26; Gal. 2:2; Phil. 2:16; 3:14; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:7) and his notation that at the *Bema* Seat believers' good works will "receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:14).

Despite the imagery of an athletic contest, we should not assume that everyone is equally pleased with the results. At this ceremony, not everyone will receive the same trophies. Paul notes both positive and negative aspects of the *Bema* Seat: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:14–15). There are two options here. Either one's works are built on the right foundation and are done with the right motive, or they are built on the wrong foundation and are done with the wrong motive (1 Cor. 4:5). In the latter case, one will "suffer loss,"⁵ but he will be saved as through fire. Both aspects are important. On the one hand, to suffer loss is to recognize that we have not obtained what we could have obtained. On the other hand, to be saved though as by fire is best taken as a figure of speech, "a metaphor for escaping, as we might say it, by the skin of one's teeth, that is, with nothing beyond one's eternal life, barely escaping destruction and bringing no credits into the kingdom."⁶ Thus, the final goal has been reached and salvation has been obtained, but there is no reward to rejoice over. As John alternatively pictures, some will *shrink back in shame* at the coming of the Lord recognizing that their works have afforded them no rewards (1 John 2:28).

Motivation

So we have seen that the projector illustration has a wrong focus, failing to account for the type of judgment that will be distributed at the *Bema* Seat. Additionally, it also suggests a wrong motivation. According to the illustration, the reason one ought to live righteously today is due to fear of the future punitive shaming Jesus will openly distribute. Contrastingly, Scripture motivates the believer by the promise of outrageous reward (Matt. 5:12; Luke 19:15–19). Some believers struggle to accept that God will provide rewards for our works, since this appears to deny grace. If salvation is by grace, then why is reward by works? Further, isn't it selfish to seek my own rewards?

A case study in the apostle Paul will help us answer the first question. Clearly, Paul sought to win the reward of a faithful servant (Phil. 3:12–14). Nevertheless, did this lead to Paul boasting in his own merit? Consider

Paul's statement in Colossians 1:29: "I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." While Paul does the labor and striving, he attributes the energy and motivation of service to God. Let's align this statement with what appears to be on the surface Paul's most prideful expression about his own ministry in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

On the surface, Paul's casual mention of his superabundance of activity in comparison to the other apostles may appear self-congratulatory, but bookending this statement are the dual references to the grace of God. Paul is admitting that without God this superabundance of ministry activity would not have been accomplished. No

Pauline text shows this balance more carefully than Philippians 2:12b–13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." In light of these verses, we see a paradox: rewards are not given on our own merit, and yet they are not given without our striving after them. All is of grace, and yet we must labor intensively if we seek to be found faithful. After this life is over and the rewards have been given, no creature will boast before the Father concerning any superiority over other believers. Instead, each will humbly kneel before the Lord, asking, in light of the fact that God gave both the will and power to do of His will, how God could give such lavish

rewards to unworthy servants (Luke 17:10).

Paul's life gives us an answer to the charge that reward-seeking denies grace. Now we will see that Jesus' life gives us an answer to the charge that reward-seeking is selfish. Have you ever considered the implications of Hebrews 12:2? "Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; *who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" Why did Jesus go to the cross? Of course, He did so because He loved humanity, but Hebrews suggests an additional reason. It was "the joy that was set before him" that motivated Him towards the fulfillment of His incomparable suffering.

The context of Hebrews 12 amplifies the importance of our point. Chapter 11 ushered us through the great hall of faith, where we briefly took glimpses of historic models of faithfulness, but the author's ultimate purpose was to get us past these examples to the chief exhibit of the museum—Jesus Himself. Moses, David, Samson, and Abraham are great models, but none compares to the surpassing excellence of Jesus. If we are to run our race as Jesus did, then we must look past the temporary trials

As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the Bema to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's Bema to receive his imperishable award.

Continued on Page 37

The Millennial Kingdom in Zechariah 14:12–19

The Old Testament promises of a messianic kingdom are familiar to most students of Scripture. Israel will enjoy agricultural prosperity, just rule by her king, and lasting peace during the time when “the wolf . . . shall dwell with the lamb” (Isa. 11:6). Those who believe in the premillennial return of Christ expect the literal fulfillment of these predictions. Those who adopt the amillennial position, however, interpret such predictions metaphorically. According to amillennialism, the descriptions of the messianic kingdom are word pictures referring to the blessings provided by Christ during the church age, the new heaven and new earth, or both. These poetic metaphors provide

a glimpse of heaven in symbols that fall far short of reality, but whose emotional force reach a deep level of our comprehension. It is as though we are observing a stained glass window depicting a person or event. The images of colored glass represent objective reality, and while they pulsate with brilliant light, they *forever remain symbols* [emphasis mine].*

Both amillennial and premillennial interpreters recognize that the Old Testament uses figurative language. None would argue that David’s statement that his “soul thirst[ed] for God” (Ps. 42:2) or Job’s lament that his losses were like “sorrowful meat” (Job 6:7) should be taken literally. They simply use the image of extreme thirst or repulsive food to represent the experiences of the speaker. Neither would one argue, however, that such statements are *always* figures of speech. The Old Testament speaks of literal water and literal food in many passages.

So how should the kingdom predictions be interpreted: as descriptions of actual events or metaphors for something else? Though Zechariah 14:12–19 may not be a familiar text, it makes a significant contribution to our overall understanding of millennial prophecies. The events described in this text seem ill-suited to metaphorically describe either the church age or the eternal state, but they are exactly what we would expect if the Messiah does one day reign politically over a kingdom comprised of large numbers of saved and unsaved people.

What Does Zechariah 14 Predict?

Zechariah 14:12–19 discusses the way the Messiah will deal with the nations while establishing and governing His kingdom. Verses 12–15 outline the fate of those who make war against Jerusalem during the Tribulation. Some will meet with a rapid and grotesque death as the Lord sends a plague to rot away their flesh (even their animals are so destroyed). Others will massacre each other during the final battle at Jerusalem as a result of divinely orchestrated confusion. After the Lord’s victory, the wealth of the nations will flow into the newly established kingdom.

The second section—verses 16–19—addresses the Lord’s dealings with those who survive the battle and enter the kingdom because they acknowledged the Messiah. These remaining people (and the children born to them) will journey to Jerusalem each year to worship the messianic king and keep the Feast of Booths. Those that do not go

will fall under a plague of drought. Even Egypt, which presently has little rain and receives its water from the Nile River, will be subject to this plague.

The “Mixed Kingdom” in Zechariah 14

Zechariah 14 indicates the kingdom will be of this earth by portraying it as a kingdom consisting of people (whether believers or unbelievers) who can sin and are therefore subject to possible chastening as the Messiah works to secure their repentance. It leads the reader to this conclusion by describing the establishment of the messianic kingdom in terms similar to those used to narrate the Exodus from Egypt. The comparison leads us to expect a wonderful kingdom but one which is nonetheless incompletely purged of rebellion.

Zechariah 14:12 predicts the Lord will strike the nations warring against Jerusalem with a plague using the exact terms employed in Exodus 8:2; 9:14; 12:23, 27 (synonyms for striking Egypt also occur in Exod. 7:17, 20; 8:16; 9:15, 25). Many of the plagues of Egypt were also directed toward animals, which is likewise a characteristic of the battle in Zechariah 14:15. As the Israelites were given gifts by the Egyptians when they departed for Mount Sinai, so the wealth of the nations will flow to Jerusalem once Messiah establishes His kingdom.

Zechariah 14 indicates that many people besides Israelites will follow the Lord just as they did during the Exodus when a “mixed multitude” (i.e., people of different races) left Egypt. The plagues had systematically demonstrated the control of the Lord over every realm of nature and so-called god of Egypt even as Israel was freed. The battle in Zechariah 14 will provide salvation for the Jews, and many foreigners will be similarly convinced to follow the Messiah during the Tribulation. (See “Salvation after the Rapture” by David Hockman in this issue.)

Zechariah 14:16–19 also associates the Lord’s victory over the nations with His previous victory over Pharaoh by reinstating the Feast of Booths. This feast, celebrated at the end of the harvest season (Exod. 23:16; Lev. 23:39), taught future generations about God’s liberation of Israel from Egypt (Lev. 23:43). So the Lord will reinstitute this celebration of His deliverance of the nation, though in the kingdom it will include all the surviving nations of the world. Those who do not attend will have rain withheld.

The comparison between the Lord’s victories in Zechariah 14 and the Exodus indicates that the citizens in this kingdom may not always respond obediently to their new king. In addition, these people will have children, some of whom will truly embrace the messianic king and some of whom will offer mere outward conformity. One way in which they will rebel is to refuse to commemorate the Feast of Booths and worship the universal king at the appointed time each year. So this kingdom is clearly theocratic in that the Lord is the only recognized ruler, but there is no prediction that all will faithfully submit to His authority.

How the Theocratic King Addresses Rebellion

As noted above, the Lord will withhold rain from the lands that refuse to keep the Feast of Booths. This chastening

is reminiscent of the way in which God revealed His pleasure or displeasure with Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. When Israel entered Canaan under Joshua, the people received what God had promised to the patriarchs. Their continued enjoyment of blessings in the land, however, was tied to their obedience. An important part of this blessing would be abundant rain, thus enabling agricultural prosperity (Deut. 28:12). Conversely, if the people disobeyed they were warned “the heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust” (Deut. 28:23–24a).

The use of weather under the Mosaic economy is recorded at several points during Old Testament history. In order to indicate the wickedness of Israel in requesting a king during the time of Samuel, the Lord sent a thunderstorm, a very unusual event during the wheat harvest (1 Sam. 12:16–19). Another example of the Lord withholding rain occurs in 1 Kings 17–18 during the ministry of Elijah. To reassert that the Lord was Israel’s God, the drought was broken only after Elijah’s victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and only in response to his prayer. Zechariah 14 states that this type of direct rule will occur again albeit on a larger scale—worldwide.

The question, of course, is to which time period the prediction refers: the church age, the millennial kingdom, or the eternal state?

During Which Dispensation Does Zechariah 14:16–19 Occur?

It is difficult to see how the prediction of drought could refer to the church age either literally or metaphorically. The literal application would require us to conclude that the Lord currently communicates His displeasure with nations by withholding rain from them. While the Lord does exhibit the negative effects of sin on earth in a general sense through natural disasters, including drought, they are not tied to His displeasure with one specific location or people group in this dispensation. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 did not communicate that God was displeased with Louisiana any more than Hurricane Hugo in 1989 communicated that He was displeased with South Carolina. All the two storms communicated was that life in a fallen world is generally difficult, and it is particularly difficult in coastal areas in the southeastern United States because they are susceptible to hurricanes.

Nor could the threatened withholding of rain refer metaphorically to the chastening of Christians for their sins during the church age. Because Israel collectively was God’s people and they lived in one location, this means of communicating His displeasure with them was

Zechariah 14:12–19 is best interpreted literally because it pictures the Messiah ruling over an earthly kingdom of people who are capable of sinning.

particularly effective. Today’s churches, however, are local bodies scattered throughout the world. We are “strangers and pilgrims” in the world living under the political jurisdiction of men who are frequently unbelievers (1 Pet. 2:11–20). We do not live under the direct political authority of Christ, and though He chastens believers in any number of ways for their sins, withholding rain is not declared in the New Testament to be one of them. People may suffer the obvious consequences of sinful choices on an individual level.

Corporately, entire churches may even cease to exist as a result of their disobedience to the Lord. Both of those outcomes, however, occur under different circumstances and with different results than withholding rain on a national level.

When considering the eternal state, it is equally difficult to see how the withholding of rain could picture events in that realm. When the new heaven and new earth arrive, every human being will either be permanently glorified or permanently condemned in the Lake of Fire. This condemnation in hell is full and irrevocable. The withholding of rain, however, is remedial. Under the Mosaic Covenant the Lord desired to use such events to expose His people’s sinfulness and lead them to repentance. The same goal would be necessary if, as Zechariah 14 leads us to expect, Messiah will rule over a kingdom consisting of unbelievers and unglorified saints. In the eternal state, however, everyone’s destiny will be sealed and such corrective measures would have no purpose.

Conclusion

Zechariah 14:12–19 is best interpreted literally because it pictures the Messiah ruling over an earthly kingdom of people who are capable of sinning. When they refuse to observe the Feast of Booths and worship the King, He will withhold rain from them. This picture does not function as an adequate metaphor for either the church age or the eternal state. During the church age the Messiah is not ruling directly over any nation, and He does not chasten His church by withholding rain. With the arrival of the eternal state His works of saving some and judging others are complete. In the new heaven and new earth, remedial action is unnecessary, for “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth” (Rev. 21:27).

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* Thomas McComiskey, “Zechariah,” *The Minor Prophets*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992–98), 3:1234.



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Responding to the Judge

Judgment Day is coming!

The Scriptures speak often of a time in the future when history will culminate in a great Assize, a judgment of all men presided over by their Creator. Some seem to view this event as a great courtroom in which they will make their case, defending themselves against unjust treatment.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell famously declared that he would confront God with the lack of evidence for the existence of God and the truth of the Christian religion.¹ Even more emphatically, atheist Stephen Fry recently explained how he would confront the Christian God at the judgment, if such a God exists: “How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault!” He then went on for two minutes or so asserting his moral superiority to such a “mean-spirited,” “capricious,” and “selfish” God.² One is reminded of the set of essays by C. S. Lewis entitled *God in the Dock*, in which Lewis exposes the tendency of modern man to think he has the right to cross-examine God about how He runs the universe.

Like similar misapprehensions about hell, these claims are utterly at odds with how the Scriptures describe the final judgment. The two major presentations of that Day—Romans 2:1–16 and Revelation 20:11–15—portray a very different scene. The time for responding to the Judge is now; on that day, “every mouth [will] be stopped.”³

We will begin our investigation at the place of judgment itself as depicted in Revelation 20:11–15. Beginning at 19:11, John uses the phrase “and I saw” to report a series of events that will bring history to a close.⁴ Jesus Christ revealed to John (1) the Second Coming (19:11–16); (2) the fowls gathered for a great feast (19:17–18); (3) Armageddon (19:19–21); (4) the imprisonment of Satan (20:1–3); (5) the millennial reign of Christ (20:4–10); (6) the Great White Throne (20:11); (7) the final judgment (20:12–15); (8) the new cosmos (21:1); and (9) the New Jerusalem (21:2–5). This series culminates in God’s people dwelling with Him in an eternal, secure, and perfect place. Before the new heaven and earth are created, however, God will finally and completely deal with all rebellion against His authority.

God will do so from a throne, which speaks of His majesty and authority. Thrones are prominent in Revelation, and God the Father is often portrayed as ruling and sending forth judgments from the throne.⁵ Only here, however, does John describe the throne as “great” and “white.” This is the throne above all thrones, the authority above all authorities, and the judgments rendered here are perfectly just and according to truth.

We get some conception of the greatness of the Judge when John sees the earth and heaven—the created order—“[flee] away” from His presence so that they no more have any “place.” In case this poetic language is insufficiently clear, 21:1 explains that “the first heaven and the first earth [have] passed away.” God created by the word of His power the vast and astonishingly complex cosmos from nothing, and He will just as easily undo it and renew it.⁶ Imagine arguing with such a Being!

Some might imagine that their intelligence or political power or military might or wealth might shield them from this tribunal, but John sees “the dead, small and great, stand before God.” The queen ant and the worker ants are equally insignificant when the elephant trods on their anthill, and, infinitely more so will the presence of such an august Judge level all distinctions on that Day. The philosopher will have no more to say than the rapist, the religious man than the atheist. They will be standing before God.

The Record of Evidence

The basis for the judgment will be the contents of “books” and a “book.” Of course, the Judge is omniscient and needs no written records, but these documents speak of the *evidence* that will lead to condemnation. While Mr. Russell complained that there is insufficient evidence to believe in God, God will have no lack of evidence in evaluating Mr. Russell and all other sinners. The evaluation will begin in the “books.” The contents of the books are evident: “The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. . . . They were judged every man according to their works.” Romans 1:18–3:20 is a powerful indictment of all people. We are all idolaters, we are rebels against God’s authority, and every thought, word, and deed falls short of God’s glorious standard. Mr. Russell was conceived in sin, and every moment of his ninety-seven years that was lived outside Christ was lived in rebellion against his Creator. No matter how moral Mr. Russell or his relatives and friends thought he was, his Creator will be the Judge. No man will have any answer for his sins on that day.

The only hope for any person is trust in Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary. Those who trust Him are written in the Book of Life. The decisive factor in a person’s eternal destiny is whether or not he or she is found written in that Book.⁷ Those written in that Book were born in sin also, had natures inclined to sinfulness also, and committed sins also; they fell short of God’s glorious standard. At some point in their lives, however, they trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ, and God counted His righteousness as theirs. If the “books” were opened relative to them, there would be plenty of evidence to condemn them forever. But “there is . . . now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” If one is written in the Book of Life, then he or she need never fear being condemned by the books. Outside of Christ—not “written in the book of life”—one must answer for one’s own sins.

John, in verse 13, clarifies that this judgment will be universal. “Death and hell,” i.e., Hades, will give up their dead. These are not separate places but rather different ways of expressing the same idea. All those who died, i.e., who are now in Hades awaiting sentencing, will appear at the Great White Throne. Even those who died at sea—an event deeply feared in the ancient world⁸—are not exempt. Their bodies may have been eaten by fish and scattered across the globe, but they will not escape standing before this Tribunal. This is an inescapable judgment.

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The sentence that God will render appears in verses 14 and 15. Every person who appears at the Great White Throne will spend eternity in a Lake of Fire, a graphic description of what Jesus called Gehenna. The text does not speak of plea-bargaining, negotiations, counterarguments, or excuses. Failing to believe in Jesus Christ—not being in the Book of Life—will open every person to the devastating evidence contained in the “books.”

In his extensive discussion of universal depravity in Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul also speaks of this final judgment. He focuses on it in 2:1–16.

Some might regard themselves as exempt from judgment because of their moral goodness, especially as compared to the gross sinners that Paul highlights in chapter 1. Paul, however, demolishes such presumption, and his entire argument is in light of the reality of future judgment (v. 16).

First, Paul turns the tables on the self-righteous person by accusing him or her of doing “the same things.” Since self-righteous Jews are primarily in view (see v. 17), it is unlikely that they were guilty of overt idolatry or homosexuality, as delineated in 1:21–28. That they “do such things” means that they are just as depraved as those they tend to condemn. The self-righteous Jew thinks he will be able to stand before God and plead his good works, but Paul suggests that he is in an especially precarious position. He not only has a deeply depraved heart, capable of the vilest affections if not graciously restrained by divine providence, but he gives himself credit for the apparent goodness that is actually God’s gift. As we know from Jesus’ ministry, such self-righteousness is more heinous in God’s sight than out-and-out wickedness. It will certainly not gain acquittal in the judgment. This is akin to a prisoner who stands before a judge with a lengthy rap sheet but proudly points to his good deeds. The judge knows, though, that the prisoner did these deeds only because the judge himself had provided wardens and boundaries that made doing good beneficial for the prisoner. He will hardly look kindly on the prisoner’s taking credit for the judge’s own unmerited mercies.

Paul makes this argument explicit in verses 4 through 6. The prisoner’s apparent goodness is actually God’s goodness (and forbearance and longsuffering) extended to him in order to turn him to repentance. When mankind stands before God—a God who has showered abundant grace on every person born into this world—man will be hardened and “impenitent,” having “[treasured] up” God’s “wrath” against that very day. God will render righteous judgment “to every man according to his deeds.”

If one wishes to earn eternal life, Paul gives him a game plan: patiently continue all your life in doing good, seeking for “glory and honour and immortality” (v. 7); in other words, make sure all your works are “good” (v. 10). Such a person will receive “eternal life” (v. 7),

Every man with a functioning conscience finds himself condemned at some point in his life.

which consists of “glory, honour, and peace” (v. 10). Unfortunately, if one is “contentious” and does not “obey the truth” but rather obeys “unrighteousness,” the prognosis is not so good: “indignation and wrath,” and “tribulation and anguish” (vv. 8–9). So, if one lives a perfect life, he can stand before God without concern. God does not play favorites (v. 11).

All Guilty before the Judge

Of course, Paul’s purpose throughout this section of Romans is to prove that no one qualifies. Jews, who have the law, should be

well aware that they do not perfectly obey it, especially as explained by Jesus (e.g., in Matt. 5:21–48). What about Gentiles who do not have the law? Verses 12 through 15 show that they do not get off the hook either. Every single Gentile will stand before God knowing that he violated his conscience at some point in his life. In a surprising twist, Paul points out that the fact that Gentiles sometimes do things contained in the law—they refrain from murdering or stealing, for instance—serves as evidence that they are guilty whenever they fail to do right. Every man with a functioning conscience finds himself condemned at some point in his life.

Paul then drives the point home with a devastating reality about God’s final judgment: He will not just judge our external behaviors; He will not just judge our words; God will judge “the secrets of men” on that Day. He will see man as he really is—stripped down to the core of his being, in all of his pride and selfishness. Like Lucifer, man ultimately loves himself more than he does God, and such distorted affection deserves eternal condemnation. That Day will show every sinner as the ungrateful, idolatrous lover of self that sin made him.

The judgment that God exercises will be “by” or through “Jesus Christ.” This, I believe, is the meaning of John 5:22 and its context.⁹ The Father will sit on that Great White Throne, as He does throughout Revelation, but His judgment will be on the basis of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. No one who has failed to respond properly to God the Son in this life will be able to respond to God the Father on that Day.

Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life—believers in Jesus Christ—will not have to respond to the Judge on that Day. Their destiny was sealed on the day they trusted in Jesus Christ and were united by faith with His death, burial, and resurrection. Their Judgment Day was on Golgotha, two thousand years ago. The Puritan pastor and theologian Richard Baxter expresses what will no doubt be their attitude on that fearful day in his great book, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*:¹⁰

If it were only for nothing, and without our merit, the wonder were great; but it is moreover *against* our merit, and against our long endeavoring our own ruin. What

an astonishing thought it will be, to think of the immeasurable difference between our deservings and receivings—between the state we should have been in, and the state we are in; to look down upon hell, and see the vast difference that grace hath made between us and them—to see the inheritance there to which we were born, so different from that to which we are adopted! What pangs of love will it cause within us to think, “Yonder was the place that sin would have brought me to; but this is it that Christ hath brought me to! Yonder death was the wages of my sin, but this eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Who made me to differ? Had I not now been in those flames if I had had my own way, and been let alone to my own will? Should I not have lingered in Sodom till the flames had seized on me, if God had not in mercy brought me out?” Doubtless this will be our everlasting admiration, that so rich a crown should fit the head of so vile a sinner.

Dr. David Saxon is a professor at Maranatha Baptist University.



¹“The original source of this line comes from an article by Leo Rosten published in *Saturday Review/World* (February 23, 1974) which features an interview with Russell. There, Rosten writes: ‘Confronted with the Almighty, [Russell] would ask, “Sir, why did you not give me better evidence?”’” (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Bertrand_Russell; emphasis in original).

²See <http://dougwils.com/s16-theology/in-which-stephen-fry-steps-in-it.html> for the entire answer and Doug Wilson’s reply to it.

³Romans 3:19–20. Moo comments, “The image, then, is of all humanity standing before God, accountable to him for willful and inexcusable violations of his will, awaiting the sentence of condemnation that their actions deserve” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996], 205). Paul’s courtroom language may be metaphorical, but it anticipates the actual judgment at which God will preside.

⁴Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 380–81.

⁵Cf. 4:2–3, 9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5. Thomas, 429.

⁶See 2 Peter 3:10–13 for Peter’s description of this event.

⁷See Exodus 32:32, 33; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; and 21:27 (22:19 is probably “tree of life”) for references to the Book of Life, which appears to be a metaphor for being in a saving relationship with God through Christ.

⁸“Both Greeks and Romans . . . recoiled with great horror at the thought of death by drowning or even burial at sea” (Thomas, 433).

⁹“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” Carson comments, “This does not mean Jesus will exercise judgment independently of the Father, for even the judgment he exercises is a reflection of his consistent determination to please the one who sent him (v. 30)” (*The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar NT Commentary [Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991], 254).

¹⁰Abridged by Benjamin Fawcett (Welwyn, Herts.: Evangelical Press, 1978 reprint), 58–59.

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

Qualificational "Nots"

Assessing fitness for ministerial office is done in two arenas. One is public, where we are subjected to everyone else's scrutiny. The other is private, where we scrutinize ourselves. But the outcomes of the two evaluations aren't always the same.

The final conclusion publicly is what we call reputation. But the assessment privately is what we call character. Ideally, the two would match, but even if they did, it's important to recognize that they are not actually the same. Reputation is something which we have (the *good name* of Prov. 22:1). But character is what we are. Reputation is outside our self. Character is our self.

D. L. Moody was getting at this fine distinction one time when he was touring G. Campbell Morgan around his home area of Northfield, Massachusetts, in a buggy. He asked his guest quite suddenly, *What's character?* Morgan, knowing that Moody had something which he wanted to say, responded, *Well, what is it?* To which the widely traveled evangelist answered immediately, *Character is what a man is in the dark.*

Who I am in the dark isn't my reputation. Moody was right: it's my character, who I am when there's no one who sees.

But character qualities generally surface, making it possible for churches to assess fairly accurately men's suitability for church leadership. Still, there are components of character that are especially difficult for others to evaluate. In this article we turn to three of these, plus one that might be labeled more accurately a "practice" (*not given to wine*). All four are stated negatively.

Wine

- not given to wine*
(1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- not greedy of filthy lucre*
(1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- not covetous* (1 Tim. 3:3)
- not self-willed* (Titus 1:7)

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

In various ways the New Testament indicates that first-century Christians drank wine. At the very least, Paul prescribed for Timothy a little of it medicinally (1 Tim. 5:23). On another occasion he asks of his own liberty rhetorically, *Have we not power to eat and to drink?* (1 Cor. 9:4), the *drink* almost certainly being wine (or wine offered to idols).

But repeatedly, the New Testament prohibits drinking excessively. *Be not drunk with wine* (Eph. 5:18). Drunkenness is a work of darkness so utterly incompatible with being a child of light who walks *in the day* (Rom. 13:13) that it actually shuts men and women out of the kingdom (Gal. 5:21). Putting it bluntly, drunks don't go to heaven.

But the qualification for ministers regarding wine (or any alcoholic beverage) doesn't appear to be demanding complete abstinence. It's made up of the word wine (οἶνος) and a preposition (*para*) meaning *alongside of*. Not *alongside of wine*. One might wish to be able to make a case for total abstinence from this literal wording, but its use in secular literature makes this a questionable stretch, as does the almost certainly synonymous expression in the qualifications for deacons, *not given to much wine* (μὴ οἶνον πολλόν | *prose,contaj*, 1 Tim. 3:8). The standard here is not *no*, but not *much* wine.

However, whatever room this word concedes for a minister's drinking at all, Paul's own apostolic example sets the bar even higher, not for ministers only, but for all consecrated Christians. After establishing by his rhetorical question that he was, in fact, at liberty to drink (or to be married, or to forbear secular work; 1 Cor. 9:3-6), he nevertheless testifies, *But I have used none of these things* (1 Cor. 9:15). That's pretty clear. When Paul, the pattern believer for all Christians (1 Cor. 11:1;

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Phil. 4:9), was free to make his own selection, he did not choose wine. *It is good*, he wrote to the Romans, *neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak* (Rom. 14:21). Evidently Timothy, his finest ministerial protégé, had followed his example to the extent that Paul was constrained to command Timothy to drink at least a little wine for his health's sake (1 Tim. 5:23). This window into Timothy's normal practice of total abstinence is especially noteworthy, coming as it does in the letter in which the qualifications for church officers are set forth. The qualifications allow for liberty, at least theoretically, but ministerial life fleshed out by Paul and Timothy forgoes that liberty.

Why risk personally disqualifying oneself, or being the cause of a brother's fall, simply for the sake of exercising a liberty which the great apostle and pattern believer didn't?

How then do we apply the qualification today? The answers will vary from church to church, depending upon the weight given to several pertinent considerations, such as the degree to which modern alcoholic beverages are legitimate parallels to ancient ones, the multiplicity of good nonalcoholic beverages available today, the centuries and centuries of church history whose practices and consequences we can now assess, the culture in which a particular church is ministering, and so on.¹

But in general, we ought to concede at least that if he were sitting in a ministerial fraternal today and this question surfaced, Paul's final word would include not only the qualification in the lists but also his own example of abstinence. And in view of the further pertinent considerations raised above, it is conceivable that his contemporary application of *not alongside wine* might be total abstinence. That's the position which I've personally embraced. As far back as Noah (Gen. 9:20–25) and Hosea, *whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart* (Hos. 4:11). Why risk personally disqualifying oneself, or being the cause of a brother's fall, simply for the sake of exercising a liberty which the great apostle and pattern believer didn't?

Money

not given to wine (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)

not greedy of filthy lucre (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)

not covetous (1 Tim. 3:3)

not self-willed (Titus 1:7)

Frequent and severe are the Scriptures' condemnations of teachers and ministers who are greedy for gain.

His watchmen . . . are greedy dogs which can never have

enough . . . ; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter (Isa. 56:10–11).

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely (Jer. 6:13).

Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. (Ezek. 34:2–3).

The priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money (Micah 3:11).

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses . . . (Matt. 23:14).

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's (Phil. 2:21).

Now, within the qualifications lists, two monetary vices are singled out. Each has to do with a wrongful approach to material things in general, or to money specifically. But the two wrongs are not entirely the same.

Not greedy of filthy lucre. The phrase here translates a descriptive adjective (αἰσχροκερδής) that combines ancient words for (1) *gain* or *profit* (κερδός) and (2) things that are *ugly*, *shameful*, or even *dishonest* (αἰδῆχος). Used of a person, it characterizes him as profiting in disreputable, even dishonest, ways, or at least being prepared to do so.

It seems doubtful that this qualification would be included in order to fence out known thieves (as if there might be any debate about their unsuitability for church leadership). What is much more likely is that it is intended to bar the door to at least four kinds of men whose ways of profiting are societally legal but nonetheless accusable.

The first of these would be the man whose business itself is disreputable. For instance, in the ancient world it was lawful to deal in slaves. But would a slave dealer, one who trafficked in buying and selling human beings, be suitably qualified for the eldership (or deaconate, 1 Tim. 3:8)? Or how about a man who owned a public bath? The baths were notorious hotbeds of immorality. Would a man who turned a blind eye to sexual vice at his place of business be suitable to lead the church in either of its offices? How about a professing Christian who owns a liquor store? Or a wealthy man who owns and rents squalid, rat-infested apartments to disadvantaged people? Men of this sort are certainly not blameless financially.

The second sort of man who is materially accusable is the one whose business might be entirely commendable but whose practices are questionable. He drives up prices (Prov. 11:26), or dickers down values (Prov. 20:14), or inflates interest rates (Prov. 28:8). You can't exactly sue him in a court of law for any of these things, but they're disturbing nonetheless. He doesn't do unto

others as he would have them do unto him.

Let me pause the sequence of these four disreputable ways of making money and raise a question. Why would a church even consider such men for leadership? The answer is simple. It's because men like this lead. They tend to be strong personalities whose nature it is to step forward and take charge. They're better thinkers, planners, and organizers than most other people. Often they're more driven, more energetic, and more successful. They know how to get things done. In smaller works especially, men like this take the lead practically, whether they're in it officially or not. The other members, not nearly as gifted, easily default to their capable direction.

There's also the factor whose influence can hardly be exaggerated—money. Men like this generally make lots of money. *Wealth maketh many friends* (Prov. 19:4), and churches need money. So do Christian schools, camps, and mission boards.

It's understandable that the Lord's people would be willing to commit their governance to men who commit their finances to the Lord's work. There's not necessarily any fault in this. Happily, the Lord gives some of His people the ability to make a great deal of money (Deut. 8:18). He charges those people to be correspondingly rich in their good works (1 Tim. 6:18). And throughout the long history of the church, many, many of them have stewarded their wealth faithfully for advancing Christ's cause wisely and generously, even sacrificially. It's regrettable that there are few biographies of these exemplary Christian lay men and women. Undoubtedly they will be commended highly by the Lord, who counts even a cup of cold water given to one of His own as if it were given to Him (Matt. 25:40).

What this qualification is fencing out is not the man who is wealthy, but the man who is discreditably wealthy. Granted, he may be incredibly competent. He may give generously. But if the nature of his business or the ways in which he practices it are accusable, he is not the blameless man a church should place into its official leadership.

But there's a third twist to how this greed for *filthy lucre* may expose itself, one which relates to potential ministers alone. The apostle Peter uses the adverb of this word in his admonition to church elders: *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind* (1 Pet. 5:2).

Because *not for filthy lucre* is contrasted with *of a ready mind* (NASB *with eagerness*), the emphasis here is apparently upon motive. It isn't that a certain line of wrong work or certain kinds of questionable practices are in view, but a certain kind of motive for ministry: a mercenary one. This is the man who, like Eli's cursed lineage, will *crouch . . . for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread* (1 Sam. 2:36).

Charles Bridges quotes another minister on this

base motive for ministry:

He enters not by Jesus Christ (into the sheepfold), who enters with a prospect of any other interest besides that of Christ and his Church. Ambition, avarice, love of ease, or desire to be distinguished from the crowd, to enjoy the conveniences of life, or to promote the interests of our family, and even the sole design of providing against want—these are all ways, by which thieves and robbers enter—and whoever enters in by any of these ways . . . he deserves no better name.²

Even worse is a fourth and related kind of man. His ministerial ancestor is *Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness* (2 Pet. 2:15). Balaam's vice wasn't merely ministry for money, it was *unrighteous* ministry for money. He was prepared to do wrong prophetically for a tempting wage. Both his motive and his ministry were unrighteous.

Here, then, are four kinds of men who do not meet the standard of *not greedy of filthy lucre*: the one whose business is itself disreputable, the one whose business practices are accusable, the one whose motive for ministry is money, and the one who is prepared to minister unrighteously for a wage.

Not covetous. This brings us to the second vice involving money. *Not covetous* translates a word that combines the ancient words for *love* and *silver*. In contrast to what we've been considering, there is no suggestion here that this kind of person is actually mistreating people for the sake of money or that he is entering the ministry or twisting it wrongly for the sake of having money. He's simply characterized as loving it.

This can be much more difficult to assess than the first vice. When our ways of accruing wealth are entirely lawful, it isn't always clear, even to ourselves, whether we're covetous or merely industrious. I earnestly recommend Charles Bridges' chapter "The Spirit of Covetousness" for anyone who wishes to examine himself in this area. Bridges begins soberly, *Covetousness in Ministers has almost grown to a proverb. Judas is an awful example of its consistency with the highest Ministerial gifts.*

That last sentence scares me. I hope it does you as well. Many a covetous minister has quieted rising accusations in his own heart about the presence of this vice in his life by reviewing his obvious success in the ministry and concluding wrongly that God evidently is satisfied with his spirit. That's not necessarily so. *Judas is an awful example of its [covetousness's] consistency with the highest Ministerial gifts.*

Bridges suggests several ways in which covetousness may display itself.

We may discern "the cloak of covetousness"—in a mean attention to small matters—in the motives that influence our plans of economy—in carefulness to maintain present appearances—in contrivances to shift off expenses upon others—in the pleasur-

able excitement from the prospect of gain—in an undue depression from the disappointment of it—in the natural current of our thoughts in the direction of the world—in the readiness in lesser matters to put it upon a level with religion. All or any of these actings of this detestable principle must deaden the exercises of the Christian life and of Ministerial energy.³

We might also add to these the subtle, internal pressure to always possess the best, the relentless drive to be constantly upgrading, the restless eye for every bargain. All of these may betray a significant character defect in the area of material things.

There are two spiritual disciplines which, through the years, have helped to tether me personally in the area of material things. I've certainly not been without failure, but I've found that periodic reconsiderations of these two passages have restored my material equilibrium. The first is the admonition of Hebrews 13:5, *Be content with such things as ye have*. For me, applying this almost always involves the necessity of deliberately turning my eyes and thoughts away from nicer things; nicer homes in my neighborhood, nicer cars in the parking lot, nicer appliances in the stores, nicer landscaping in someone else's yard, nicer electronics on Amazon, etc., etc. *Be content*.

The other tether for me has been the ministerial standard for good soldiers of Jesus Christ: *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier* (2 Tim. 2:4). When I've occasionally been tempted to look into ways of making money on the side, that verse has cautioned me.

D. L. Moody observed that he had *seen more ministers injured in their ministries by money-making schemes than by any other means*.⁴ Who among us shouldn't take heed?

Will

not given to wine (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)
not greedy of filthy lucre (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)
not covetous (1 Tim. 3:3)
not self-willed (Titus 1:7)

This prohibition, not αὐθάδης, seems to have to do with pride, perhaps particularly as it manifests itself in anger or scorn. The Septuagint uses it of Reuben's preeminence (Gen. 49:3) and of Simeon and Levi's fierce anger (Gen. 49:7). Proverbs 21:24 includes it with pride and scorn as a description of the man who *dealeth in proud wrath*.

One of the nineteenth century's most acclaimed English preachers was a London pastor named Joseph Parker. His congregation at City Temple was second in size only to C. H. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle.

The two had been friends and had even exchanged pulpits on one occasion. But in April of 1890, just two days after the Baptist Union had met at Parker's church and officially voted 2000 to 7 in opposition to Spurgeon's insistence that the Union require that its members subscribe to an entirely orthodox creedal statement, Parker wrote an open letter to Spurgeon. It was condescending and belittling.

Let me advise you to widen the circle of which you are the centre. You are surrounded by offerers of incense. They flatter your weakness, they laugh at your jokes, they feed you with compliments. My dear Spurgeon, you are too big a man for this. Renounce it. Take in more fresh air. Open your windows even when the wind is in the east. Scatter your ecclesiastical harem. . . . Believe me, you are really not infallible. Pardon me if I venture upon the suggestion, that even you are at least presumably human. I almost tremble at my own temerity, for I cannot but think that any man who expels the whole Baptist Union must occupy a sovereign place in some pantheon of his own invention.⁵

What can account for this biting spirit, even when Parker believed that he, not Spurgeon, was in the right? Well, at least part of it can probably be explained by pride. Parker was known as an egotist.

When City Temple was being designed, the architects asked what style of building he desired. Parker replied, *Any style! But build me such a church that when Queen Victoria drives into the city, she will say, "Why, what place is that?"—and she will be told, "That is where Joseph Parker preaches!"*⁶

On another occasion a smaller congregation inquired as to whether Parker might consider becoming its pastor. Parker replied, *An eagle does not roost in a sparrow's nest*.⁷

This startling character defect is something of which a man may repent and requalify himself for ministry, but churches considering pastors would do well to give serious consideration to the qualification, *not self-willed*, before settling on their choices. ☞

¹ For a very helpful, up-to-date resource on the issue of the Christian and alcoholic beverages, I recommend Randy Jaeggli's *Christians and Alcohol: A Scriptural Case for Abstinence* (Bob Jones University Press, 2014).

² Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 138.

³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴ Helen Dixon, *A Romance of Preaching*, 271.

⁵ Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 735–36.

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Walking with the Giants*, 54.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

Bring . . . the Books

A Practical View of Christianity
William Wilberforce

Composed in the deteriorating culture of eighteenth-century England, William Wilberforce's *A Practical View of Christianity* was penned "not to convince the Sceptic . . ., or to answer the arguments of persons who avowedly oppose the fundamental doctrines of our Religion; but to point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians, and to contrast their defective scheme with a representation of what the author apprehends to be real Christianity" (xxv).^{*} And that he did. In seven chapters Wilberforce presents the argument that genuine Christianity affects a person's life practically. He is even bold enough to give clear examples of how real conversion will bring an end to some activities once enjoyed as an unbeliever and prompt other actions not engaged in before salvation.

His polemical style of writing is not harsh or condemning, but kind reasoning from biblical principles. Apparently this work was well received. Before the author's death, the book went through fifteen editions in England and twenty-five editions in the United States. It was also translated into at least five other languages. John Newton stated, "I deem it the most valuable and important publication of the present age" (xxvi). It is also "credited with helping spark the second Great Awakening" (xv).

Understanding the reality of timeless principles from the Scripture and that mankind is always the same at its core, a person would gain great value in reading this book. Here is an example of an author who mixed proclamation of truth with practical application. It touched a real need of the day and was widely accepted.

Wilberforce lived a religious life until he was radically converted in 1785. He then realized that many others, like himself, were religious yet not truly converted. Wilberforce states that to come to realize that salvation requires that one first understand the essence of human depravity.

The bulk of professed Christians are used to speak of man as of a being, who naturally pure, and inclined to all virtue, is sometimes, almost involuntarily, drawn out of the right course, or is overpowered by the violence of temptation. Vice with them is rather an accidental and temporary, than a constitutional and habitual distemper. . . . Far different is the humiliating language of Christianity. From it we learn that man is an apostate creature, fallen from his high original, degraded in his nature, and depraved in his faculties . . . not slightly and superficially, but radically and to the very core (14–15).

From this foundational truth he begins his thesis that there must be a change in one's conduct after receiving salvation. The effects of this depravity are still latent in the soul.

The convert must actively turn away from areas of conduct and must purposefully engage in new pursuits precisely because of this inclination. Chapter 4 gives examples of things to be avoided because of their unwholesome influence, and furnishes a peek into eighteenth-century England. The same chapter lists actions that should be practiced and explains the motivation for each of these as "looking unto Jesus" (i.e., the cross). The author also presents the fallacies of much of the established religion of his day.

Though Wilberforce is known for his persistent opposition to slavery, this volume includes only a brief mention that slavery should be repudiated and fought against by all Christians. It wasn't until 1833, the year of his death, that slavery was outlawed in the British Empire.

One interesting fact is that William Wilberforce was not a minister or a theologian. He was a member of the British parliament. The preface, written by Charles Colson, gives details about Wilberforce's life that brought him to write such a work. It is a good reminder to all believers to be light and salt no matter where they are.

The book was first published on April 12, 1797, under the title *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Thanks to Hendrickson Publishers, the work was revived in 2006 in the Hendrickson Christian Classics series.

I found the book fascinating and very thought provoking. This is not a fast read. Since the volume is written in the Elizabethan style of the King James Version, the reader will often have to stop and contemplate what was just read to ascertain what the author is communicating. It is well worth the pondering. The editor gives definitions for archaic words in the text.

I was intrigued by the author's direct insistence on actions being avoided and practices being implemented. "Salt and light" was the emphasis. Avoiding the corrupt influence of a deteriorating culture is the author's heartbeat. I could not help drawing parallels with my own culture. Although the author's friends advised him not to write a work expressing such clear principles of distinction and giving specific examples to follow (xxv), the first edition sold out in only a few days. I found myself encouraged by the boldness of the author and by this adventure.

^{*}All quotations are from the Hendrickson Christian Classics edition edited by Kevin Charles Belmonte, 2006.

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

Dr. Dale Heffernan is senior pastor of Midland Baptist Church (Wichita, Kansas), which he planted in 1986.

Straight Cuts

Seeing God Work When You Can't See God

For times of uncertainty, God packs a large and reassuring revelation of Himself into the little phrase “The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” (Ezra 1:1). A clear understanding of the dynamic in this phrase provides the believer with assurance that his God is the God who can be trusted in both world affairs and in personal daily life.

The announcement in 1:1 states that, in fulfillment of prophecies made by Isaiah and Jeremiah, Cyrus the Persian king would issue an edict. Fresh from his conquest of Babylon, he proclaimed that all willing Jewish people could return to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon. The author of the book attributed this action to the fact that “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus.” Did God perform this in a vacuum, or by means? Did Cyrus suddenly feel an unexpected impulse from God that temporarily transformed him into God’s puppet? No. God used the means of divine interventions in the life and world of Cyrus that would culminate in his awakening. In turn, this stirring would not overrule or suspend the king’s will.

How, then, does God exercise His sovereignty without suspending mankind’s natural free will? While ultimately this puzzle extends beyond the limits of complete human understanding, various passages enlighten our understanding. As part of the prophecy concerning the rise of Cyrus, Isaiah 45:13 records a portion of God’s declaration: “I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts.” As God raised up Cyrus, the Lord made Cyrus’s paths smooth (the idea of “direct all his ways”). God intervened in circumstances to facilitate the rise of this coming world leader. Those factors that could have blocked his ascent were moved out of his path by God. While Cyrus asserted his own will to rise in power, God was still active. Isaiah emphasizes the same type of divine activity in 45:1–3, where God lists His acts that made Cyrus’s victories possible.

Proverbs 21:1 sheds further light on this movement of God: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” The first half of this verse states that the king’s decisions are under God’s control, while the second half demonstrates that God does not suspend the king’s free will but rather “steers” him through means. The metaphor of “the rivers of water” demonstrates God’s wisdom and power in accomplishing this. If this figure is a reference to irrigation ditches, the point is that farmers erected dams and other obstructions that would cause the water to seek a different course, a course

that would serve the needs of the farmer. If the waters refer to natural streams, we know that various activities of nature such as collapsed banks and fallen trees cause the stream to naturally seek a different course.

The point is that God used various factors to direct the watercourses of Cyrus’s development and philosophy. From the DNA God put into Cyrus at conception to the experiences of his life that molded him, the waters of his life would be diverted to a certain path. The king, like the water, would choose his direction in response to outward influences. Cyrus differed from previous rulers in his treatment of those whom he had conquered. This king chose to let conquered people stay contented in their homeland under his rule rather than crushing their spirits through deportation. The Lord stirred up Cyrus through the culmination of all of the molding forces in his life.

In Isaiah 10:5–7 God used Assyria’s desire to conquer many nations, including Judah, to bring about chastening upon His own people. The realization and acceptance of the providence of God in his life led Joseph to declare, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20). God marvelously worked in the background, using the evil choices of men to produce His good will.

The believer must not overlook the other dynamic in God’s providential activity: prayer. In the ninth chapter of his prophecy, Daniel read the prophecy of Jeremiah about the restoration of his people. Subsequently, Daniel prayed for God to fulfill His promise. God binds the prayers of His people with His purpose. Our supplications, in some incomprehensible way, all work together with the Lord’s will. God even began His providential activity before Daniel began to pray: “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear” (Isa. 65:24).

What results from this activity of the Lord? The portrait of a trustworthy God emerges. As the Lord influenced the thoughts and actions of Cyrus without ever overruling the king’s will, God completes His plans without violating man’s free will. God is in control of the events of life and can use whatever means He needs to use. Just because we cannot see God’s work does not mean He is not acting. The Jewish people could not see the molding of Cyrus that would result in their release, but God was still actively working behind the scenes in it. As the believer faithfully prays and waits upon God, one day he will be rewarded when he sees the culmination of God’s activity. Even though God’s hand wasn’t readily apparent, God was working then, and is as active in working through believers now. ☞

*“Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)*

So much that relates to the coming of the Savior depends on the juxtaposition of the lives of Boaz and Ruth (Matt. 1:5–16). Ruth 2:3 says that Ruth’s “hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.” Boaz just “happened” to be the one who was second in line to become the kinsman-redeemer when the first in line did not choose to exercise his privilege or responsibility (Ruth 4:6).

Was this “happenstance” or even what is today called “open theism”? No, this was God’s providence. Matthew Henry comments on Ruth 2:3: “To Ruth it seemed casual but Providence directed her steps to this (portion of the larger) field. Many a great affair is brought about by a little turn, which seemed fortuitous to us, but was directed by Providence with design.” Matthew Poole similarly remarks on this verse, “It was indeed a chance in reference to second causes, but ordered and designed by God’s providence.”

Charles H. Spurgeon said, “On how small an incident the greatest results may hinge! The pivots of history are microscopic.”¹ Spurgeon also wrote, “The keys of providence swing at the girdle of Christ. Believe it, Christian, nothing occurs here without the permit or decree of your Savior.”²

Consistent antisupernaturalists and secular humanists detest the very mention of providence. Christians, as Spurgeon suggested, take comfort and security from it. And history is on the side of the Christians. In fact, if you subtract providence from the narrative of either church history or world history, the timelines of both are riddled with inexplicable holes.

Providence and benevolence are kin. Providence is benevolent. It is good—not bad. It is good toward “them that love God,” which means that an attendant implication is that those who choose not to love God may find themselves to be recipients not of the benevolence of God but rather of the judgment of God. Perhaps one of the best descriptions of the providence of God is the verse just referenced: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The word “providence” occurs only once in the Authorized Translation in Acts 24:2, where it is used not in reference to God but in a flattering reference to Felix. The Greek word *pronoia*, however, also occurs in Romans 13:14, where the KJV translates it “provision.” The word means “to know ahead, to care for beforehand or to provide.”³ *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (1047–48) defines “providence” as “a term that in theology designates the continued care that God exercises over the universe He has created. This includes the two facts of preservation and government. The doctrine of providence is closely connected with that of creation.

That God could create the world and then forsake it is inconceivable in view of the perfection of God. . . . There is ground in Scripture, as in reason, for the distinction between general and particular and special providence.”

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary adds that providence “is the denial of the idea that the universe is governed by chance or fate (Psalm 103:19). . . . God preserves all things through His providence (Acts 17:28). . . . The laws of nature are nothing more than man’s description of how we perceive God at work in the world. . . . God’s actions, however, do not violate the reality of human choice or negate man’s responsibility as a moral being. God permits sinful acts to occur, but He does not cause man to sin (Genesis 45:5; Romans 9:22).”⁴

Henry Ward Beecher wrote, “No physician ever weighed out medicine to his patients with half so much care and exactness as God weighs out to us every trial. The effect or end result of this divine mixing is often not seen until man has the benefit of hindsight.” John Flavel in *The Mystery of Providence* said, “Some providences, like Hebrew letters, must be read backwards.”

This hindsight may be many years in coming. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery when he was seventeen (Gen. 37:2). He was at least thirty years of age when he said to his brothers, “Ye sold me . . . [but] God sent me” (Gen. 41:46; 45:5, 7). It was yet another seventeen years before Joseph said, “But as for you, ye **thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 47:28; 50:20). It takes time to see the working of providence.

Sir Thomas Browne said, “Let not fortune, which hath no name in Scripture, have any place in thy divinity [theology or doctrine]. Let providence, not chance, have the honour of thy acknowledgments. . . . Mark well the paths and winding ways thereof; but be not too wise in the construction or sudden in the application. The hand of providence writes often by [abbreviations], hieroglyphics . . . which are not to be made out but by a hint or key from that Spirit which indicted them.”⁵

Another Puritan referred to providence as “the hand of God in the robbery of man.” It was only in retrospect that Samuel Rutherford saw his ecclesiastically enforced exile from his beloved congregation at Anwoth as a good thing. At the time it pained his under-shepherd’s heart very deeply. Rutherford, like Joseph, learned that God’s providence eventually overrides evil for good. Joseph said that his brothers “sold” but God

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

Charles Spurgeon

“sent.” When Peter preached after the lame man at the temple was healed, he said, “Ye men of Israel, . . . **the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up**” (Acts 3:12, 13).

While both the cistern into which Joseph’s brothers threw him and their lunching spot were along the well-traveled trade route between Gilead and Egypt, it was the hand of providence that brought the Ishmaelites and Midianites to that place at exactly the right time. (There is no guarantee that Reuben’s secret plan to save Joseph from the other infuriated brothers would have succeeded long term. They had murder in their hearts, and they would have found or made another opportunity to kill him.) It was the care and precise timing of God that got Joseph to Egypt to begin the fulfillment of God’s word to Abraham in Genesis 15:13.

Joseph’s whole life is an astounding illustration of the supernatural miracles of providence. The seventeen-year-old slave is not sold into hard labor where he could well have died in a short time. He is bought by the commanding officer of Pharaoh’s bodyguard. This opened the door to the very palace of Egypt. And on and on it goes for the next ninety-three years, of which Thomas Browne wrote, Joseph spends eighty of those years as de facto ruler of the most powerful nation on earth.

In *Gold by Moonlight* missionary Amy Carmichael wrote,

The illustration of the Chladni plate beautifully shows how . . . agitating circumstances can be caused to work together. You sprinkle sand on a brass plate fixed on a pedestal, and draw a [violin] bow across the edge of the plate, touching it at the same time with two fingers. Then, because of this touch, the sand does not fall into confusion but into an ordered pattern like music made visible. Each little grain of sand finds its place in that pattern. Not one grain is forgotten and left to drift about unregarded. There is nothing in the vibrations of the bow to make a pattern. Suffering, hunger, poverty, baffling circumstances cannot of themselves make anything but confusion. But if there be the touch of the Hand, all these things work together for good, not an ill, not for discord, but for something like the harmony of music.⁶

There are several accounts of an event that took place in July of 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion in the life of Rosalind Goforth, missionary to China. Though there are slight variations in the story, there is more than enough similarity to see “the hand of God in the robbery of man.”

Rosalind, her husband Jonathan, their four remaining children, and ten others were trying to escape from the dragnet of death which the Empress Dowager and the Boxers had unleashed against all foreigners. They engaged several carters and oxcarts for the fourteen-day journey to Fancheng where they would

take a houseboat to Hankow. At numerous points along the journey mobs rushed at their carts crying, “Kill, kill!” Jonathan’s neck was hit and scarred by the blunt edge of a sword, and his helmet was almost cut to pieces. Rosalind writes, “Had the sharp edge struck his neck he would certainly have been beheaded!” After one of their narrow escapes from death, they managed to reach a small village where the inhabitants wept when they saw their wounds, bathed them, made bandages, and gave them food, drink, and a straw bed. The Goforths soon learned that all the inhabitants of this village were Muslim! “We felt that God had wonderfully directed our steps to that village.”⁷

When they reached the large city of Nang Yang Fu they were attacked again by a mob of over a thousand men. “Why did they not kill us then? Why, indeed? None but an Almighty God kept that crowd back.”⁸ Within hours, the official of the city, reluctant to have them killed in the city “lest he should afterward be blamed,” laid a plan to have the Goforth party ambushed by fifty soldiers on a road past the city so he could say brigands had murdered them. The official sent some soldiers with them to “guide them onto the ‘right road.’” The soldiers fell asleep. The missionaries came to a fork in the road and did not know which road to take. The oxen took the road away from the ambush! In the case of Baalam, God used a donkey. In the case of the Goforths, God used some oxen.

In the case of David Brainerd, God used a rattlesnake. During Brainerd’s first trip to the Forks of the Delaware, a party of ferocious Indians had approached his tent to kill him. When they arrived Brainerd was on his knees in prayer. A rattlesnake crept to his side and flicked its forked tongue almost in his face. Then, for no apparent reason, the snake suddenly turned away and glided into the underbrush. The Indians concluded that the Great Spirit was with the paleface and accorded him the awe of a prophet of God the next morning.⁹

What a comfort it is to know that God superintends the actions of slave traders, oxen, snakes, and men for His glory and the good of those who love Him. ☞

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 54, 25.

² C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 13, 154.

³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament*, Chattanooga: AMG, 1223.

⁴ *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 883.

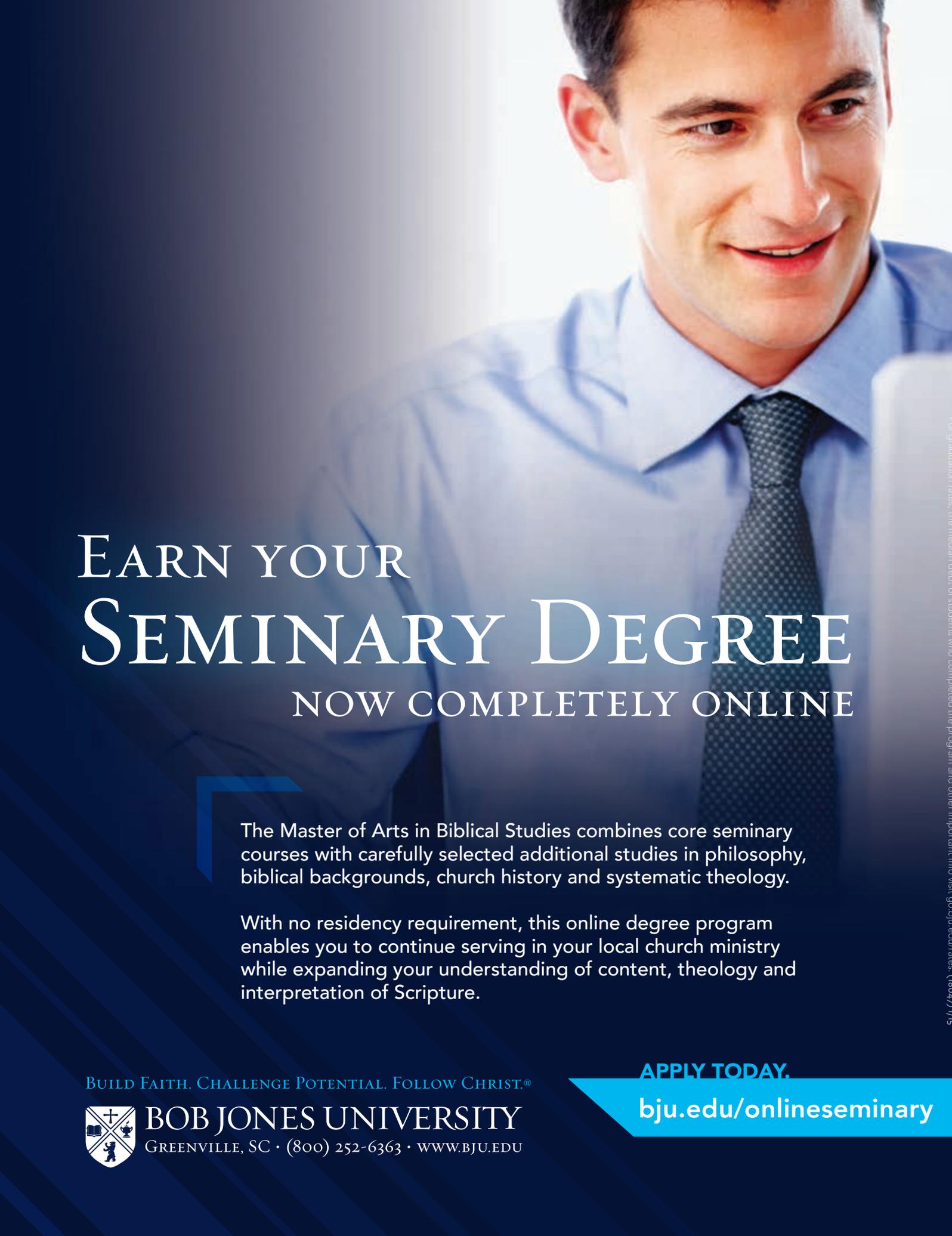
⁵ I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, Chicago: Moody, 231.

⁶ Amy Carmichael, *Gold by Moonlight*, Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 39.

⁷ Rosalind Goforth, *How I Know God Answers Prayer*, Elkhart, IN: Bethel, 53.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹ Frank W. Borham, *Life Verses*, Vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 22.



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Till He comes it is the reign of hope; when He comes it is the reign of grateful remembrance. —John Duncan

Now we say, "Give your heart to God." I know what we mean when we say give your heart to God, but that's not really Bible language. . . . God doesn't really want your heart if you're a sinner. He wants to give you a new heart. —Bob Jones Sr.

Nowadays a raise enables a man to live the way he is already living. —Unknown

To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting. —Edmund Burke

Humility as a sovereign grace is the creation of Christianity. —William Gladstone

I preach as though Christ was crucified yesterday; rose again from the dead today; and is coming back to earth tomorrow. —Martin Luther

The recession hasn't hurt my family yet—we can still live beyond our means. —Unknown

In the incarnation, Christ took our flesh, that He might give us His Spirit. —John Duncan

Dr. Horatius Bonar, as he drew the curtains at night and retired to rest, used to say, as if in prayer, and certainly with expectancy, "Perhaps tonight, Lord!" In the morning, as he awoke and looked out on the dawn of a new day, looking up into the sky, he would say, "Perhaps today, Lord!"

God is great in great things and very great in little things. —Henry Dyer

A man without enemies is a man who has accomplished nothing. You cannot move without producing friction. —Bob Jones Sr.

To read between the lines was easier than to follow the text. —Henry James

A plain man in one of the Scottish Presbyterian churches learned the precious doctrine of the Second Coming. [Then] the man spent a Sunday in Edinburgh. When he returned to his village, the people asked how he liked the Edinburgh preachers. He replied, "They all fly on one wing. They all preach the first coming of Christ but not the second." —Andrew Bonar

I feel that such a poor sinful creature as I am is unworthy to have anything said about him; but if a funeral sermon must be preached, preach from the words, "Have mercy upon me." —William Carey

What I was as an artist seemed to me of some importance while I lived, but what I am as a believer in Christ Jesus is the thing of most importance to me now. —Self-composed inscription, tomb of John Bacon, celebrated British sculptor, 1799

If doing God's will is all that counts for you, then no matter what the rest of life brings, you can find joy. —Vernon C. Lyons

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

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Biblical Imperatives on Separation

David C. Innes

The doctrine of separation applies to both *unbelievers* (top sections) and to *believers* (bottom sections). The practice of the doctrine of separation assures the purity and preservation of the other doctrines. This is a very general sampling of texts, not a comprehensive explanation of personal and/or ecclesiastical separation. Titus 1:13 is viewed by some as a reference to straying believers. Whatever their precise spiritual status, one's responsibility toward them is clear.

Scripture quotations and references are the author's personal paraphrase.

REFERENCE	WHO IS INVOLVED	WHAT THEY DO	WHAT WE ARE COMMANDED* TO DO
Eph. 5:7, 11	Immoral, impure, covetous, idolatrous persons	Practice immorality, impurity, and greed	Do not have things in common (fellowship) with them. Do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness but . . . expose them.
Titus 1:13	Judaizers and Gnostics professing Christianity	Rebel and speak against the truth, deceive believers, upset whole families, teach false doctrine, seek personal gain	Reprove them severely (rebuke them sharply) that they may be sound in the faith.
1 John 4:1–3	Many false prophets	Deny the incarnation of Christ—that He has come in the flesh	Do not believe every spirit but test the spirits whether they are from God.
2 John 7–11	Many deceivers who personify the Antichrist	Do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh, go beyond sound teaching and do not abide in the teaching of Christ	Do not receive him into your house, do not give him a greeting (i.e., bid him Godspeed)—do not wish him well.
2 Tim. 3:5	Wicked men holding to an outward form of godliness while professing adherence to Christianity	Deny the power of godliness (they continue to refuse God's transforming power in their lives)	Avoid (turn away from) such men as these.
Gal. 1:6–9	Judaizers (They added circumcision to the gospel as a requirement for salvation.)	Preach a different gospel of a completely different kind, distort (completely change) the gospel of Christ	Let him be accursed ("devoted" to divine judgment).
2 Cor. 6:14–18	Unbelievers, unregenerate but religious pagans	That which by nature unbelievers and pagans do	Stop being yoked unequally together with them. Come out from their midst. Be separated (draw a boundary line between yourself and them).
2 Thess. 3:6, 14–15	Disobedient believers—"brothers"	Conduct themselves contrary to the prescribed order, refuse to obey Paul's instructions as recorded in inspired Scripture	Withdraw yourself (avoid) from him. Take special note of that man (mark him). Have no company with him. (Do not associate with him.) Keep admonishing him as a brother.
Titus 3:10	Professing believers	As to doctrine, they teach heresy (wrong doctrine); as to conduct, they are factious persons (cause divisions and factions)	After a first and second warning, reject them—have nothing more to do with them.
Rom. 16:17–20	Professing believers	Cause divisions and offenses (entrapments) contrary to the accepted body of teaching, use smooth speech, deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting	Keep your eye on them (mark them). Turn away from them (avoid them).

*Without exception all of these are in the imperative mode. They are God-given commands to be obeyed!



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Written and Compiled by Dr. Layton Talbert

THE STORY OF DAVID, PART 1:

We are about to jump into a big story about a central individual who is part of an even larger story. So a glance at the wider context into which we are stepping will help orient us to the surrounding story. Here are the major movements:

- *1 Samuel 1–8 focuses on God’s leader Samuel.* Chapter 8 is the critical hinge in the story as the nation transitions toward monarchy. Israel had a legitimate complaint (8:1–3). But they already had (a) their own solution (“a king,” 8:5), (b) their own timetable (“now,” 8:5), (c) their own will (“nay,” 8:19), and (d) their own agenda (“that we also may be like all the nations,” 8:20).
- *1 Samuel 9–15 focuses on God’s leader Saul* (though Samuel is still present). Chapter 15 is the critical hinge here as the nation transitions from the Saulide dynasty and sets the stage for the Davidic dynasty (see especially 15:23, 26, 28).
- *1 Samuel 16–31 focuses on God’s leader-in-waiting, David* (though Saul is still present).
- *2 Samuel focuses on God’s leader in charge, David, and the triumphs and troubles of his leadership.*

Everyone loves a good story. A good story is always enjoyable, but a good story skillfully told, that’s a work of art. Woven into a well-told story are hints and markers that tip you off as to what’s going on beneath the surface of the action. Two concepts keep bobbing to the surface as the narrative transitions from Saul (1 Sam. 15) to David (1 Sam. 16).

- **Vision and Provision**—The Hebrew verb *ra’ah* can mean either “see” or “see to” (i.e., “provide”), and it occurs 7x (16:1, 6, 7 [3x], 17, 18).
- **Selection and Rejection**—These are two sides of the same coin, as three terms play off one another in the story: “reject” (*ma’as*; 15:23, 26, 16:1, 7), “choose” (*bachar*; 16:8, 9, 10), and “anoint” (*mashach*; 15:1, 17; 16:3, 6, 12, 13). The story orbits around these actions of God.

These words are like little blinking lights that alert you to the heart of what is going on in the passage. They are the narrator’s way of emphasizing God’s awareness and involvement. Some see Israel’s demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8 as an end to the theocracy—the rule of

God. It was nothing of the sort. God is still very much governing His people. Four centuries later Daniel will insist that “[God] removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (2:21), and that’s in the context of even pagan nations. He is still the one in charge; that never changes even when we disobey and demand our own way and think we are taking control over our own ways. We can remove ourselves from His blessing, but not from His presence or His control.

The Selection of Saul’s Replacement

“I have provided me a king” (16:1) conveys God’s providence. But how is the anointing of this new king to be accomplished with Saul on the throne, without Samuel appearing to be guilty of treason? Was God telling Samuel to do something dishonest (16:2–3)? No, the sacrifice Samuel came to Bethlehem to make was entirely legitimate and appropriate; and to have an ulterior motive does not invalidate the surface motive. But it does raise a curious question.

Why all the suspense? Why did God tell Samuel to invite Jesse and then He would show him what to do and whom to anoint (16:3)? Why didn’t God just say, “Go to Bethlehem and anoint so-and-so”? Wouldn’t that be simpler? Why the mystery? For that matter, why doesn’t God spell out everything for *you and me* ahead of time?

In Samuel’s case, one factor was efficiency. Samuel had no opportunity to question the wisdom or appropriateness of anointing a little kid as king. He knew Saul had been rejected and was going to be replaced. But by a *kid*? No. As a matter of fact, Saul was going to reign *eighteen more years* after God had rejected him. God’s timetable is very different than ours, but rarely does He lay it all out for us ahead of time.

So Samuel went to Bethlehem not knowing whom he was to anoint. In fact, when he got there, the one he was supposed to anoint wasn’t even there. He’d been overlooked. He wasn’t included in the family plans at all. He was just the youngest; as we find out later, he was left behind to watch the family’s sheep.

Did you know even prophets can be mistaken when left to their own observations and conclusions? (See 2 Sam. 7:1–3.) When Samuel saw the oldest son, Eliab, he thought that *had* to be God’s choice (16:6). Wrong (16:7).

DAVID'S HEART DIVINELY CHOSEN (1 SAMUEL 16)

Here is another reason (or at least another result) that God didn't tell Samuel ahead of time: to teach not just Samuel but us as readers to *beware of immediate impressions and external appearances*. Learn, instead, to be guided by God's voice, God's words. Dale Davis (1 Samuel, 170–71) fills in the blanks of 16:6 with the kinds of things that impress us:

In 1 Samuel so much hangs on choices. . . . One can understand Samuel's thinking. Eliab was doubtless an impressive hunk of manhood. Around 6'2" perhaps, about 225 pounds, met people well, all man but with social grace, excellent taste in after-shave lotion, and so on. Perhaps he'd starred as wide receiver for Bethlehem High School football. Probably made the All-Judean All-Star team. [Probably] Samuel was not alone in his estimate of Eliab. . . . If we are mesmerized, Yahweh is not. He can see clearly. . . . We must not conclude from verse 7 that God opposes fine appearance [cf. 16:12]. . . . Rather, external appearance neither qualifies nor disqualifies; it simply does not matter. . . . Yahweh looks on the heart. That matters.

That is encouraging, and comforting, and convicting. "Sometimes," Davis later adds (172), "Yahweh must save us from our saviors, our self-chosen solutions to kingdom needs or personal dilemmas."

And so it continued; seven sons, seven rejections (16:8–10). Samuel was befuddled. But when your back is to the wall and you think you've exhausted all the possibilities, don't be too quick to assume that there are no other options. It is to Samuel's credit that he doesn't assume God has made a mistake, but that Jesse has. "This doesn't make sense. You're sure all your sons are here?" (16:11). "Well," Jesse hems, "actually, no."

As soon as young David came in, God told Samuel, "That's him!" (16:12). God had singled him out long ago (13:14). But from a human standpoint, you have to ask, how much sense does this make? God had just told Samuel that Saul was rejected. So he sent him to Jesse's family in Bethlehem to anoint a replacement, who turns out to be . . . the youngest? The family gopher? Take his shepherd's staff and give him a scepter? Empty the rocks out of that bag hanging from his waist and fill them with the crown jewels? He's not ready to lead yet! Granted.

That being the case, why *did* God do all this now? Why didn't God just wait till the time came? David's not ready

to lead yet. God's not ready for him to lead yet. God's not done dealing with Saul yet. But God has to start preparing David.

Don't tell David, but he has a long, hard road ahead of him to get to that throne. He's about twelve right now, when God chooses and calls him to be the next king; but Saul has, in the providence of God, almost half of his reign left! David has an *eighteen-year wait* (or, more often than not, an eighteen-year run) ahead of him. *So might some of us, even if we think we know what God wants us to do!*

Preparation often takes longer than we like to think. The task He calls us to may take longer than we think. David *knows* now what God has called and anointed him to do. But he still has chapters 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 (does this begin to sound like your life?), 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 2 Samuel 1. And then *finally* David becomes king.

God's calls to His children are almost always calls not to *be* but to *become*, not to *do* but to *prepare*. Don't begrudge the process of *becoming* and *preparing*; it's crucial. It is the only way you will effectively *be* and *do* what God has called you to when the time comes. His time.

God will teach David an awful lot along the way—about leadership (positively and negatively), about relying on God, about waiting on God's timing (unlike Israel), about what it looks like when a man sins against God and refuses to repent and God removes His Spirit and leaves him alone (like Saul).

The Contrast between Saul and His Replacement (16:14–23)

That narrative wastes not a moment introducing us to the most telling contrast between Saul the rejected and David the chosen. And it is not a contrast rooted in natural abilities or human merit but in the grace and sovereignty of God: "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (16:13), "but the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (16:14). Indeed, it was God's just judgment on Saul that opened the door for David's unusual talents, an opportunity that would begin to accustom David to court life (16:15–20). The unwitting introduction of Saul to his replacement is a moment of stunning literary irony: "And [Saul] loved him greatly" (16:21). It is even a moment that could almost be seen as a redemptive opportunity for Saul (16:23).

Olivet Discourse

Continued from page 7

Kingdom entrance. Jesus concludes His discourse on the timing of His Second Coming by giving several parables and illustrations (24:32–25:46). The purpose of these parables is to encourage humans to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ. One prepares for the Second Coming by placing faith in Christ. Throughout this section Jesus mentions the separation of evil ones for eternal punishment from righteous ones for eternal life (e.g., 25:46; illustrated in 24:45–51). The evil ones are not alert, but all of the righteous ones are alert and ready. As a result Jesus exhorts mankind to be ready and alert for the Second Coming by means of joining the righteous group through faith. This division of evil and righteous applies to both Jews and Gentiles.

Readiness/alertness is not a work that someone must do to be ready for the Second Coming. It is a natural result of one who is already in the righteous group. Jesus uses the example of Noah's flood (Matt. 24:37–39). Noah and his family (the righteous) prepared for the flood and were watching for it. They did not earn deliverance because of their alertness. They were alert because they believed. Those who did not think that judgment would come (the unrighteous) were taken by surprise into judgment. It is not that they had not been told by Noah. It is that they did not believe that judgment would come. This is exactly what is seen at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 16:11, 21). The evil ones refuse to repent. Instead, they blaspheme God even in the face of the bowl judgments. It is not that they do not know; it is that they refuse to believe.

The appeal for alertness/readiness is not referring to the Rapture. It is referring to Christ's Second Coming. The evil ones are taken away to judgment. The righteous are allowed to enter the millennial kingdom. This is not a description of the Rapture. It is interesting that Jesus uses the same illustration about a thief in the night in Matthew 24:43 and Revelation 16:15. Both are a reference to the Second Coming.

Neither is the Olivet Discourse an encouragement for believers to be alert and watching for the Rapture. That would imply that some believers are not watching for the Rapture. All of the nonalert people in the Olivet Discourse are unsaved people headed for judgment. There may, in fact, be believers who are not watching for the Rapture, but they should not be included in the group of unbelievers headed for eternal destruction.

Conclusion

In the Olivet Discourse Jesus taught that His Second Coming to establish the kingdom would not immediately follow the destruction of the temple. His Second Coming would follow the Tribulation period. Jesus exhorted people to prepare for His Second Coming by trusting in Him for eternal life. Whether one is genuinely converted during Christ's day, the church age, or the Tribulation period, he is ready for the Second Coming. Ironically, a church saint who is prepared for the Second Coming is also prepared for the Rapture.

Dr. Andrew Hudson is a professor at Maranatha Baptist Seminary.



¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, 269.

² Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* (Spring 2003): 118.

³ Stanley Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, "No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God's Promised Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (April 2007): 131–47.

⁴ John Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Present Age," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (July 1971): 208.

⁵ Larry Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (Fall 2002): 175.

⁶ Bigalke, 121–22. There is no agreement that the midpoint of the Tribulation is after the sixth seal judgment, though.

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Stateside “Tolerance”?

Two churches in North Carolina have been on the receiving end of “public tolerance.” The Bales Memorial Wesleyan Church of Jamestown was the first to be targeted. Church members found their flower gardens shredded, windows broken, parking signs removed, and the exterior of the church building covered with egg, Silly String, and painted vandalism. Activists also vandalized the church bus by scratching the hood and jamming a sign into the front grill. Damage was estimated around ten thousand dollars.

Grace Baptist Church of Greensboro was the next to be violated. The sanctuary was pelted with eggs and toilet paper. The signature window was broken. Outer walls were spray-painted with pro-homosexual slogans.

The pastor of Grace Baptist could not understand why his church was targeted among so many except that the message of the gospel proclaimed by that congregation. Both pastors spoke words of grace and forgiveness.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/persecution/2015/04/24/homosexuals-ransack-tag-n-churches-with-pro-gay-slogans#.VT6agc7NqJU>.

Don’t Fund Me

Aaron and Melissa Klein are the former owners of Sweet Cakes by Melissa. Trouble began for this

Oregon-based business when Melissa declined to bake a cake for a lesbian wedding ceremony. A civil lawsuit was filed by the rebuffed customer. An Oregon judge made it clear that he believes the Kleins have violated Oregon law and now need to pay a fine of \$135,000, which would be given to the couple, Rachel Cryer and Laurel Bowman, for the suffering they endured.

The popular fundraising website GoFundMe initially allowed the Kleins to receive financial contributions toward their fine. The couple quickly raised \$109,000 before GoFundMe pulled the plug on fundraiser, stating that the Kleins failed to function within the terms of agreement. Franklin Graham from Samaritan’s Purse is picking up the cause to help raise the additional funding needed.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/gofundme-blocks-camapign-for-christian-bakers-asked-to-pay-135000-fine-for-refusing-to-make-cake-for-gay-wedding-138186/>.

Changes for Northland

On April 22 of this year Northland International University president Daniel Patz announced that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has withdrawn its intention to receive the Northland Campus to create a northern campus for Boyce College. The seminary also indicated that it will not provide oversight for the camp ministry.

On Sunday, April 26, 2015, . . . the Northland

Board of Trustees voted to close Northland International University, the undergraduate and graduate schools of the ministry.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.ni.edu/news-events/important-announcement>.

Severing Ties

In the last publication of *FrontLine*, an article was introduced that chronicled the journey of the PCUSA and its redefining of marriage. At the writing of that article, only a few more voting groups were required to embrace the new marriage definition. Since then, the PCUSA has fully endorsed its redefinition and now has begun to reap the consequences.

On March 31, 2015, Pastor Anthony Evans, president of the National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), announced that his group would be severing ties with the PCUSA. The NBCI networks over 34,000 black churches and represents 15.7 million African American church members.

Pastor Evans called the PCUSA back to repentance, insisting that the church vote was a “flagrantly pretentious and illegitimate maneuver by a body that has no authority whatsoever to alter holy text.”

This article can be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2015/03/31/34k-black-churches-sever-ties-with-pcusa-over-gay-marriage#.VT-X8c7NqJU>.

Churched and Unchurched

The Barna Research group recently conducted a poll of the 100 largest cities in the United States regarding church attendance. Research reflects that nearly fifty percent of the members of these cities attend church on any given week. Forty-two percent of those polled were considered active church members (attending church once a week). Yet on the converse, thirty-eight percent have not attended church once in the last six months. The study also drew conclusions about Bible-mindedness, “dechurched,” or never once attending church. The poll result of the most-churched cities is

1. Chattanooga, Tennessee—63 percent
2. Baton Rouge, Louisiana—62 percent
3. Salt Lake City, Utah—60 percent
4. Birmingham, Alabama—60 percent
5. Augusta/Aiken, Georgia—60 percent
6. Greenville/Spartanburg/Anderson, South Carolina/Asheville, North Carolina—57 percent
7. Paducah, Kentucky/Cape Girardeau, Missouri/Harrisburg/Mt. Vernon, Illinois—56 percent
8. Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem, North Carolina—55 percent
9. Myrtle Beach/Florence, South Carolina—55 percent
10. Montgomery/Selma, Alabama—55 percent.

And for the unchurched:

NOTABLE QUOTES

1. San Francisco/Oakland/
San Jose, California—61
percent
2. Burlington, Vermont/
Plattsburgh, New York—55
percent
3. Boston/Manchester,
Massachusetts—53 percent
4. Portland/Auburn, Maine—
52 percent
5. Chico/Redding,
California—52 percent
6. Las Vegas, Nevada—51
percent
7. Seattle/Tacoma,
Washington—50 percent
8. Albany/Schenectady/Troy,
New York—50 percent
9. Phoenix/Prescott,
Arizona—49 percent
10. New York, New York—48
percent.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2015/04/27/and-the-most-churched-unchurched-cities-in-us-are-...#.VT-fms7NqJU>.

Atheist Minister

John Shuck would describe himself as an atheist. Shuck asserts, "God is a symbol of myth-making and not credible as a supernatural being or force." Oh, and one more thing, John Shuck is a Presbyterian minister. He rather resents not being called a Christian. Are you confused?

"I believe one of the newer religious paths could be a 'belief-less' Christianity," Shuck expressed. "In this 'sect,' one is not required to believe things." In his view, members of society create their own god or embrace none at all. Those who reject scriptural absolutes and are rather guided by societal norms have "graduated to some kind of higher view of the world."

Shuck believes that his "belief-less Christianity" is on the rise, and he may be right. "Many liberal or progressive Christians have already let go or de-emphasized belief in heaven, that the Bible is liter-

How can we possibly believe the promises concerning Heaven, immortality, and glory, when we do not believe the promises concerning our present life? And how can we be trusted when we say we believe these promises but make no effort to experience them ourselves? It is just here that men deceive themselves. It is not that they do not want the Gospel privileges of joy, peace and assurance, but they are not prepared to repent of their evil attitudes and careless lifestyles. Some have even attempted to reconcile these things and ruined their souls. But without the diligent exercise of the grace of obedience, we shall never enjoy the graces of joy, peace and assurance.—Jonathan Owen

Wilderness is a temporary condition through which we are passing to the Promised Land.—Cotton Mather

It is of no value to God to give Him your life for death. He wants you to be a "living sacrifice," to let Him have all your powers that have been saved and sanctified through Jesus. This is the thing that is acceptable to God.—Oswald Chambers

Faith is the least self-regarding of all the virtues. It is by its very nature scarcely conscious of its own existence. Like the eye which sees everything in front of it and never sees itself, faith is occupied with the Object upon which it rests and pays no attention to itself at all. While we are looking at God we do not see ourselves—blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself and has nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the Perfect One.—A. W. Tozer

God has provided a Saviour that woos in a manner that has the greatest tendency to win our hearts. His word is most attractive. He stands at our door and knocks. He does not merely command us to receive him; but he condescends to apply himself to us in a more endearing manner. He entreats and beseeches us by his word and his messengers.—Jonathan Edwards

God did not design the things of His Word to work for people who are half-hearted about them.—Mark Minnick

ally true, that Jesus is supernatural, and that Christianity is the only way. Yet they still practice what they call Christianity."

Shuck also quipped that his congregation was BYOG (Bring Your Own God)—"I use that to invite people to 'bring their own God'—or none at all."

This article can be accessed at http://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2015/03/30/a-presbyterian-minister-who-doesnt-believe-in-god-why#.VT_ERs7NqJU.

Prosperity Gospel

Television evangelist Creflo Dollar has come under intense scrutiny for his request that supporters help him purchase a \$65-million jet for the ministry.

"If I want to believe God for a \$65-million plane, you cannot stop me," was Dollar's incredulous defense. Dollar claimed to his congregation the Spirit had led him to address the issue because critics were trying to discredit his voice and ministry. Dollar explained that he had never asked his congregation for any support for this plane. Rather, there were three million donors throughout the world to which he appealed.

Dollar went on to address other criticisms. Later he insisted that there was no such thing as a prosperity gospel, only a gospel of grace.

This article can be accessed at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/creflo-dollar-slams-critics-if-i-want-to-believe-god-for-a-65-million-plane-you-cannot-stop-me-138010/>.

Newsworthy is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of FBFI.

Compiled by Robert Conduct, FBFI Executive Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

Christ's coming is imminent. Or is it "immanent" . . . ?
No, no—"eminent," right? Um, does it really matter?

These three terms have to do with critically important Bible doctrines. Jesus' coming is *imminent*—He could come at any time (Rev. 22:20). God is both *immanent* and transcendent: both present in His creation and existing in a different category from it (Matt. 28:20; Isa. 6:1). *Eminent* isn't a theological word, really, but it does appear in Ezekiel to refer to something very prominent (16:24ff.). It's important to use the right word.

I once saw a doctrinal statement for a small Baptist college, now defunct. "We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins," the statement said, "as a reprehensive and substitutionary sacrifice." I'm pretty sure I know what they meant—"representative." And that's good doctrine: when Christ died He died *representing* me. But what they actually said was weird at best, heresy at worst. Somebody there mixed up "representative" and "reprehensible."

We all do this: it's called a "malapropism." For example: "He must have been *diluted* to think he could win that basketball game!" or "Do you believe in the five *tenants* of Calvinism?" The other day in a world-class publication I saw "take it for grant it" instead of "take it for granted." Generally, people have no trouble understanding the message in these cases, because (1) malapropisms tend to rhyme with the words they displace and (2) context makes the intended meaning quite clear. Nobody really thought that this small Fundamentalist college was saying that Jesus' sacrifice deserved censure and condemnation.

As I said, we all commit malapropisms—but not usually in doctrinal statements, where precise wording is the whole point. For someone to let such an embarrassing malapropism into a doctrinal statement suggests. . . Well, it suggests that we Christians are what we are: a group of people into which "not many wise . . . , not many noble" are called (1 Cor. 1:26).

It's awkward to say so, but the reality is that some Christians will never get *imminent*, *immanent*, and *eminent* straight. God called them knowing full well that their educational opportunities were limited. He delights to use the weak to shame the strong. And He gave them other gifts.

If you are blessed by God with the years of education (and the personal inclination) necessary to keep commonly confused words fully distinct in your mind—if you never mix up "affect" and "effect," "lie" and "lay," "nauseated" and "nauseous"—then use your gifts for God's glory. But, you dictionary, you, don't say to the auto repair manual in your church—or the farmer's almanac, or the cookbook—"I have no need of thee" (1 Cor. 12:21).

And if you didn't know that there were such words as "imminent" (coming soon), "immanent" (inherent), and "eminent" (famous), ask for a little help when writing doctrinal statements. We need each other's gifts.

Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. writes Bible textbooks at BJU Press and designs church websites at Forward Design.



2015 FBFI Position Statements

15.01: The Importance of Prophecy

Although many believers avoid the study of Bible prophecy because of the misuse of prophetic passages and because of differences among interpreters, prophecy is a very important component of biblical revelation and properly understood is a great blessing to God's people. We should preach the whole counsel of God, including prophetic portions. Promises and predictions of the future are an integral part of both Old and New Testament preaching.

Prophetic teaching serves as a warning to the unsaved. It is also profitable for the believer's life and ministry. The Scriptures promise a special blessing on those who study and apply prophetic teaching. Specific benefits include a greater appreciation for the glory and trustworthiness of God, a fuller understanding of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promotion of evangelistic zeal, a motivation for holy living and mutual exhortation, comfort in sorrow, encouragement in affliction, and a calming of fears.

15.02: Hermeneutics and Bible Prophecy

We advocate the grammatical/historical approach to hermeneutics. This is also called "literal" or "plain sense." Covenant theology is ambivalent on hermeneutics, using literalism to interpret most Scripture but employing a form of allegorism or figurative interpretation on much of prophetic literature. This is done to uphold the generic unity and continuity of Israel and the church as the one people of God in the outworking of the one redemptive covenant of grace.

We reject the nonliteral position and advocate a consistent hermeneutic for the following reasons.

1. Prophecy, indeed created language as a whole, was designed to convey a specific message. Without a consistent means of interpretation, there is no restraint on meaning.
2. The fulfillment of prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were literally fulfilled.
3. An ambivalent literal/nonliteral hermeneutic robs the Old Testament of its real authority by denying to the people of the Old Testament the key to unlock its truths. If the meaning was allegorical all along, how could the prophecies have been genuinely meaningful to those who heard them? For the covenant theologian this key cannot be the self-contained meaning of the words themselves, so it must be an outside factor. For the dispensationalist, prophecy means in the New Testament what it meant in the Old Testament.

15.03: The Premillennial Return of Christ

We affirm the premillennial return of Christ, that is, His future literal and bodily return in glory and His subsequent thousand-year reign over all the nations of the earth. We also affirm that His return and reign will bring about the spiritual and physical salvation of the nation of Israel and

the fulfillment of the kingdom promised to the house of David. We affirm premillennialism and reject amillennialism and postmillennialism based on a literal understanding of Bible prophecy.

15.04: The Pretribulational Rapture of the Church

We believe in the pretribulational Rapture of the Church to meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever. We believe that nothing remains to be fulfilled prior to the Rapture, thereby making it an imminent event. We believe that this view of the Rapture is correct for several reasons, including the following:

1. The Holy Spirit's influence through the church is removed prior to the Seventieth Week of Daniel and the Wicked One being revealed (2 Thess. 2);
2. The church will be kept from the time of wrath that is to come upon the earth (1 Thess. 5; Rev. 3:10);
3. The church is absent from the earth in Revelation 4–18; and
4. This view is consistent with the contextual Jewish messianic expectations and ancient marriage customs and language used by our Lord to describe the events surrounding His return (John 14).

15.05: Prophetic Views and Separation

Regarding the reality of the return of Christ. The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ has always been considered one of the fundamentals of the faith. A denial of the return of Christ constitutes a denial of the veracity and faithfulness of Jesus Christ. We would call on all true Bible believers to separate ecclesiastically from anyone who denies the return of Christ.

Regarding views on the Millennium. We are committed to a premillennial position on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy has made room for various positions on the Millennium. Nevertheless, the difference in hermeneutic between the consistently literal approach of premillennialism and the partially allegorical approach of amillennialism and postmillennialism has an impact on ministry philosophy, cultural application, and ecclesiology. Therefore this difference limits the level of cooperation between those who hold to these two views and those who hold the premillennial position.

Regarding the views on the Rapture. While faithful people, implementing a normal, literal hermeneutic, have come to different conclusions regarding the timing of the Rapture, we affirm the doctrine of a pretribulational Rapture. We believe there is clear and compelling biblical evidence that the Rapture will occur prior to a literal seven-year tribulation period as described in Revelation 4–19.

Views on the Millennium and Rapture do not demand ecclesiastical separation but do limit cooperation. See Position Statement on limited participation (FBFI Resolution 09.03). We consider it legitimate for local churches, fellowships, and ministry institutions to include such a doctrine in their defining doctrinal statements as well as to make agreement on this doctrine a condition for membership or employment.

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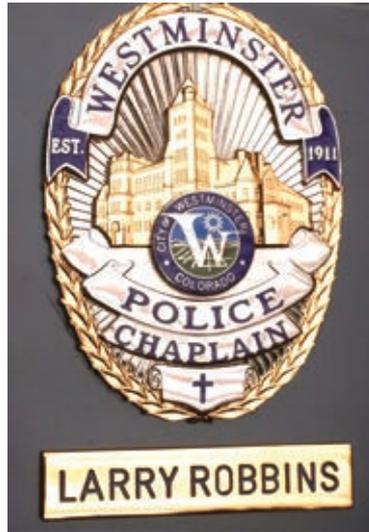
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The Power of Personal Prayer in

Having served as associate pastor at Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado, for over thirty-one years, I have also served for the last seventeen years as the chaplain for the Westminster Police Department. Although some departments assign their chaplains to deal with victims of crimes and other citizens with whom the police interact, our chaplaincy serves only the police department family. Investing volunteer time in the lives of law-enforcement personnel brings countless blessings. The Westminster Police Department (WPD) affords me the opportunity to minister to some 250 families—a



congregation larger than most churches in Colorado.

Of course, if I were a senior pastor this task would be more difficult. As an associate pastor, however, my chaplaincy affords me a structured opportunity to engage in effective outreach to our community, something all of us should find ways to do. Official functions provide opportunities to get to know officers and support staff and their families. Interacting with officers individually is a priority if a chaplain is to be accepted into the "brotherhood of blue." Regular "ride-alongs" with the officers, participation in various training exercises such as squad car driver training, motorcycle training, marksmanship training at the firing range, K-9 exercises, and even SWAT training scenarios. Frankly, these events are usually a blast (pun intended)!

In addition to these training opportunities and the routine ministry that I have with officers and staff, I am also asked to lead in prayer at various events coordinated by our city, such as memorial services and official ceremonies. At these events, formal public prayer is in order, but because of the nature of chaplaincy, I find far more, even daily, blessings from personal prayer with individuals while out in public. God gives great freedom in this kind of prayer—people within the department and beyond actually expect it from the chaplain. It has become common to see the WPD chaplain bowing in prayer with an officer, a secretary, or some other individual who happens to be going through a burdensome family or work event.

For example, when she was born fourteen years ago, Police Commander Dean Villano's daughter Mikayla had a heart defect that required several surgeries and even a heart transplant at the age of four months. Although those procedures were successful and she had made great progress, in recent months the new heart had begun to fail. In January of this year she was near death. Then, on Wednesday, February 12, I was summoned by the chief's secretary about the possibility of leading a prayer meeting in the department training room. The family had just been notified of a possible transplant match, and they were hoping I could be available by Thursday or Friday. "How about 1:30

today?" I replied. Since that was a mere hour-and-a-half away, I added, "Send out a department e-mail and invite all who can come. I'll be there in an hour."

Quickly selecting some Scripture passages, I reported to the training room to wait for anyone who might show up. Due to the very short notice, the limitations of the department lunch hour, and the rotational nature of shift work, I was unsure of how many actually saw the invitation or even heard about the gathering. Just before 1:30, a few arrived at the large training room and took seats near the front where I was standing. As I began reading Scripture and explaining the sovereignty of God and the effectiveness of prayer, others began to file in. I shared the burden of the Villano family, mentioning not only their need, but also the needs of the family of the unknown donor. For about thirty minutes we alternated between Scripture reading and prayer. In addition to my prayer, others prayed out loud—two department commanders, and then the patrol division



Larry Robbins and Police Commander Dean Villano

Public

Larry Robbins

secretary prayed, leading the group, which had quickly grown to over thirty individuals.

I was overwhelmed by the open demonstration of support for the Bible and prayer, not as an official function but as a spontaneous outpouring of love and concern for young Mikayla and her parents. Yet there we were in the police department training room, next door to City Hall. What a contrast to the fear-driven hesitation to exercise our Constitutional freedom of religion so often restrained by the political correctness that pervades our nation. Someone once said, "As long as the public schools continue to give pop quizzes, there will be prayer in public schools." Well, as long as public officials have life-changing trials, there will be prayer in public places too.

The prophet Daniel is a hero of mine. I love the accounts of his trials. His humble boldness in prayer and service to God, displayed without shame under threats to his life, should be our example. Yes, he ended up in the lion's den, but his testimony didn't end there; it was established there forever. Daniel was a faithful, fearless, and very public figure. As I have looked for opportunities to openly pray with people in public, God has increased my own boldness. While making a hospital call this week, I was told by a nurse, "You can pray for me, too!" As I consciously make myself available to pray with anyone who is open to it, in any place and at any time, I see on the faces of others, and often hear in their words, "I wish someone would pray with me."

This venture of personal prayer in public is empowering. Placing my hand on the shoulder of a state senator and praying following a fundraising event, or taking time to pray with a candidate for public office, for example, all yield a common response: a genuine, heartfelt sense of appreciation that someone prays and cares for them. When I participate in one-on-one prayer sessions such as these, I find no sense of embarrassment but of guidance and power from God. There seems almost to be a protective shroud from opposition. Of course, God may allow us to be rejected, even hated, or persecuted at any point in the future, but public prayer opens a great and effectual door of opportunity.

By the way, Mikayla Villano is continuing to do remarkably well—a marvelous testimony of the effectiveness of prayer and the power of God to answer prayer even when prayed in public.

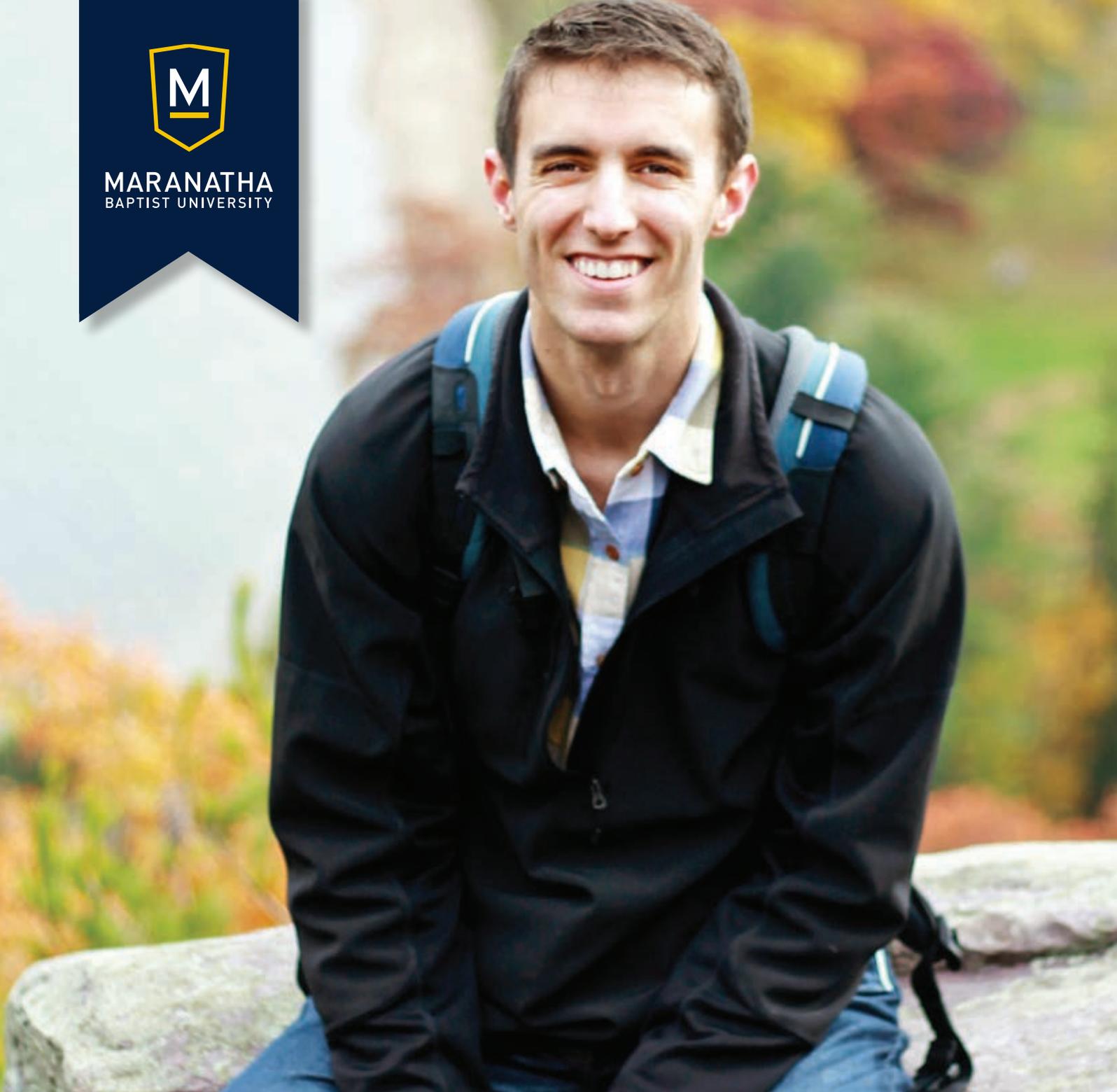


Mikayla Villano





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Judgment Seat of Christ

Continued from page 11

and struggles of life to the ultimate rewards promised us. Is seeking a reward selfish? Clearly not, for in seeking that reward, we are seeking the will of God.⁷

Audience

A final failure of the projector illustration concerns the audience in view. Even if God were to display all our sins on His heavenly projector, we would not care what Jimmy, Kelly or anyone else thought of us. When we stand at the Bema Seat, the only one who will matter is Jesus. Every other human will fade from view in light of the glory of His majesty.

In summary, we have detailed why the projector illustration should be abandoned. It fails because it encourages the believer to understand the Bema Seat with a wrong focus on judgment, a wrong motivation for godliness, and a wrong audience in perspective. If we must use an illustration, I suggest Hoyt's powerful analogy:

The judgment seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.⁸

Such an illustration, as it aligns with the theology of the text, provides a proper perspective on the judgment, encouraging all who hear to carefully and faithfully prepare for the Bema Seat with anticipatory seriousness and joy.

Timothy Miller is an assistant professor at Maranatha Baptist University.



¹ K. F. Dodson, when writing on the Judgment Seat of Christ, suggests something similar: "The whole Bible teaches that God is a God of absolute justice and holiness, Who will bring every word and deed of human beings into judgment. *He has a videotape of every human life*, with all the lines of human influence that have gone from that life into other human lives, and He will play back all of these video-tapes of all humanity. This will be 'God's Drama of History'" (Kenneth F. Dodson, *The Prize of the Up-Calling*, 3rd ed. [Haysville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1989]).

² The judgment of believers will occur directly following the Rapture and before our descent with Him to establish the millennial kingdom.

³ Samuel Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective," Part 1, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (January–March 1980): 37.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ It is possible to translate "suffer loss" as "suffer punishment," but the passive form is used more consistently with the idea of forfeiting that which could have been obtained. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 565.

⁶ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 134.

⁷ For more detail, see C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Christian Addresses* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 25–28.

⁸ Samuel Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective," Part 2, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (April–June 1980): 131.



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Persevering in Spite of Opposition

The apostle Paul stated in Galatians 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." I am grateful that the Holy Spirit led this man of God to pen these words for our encouragement. It is easy to become weary in well doing when there is constant opposition to our endeavors. It is tempting to give up and quit when defeat continues to pound our attempts.

Recently I came across an interesting article about the life of Abraham Lincoln. His perseverance in spite of opposition to his political career is amazing! Here is a brief rundown of his record.

- He failed in business at the age of 22.
- He ran for the legislature and was defeated the next year.
- He failed again in business when he was 24.
- He was elected to the legislature at the age of 25; the next year his sweetheart died.
- At 27 he suffered a nervous breakdown.
- He was defeated when he ran for Speaker of the House at the age of 29, defeated for elector at 31, and defeated for Congress at 34.
- He was elected to Congress at the age of 39.
- He was defeated for Senate when he was 46.
- He was defeated for the office of vice president when he was 47, and defeated for the Senate again at age 49.
- Then, when he was 51 years old, he was elected as president of the United States.

What a life of perseverance during twenty-nine years of defeat and heartbreak! Of course, we know him to be one of the greatest presidents our country has ever had. Lincoln reaped the honor of becoming president by his enduring, persevering spirit in the face of opposition, and we can apply this same principle in the spiritual realm.

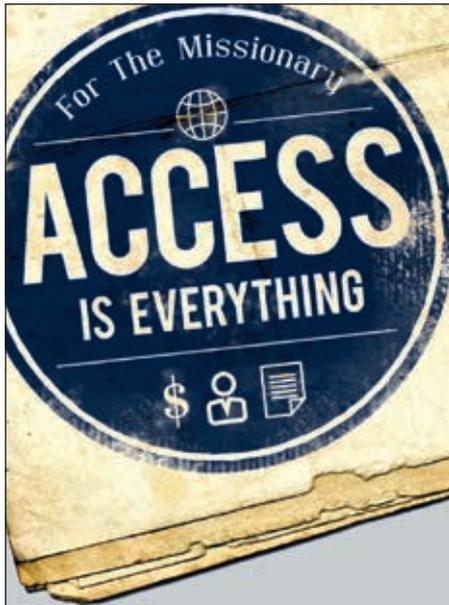
The prime example of this is the life of the apostle Paul, a man who faced intense opposition in serving his Lord. We can find an account of all he suffered for Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:24–28:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

What a staggering account of what this man of God experienced! However, it was all for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Paul experienced many years of opposition in the spiritual realm just as Abraham Lincoln did in the political realm. But the difference between these men is that Lincoln attained a position, but Paul attained a prize! He said in Philippians 3:14, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." When this man of God came to the close of his life, he was able to say in 2 Timothy 4:7–8, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

I challenge all of us to consider the blessings and privileges that can be ours if we will persevere in spite of the difficulties we encounter. Perhaps you have been discouraged by constant criticism and resistance in your stand for the Lord. I encourage you to stay strong in the Lord and wait upon Him, and one day He will honor you for your loyalty to Him!

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