

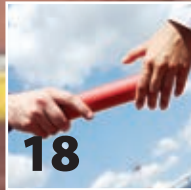
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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

Run with Patience

Run with Patience



FEATURES

6 Running with Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus

Brian Collins

Jesus is our final and climatic example of One who ran the race with an eye on the promised reward.

8 Understanding and Responding to Persecution

Chris Pennington

We must let Scripture set our expectations and inform our response.

11 Pressed to Prosper, Propagate, and Pray

Robert Vincent

In God's magnificent armory of instruments skillfully designed for His people's good, an entire corridor is dedicated to the bittersweet gift of suffering.

14 Rethinking America's Shrinking Christianity

Jonathan Threlfall

Is every change a wave that threatens to dash us against the rocks?

18 The Race That Is Set Before Us

Greg Baker

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples would be even better than having the physical presence of Jesus with them on earth.

35 The Fruit of Fervent Prayer

Mary MacGregor Thomas

DEPARTMENTS

5 Mail Bag & News from All Over

20 On the Home Front

23 Wit & Wisdom

David Atkinson

24 Very Clear Biblical Teaching

David C. Innes

26 At a Glance

Habakkuk: From Consternation to Confidence and Contentment in God
Layton Talbert

29 Newsworthy

Robert Condict

31 On Language & Scripture

Mark L. Ward Jr.

32 Answered Prayers and Open Opportunities

Tony Pelc

38 The Necessity of Hard Work

Jerry Sivnksty

We would like to thank Dr. Joel Arnold for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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It's Time to Run

Joel Arnold

Like the breath of God that brought life to Adam's body, every word that God has breathed out is powerful and brings life to the hearer. The result, then, is that all of God's words are profitable for the spiritual life of the people of God. We need them all.

And yet some passages speak more powerfully to a specific need, situation, or juncture in the life of the church. Recognizing that most of the New Testament is situational—written to a specific church with a specific need—the epistles have a specific historical background. The original recipients are our fellow believers, sharing in our faith across thousands of years and culture. For all our differences, the challenges we face are the same, and the theological answers we need are unabated in their power. And so the passages that most direct us in our present milieu are often those whose original context closely matches our own because the first recipients faced situations similar to our own.

“Let Us Run”

Hebrews 12 addresses people who face a newly resistant society. Some of the recipients have even suffered persecution—losing not their lives but suffering a sharp financial setback. They are now tempted to capitulate, and some of them will leave the faith altogether. And so the author calls them to finish the race—to keep on running, even when the resistance seems to mount with every passing year.

Move forward to today. What Christian among us does not feel as though the earth has given way beneath our feet before the tsunami of progressive public opinion? We wonder about the ongoing viability of our churches, institutions, and outreaches. If caught unguarded, we're tempted to seek an easier way. And in the face of that, Scripture calls us not merely to exist, not merely to move forward, but to run.

Grammatically, this command is the core of the passage. In fact, it is the only command in verses 1 and 2. The other phrases simply link to it and tell us how. If we ask why we should run, the answer is that we have a cloud of witnesses. How to prepare to

run? We should lay aside sin and every unnecessary impediment. If we aren't sure what our experience will be when we run, we find it requires patience. If we ask where to run and with what focus, the answer is that we are to look to our chief example, Jesus Christ. But all of these are explanations for our most basic task—to run.

“So Great a Cloud of Witnesses”

Of course, there's a further background to the command of chapter 12. The lives chronicled in chapter 11 are the cloud of witnesses, testifying to us as we run and affirming that we are hardly the first to run this race. And yet we might miss several notable features.

For example, if you plot a timeline of the individuals in chapter 11, something becomes immediately obvious. The chronicle starts with Abel and Enoch, only progressing to Moses by verse 23. By the time the author has reached Rahab (v. 31), still quite early in biblical history, most of the passage (85%) is already done. The author then breathtakingly covers a thousand years of history in one verse, including the largest group of OT books in one word—“the prophets” (v. 32).

The effect is to highlight just how many witnesses there are.¹ Like a preacher who has entirely too much to share in the short time given him, the author has to stop short. Fully covering the lives of the witnesses would overflow from this chapter into volumes more. “And what shall I more say?” he asks us. “The time would fail me” (Heb. 11:32).

These witnesses exemplify the challenge of godly living, the faith that saw them through, and the fact that it brings great rewards. But the author actually chooses to call something else to our attention. It's the fact that they all died waiting. The chapter ends reminding us that “these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.” Verse 13 explains further that “these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.”

That emphasis almost seems to cut against the point of the chapter, as though somehow their faith and trust were betrayed. But we simply have to ask

Continued on page 4

what was the content of “the promises” (Heb 11:9, 11, 13, 17, 33, 39). While it certainly includes things such as the land (v. 8) and the resurrection (v. 19), the core is clearly the promised Messiah.² From the beginning of the Old Testament (Gen. 3:15) to the end (Mal. 3:1–4), the longing and hope of every Old Testament believer was for this One. You can almost hear their collective cry—“When will He come?” Their struggle, suffering, and waiting stretched across the centuries, as they lifted up their eyes in hope for the promised Savior.

“Looking unto Jesus”

And so do we. The final encouragement of Hebrews 12:1–2 is that we look to Jesus. We could legitimately say that our experience of waiting is completely different than theirs. They lived a life of faith, waiting for Him to come. We know who He is, what He did, and even the theological significance of His life and death. To use a kind of argument that very much fills the book (Heb. 2:1–3; 4:14–16; 9:13–14; 10:28–31; 12:18–29), we are only the more responsible for our greater knowledge.

But the passage actually seems to be emphasizing our continuity with them. They endured. So must we. Their endurance was only because of faith, as is ours. And most importantly, the object of our faith and theirs is the same—Jesus Christ. As they waited for Him to be born, we wait for Him to return. As they put their faith in what He would do, we rest in what He did.

Because profoundly, He is not just the object of our faith. In this great cloud of witnesses, He is also the climax—the supreme Witness above them all. They were remarkable examples of faith, of course. But they are only dim reflections of the supreme Witness. He is not only the One we believe in, but also the perfect example of what it looks like to believe, because our great hope, the object of our faith, also Himself ran the race.

There is, then, a double significance to what it means to “look to Jesus.” Any true faith is faith in Him. To be a Christian is to lift our eyes in wholehearted faith in what He did and who He is. He is, after all, the “author and finisher” of our faith. But we can just as accurately speak in terms of

following Him. In yet another type of argument common in Hebrews, everything we endure, He Himself faced and overcame. And so we run following in the footsteps of the One who “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Conclusion

All of this calls us to understand better both the passage at hand and what it means in the present challenge. Brian Collins helps us exegetically in Hebrews 12:1–2; Chris Pennington delivers the theological foundation; Robert Vincent covers historical context; Jonathan Threlfall challenges our disposition or attitude; and Greg Baker leaves us with practical application.

Because Scripture is always the most relevant thing we could say in a crisis. Within all of Scripture, Hebrews 12:1–2 stands out as one of the more striking parallels to our historical moment. Commanded to run, reminded of those who came before, and ultimately looking to Jesus Christ as the supreme example, we must fulfill our part in our time, testifying that it’s worth it. It’s time to lift our eyes from the moral chaos, pick up our feet from the sinking sand, and put away the unnecessary distractions. It’s time to run.

Dr. Joel Arnold serves in the Philippines under Gospel Fellowship Association. He and his wife, Sarah, have three children. Among other ministries, Joel teaches at Bob Jones Memorial Bible College in Quezon City.



¹We sometimes speak of those recorded in Hebrews 11 as though they were selected specifically because their faith shone the brightest. But many remarkable figures go unmentioned (Daniel, Isaiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others). The author’s point in his selections is not so much to gather a “hall of faith” from the best examples but to choose examples from only a small part of biblical history, implying that the list could be tremendously longer if it continued (c.f. Acts 7).

²There are several reasons for this. (1) The coming Messiah is at the core of all of the OT promises (Luke 24:27; Heb. 11:19). (2) This is also the fundamental argument of this book—Jesus Christ is the superior fulfillment of everything the OT anticipated. (3) The ultimate and final witness that heads the entire list is Jesus Christ Himself (Heb. 12:2).

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Jesus Christ is the only source of freedom that lasts!

I share your concern for those who would desire us to move away from our Biblical moorings that have stood and withstood the test of time and the onslaught of men's so-called wisdom. Thank you for recognizing that there is afoot a new wave of convergence. Dr. Nieman and I have talked much and lamented together the drift of many that were once where we are but have accepted the siren call for compromise.

It is my prayer that the FBFI will stay rooted and grounded in the Biblical truths that have weathered many a storm over the past ninety-some years and will stand tall as an ensign to all so that all like-minded believers will know unequivocally this is where we stand and you're welcome to rally around our ensign and push forward the cause of Christ. In this day of spiritual declension and compromise, it comes as no surprise that a truly Biblical position is unpopular to so many. God has always had His remnant; may we be that remnant in our day.

*Brian Ernsberger
Lincoln Park Baptist Church
Wenatchee, WA*

We recently had Chaplain Joe Willis at Heritage Baptist Church for a Sunday service, and he was a tremendous challenge to our people. With his coming God gave our church a season of revival! He arrived early in order to go out on our Saturday homeless outreach, and on Sunday he presented his work and preached a powerful message on "Being an Example of the Believer." Many responded to his message with a desire to live for Christ throughout their life. On Sunday night Chaplain Willis was interviewed on our radio broadcast. He is a humble yet Spirit-filled servant for Christ, and I am grateful that God has raised him up to recruit chaplains for the FBFI in these days. I commend him to our churches, and I know he will be a blessing to many.

*Matthew Recker
Heritage Baptist Church, NYC*

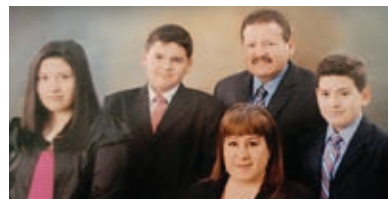
My final tour of active duty was as the Division Chaplain at the Second Marine Division (2D MARDIV) at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I could not have been more pleased to (then) have all four active duty FBFI Chaplains (Rob Johnson, Tavis Long, Robert Spivey, and Trenten Long) as battalion chaplains in 2D MARDIV. Their ministry was simply phenomenal! As I unexpectedly but provisionally departed active duty to become the president of the AGC [Associated Gospel Churches], I wrote a short note letting Dr. John Vaughn know my sincere pleasure in having his men faithfully serve Christ as

Continued on page 34

Publisher's Note: Thank you to those who responded to our appeal in the last issue. The Lord has provided the funds necessary for Dr. Vaughn to make the trip to Bolivia in March to participate in the FBFI Bolivia Regional Fellowship.

Franz and Katty Carreon

serve in Bolivia, where Franz has pastored Maranatha First Baptist Church in Cochabamba for



over twenty-six years and has organized four Bolivian FBFI conferences in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and Tarija. The Carreons would like to organize other conferences, raise Latin American Baptist missions, and start a youth camp for young adults who are studying in the university. They plan to raise a new building for their church in Arocagua and to finish building the Bible seminary in Carcaje and Barja Loma to provide a place for conferences, meetings, and Bible camps.



Mike and Glenda Coupe are missionaries to the West Indies, serving on the island of Dominica. Mike pastors in La Plaine. He is serving not only as a missionary pastor but also as a missionary pilot. The Lord has recently blessed them with a Piper Aztec. This twin-engine airplane is now being used in the Caribbean Islands to move men, ministries, and material throughout the islands. The Coupes have been in the Caribbean since 2010 and have become familiar with FBFI and *FrontLine* magazine through Calvary Baptist Tabernacle in Carolina, Puerto Rico.

Pastor Jesse Naitram was born in Barbados into a Christian home and was saved at the age of nine. He surrendered his life to the Lord at age eighteen, and the Lord called him into His ministry. After attending Calvary Baptist Bible College in Puerto Rico from 1997 to 2002, he met and married Edlina, who was also a graduate of the college. Jesse and Edlina served the Lord in Guyana, South America, for six years before moving to St. Lucia, where they have served for the past seven years, six of which Jesse has served as the pastor of Solid Rock Baptist Church in the south of the island. The Lord has blessed them with three children.



Running with Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus

How would you respond if one day you turned on the news and the coverage was about your church? The story was not about any scandal or sin but in fact amounted to a public shaming simply because your church held to the teachings of Scripture. How would you respond if some of your fellow church members were in prison simply for confessing faith in Christ? How would you respond if you had lost your home and many of your possessions for the same reason?

This is what happened to the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews: “Ye were made a gazestock both by reproaches and afflictions. . . . Ye

had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods” (Heb. 10:33–34).

These people had endured much, and they had responded well. They responded to the theft of their property with joy. And yet there existed the real danger that some of these people would cave under the pressure and abandon the faith. So Hebrews exhorts them, “Cast not away therefore your confidence” (Heb. 10:35).

This is the context for the famous Hall of Faith chapter. Hebrews 10:33–35 launches a section of exhortation that extends though 12:24. The core teaching of this section is an exhortation to endurance with the goal of receiving the promised reward (10:35–36). Hebrews 10:37–39 teaches that a life of faith is needed to endure unto the reward. Hebrews 11 provides a host of examples from the

Old Testament and intertestamental period of people who endured by faith and who will receive the reward. Hebrews 12:1 then draws the conclusion from the examples recited in Hebrews 11: “Wherefore . . . let us run with patience,” or endurance.

Run with Endurance

This is the heart of Hebrews 12:1: run with endurance. Before the recitation of the witnesses the author urged his readers not to cast away their confidence but to endure (10:35). Now after the recitation of testimony about those who live by faith, we are once again called to endurance.

But this call comes with the background of what it means to live by faith in the promises of God. How are we to lay aside weights and run with endurance? We do this by faith in God’s Word. We trust that promises from God that we hope for are indeed more real than what allures us or threatens us, and we take God’s Word by faith as the proof of the future reality of the yet unseen rewards (11:1). Faith is the foundation for endurance.

Three Ways We Run

Surrounding the command to run with endurance are three phrases which tell us how we ought to run. We run having a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, we run laying aside every weight and sin, and we run looking unto Jesus.

Run Having a Cloud of Witnesses. Because of the athletic imagery later in the verse, people often read this verse as though the saints in heaven are looking down as spectators of our race and cheering us on from their vantage point. However, the Greek word translated “witnesses” doesn’t refer to spectators at an event. Another Greek word is used to describe spectators or onlookers. The Greek word used here refers someone who gives testimony about something he has seen or heard.¹ The witnesses are those whose lives are recounted or alluded to in chapter 11. We are to run knowing the testimonies of those who have already run their race by faith and finished their course.

This is no minor matter. The author stresses the great number of these witnesses.² Hebrews 11 is a lengthy chapter, and in 11:32 the author says that time would fail him to tell of all the people who lived by faith. This gives us a sense of the innumerable witnesses who can testify that by faith in God’s Word they endured the running of their race. Given the witnesses presented in Hebrews 11, let us now run with endurance.

Run, Laying Aside Every Weight and Sin. Second, we are to lay aside every weight and sin as we run. Because the author says the Christian runner is to lay aside “every weight,” it seems that these weights include things that are not inherently sinful. The Christian walks a fine line here. The Christian cannot call God’s good creation evil. That is a doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). Yet Romans 1 is clear that it is possible to love the creation and not the Creator, the gift and not the Giver. When this temptation presents itself to the Christian, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow his Savior.

If the Christian denies himself even good parts of God’s creation because they have become encumbrances to his race, then how much more must he turn from sin? To cling to sin is an evidence of lack of faith. It is a statement that the person believes that God is less desirable than the pleasures of sin. To run with endurance, sin must be laid aside.

Run, Looking unto Jesus. The final way of running with endurance is to run looking to Jesus. Jesus is the final and climatic example of enduring by faith.³ He is the climatic example of running with an eye on the promised reward. Though the Christian runner runs with an awareness of the cloud of witnesses, he runs with his eyes focused on Jesus. He has turned away from everything else. His gaze is fixed like that of a runner focused on the finish line, undistracted by what is occurring in the stands or elsewhere on the track.

Who Is This Jesus?

Because we are to look to Jesus as we run, the author of Hebrews expands on who Jesus is in 12:2–3. He directs our gaze to several specific aspects of who Jesus is which will enable us to endure in our race.

Author and Finisher of Our Faith. By “author of our faith,” Hebrews may be saying that Jesus is the One who bestows faith upon us and works it in us. Philippians 1:29 says that faith is something that is bestowed on us by God. It is for this reason that the disciples pray to Christ for faith in Luke 17:5. Since the point of these verses is endurance in faith, it is right for us to have our eyes fixed on the only One who can give us the faith that we need to endure.

Jesus is also the finisher of our faith. He continues His work of strengthening faith and all its effects in our lives. He grants us more faith as we call out to Him. So we look to Jesus as we run with endurance, because He is the source of our continued faith. We run in dependence upon Him.

The One Who Also Endured. The second description of Jesus reveals that He endured suffering and shame for the sake of the promised reward. In this Jesus is our example. We too ought to endure suffering and shame for the sake of the reward. In the context we are told what Jesus’ reward was: enthronement at the right hand of God. We know from Philippians 2:9–11 that this exaltation of Christ ultimately culminates in “the glory of God the Father.” In all of this Jesus is shown to be our perfect example. His and our ultimate joy is the glory of God the Father. As Jonathan Edwards demonstrated through painstaking study of Scripture, bringing glory to God is *The End for Which God Created the World*.

For Jesus the reward was an enthronement that will bring glory to God. Our reward is different. Hebrews 11 teaches that the reward Christians look forward to is our resurrection bodies and the new creation (11:16–19). Hebrews has encouraged us to endure suffering with these future joys and rewards serving as motivations. And these joys too will ultimately eventuate in glory for God the Father.

The joy, however, is not achieved without suffering and shame. Here again is the theme of endurance with Jesus as the preeminent example of endurance. Just as He endured

Continued on page 34

Understanding and Responding to Persecution



Setting the Right Expectations

Michael was the fastest kid on our soccer team. In eighth grade he held the best pace for the entire team at just over six minutes per mile. Although we were good friends, I typically didn't run with him. I just couldn't keep up. But on this particular afternoon, we were running in lockstep. Stretch after stretch, stride after stride.

That day I heard we were just running a mile. *I know I can hang with him for a mile*, I thought. And I was right. We started together and darted in and out of the slower runners until we were pushing each other faster and faster at the front of the pack.

We turned the last corner, and I was still keeping pace! I could see the end of the run. With every stretch of my legs, I was more determined. Only one hundred yards to go! Fifty! Twenty!

"All right, let's do one more lap, guys! Let's do another mile!" yelled my coach. The strength in my legs gave out. *Another mile?* On a typical day we ran 2.5 miles, but at this point, another mile seemed impossible. I had set my expectations and now another mile was discouraging, disheartening, and frustrating.

I fear that my running experience too often mirrors our experience with persecution. We assume a mile's worth of persecution and we are quickly discouraged, disheartened, and frustrated when one mile becomes two. Only the right expectation encourages the right response, so we must let Scripture set our expectation and inform our response.

A New Testament Survey of Persecution

My purpose is to provide a basic New Testament framework for understanding and responding to persecution. As with any area of doctrine or practice, the Word, not our own opinions, must direct us.

Understanding Persecution: Agents of Persecution. The New Testament teaches Christians to expect persecution from several different groups: governments (Mark 13:9), religious leaders (Acts 5:17), and unbelieving family members (Matt. 10:21).

One umbrella designation, however, dominates the biblical material: the world (i.e., the satanically directed opposition to God visible in the willful rebellion of unbelievers). Persecution takes place when the world opposes us because of our connection with Christ. So Scripture instructs us to "Marvel not . . . if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13), for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). If we heed these passages, we will rightly expect persecution.

Understanding Persecution: Motives for Persecution. The writers of the New Testament present at least five motives for persecution: envy (Acts 5:17–18), greed (Acts 19:23–27), fear (Matt. 2:3), hatred (1 John 3:12), and conviction (Acts 7:54–60). Although the world may persecute believers for one or all of these motives, one primary motive stands behind and energizes them all.

Ultimately, unbelievers persecute Christians because unbelievers oppose God. This is true for a few reasons. First, our Lord habitually teaches that the world's

hatred of believers is an extension of their hatred of him (John 15:18–19). Second, many scriptural examples explicitly connect our persecution to the Lord's (Acts 4:27, 29). Finally, the entire course of the world is ultimately movement against God. In a sense, opposition against believers is always secondary, not primary.

Opposition to God is the driving motive for all hostility against Christians. In our persecution, however, it's easy to turn that around. It's easy to believe that the world is chiefly against *us*, not our Lord. If a man runs forward from cabin to cabin on a train, is he primarily moving forward because he is running or because he is on a moving train? Although he is running on the train, ultimately he moves because the train moves. So it is with persecution. Does the unbeliever oppose us personally? Yes, but ultimately he moves against us because he moves against God.

Understanding Persecution: Forms of Persecution. We can organize forms of persecution into two categories: physical and non-physical. The New Testament provides examples of physical persecution ranging from beating, torture, and imprisonment (2 Cor. 11:23–25) to death (Acts 7:57–59).

Too often we equate "persecution" with "physical persecution," demoting non-physical persecution to a second class. But the New Testament evidence does not allow for this two-tier system. Non-physical persecution is *real* persecution. In fact, it is the predominate focus in the New Testament. The writers identify several examples of non-physical persecution, including revilement (Matt. 5:11), derision (Heb. 11:36), deception (Acts 6:10–14), threats (Acts 4:17), slander (1 Cor. 4:13), and ostracism (John 9:22). What are the dangers of devaluing non-physical persecution?

1. We will misunderstand Scripture. Scripture speaks of physical and non-physical persecution, but it throws the accent on the non-physical. Consider one example: even Christ primarily suffered from non-physical persecution. With a few exceptions, He faced only physical persecution in the last few hours of His life. Certainly, however, we would not deny that Christ faced persecution before His Passion.
2. We may dismiss believers facing verbal persecution. If we view verbal persecution as "less than real persecution," we will fail to support other Christians properly. Instead of praying for these believers, we may be tempted to think, "It sounds like they need to grow a thicker skin." If the Holy Spirit does not dismiss believers facing non-physical persecution, though, neither should we.
3. We will not derive full encouragement. If persecution promises are given only to those suffering physically, we will not receive the full benefit from these precious passages. We will not be encouraged to continue believing through non-physical persecution. Instead of being strengthened, we'll be weakened. We may think, "If I can't stand up against mere verbal opposition, how will I ever face 'real' hostility?"
4. We will hyper-sensationalize physical persecution. I don't want to diminish the struggle of physical

persecution. Physical persecution most certainly carries its own challenges. We should pray for our dear brothers and sisters undergoing physical persecution, but we should not idolize them. Hyper-sensationalizing any persecution redirects the focus away from Christ and onto the one being persecuted. When observing persecution, our predominate response must be, "What a God!" not, "What a Christian!"

Responding to Persecution

Scripture does not simply warn about persecution. It also provides direction, exhortation, and comfort. Let's examine a few ways Scripture directs our response.

Responding to Persecution: Rejoice. Jesus uttered many countercultural statements, but perhaps His most shocking was, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Matt. 5:11-12)!

With these words Christ turns persecution upside-down, or rather, right-side up. From God's perspective, if we suffer persecution, we should respond with joy. Notice Christ does not encourage us to invite or incite persecution—only that we should rejoice when it comes.

Why should we rejoice in persecution? The New Testament presents at least four reasons. First, we can rejoice because we will be rewarded (Matt. 5:12). Second, persecution indicates that we have been chosen to suffer (Acts 5:41). Third, persecution for Christ participates in His sufferings (Col. 1:24). Finally, we can rejoice because persecution grants us an opportunity to glorify God (1 Pet. 4:16).

Responding to Persecution: Return Good. The Word pushes us a step beyond rejoicing in persecution. Scripture drives us to love our enemies. Our Lord gives this its fullest teaching in Luke 6:27-30.

Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

Paul often echoes the same exhortations. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:20-21).

At the heart of Christ's work is grace, God's kindness to those who deserve the very opposite. There is a certain sense in which we cannot fully illustrate the heart of the gospel without being persecuted, for it is only when we are wronged that we can truly picture God's kindness to us. In other words, you cannot extend grace in the fullest sense unless you have been wronged by someone. In persecution rests a unique opportunity to illustrate the gospel by loving our enemies.

Responding to Persecution: Entrust Yourself to God. The first two responses presuppose the first. You cannot rejoice

in suffering or return good to those who have wronged you in a world without God. But since there is a good, wise, and just Sovereign, you can trust Him in persecution. Entrusting yourself to God especially highlights one aspect of God's nature: His justice.

It is no wonder that in the midst of passages about persecution, God is constantly calling to mind His ability to avenge and enact justice (Rom. 12:19). Paul marks God's justice when he reflects on the trials faced throughout his ministry: "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Jesus Christ also endured persecution because He trusted the righteous Judge. Peter explains, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: . . . [he] committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

God's role as the righteous Judge fuels our trust. And this trust is not misplaced. How does God respond to persecutors? Scripture provides three answers. First, God can gloriously transform persecutors so that we may say, "He which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith" (Gal. 1:23). God can also choose to immediately judge those who persecute believers, as with Herod in Acts 12. Finally, God can delay His perfect justice.

This final category often bewilders us. Can God's justice be just if it is not immediate? This is Christ's focus in Luke 18 when He shares a parable to encourage faith-filled prayer in the face of delayed justice. His parable uses contrast to teach that delay in judgment is not unjust or unloving. God will "avenge his own elect" (v. 7), but why does He delay? We cannot attribute His delay to indecision. He is not laboring over His decision like the unrighteous judge, thinking, *Should I avenge them or should I not?* As Christ says, "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily!" His mind is made up. The question we must face is not, "Will God be just?" but, "Will we keep believing?" It is this question that Christ leaves in the air: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (18:8). Will we still believe when His justice is delayed? Will we still be trusting the righteous Judge?

Responding to Persecution: Look to Jesus. Hebrews 12:1-2 sets our persecution in the proper context. We are not alone, for we run our race surrounded by "a great cloud of witnesses." How did they all endure? How did they keep believing through persecution?

Further, how will we keep enduring? It is not enough to simply understand persecution and know how to respond. We may expect a rousing speech to muster determination, but the writer presents a far more powerful force: Jesus Christ.

How can we keep running with patience? Only by "looking to Jesus"! Behold Him, love Him, worship Him! In His faithfulness we find our faith! In His endurance, we find our strength. In His work, we find our rest.

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Pressed to Prosper, Propagate, and Pray

When the Jews of Jesus' day discarded a seemingly meaningless stone, little did they realize they rejected the irreplaceable Cornerstone. Jesus' own words could have delivered them, had the eyes of their understanding been opened. They could have listened to the prophets who had spoken at length of Him. They could have looked beneficially at the scriptural history of their people.

A wealth of divinely provided resources, overlooked or rejected in the hour of greatest need, left them to answer important questions pragmatically and logically, but not theo-logically.

In God's magnificent armory of instruments skillfully designed for His people's good, an entire corridor is dedicated to the bittersweet gift of suffering. Along that majestic corridor, several galleries depict suffering through persecution. Like their Master, His people have always known

rejection and persecution, in some regions and eras far more rabid and enduring than others. People among the nations and the nations themselves despise the rule of the Messiah, endeavoring to cast it off. The people of God are often then caught in the crosshairs and receive wounds intended for their Savior.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. (John 15:18–20).

Jesus' brief but profound question to Saul on the road to Damascus opens the window into Jesus' perspective when members of His body are being persecuted: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4). "Me," He says. Jesus had taken note of each of Saul's threats and unceasing efforts to harass and silence His people. Every action against the body, He not only felt, but knew the ultimate intent—to destroy the Head so as to leave no life in the body.

Persecution in Early America

In the same way that people once heard Jesus gladly (Mark 1:45), Christianity once was wildly popular in America. Sermons filled newspapers, the fear of God was a respected virtue, Christians knew the Ten Commandments and submitted to be governed by them, and the gracious gospel, though always offensive, ran with more liberty through our streets.

Yet even in our earliest days, when the colonies born in the quest for religious freedom were getting their infant wings, persecution by those very colonies reared its head. A "city on a hill" indeed was not the Celestial City. The early colonies, just like the developing nations of the Old World in Europe, wrestled with the competing ideas of uniformity of religion and religious freedom.

Society believed that freedom of religion would lead to the destruction of the social order. Protestants and Roman Catholics alike never understood that diversity of opinion on theological issues could be resolved without significant social dislocation. Both sides could co-exist peacefully [as neighbors], if only they believed it possible (Martin Klauber, "Roland Bainton," *Historians of the Christian Tradition*, 482).

Perhaps the most memorable colonial protagonist to advance the conversation concerning religious freedom is Roger Williams (1607–83). He found the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay as intolerant of variety as the Church of England under King James and Charles I had been. Williams' chief offense proved to be his belief in a necessary independence of the colonial "state" and church from each other. In the end, at the onset of the winter of 1635, the colony banished Williams for his non-uniform views. Williams later founded Providence (in modern Rhode

Island), establishing the first government in the world whose cornerstone was religious liberty.

During that season, Williams penned a pamphlet articulating his growing Scriptural understanding of the necessity of religious liberty. The persuasion of the right of civil authorities to persecute religious difference he labeled a "Bloody Tenent," and he entitled his work, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience, Discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace* (1644). Intriguingly, John Cotton, a godly Boston pastor in Massachusetts Bay, took the opposite position and attempted to counter Williams, writing *The Bloudy Tenent Washed and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe*. Williams responded in 1652 with *The Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy by Mr. Cotton's Endeavour to Wash It White in the Blood of the Lambe*.

Others similar to Williams attempted to maneuver these political-theological rapids in the New World, each paying a high price for his lack of uniformity. Henry Dunster, an Englishman who immigrated in 1640 to be part of Massachusetts Bay, wrestled to gain clarity over the difficult issue of infant baptism. He had permitted his first three children to be baptized as infants but gradually became convinced of the need for believers' baptism, concluding that infant baptism was not true baptism at all. It's hard for us at this distance to comprehend how "radical" his conclusion appeared. Denying the validity of infant baptism seemed to most Puritans to strike a blow at the foundation of their church and society. Dunster might have been able to quietly disagree, but he happened to be one of the early presidents of Harvard, a school founded in 1636 in Massachusetts Bay to help perpetuate faith in the Word of God among a new generation of non-Baptistic colonists. The sermons Dunster preached to articulate his Baptist view necessitated his voluntarily vacating his role at Harvard.

Silver Lining of Persecution

Without glamorizing persecution or encouraging believers to aspire to it, God always embeds a silver lining when the church is pressed through persecution (*ecclesia pressa*) though the ostensible reasons for the persecution may vary widely.

1. *Persecution Purifies the Church*—The church's prospering is often through the painful process of having its weaknesses and sins exposed by the testing in the fires of persecution. Persecution is "the judgment of the Lord. . . . This is that fan which even now cleanses the Lord's threshing floor" (Tertullian). When the fires of persecution pervade any locale, it is a providential time for self-assessment for believers. Where is our faith? Is it a fair-weather faith? When we are tempted to believe that our persecutors are more powerful than God, how do we respond? Are we being tried for beliefs that are truly Scriptural?
2. *Persecution Prospers the Church*—The Puritans often said, "God outshoots Satan oftentimes in his own bow." What Satan employs to rob the church of its life, God uses to prosper the body of Christ. Writing in the

early fifth century after the earliest age of severe persecution of the church had spent itself, Jerome (347–420) observed in a lengthy letter to Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, “The church of Christ has been founded by shedding its own blood not that of others; by enduring outrage not by inflicting it. Persecutions have made it grow; martyrdoms have crowned it” (Letter 82). Suffering for righteousness well, Erwin Lutzer wisely notes, “gives the church its credibility” (*Hitler’s Cross*, 182). In a biography reflecting much of the turbulent setting in which the church in Scotland has been forced to grow, D. C. MacNicol extrapolates a broader assessment:

It hath been the custom of God, from time to time to bring His church into wonderful extremities, that in the judgment of man there appeareth no hope of safety in them: yea, in our own judgment oftentimes there appeareth no escape. I say it is His custom to bring His church into these extremities that His glory may appear so much the more in her extraordinary deliverances” (*Robert Bruce*, 48).

3. *Persecution Disperses the Church*—Even in the New Testament we see how God used persecution to push the church into new regions. When the church in Jerusalem encountered severe persecution, many of its members were scattered, and “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). We later learn that these traveled to distant regions where more churches were established (Acts 11:19). James writes to Jewish saints “scattered abroad” (James 1:1); Peter writes to strangers and pilgrims “scattered” (1 Pet. 1:1). The same phenomenon has repeated itself throughout history, and the colonial days of our country are a further testimony to it.

The presence of persecution of the church in no way indicates the absence of or negligence by the church’s Head. Indeed, persecution is one of the forms of suffering that better enables the church: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). When persecution does come, our faith in the One who promised it would come can grow (Mark 10:30; John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12).

The Present Hour

The present eclectic religious climate in America that so prides itself for its tolerance of all is increasingly intolerant of biblical truth. In so many ways, the culture and context in which we are to live out our faith has been horrendously disfigured and misshapen. Sin has emerged brazenly from its proverbial closet, and now both popular and political

Our aspiration must be to do what believers in every generation have learned to do—to look to Christ.

culture holds the door, insisting that righteousness now hide itself quietly within. Yet God is at work, erecting the scaffold on which He will stand to employ persecution in the intricate work He aims to do to further beautify those He loves. Indeed, God’s “most loved are often His most tried: ‘The lintel-stone and pillars of His New Jerusalem suffer more knocks of God’s hammer and tools than the common side wall stones’” (Andrew Bonar, ed., *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, 28).

Any theology or worldview that omits the necessity, glory, and benefit of the school of suffering needs serious re-evaluation and revision. As the Church of England pastor Charles Simeon (1759–1836) once admonished a group of younger preachers, “We must not mind a little suffering” because our Head has taken the worst the enemy has to offer, not only withstanding it, but conquering it, paving the way for us to share in His victory. Read his original counsel in full:

My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering. When I am getting through a hedge, if my head and shoulders are safely through, I can bear the pricking of my legs. Let us rejoice in the remembrance that our holy Head has surmounted all His sufferings and triumphed over death. Let us follow Him patiently; we shall soon be partakers of His victory (H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon*, 155–56).

Whether persecution comes from civil authorities under the guise of tolerance, from fellow believers with differing theological views (Phil. 1:16), from those who openly espouse false teaching (1 Pet. 2:1), or from anti-Christian militants (Acts 7:54; 16:22–23), our aspiration must be to do what believers in every generation have learned to do—to look to Christ, “the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2). While we suffer, we can continually commit ourselves “to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23). And if we are among those awaiting persecution, we can use the time well by studying the cloud of witnesses who have refused to cast away their confidence but grew stronger in faith, and by remembering them “that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb. 13:3). The church truly displays the credibility of its faith, when, being persecuted it behaves itself excellently in these ways, so that in the very thing in which they “speak against [us] as evildoers, they may by [our] good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12). At such times, our light has historically shone the brightest and our salty influence has been the most influential.

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Rethinking America's

Jonathan Threlfall

Shrinking Christianity

One Sunday after I had been working on this article, a gentleman in my church slipped a folded newspaper clipping into my hand. “I thought you’d want to read this,” he said, and walked away. Sure enough, I was interested. The article—featured prominently at the top of the editorial section on “faith”—was entitled: “Religion in the U.S.: Up? Down? Both?”

This ambiguous title resembled my own tangled thoughts on the question: what *is* the current state of Christianity in America? If you listen to the apocalyptic-sounding pronouncements, you will get the idea that every year thousands of pastors—with drooped shoulders and sinking hearts—are walking away from their church buildings, having just closed the doors for the very last time.

On the other hand, if you turn to Pew Research Center’s findings, you will discover a more objective, well-documented assessment of American Christianity. The subtitle to a report on this study captures it succinctly: “Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow.” (The “sharp decline” is a drop from 78.4% to 70.6% of the Christian share of the population during the years 2007–14. Evangelical Protestants dropped only 0.9%).

Still another factor—less tangible, more visceral—shades our vision of America’s religious landscape. This is the dizzying speed at which our nation’s moral values are changing, especially regarding sexual orientation, same-sex marriage, and a host of related issues.

I don’t have the expertise to interpret all this information. Even if I did, I wouldn’t have the genius to develop a strategy for overcoming these trends. So instead of trying to interpret or invent, for now let’s simply *assume* it—first, that the metrics being used are the right ones, and second, that the worst evaluations are correct. Let’s believe that churches *are* closing by the thousands yearly and that the swelling cohort of “nones” (religiously unaffiliated) is siphoning millions away from those who used to label themselves as Christians. Let’s further assume that Millennials are recalcitrantly unreligious and virtually unreachable (except by the uber-cool and dubiously orthodox). Finally, let’s assume that the rapid changes we’ve seen in American public morality are the harbinger of increasingly aggressive pressure on Christians to adjust their beliefs or suffer the consequences. In short, let’s accept the claim that our numbers and influence are rapidly shrinking in a hostile culture—like never before.

Facing this gloomy landscape (and ignoring the question of how much of the gloom is real and how much is imaginary), we would do well to ask the question, “Where might we discern the good sovereign hand of God at work

in these changes to *strengthen* His people and bring glory to Himself?” Is *every* change a wave that threatens to dash us against the rocks, or are there also currents to set us on a better course? I am suggesting that, even though many of these trends are clearly lamentable, America’s changing religious landscape may bring unexpected benefits to God’s people. But in order to see these as benefits, we might have to reevaluate what we have cherished as American Christians.

Lest I be misunderstood, I don’t mean that there are benefits in fewer people coming to Christ or in believers being less faithful to church. I *do* mean to point out possible benefits for Christians when fewer people identify themselves as Christians and where Christianity as a cultural force appears to be waning.

Where’s Our Confidence?

First, in the midst of a shrinking American Christianity, we are forced to reassess our source of confidence.

Of course we would know which answer to check on a quiz if asked: “A or B: What’s your source of confidence? A, ‘The power of the gospel,’ or B, ‘The power of the flesh.’” But the question I’m interested in is where our confidence is on the “gut level.” To test yourself on this, consider how much your comfort increases when political elections go “our way”—when men and women whose values align with ours hold the reins of power or when celebrities champion truths we also cherish. For example, how do you feel when Tim Tebow kneels in prayer on the football field and advertises John 3:16 in his eye black?

On the other hand, what happens to our confidence meter when the US Supreme Court rules in favor of same-sex marriage or when reports come out that non-Christian faiths are on the rise while Christianity declines? How do you feel when an evangelical leader withdraws from praying at Barack Obama’s inauguration ceremony over the hubbub about his “anti-gay” sermon from the 1990s? Or when Tim Tebow backs out of a speaking commitment at a Baptist church whose pastor is an outspoken critic of same-sex marriage? Or when the fire chief of Atlanta gets fired after distributing to coworkers several copies of his book containing Christian views?

It’s simply human nature to put confidence in things we can see and experience—whether personalities, politics, or cultural sway. But when these things feel wobbly, we begin to see Romans 1:16 with dramatic clarity: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” In reality, God’s power to save people never depended on politicians, celebrities, or institutions, but on the gospel of Christ. But it might take the shaking of these things away from us to help us see the power of the gospel.

What Do We Believe and Why?

Second, the shrinking of Christianity in America forces us to clarify what we believe and why we believe it. This clarity compelled by conflict has been part of the church's history since the very beginning. The apostle Peter had to explain to his fellow Jews why he and the other disciples believed that Jesus was indeed the Christ. To the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers of Mars Hill, the apostle Paul dismantled idolatry, declared God's certain judgment, and defended the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Early Christians faced demeaning opinions such as Roman Governor Pliny's, who wrote that Christianity was a "nothing but a depraved and extravagant superstition,"¹ and Tacitus' remark to Emperor Trajan that Christians were "a set of men adhering to a novel and mischievous superstition."² Pagan thinkers dismissed the Christian faith as too chronologically recent to be trustworthy, the incarnation as unworthy of God, and Christ's resurrection as simply ridiculous. From these clashes of beliefs (as well as internal heresies) came some of the richest and most important articulations of the Christian faith.

As American Christians, we are inching closer to the circumstances of our Christian forebears in that we occupy less of a share of the American population and less cultural sway. We will increasingly rub shoulders with people whose belief systems differ radically from our own. Our hitherto unexamined beliefs now stand in stark contrast with other worldviews. For example, my parents grew up in the '50s and '60s. They never had to wonder whether it was right or wrong for two men, who felt mutual love for each other, to formalize their love with a marriage ceremony. For most people in their generation, the "yuck factor" settled the discussion before it even started. But our culture's changing perspective on sexuality and marriage has required us to come to a deeper understanding of the biblical explanation of sexuality and gender roles. Similarly, while I grew up believing in the Trinity, it has remained mostly as a background belief. But my children, growing up in a population with a higher percentage of Muslims, must understand why God's triune nature is essential for God to be love, and thus to be our Savior.

But this benefit of thinking through carefully what we believe and why comes at the cost of a certain comfort: the comfort of sharing a basic Christian worldview with most of the people around us, whether they are believers or not. We can either bemoan the loss of this comfort, or we can see it as an opportunity to understand and share the gospel more deeply, more biblically. In a day when a Muslim mosque and Christian church stand on the same street, we

As American Christians, we are inching closer to the circumstances of our Christian forebears in that we occupy less of a share of the American population and less cultural sway.

no longer have the luxury of speaking to our neighbors in Christian idioms. Often, we don't understand what we really believe until we try to explain it to someone who disagrees. If our waning share of the population helps us to discover that we didn't understand the gospel as well as we thought we did; and if that discovery leads us to hold it more deeply and share it more clearly, I consider that a benefit.

Luxuries We Need?

Third, the shrinking of American Christianity will require Christians to be creative in accomplishing kingdom goals. Granted, this need for creativity does not spring exclusively from a declining share of Christianity: other factors contribute, most notably a weak economy and the rise of technology. But when these factors conspire with an increasingly marginalized

Christianity, they call for Christians to reassess their traditional models of education, global missions, and pastoral support.

Let's consider what would happen if the US government revoked the tax-exempt status of churches and the parsonage tax exemption—a much-discussed possibility following the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of gay marriage. This extra financial burden on smaller churches would make it even more difficult to support a full-time pastor. The percentage of churches with part-time pastors would inevitably rise, and churches that are able to support a senior pastor will be less likely to hire a full-time associate pastor.

Obviously, I'm not rooting for this to happen. On a biblical level, the New Testament teaches that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). On a personal level, since I receive my salary from a local church, my family and I—along with the thousands of other "clergy"—would feel enormous pressure. We don't possess highly marketable degrees. Our experience in preaching and pastoring won't impress a potential employer. And churches themselves would feel the loss of pastors who are able to devote extended time and energy to the work of the ministry.

But before we consider the decline of full pastoral support to be an unmitigated evil, we should back up to get a fuller historical and biblical perspective—stretching all the way back to the New Testament. Even though the apostle Paul taught that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel," he obviously did not consider it to be a rule for every preacher, since he himself forfeited that right (1 Cor. 9:15).

Besides this biblical concession, there are residual benefits from a part-time or lay pastoral leadership. First,

Continued on page 37



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The Race That Is Set

Perhaps you've experienced one of those I-don't-recognize-Americans-anymore moments. And, perhaps, like me, you've resented the irrevocable loss of virtue, the utter bankruptcy of genuine wisdom, and the flouting of traditional values Americans used to hold dear. Just about the time I'm pricing flights to the nearest foreign mission field, I'm reminded of our theme passage, Hebrews 12:1–2—specifically the phrase, “the race that is set before us” with an emphasis on the word “us.”

Because God does all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11), we know with absolute certainty that God has graciously assigned to us the race that is twenty-first-century America. Tempting as it is for me to question the Potter's wisdom (Rom. 9:21), God has definite purposes in mind when He places His servants onto courses tailored just for them. In fact, when we arrive at Hebrews 12, we've just marveled at heroes who worked out their faith in their particular time-bound situation. Jesus Christ Himself despised the shame of the cross and finished His utterly unique race with a ringing shout of victory (12:2).

Our countrymen badly need preachers to conquer the unique challenges of *our* course by confronting *our* culture with the glorious good news of Jesus Christ and by comforting *our* brethren with the promises therein. Like any distance runner preparing to attack difficult terrain, we desperately need to fuel our pursuit of God's race with life-sustaining truth. Instead of priming our bodies, we must hydrate our souls with heavenly water that will carry us across the finish line.

What are some of these sustaining truths demanding constant refreshment? (1) Rest in the providence of God; (2) rely on God's gospel power; (3) rejoice in the victory won.

Rest in the Providence of God

In every high-level distance race, the winner is brought to a place of complete commitment: he (or she) must trust his finely tuned body to slam every last ounce of energy into a final acceleration. Believers, likewise, must implicitly trust the providence of God. Scripture is unanimous: the Lord sovereignly selects specific individuals for specific ministries. And He's willing to shake world events high and low to get His servant into a winning position. Consider how God effortlessly manipulated the shenanigans of a silly woman, precisely maneuvered the disloyalty of an intimidated lackey, dramatically disturbed the sleep of the world's most powerful sovereign, and miraculously altered the environmental cycles of an entire region just to bring Joseph to the decisive place of influence.



Just as Boaz happened to visit workers the very day Ruth gleaned in his field, just as Esther found herself improbably at the nexus of power and protection, and just as Philip intersected an Ethiopian who at that very moment was reading Isaiah 53, God has placed us right here, right now just for the execution of His purposes. However much I might desire another's course, Jesus says, “What is that to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:22).

Rely on God's Gospel Power

I've been running in races for over ten years now, and I've never crossed the finish line first. But I did finish second . . . once. With a half-mile remaining, the eventual winner pulled alongside me and offered a quick glance—he was sizing me up. Just after our eyes met, he sprang forward with a flourish of cardiovascular horsepower I could never possess. And when it comes to your Christian race, perhaps you feel as utterly powerless as I felt that day. If I'm being honest, I feel helpless quite often. LDS people—i.e., Mormons—are perfectly content to ignore my every effort . . . and they're really good at it (much to my chagrin). How does a gospel-soldier keep running when every step seems to land in quicksand?

A few years back, I didn't know the precise answer to that question. But by God's grace, I just point people to the

Before Us



singular demonstration of God's power that isn't found in nature, logic, apologetics, or methods, but in the cross of Christ. The message of Christ crucified is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). And this realization has been so liberating when talking to people of vastly different worldviews.

For example, I've had the following conversations with different Millennials: a medical professional who began a diatribe with the phrase, "The problem with free-speech is . . .!"; a high school junior who claimed that playing the Mexican Train Game was an act of racism (that's the actual name of the game); and a military officer who theorized that any god worth worshipping would allow people to determine their own gender. And at those particular moments, it's sinfully easy to launch into conservative-talk-radio mode and blast their conclusions, forgetting that those convictions are rooted within their own sense of morality. And I suppose there's some spiritual power in belittling them, but Scripture suggests a different approach altogether. Listen to the heart of the Spirit through the Apostle Paul: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

But that's the rub, isn't it? God's transcultural, multi-epochal gospel undercuts our desire to be right politically, socially, and economically. It takes such immense

preparation and wisdom to respond with gospel truth that I find myself overwhelmed with an inability to articulate gospel truth. "Yes, my dear friend, speech can be offensive. Do you know what's been the most offensive speech of all time (1 Cor. 1:23)?" Or, "Wow, you know, racial diversity is dear to the heart of God—He sacrificed His only Son because He wants every single nationality to bow harmoniously at His feet (Ps. 67:2–3)." Or, again, "Did you know there's a very good reason God created us male and female? Not only do both genders display different aspects of God's image, but the committed union of those differing sexes pictures the gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:25–28)." May we cultivate gospel responses to the secular conclusions with gospel-focused intentionality.

Rejoice in the Victory Won

Sometimes people are perplexed that runners enter races that they have no chance of winning. And, yes, I'll admit, that's a touch crazy. But for the Christian, his race is already won by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Through Him we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). Paul's epitaph is quite literally translated "super victors." And notice the present-tense reality—believers are right now, at this very moment, scoring an overwhelming victory through the triumph of our elder Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, our greatest triumph for Christ stands at the exact intersection of our faith and our suffering. If our nation descends into widespread persecution, God will have permitted it. And at that moment of suffering, we will rejoice that Christ has counted us worthy (Acts 5:41) to fill up in our body His very own afflictions (Col. 1:24). Am I afraid of that type of suffering? Of course I am. But my sufficiency isn't in me, it's from God who makes me a competent minister of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5–6).

Final Thoughts

We have to ask ourselves a vital question: What is the *Christian* response to our generation's demands? Talking heads, politicians, bloggers, et al., offer varying solutions, most of which have nary a shred of genuine hope. The gospel is God's powerful answer to our culture's woes. So please don't waste your voice articulating something any unbeliever could trumpet—to no saving effect. God demands that we confront our nation with, of all things, His grace. We've been chosen for this historical moment. We possess the truest demonstration of God's power. We own a certain victory in the performance of Jesus Christ alone. So run, my friend. Run your race.



Dr. Greg Baker pastors Fellowship Bible Church near Ogden, Utah.

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First Partaker

Ply Your Books in This New Year

Alexander Whyte (1836–1921), the Scottish Presbyterian minister whose own books continue to do preachers so much good, testified, *I myself owe so much to good books that I cannot stop myself on this subject as long as I see a single student sitting before me. I have a thousand times had Thomas Boston's experience of good books. "I plied my books. After earnestly plying my books, I felt my heart begin to grow better. I always find that my health and my heart are the better according as I ply my books."*¹

Ply is an antique verb we almost never use or hear. It spoke in the past of working steadily at one's business, especially a complicated business involving multiple strands of materials or responsibilities (like the noun *ply*, used for many-stranded yarn). One strand of a preacher's business is to read, and in this happy day of hundreds, even thousands, of good titles a preacher may ply his reading in handfuls and multiples.

A new year is upon us, one in which our hearts will grow better or worse, and our reading habits will figure into it significantly. Here are some recommendations for better hearts this next year.

The Bible

Beginning in January, will we strike a steady rhythm of reading repeatedly through the entirety of our Bibles? Without determining to do so, we're likely to drift into an undisciplined pattern of poking around for chapters here and there which complement our

daily moods. By that approach, we'll seldom expose our hearts to the stern, uncompromising parts of Scripture that are often the very ones our mushy sentiments most require to restore us to being good, militant soldiers.

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

For myself, I intend to continue another year's plodding doggedly along with the schedule devised by Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–43) for his people. The letter to them with which he introduced it reads as though it were composed for just such a year as 2016 (with its national elections) may prove to be.

MY DEAR FLOCK,—The approach of another year stirs up within me new desires for your salvation, and for the growth of those of you who are saved. *God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.* What the coming year is to bring forth who can tell? There is plainly a weight lying on the spirits of all good men, and a looking for some strange work of judgment upon this land. There is a need now to ask that solemn question—*If in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?* Those believers will stand firmest who have no dependence upon self or upon creatures, but upon Jehovah our Righteousness. We must be driven more to our Bibles, and to the mercy-seat, if we are to stand in the evil day. Then we shall be able to say, like David—*The proud have had me greatly in derision, yet have I not declined from Thy law. Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of Thy word.*

M'Cheyne's plan has two advantages. First, it starts our reading in four parts of the Bible simultaneously (Genesis, Matthew, Ezra, Acts). Second, by reading just four chapters a day, we complete each year the entire Old Testament once, and the Psalms and New Testament twice. Or one can slow his pace and stretch the schedule out over eighteen, or even twenty-four,

Inside

Bring . . . the Books—Key books for the pastor's study	5
Straight Cuts—An exegetical study	6
Windows—Themed sermon illustrations	7

months. But if I could do my ministry over, I would begin it with the enthusiastic ambition to complete M'Cheyne's plan, not once, but twice a year. No more than half an hour's reading morning and evening would have achieved that splendid goal easily.

My personal twist on the plan has been to choose at least one of the daily chapters for a little more in-depth study. This I do three or four days a week with an insightful commentator, some of whose findings or insights I pen into my wide-margin Bible. I seldom have time to read everything the commentary has on the chapter, but if I can take a small bite and get something, even a single good fact, stored away in my Bible's margins, I'm profiting at a level above mere reading. In time, my systematic yearly readings will bring me back time and again to every chapter, allowing me repeated opportunities to enlarge my notes on all of them. This too is a system I wish I'd discovered decades ago.

Beginning in January, will we strike a steady rhythm of reading repeatedly through the entirety of our Bibles? Without determining to do so, we're likely to drift into an undisciplined pattern of poking around for chapters here and there which complement our daily moods.

Some of Church History's Best Teachers

When I have the opportunity to talk to groups of ministers, or even lay Christians, about their reading habits, I prioritize reading the works of preachers and teachers whose works have passed the test of time. John Ruskin, the English writer, observed, *Books are divided into two classes, the books of the hour and the books of all time.* How long has it been since we've read one of the books of all time? These are the titles which break ground into a subject with such seminal insight that *anyone who later deals with this subject must take this book into consideration. It is a book from which other books spring.*² This factor is what, at least in part, makes a book a classic.

Let me recommend three classic titles that have ministered to me profoundly this last year. The first is John Owen's *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*. Many of Owen's works are unusually difficult to read (though always worth the work), but this particular title is relatively easy to follow. It is a series of discourses on Christ's petition, *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me* (John 17:24). Owen penned these for the exercise of his own mind and

as the substance of the last sermons he preached to his London congregation before his death in 1683. His general thesis is arresting:

All persons not immersed in sensual pleasures,—not overdrenched in the love of this world and present things,—who have any generous or noble thoughts about their own nature, being, and end,—are under the highest obligation to betake themselves unto this contemplation of Christ and his glory. Without this, they shall never attain true rest or satisfaction in their own minds.

Owen noted that *temptations, afflictions changes, sorrows, dangers, fears, sickness, and pains* fill up no small part of our earthly existence. Everything about our earthly lives contains roots of trouble and sorrow. But, he argued, *He that can at all times retreat unto the contemplation of this glory, will be carried above the perplexing prevailing sense of any of these evils, of a confluence of them all. . . . Whatever presseth, urgeth, perplexeth, if we can but retreat in our minds unto a view of this glory, and a due consideration of our own interest therein, comfort and support will be administered unto us.*

Meditations and Discourses is one of three titles on the Person and glory of Christ in the first volume of Owen's *Works* (Banner of Truth, 1972). The other two are equally good, but in this final work Owen is exceptionally practical in his directives about how to behold Christ's glory by faith at present long before we behold it by sight in the future.

A second classic work that has strengthened me this last year is Thomas Boston's *The Crook in the Lot*. Boston (1676–1732) was a Scottish minister who pastored just two churches, both of which were located remotely in the Scottish borders, and neither of which was large. He called his final years the “groaning years.” His wife had gradually slipped into total dementia, he suffered acutely from kidney stones, and the two of them looked back submissively, though still painfully, on the loss of six of their ten children. These experiences directed Boston to Ecclesiastes 7:13, *Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?*

Boston's thought is that every Christian has a *crook* (some crooked thing) in his *lot* (his portion in life) that has been given to him for his good by a sovereign God, and that unless God Himself chooses to straighten it, no amount of self-effort can make it any better. It is an affliction, and it will be lasting. It may be a crook in one part of a believer's life (such as his reputation) or in many parts simultaneously. It often may be in a very sensitive part of our life, such as our relationships, which Boston calls *the joints of society*. These are, Boston says, *in their nature the springs of man's comfort; yet, they often turn the greatest bitterness to him.*

A crook in our lot makes us vulnerable. Satan will attempt to *make diligent use of it for . . . dangerous purposes*. But there is a successful way to manage it for our own blessing, provided that we can come to view it by

faith. *A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them; and that view is to be obtained by faith, not by sense; for, it is the light of the word alone that represents them justly, discovering in them the work of God, and, consequently, designs becoming the divine perfections.*

The Crook in the Lot has been republished in a small paperback by Christian Heritage (2002), complete with a helpful introduction by J. I. Packer. I urge you to read it. If you don't need it now, you will shortly, for, as Boston demonstrates, *there is no lot out of heaven without a crook.*

The third classic title which I'd like to recommend is by John Flavel (1628–91). It's without doubt one of the best books that I've read in many years. Perhaps that's because of my life circumstances now. Nevertheless, I'm confident that most Christians would find it to be the rare jewel for comfort for which they've been searching for a long time. The book appears as *A Practical Treatise of Fear* (1682) in volume 3 of Flavel's *Works*. But the reprint which I read has been published as a small paperback under the title *Triumphing over Sinful Fear* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2011). There are three types of fear, Flavel explains: natural fear (the kind that makes us lock our doors at night), reverential fear (*which is our treasure, not our torment*), and sinful fear. It is this last kind that Flavel is concerned to remedy. *It is not only our unhappiness, but our fault.* It arises from unbelief, which Flavel calls *unworthy distrust of God*, and paralyzes both grace and reason in our hearts, *like the wheels of a watch wound above its due height.* Its great danger is *its power to dispose and incline people to use sinful means to escape danger. . . . Satan spreads the net and fear drives people right into it.*

Flavel's thought is easy to follow. The chapters progress from "Uses of Fear" to "Causes, Effects," and finally, "Remedies." A concluding chapter answers objections to his remedies. The fact that Flavel published this work twenty years after his ejection from the pulpit of Saint Saviour's in Dartmouth certainly must have something to do with the wealth of its insights. During those twenty years he was dogged by government agents rabid to arrest him, suffered the loss of most of his estate, witnessed the grievous deaths of his godly parents after they contracted the plague during imprisonment for their religious convictions, and buried two wives. Flavel knew fear! But he had learned to triumph over it, and the remedies he offers are the ones that he himself had learned in fires that probably none of us will ever have to brave.

Pastoral Theology

Andrew Bonar's *The Visitor's Book of Texts* (Banner of Truth, 2010) is a veritable course on the pastoral theology of ministering to the sick and sorrowing. Consisting of hundreds of texts arranged topically for ministering to those who are ill or who are grieving, it also includes Bonar's own pastoral comments or quotations from other spiritually minded believers, suited to

apply those texts. For instance, Bonar quotes nineteen texts for those who are "Under Bodily Pain." Here are just three of the texts and Bonar's comments.

Lam. 3:33 *For he doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men.*

It is in order to attain some great end that he sends that agonizing pain; otherwise he would no more have sent it than a tender mother would put her babe on the rack. "Love will not wrong us. There shall be no needless suffering."

Deut. 32:36 *For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone.*

Deliverance is nearest when affliction is at its height.

Luke 21:19 *In your patience possess ye your souls.*

A man of God could say, "Blessed be God for all his favours, and particularly for the special mercy of the [kidney] stone!" The will of my God may put me to pain, but it is the will of God. He says also, "By pain God drives me to prayer, teaches me what prayer is, inclines me to pray. . . . Say, my heart, with respect to the stone, I am unworthy of this mercy!"

You really should take a look at this book. I'm thinking that you'll almost certainly want a copy for yourself, and then probably several more to give to church members in troubled circumstances.

Flavel knew fear! But he had learned to triumph over it, and the remedies he offers are the ones that he himself had learned in fires that probably none of us will ever have to brave.

Another extremely helpful title is *Encouragement for Today's Pastors: Help from the Puritans* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), by Joel Beeke and Terry Slachter. Sixteen chapters are arranged under topics such as "Piety," "Sovereignty," "Dignity," etc. To take just one of the topics as an example, under "Piety" are three chapters: "Zeal for the Ministry of the Word," "In Sweet Communion, Lord, with Thee," and "Encouraged by God's Promises." Each chapter then explores its subject through the glowing writings of Puritan authors. For instance, "Zeal for the Ministry of the Word" contains some twenty heartwarming quotations, including Samuel Ward's (1577–1640) definition of spiritual zeal. *In plain English, zeal is nothing but heat. . . . It is a spiritual heat wrought in the heart of man by the Holy Ghost, improving the good affections of love, joy, hope, etc., for the best service and furtherance of God's glory.* This kind of

love, especially zealous love for God, cannot be self-produced. John Preston (1587–1628) explained, *We are no more able to love the Lord than cold water is able to heat itself . . . so the Holy Ghost must breed that fire of love in us, it must be kindled from heaven, or else we shall never have it.*

A third title of great encouragement as we begin this new year is Albert Martin's *You Lift Me Up: Overcoming Ministry Challenges* (Christian Focus, 2013). Martin pastored Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, New Jersey, for more than forty years. Through the ministerial training program he oversaw there for some twenty years, scores of men sat under his systematic teaching of pastoral theology. (Over one hundred of these lectures, including his eleven-part series on the call to the ministry, are downloadable at sg-audiotreasures.org/am_ptheology).

For those who are considering catechizing their children, Terry Johnson has put both his family's and his church's practices into print. *Catechizing Our Children* (Banner of Truth, 2013) is an inspirational "how-to" for parents and pastors. Although advocating the use of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Johnson's work is seamlessly applicable to any Baptist catechism as well.

You Lift Me Up addresses ministerial backsliding, ministerial burnout, and credibility washout (through neglecting our physical bodies). Many of the chapters on these topics speak to issues seldom addressed among ministers, such as "Beware of Losing Your Own Nurture by Isolation from the Congregation," "Beware of Priorities Shaped by Others' Perceived Needs," and "Beware of Hiding Your Real Humanity." All throughout Martin directs us to the Lord to provide what we do not have in ourselves. *Remember God's gracious provisions which have furnished us with the power to change the patterns and practices. . . . God is not like the harsh and unreasonable taskmasters of Egypt who demanded bricks without providing straw. Rather, God has "granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).* But, Martin concludes, *My brother preacher, if you are to profit from the counsels given in this book then you must be able to say with the psalmist, "When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments" (Ps. 119:59–60).*

Family

One of the finest things on the family that I've ever seen is *A Theology of the Family* (National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2014), edited by Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown. Fifty-six authors, most of them historic (such as Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, J. C. Ryle, and C. H. Spurgeon) rather than contemporary, are featured in this attractively formatted work of over 700 pages. Their writings are arranged under twelve topics, including "Family Worship" (twelve writers), "Duties of Sons and Daughters" (ten authors), "Modest Apparel" (ten authors), and "Thoughts for Young People" (seven authors). It's a hard book to put down, and one that would massively reform families if its directions were taken even halfway to heart.

For those who are considering catechizing their children, Terry Johnson has put both his family's and his church's practices into print. *Catechizing Our Children* (Banner of Truth, 2013) is an inspirational "how-to" for parents and pastors. Although advocating the use of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Johnson's work is seamlessly applicable to any Baptist catechism as well. *Our faith can be transmitted to our children but, clearly, the process is not automatic,* Johnson cautions. For the process to succeed, it requires both parents and church to work together to systematically indoctrinate young people. Apart from this, much of our preaching fails. Johnson quotes Thomas Watson (1620–86), *I fear one reason why there has been no more good done by preaching, has been because the chief heads and articles of religion have not been explained in a catechetical way. . . . To preach and not to catechize is to build without a foundation.*

The last title I'll recommend is Ashton Oxenden's *A Happy Old Age* (rpt., Reformation Heritage, 2004). Oxenden (1808–92) was an English evangelical minister who authored more than forty books. This one contains twelve short chapters giving advice to the elderly on duties, temptations, trials, and joys peculiar to their age and circumstances. *I observe that old persons are in some respects much alike, but are in other respects very different,* Oxenden says. The greatest difference between them is that some are groaning under their heavy burdens, filled with complaint, and clinging to life only as a drowning man grasps at the only plank that is left. But others are thankful, contented, peaceful, and cheerfully willing to bear all that God assigns them. What makes the difference? *It is God's grace alone. . . . And such an old age, dear reader, is just what I desire for you. May it be your portion.*

These are all good reads. May the Lord grant us holy ambition, time, and workmanlike system in making a profitable use of these and many other blessed titles as we ply our ministerial trade in this new year. ☞

¹*The Apostle Paul* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1903), 20.

²Warren Wiersbe, "Christian Classics," *Walking with the Giants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 232.

Bring . . . the Books

An Exposition of the Book of Proverbs by Charles Bridges

Preachers today live in a time of unprecedented accessibility to tools for studying the Bible. We enjoy electronic aids that employ incredible and instantaneous search powers. Additionally, the blessing of a new generation of books further opens the text and delivers fresh expositional treasures. Preachers should regularly expand their horizons to include these aids and books so that they may grow in their skills as expositors of Scripture. At the same time, serious students of Scripture should not neglect the “old books.” Timeless classics do not diminish in value with age. Charles Bridges’ commentary on Proverbs is one such classic.

Pastor, preacher, author, and leader within the evangelical wing of the Church of England, Charles Bridges was born in 1794. Following his graduation from Queens College, Cambridge, he experienced a fruitful ministry that spanned over four decades. A life that evidenced a deep walk with God reinforced his ministry. Bridges’ writings are his lasting legacy and are available from Banner of Truth and various online resources, including Kindle.

In his preface Bridges challenges his readers to have the proper approach to Proverbs.

The riches lie not on the surface. Only those, therefore, that dig into the bowels of the earth—not the readers, but “the *searchers of the Scriptures*”—are enriched. If the surface be barren, the mine beneath is inexhaustible. . . . While other parts of Scripture show us the glory of our high calling, this may instruct in all minuteness of detail how to “walk worthy of it.” . . . We look into this book, and, as by the aid of the microscope, we see the minuteness of our Christian obligations; that there is not a temper, a look, a word, a movement, the most important action of the day, the smallest relative duty, in which we do not either deface or adorn the image of our Lord, and the profession of his name.

Thus Bridges sets the tone for the entire 544-page book. After owning this book for thirty years, I still gain fresh insight when using it for sermon preparation.

Bridges’ commentary on Proverbs commends itself in three ways. First and foremost, this work is a valuable, but never shallow, balance to the more technical works available today. The Banner of Truth’s dustjacket reminds us that “Bridges gives homiletical and practical advice, rather than presenting a technical study.” While outstanding authors such as Walke, Alden, Garrett, Steveson, Kitchen, and others delve into more technical matters and make some valuable application, Bridges focuses on practical and probing applications.

Consider one example: Proverbs 21:20, “There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.” While technical commentators provide outstanding and useful in-depth


analysis of the verse along with some application, Bridges provides additional insight not readily found in other commentaries.

To love an earthly treasure is the way to poverty. Yet we may thankfully enjoy the prudent gathering as the fruit of the Lord’s blessing, like the oil of Canaan, for refreshment. This is not the forbidden “laying up for yourselves treasures upon earth”—a hoard for selfishness and distrust of God. This *treasure is in the house of the wise*. For prudence is not worldliness; an indifference to coming trial is not faith, but foolish simplicity.

Good commentaries normally include helpful cross references. Bridges often delights the reader by citing these and consequently supplies additional insight into the passage. His use of references serves then as a second commendation of his commentary. While many verses include five to ten helpful cross references, some verses contain many more. (For example, 16:1 contains eighteen cross references). These citations deepen understanding of the verse and, many times, illustrate it. Sprinkled among these cross references are occasional quotations and explanatory notes.

Finally, as Spurgeon noted, Bridges’ writings are “very suggestive to ministers.” For example, his brief comments on 26:23 and 24 (“Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him”) are followed with several biblical examples of those with burning and dissembling lips (Joseph’s brethren, Absalom, Judas Iscariot, Cain, Joab, and King Saul). This sermon about sinful lips begs to be preached!

Every commentator produces a work that contains weaknesses, and Bridges is no exception. If a preacher succumbs to the temptation to bring a critical eye to this work because it does not always reflect the in-depth exegetical work found in a few of the most technical commentaries, he misses the point and value of this book. The reader may also find some statements to be awkward, dated (it is 168 years old), or both.

Just as one does not leave the watermelon at home during the family picnic because of a few seeds, so one should not neglect Bridges because of a few “seeds.” Over and over again, he speaks with godly insight and memorable words. This work complements the newer technical works in our libraries and should find its place among our commentaries on Proverbs. 

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

Carlos Galvan has served as a youth pastor in Maryland and as a senior pastor in New York and Pennsylvania, and he now pastors Bible Baptist Church in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin.

Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head (Rom. 12:20).

A brief survey of *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* reveals considerable diversity in how this biblical language has been understood and applied down through the years. This column was birthed in a family discussion, and if impressions within my own family are any indication, a good deal of uncertainty still lingers about exactly what Paul means.

Interpretational Options

Paul draws directly from Proverbs 25:21–22. What's clear from the context of Romans is that in light of the certainty of the ultimate judgment of God, believers are not to avenge themselves on those who hate them but are, instead, to do positive good to them. Most agree that “food and drink” are symbolic of any kind of good work we can render to an enemy in need. The nub of the difference lies primarily in the meaning of the metaphor of heaping coals on the head and, therefore, the *rationale* and *intent* of doing good to one's enemies.

View 1: “Coals of fire” refers to divine retribution. So the *rationale* and *result* of doing good to our enemies is that it will increase their judgment. Interpreters who take this view are quick to insist that increasing our enemy's judgment should never be our *conscious intent* in doing them good. But that caveat is hard to defend in the face of Paul's explanatory language in 12:20b. If this view is correct, Paul is essentially saying, “Do good to them **because by doing so** you will be increasing God's judgment on them.” Perhaps the strongest argument against this view is that those who hold it (Schreiner, Haldane) are anxious to stop short of what Paul clearly seems to be saying.

View 2: “Coals of fire” refers to the enemy's sense of conviction, shame, or contrition when he sees you responding to his evil with good. In this case, the *rationale* and *intent* of doing good to one's enemy in need is to effect his repentance (though that may or may not be the result), thereby “overcom[ing] [his] evil with [your] good” (12:21). Some trace the source of the image itself to a neighbor providing hot embers in a culture where continual fire in the home-hearth was a necessity and where virtually everything was transported in containers carried on the head. That view would seem, however, to make the “coals of fire” statement a mere repetition—another example of doing good to one's enemy—rather than an explanation (as Paul seems to express it) of *why* we should be willing to give food and drink (i.e., do good) to our enemies. Commenting on Proverbs 25:22, Duane Garrett explains that because


“the metaphor of burning coals implies intense pain,” the implication is that the enemy “will be humiliated at having to take bread from a hated rival.”

Considerations

Paul exhorts to “recompense to no man evil for evil” (12:17), to “live peaceably with all men” (12:18), and to “avenge not yourselves” (12:19) because dealing with wrongs committed against you is God's business and responsibility, not yours. Relying on the righteous God to adjudicate all wrongs in His time liberates me from the desire to even my own score. But that's not the same as nursing a desire for vengeance (we would call it “justice”) with the thought that my “kindness” will only add to their culpability and condemnation.

Whether the reference to wrath in 12:19 implies God's wrath, our wrath, or the enemy's wrath doesn't really tip the interpretational balance one way or the other. Most interpreters favor taking it as God's wrath, but still hold to View 2. Even if the immediate context is divine wrath, the larger context of the chapter is an exhortation to display love (12:9–10), concern for others (12:3, 13–16), and benevolence over revenge (12:17–19, 21). Kindness to enemies in order to increase their condemnation directly contradicts an unhypocritical love (12:9). Douglas Moo asserts that while View 1 “cannot be cavalierly dismissed as ‘sub-Christian,’” the “major difficulty with the view is that it does not fit well with the context. Paul has been urging that Christians avoid a spirit of retaliation; yet, however qualified, this first interpretation comes close to encouraging just such an attitude. Moreover the teaching of Jesus from which Paul draws so much of what he says in these verses contains no such idea.”

The sentiment seems reminiscent of our well-known proverb to “kill with kindness.” The idea is akin to that expressed in 12:21—“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” More importantly, however, while one is hard-pressed to cite corroborative Scripture for contributing to another's condemnation, passages abound that encourage kindness to enemies for the sake (assumed or implied) of winning them (e.g., Exod. 23:4–5; Matt. 5:43–45; Luke 6:27–36; Rom. 2:4; 1 Pet. 2:19–25; 3:1; 3:14–18).

A survey of 24 commentaries on Proverbs and Romans reveals only two who hold View 1. Not all who hold View 2 interpret the coals of fire in exactly the same sense, but they do hold that the result or intent is a positive one (to engage the conscience and elicit repentance) not a negative one (to add to their judgment). 

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

The attitudes and actions of believers have been quite transformed as they simply remained in the conscious awareness of the presence of God. Christians can receive great encouragements from this reality as they reflect on related Scriptures and on related illustrations from the lives of godly missionaries. One who meditates on God's presence will receive multiple benefits.

Inner Strength to Carry Out God's Work

The Lord's work orders to believers prior to His "departure" to heaven were accompanied by the promise that He really was not going to depart: "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:20). In Paul's second epistle to Timothy, he encouraged Timothy with the promise of God's presence even when the supportive presence of others was absent. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 4:16–17). How did the Lord encourage Joshua when he was taking over the work of leading the nation of Israel? "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5).

Hudson Taylor, in his late fifties, wrote a sermon particularly focused on reaching "every creature" in China with the gospel:

"I am so glad it was a great multitude," he wrote in the draft of his discourse, "so great that the disciples thought it simply impossible to feed them. Yet the multitudes were in real need, and the need too was immediate. It must either be met at once or not at all. . . . Let us notice that in these circumstances the presence of the disciples alone would not have sufficed. They might perhaps have said, 'Poor things!' They might have regretted that they had not more bread with them; but they would have left the multitude hungry. But *Jesus was there; and His presence secured the carrying out of His compassionate purpose.* All were fed, all were filled, all went away satisfied and strengthened; and the disciples were not only reproved and instructed, but were enriched also."¹

God's presence made all the difference in the world. In March of 1889, Taylor was in China at the time of a very distressing problem back at the London office: "I have been greatly distressed," he wrote to Mrs. Taylor in March, "but all that is passed now. God has spoken, and my heart is at rest. . . . I see no light as to the future of home (London) arrangements; *but I see God, the living God; and I love him all the more for this trial—and trust.*"² Hudson Taylor did not know how this problem

back in the home office was going to be resolved, but he knew God was present, he saw God with him, and that gave him encouragement and strength to carry out God's work.

Amy Carmichael, in her late twenties, was tempted to be in a panic with all the spiritual work necessary in India.

She made a visit in December of 1896, traveling by train from Madras to the hot plain. From the train window she saw temples in every village, idols under nearly every tree, people working in the fields with Siva's ashes on their foreheads. "It makes you feel as if you couldn't sit still. You must do something, try to do something, *anything!* . . . Oh to get into that stronger, calmer current, out of the feverishness of human haste. Do please, dear friends, ask that we may exchange the eagerness of the flesh for the earnestness of the Spirit and so move in the force of that Holy Wind that we shall be carried along by His great calm."³

Amy moved from a feverish panic about the work of God to a calmness and strength as she believed in the reality of His calm and strong presence.

In Spurgeon's classic work on the Psalms, *The Treasury of David*, he comments on Psalm 139:10. "And Thy right hand shall hold me." The exploring missionary in his lonely wanderings is led; in his solitary feebleness he is held. Both the hands of God are with His own servants to sustain them and against rebels to overthrow them; and in this respect it matters not to what realms they resort; the active energy of God is around them still."⁴ Spurgeon recognized that God's presence was the strength that sustained His servants in dangerous fields around the globe.

Confidence That God Will Keep His Promises

The Lord was giving Jacob promises concerning the future. How did God give Jacob confidence that those promises would be kept? God said that He Himself would be there to guarantee it:

The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of (Gen. 28:13–15).

"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"

Charles Spurgeon

God encouraged Jacob to believe His promises with the truth that He would be right there to ensure those promises were kept.

Many modern technology devices come with the option to buy a warranty. Basically the warranty says that this device will keep working, and if it does not, someone will be available to fix it or replace it. There is always the question: How much confidence does one have that they truly will be available to fix it or replace it? If the warranty included the presence of a technician, ever present to ensure the warranty promises were kept, that would give the purchaser great confidence. God's promises are guaranteed with His actual presence.

Courage in the Face of an Often Fearful and Unknown Future

Paul faced an unknown future as he began his ministry in Corinth, a city that would tend to give any ministry worker fear. How was Paul encouraged? "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9–10). The Lord said that His presence guaranteed that Paul would be able to do what He needed to do. Solomon was facing a future filled with great responsibilities. How did David encourage him? "And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD" (1 Chron. 28:20).

John Paton, missionary to the cannibals in present-day Vanuatu, wrote about God's sustaining presence in fearful circumstances. In his autobiography he relates a story from when he was in his mid-thirties.

Next day, a wild Chief followed me about for four hours with his loaded musket, and, though often directed towards me, God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him, and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in His hands and felt immortal till my work was done. Trials and hairbreadth escapes strengthened my faith, and seemed only to nerve me for more to follow; and they did tread swiftly upon each other's heels. *Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Saviour*, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. His words, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power,

as did St. Paul, when he cried, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after twenty years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smile of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing "Him who is invisible"!⁵

A Mrs. Ridley, a fellow missionary with Hudson Taylor (1895), was in the middle of a Mohammedan uprising in which 80,000 civilians were massacred in a two-year period.

She herself could hardly understand it, as those fearful days wore on. Once, only once, her heart failed her—in the midst of an attack upon the city, when it seemed as though all hell were let loose, and that at any moment the defenses might fall. She was fully alive by that time to what it meant to be at the mercy of Mohammedan hordes. Had not infants been brought to her, scores of them, mutilated by their savagery? Alone in the house that night, her husband and Mr. Hall being out amid the panic-stricken people, a wave of terror swept over her. It was Dora, little Dora (her baby daughter) she thought of. For themselves it did not matter—but oh, her baby! Her happy, smiling, always contented treasure! How could she bear to see _____? But as she knelt beside the sleeping infant and cried to God, *the presence which is salvation so wrapped her round* that all else receded and was forgotten. "He gave me the assurance then," she said, "that no harm should come to us." And though it was many a long month before fighting and massacre were over, that agonizing dread never returned.⁶

How many times do Christians find themselves enveloped by fear, doubt, and paralyzing weakness, all because of failing to practice remembering God's presence? May believers find courage, confidence, and strength as they meditate on the Ever-Present One, just as they have down through the centuries. ☞

¹ Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God* (Littleton, CO: OMF International, 1911), 483.

² Ibid., 463.

³ Elisabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 126.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon abridged by David Fuller, *Treasury of David* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1968), 637.

⁵ John Paton edited by James Paton, *John G. Paton Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography Edited by His Brother, James Paton* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1891), 117.

⁶ Taylor, 543–44.



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Don't let your mind wander. It's too little to be out alone.
—Unknown

If it is good, it came from God, and it is, therefore, less than God. Don't worship it.
—Lee Atkinson

Boredom in the Lord's work always means that you are doing it in the flesh.
—Wayne Van Gelderen Sr.

God often permits us to be perplexed so that we may learn patience.
—T. J. Bach

If all the skeletons in all the closets of all the people were brought out and dangled in the faces of all those people . . . all the people would turn their faces toward hell and say, "I ought to go to hell."
—Bob Jones Sr.

One moment of patience may prevent disaster; one moment of impatience may ruin a life.
—Chinese Proverb

God sets before each of us a course, a race. It is not carried on in heaven, but here, where is only the wilderness, with its constant trials of faith, the patient endurance of which is the only way to perfecting.
—William R. Newell

In ancient times at the great Isthmian games and races . . . preceding the contest, the athletes were paraded around the arena by a herald who cried out, asking whether the audience could accuse the contestants of any crime, wickedness, slavery, or depravity of life.
—John L. Benson

Get clear hold of the three elements of success in a race: self-denial, decision, and patience.
—Andrew Murray

Repartee is something we think of twenty-four hours too late.
—Mark Twain

The Almighty is working on a great scale and will not be hustled by our peevish impetuosity.
—William Graham Scroggie

God alters things while we wait for Him.
—Oswald Chambers

Patience and diligence, like faith, remove mountains.
—William Penn

Patience achieves more than force.
—Edmund Burke

To the contestant in a Greek athletic event there were no bargain days and no easy ways. . . . His training was one, long period of self-denial. He exposed himself to all kinds of toughening experiences.
—James T. Dyet

A race means . . . that while a man is on the course he gives himself wholly to one thing—running with all his might. It means that for the time being he forgets everything for the all-absorbing desire—to gain the prize.
—Andrew Murray

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



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Very Clear Biblical Teaching

David C. Innes

There are two major aspects to *fundamental* statements of Scripture: statements that tell us *what to believe* and statements that tell us *what to do*. Both are equal and absolute in their authority. Fundamentalism goes beyond what we believe into what we are to do and how we are to conduct ourselves in the carrying out of the Great Commission. Obedience is equal in necessity to believing and teaching correct doctrine. True Fundamentalism embraces both.

The truths referred to here are so clearly set forth in Scripture that to deny them is to deny the meaning of words and the integrity of language. In other words, to deny them is an outright denial of the Word of God. Therefore, these truths are both fundamental and essential! Please note, however: there are many things that we teach, preach, and practice that are not in this category of truth.

APPLICATIONS	DOCTRINE Clearly revealed truths to be believed	PRACTICE Clearly revealed commands to be obeyed
This is	Clearly taught—Truth we must believe	Clearly commanded—Truth we must obey
Violation is	Heresy (a choosing, embracing and propagation of false teaching contrary to clearly revealed truth)	Insubordination, willful rebellion against God, complicity with Satan and demonic powers
Violation in relation to God is	A denial of God's authenticity (who He says He is), an attack on God's character (what He is)	A denial of God's authority (what He wants done), an attack on God's wisdom (how He wants it done)
Violation in relation to Scripture	Outright rejection of the Word of God	Outright rejection of the Word of God
Level of importance	These are irreducible minimums of the Christian faith and are absolutely essential to the Christian faith—for which we are commanded to "earnestly contend"	These are also irreducible minimums of the Christian faith and are absolutely essential to the Christian faith—for which we are commanded to "earnestly contend"
Those who deny are	Unbelievers, heretics, not saved	Unbelievers or willfully disobedient believers
When these are denied	We must expose, repudiate, separate	We must expose, rebuke, separate—even in the case of believers
Exclusivist	Insists on making teachings that are not clearly taught fundamental	Insists on making practices that are not clearly commanded fundamental
Fundamentalist	Regards belief as essential; believes wholly	Regards obedience as essential; practices wholly
Pseudo-Fundamentalist	Believes wholly but regards belief as optional	Regards obedience as optional; practices selective obedience
Neo-Evangelical	Believes almost wholly—has problems concerning the inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of Scripture	Replaces Scriptural instructions with "pragmatism"; regards obedience as irrelevant and unnecessary
Neo-Orthodox	Doesn't believe but uses biblical vocabulary	Doesn't believe and doesn't practice
Liberal	Denies outright	Denies outright
Charismatic	Rejects the Scriptures as the exclusive source of Divine Revelation	The Charismatic experience validates almost any and all practices and beliefs



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Written and Compiled by Dr. Layton Talbert

HABAKKUK: FROM CONSTERNATION

This column represents a break from the series on the life of David. Habakkuk is a book for a new year—especially a new year of political uncertainty, fiscal irresponsibility, pervasive corruption, social degeneracy, and normalization of perversion. The Supreme Court ruling redefining marriage as inclusive of same-sex unions is now old news. But working through its implications is likely to be a relevant topic for quite some time to come. This column is not about that ruling or even that topic, *per se*. That's just one of the most visible symptoms of a society that has not merely turned its back on God but snubbed its nose at Him as well. This column is about the Bible's answer to believers reeling from unstoppable and seemingly unstoppable evil in the surrounding society.

Background

Habakkuk supplies no autobiographical data. Since the book centers on a coming Babylonian invasion of Judah, however, it can be dated prior to the first deportation of Jews to Babylon in 605 BC. Since God states that the Babylonians would overrun Judah in Habakkuk's days and implies that it would be an unexpected event (1:5–6), a date at the dawn of Babylonian ascendancy (ca. 620–612 BC) would seem to satisfy all the data at our disposal. This makes him a contemporary of Jeremiah, probably prophesying late in the reign of Josiah. That means God's prophesied use of Babylon to chasten Judah is decades away, and His equally prophesied judgment of Babylon itself is nearly a century away.

Nature of the Book

How would you describe the literary character of this book? Habakkuk is unique among the prophetic books. It is not a collection of predictions (such as Zechariah). It is not a sermon aimed at God's people themselves (such as Malachi or Jeremiah 7). It is not a warning directed to Israel or one of the surrounding nations (such as Amos or Isaiah 13–22). It is simply a conversation, a prayer dialogue between the prophet and God that revolves around Habakkuk's personal struggle with the purposes of God. But it's a conversation designed to instruct God's people; that's why we get to listen in. It's a window into God's mind regarding the confusing circumstances in which we often find ourselves in a godless world. Like the struggle of other OT figures (Job, Solomon, Jeremiah, Asaph), Habakkuk's struggle relates to the justice of God's ways in the world.

Habakkuk is talking to God in thirty of the book's fifty-six verses. Remarkably, despite the fact that we are

listening in on the prophet's prayer conversation with God, he makes only one (twofold) request. In the concluding "prayer of Habakkuk" (3:1–19), he asks God to (a) make it clear to everyone that He is the one working in history, and (b) remember mercy in the midst of His wrath (3:2). The rest of the prayer is Habakkuk rehearsing God's glorious acts in the past (3:3–15) and his confession of total confidence and delight in God alone (3:16–19). Habakkuk's prayer is just one more biblical model demonstrating that prayer is often more than merely asking God for things; in Habakkuk, requests comprise a tiny fraction of his praying. And even those requests pertain not to the prophet's needs but to the glory and goodness of God.

The Conversation

Habakkuk's immediate concern is the *violence* (Hebrew, *chamas*) that pervades his society (1:2–3). The word implies malice, injustice, or cruelty; it characterized the population in Noah's day, prompting God to destroy humanity with the Flood (Gen. 6:11, 13). What's particularly interesting is that this diminutive book includes more occurrences of this word (6x) than the colossal writings of either Isaiah or Jeremiah, and the same number as Proverbs and Ezekiel. In fact, this word appears more frequently in only one other OT book: Psalms!

Habakkuk is grieved and frustrated (1:2–4) at the apparent indifference and inactivity of a righteous God in a wicked world. How can God permit so much wickedness to go unpunished for so long without intervening to put a stop to it (1:2–4)? Can you relate to his complaint in 1:4? The NCV renders it arrestingly: "Evil people gain while good people lose; the judges no longer make fair decisions." But God has a plan to deal with unjust Judah: He will use the pagan Babylonians as His rod (1:5–11).

Now Habakkuk is baffled and appalled (1:12–2:1). How could God possibly give wicked idol-worshippers victory over His own people? Won't that only confirm their idolatrous beliefs that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is impotent and that their false gods are the real power brokers in human history?

Not to worry. God is in no hurry. He can bide His time until they have fulfilled their purpose and their turn, too, comes (2:2–20). This is the soul of God's message to the perplexed prophet. What does God want Habakkuk to do—and all believers who are frustrated that evil seems always to have the upper hand in society?

- *Wait on Me* (2:2–3)—We always want God to act *now*. We have to learn to submit to the wisdom and righteousness of God's timetable.

TO CONFIDENCE AND CONTENTMENT IN GOD

- *Trust in Me* (2:4)—In the meantime, the righteous go on living by faith in the character and control of God.
- *Leave it to Me* (2:6–20)—The series of “woes” that follows (2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19) is God’s way of assuring the prophet—and all His people—that nothing escapes His awareness or His righteous judgment. “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing” (Eccles. 12:14).
- *Rest in Me* (2:20)—So even amid the chaos of a wicked world we can live in perfect peace when we keep our mind and eye fixed on Him (cf. Isa. 26:3).

Habakkuk’s response is a formal prayer, a meditation saturated with God, with His past actions of judgment and salvation, and with His sufficiency for whatever the future holds.

- *God-Centered Request* (3:2): “Your will be done. Do Your work in Your way and time, but in wrath remember mercy.”
- *Worshipful Rehearsal* (3:3–15): “You, Lord, have displayed Your majestic sovereignty over the nations in the past. Do it again in the future.”
- *Personal Resolve* (3:16–19): “Regardless of circumstances or appearances, I will rejoice in Yahweh; all my strength and confidence rest in Him.”

The Point

How can we wrap up the theme of this book in a portable way that we can carry away with us? Habakkuk is not just a prayer conversation. It is the record of the prophet’s personal journey from **exasperation** with surrounding evil and God’s inaction, through **confusion** about God’s means of dealing with it, to **confident faith and joyful submission** regarding God’s sovereign ways and means and timing.

What, then, is the book’s actual message to *us*? How do we apply the lessons of Habakkuk’s journey to ourselves in our surroundings? Do not fret when evil goes unpunished or when greater wickedness prevails. God is aware and sovereign and in control. So trust, rest, and rejoice in Him, regardless of the temporary circumstances.

In short, God’s people must trust in His character even (especially) when they do not understand His ways. Habakkuk displays no disrespect, and his questions are legitimate. God never rebukes Habakkuk for pouring out his honest frustration and confusion. The Lord kindly ministers to him because his burden is for righteousness. That doesn’t mean God gives Habakkuk all the answers, nor does He satisfy his desire for justice immediately. Before

predicting the judgment of Babylon, the Lord stresses His main point: “the just [righteous] shall live by his faith” (2:4). When our sensory experience does not seem to match biblical theology, we need to go with biblical theology.

Habakkuk needed to accept by faith that the Judge of all the earth always does what is right in His own sovereign way and time. This is precisely the decision he makes as the book concludes (3:17–18), and when he does God ministers to him the strength he needs to move forward (3:19). Habakkuk’s experience was inscripturated as a model for all believers struggling with the mysteries of providence, whether personally or nationally. Just as faith in God’s character and words (Hab. 2:4) is the key that opens the door to the Christian life (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), it is the key to persevering in the face of troubling circumstances and delayed expectations (Heb. 10:38).

To summarize the theme/message in Habakkuk’s own words—or rather, in God’s own words: “the just shall live by faith.” That sums up *living* the Christian life as much as it does *entering* the Christian life. Habakkuk 2:4 really is the theological soul of the book, and 3:16–17 is what that looks like.

When you think about it, it’s remarkable that these three Hebrew words in this obscure little book buried in the minor prophets would become a pivotal proof text in the NT (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:37–38) and the battle cry for a history-shaking movement—the Reformation—that sought to recover the truth that lay buried under the rubble of Romanism.

Why did God include this book in the Bible? What important things does it say about God or about other significant topics? It gives voice to a legitimate frustration of the righteous. It reminds us that our ways and time are not always God’s ways or time. It illustrates that understanding God better often comes through frankly asking Him our questions and reverently but honestly voicing our frustrations. It reminds us of the necessity of submission to God’s ways and time. It models a mature, thoughtful, scriptural approach to prayer. It is an unequivocal testimony both to God’s keen sense justice and God’s complete awareness of and control over all things.

In the unlikelyst of places—amid God’s woes on the wicked behaviors of the unrighteous—God serenely affirms two reassuring realities: *He will completely redeem the whole earth one day* (2:14); and, in the meantime, *His sovereign presence presides over the whole earth right now* (2:20). The just can live—must live—by faith in those twin truths.

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Teens and Bible Reading

The American Bible Society engaged in a study of American teenagers and their Bible reading habits. Results and conclusions were a bit puzzling. For example, the percentage of teenagers who would claim no religious identity (the “nones”) was 16% compared to 37% of millennials (18–30-year-olds). It is suggested, based on the research, that 70% of teens have a high view of the Bible and its teaching.

Before you celebrate the advances, the study also indicated that 64% of teens have not read or heard the Bible read more than three-to-four times annually.

Of particular interest was a chart that showed a corresponding increase of the Bible’s influence on the lives of the teenagers compared with the amount of time they spent immersed in the Bible. Of those who read the Bible daily, 94% indicated the Bible influenced them a lot. Of those who read it every week, 76% indicated the Bible influenced them a lot. The less the Bible was engaged, the less influence and meaning it seemed to have in the teen’s own opinion.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2015/12/28/most-teens-believe-the-bible-never-read-whats-in-it>. Of more help is the full ABS report, which can be found on their website: www.americanbible.org under “Teen State of the Bible.”

Christians and Orthodox Judaism

A statement, which can be read at the website

of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation (www.cjuc.com) bears the signature of twenty-five orthodox rabbis indicating a new era of Christian-Jewish cooperation. The statement, entitled “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians,” identifies Christianity as being represented by Roman Catholicism. The basis of the claim is that the views of “Christianity” have changed dramatically and “irrevocably” since Vatican II.

Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn, academic director of the center, shared in a One News Now interview that Christianity and Judaism had more in common than what has separated them. He illustrated his point with the mutual belief that God created man to bear His image. Korn does believe that the unity between the two groups is being hindered by extremist views. He did not articulate just what those extremist views might be.

Korn stated the following in a press release about this document: “Jewish thinkers have previously crafted statements like Dabru Emet in 2000 on Jewish-Christian relations and theology, but few Orthodox rabbis could go along with those theological and practical claims in light of their understanding of Jewish tradition. This proclamation’s breakthrough is that influential Orthodox rabbis across all centers of Jewish life have finally acknowledged that Christianity and Judaism

are no longer engaged in a theological duel to the death and that Christianity and Judaism have much in common spiritually and practically. Given our toxic history, this is unprecedented in Orthodoxy.”

This article can be referenced at <http://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2015/12/11/rabbis-pen-breakthrough-proclamation>.

Maintaining Their Position

The Reverend Michael Bruce Curry was installed as the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church this past November at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. His leadership and conviction in supporting gay marriage were immediately tested in discussions with the Anglican Communion. Bishop Curry told the AP, “They heard from me directly that . . . [suspending previously supporting views on gay marriage is] not something that we’re considering. They basically understand we made our decision, and this is who we are, and we’re committed to being a house of prayer for all.”

The result of those meetings was that the Anglican Communion has suspended communion with the Episcopal group for the next three years.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/episcopal-church-supports-gay-marriage-despite-anglican-church-three-year-suspension-bishop-michael-curry-155245/#izAKADZPMu4iVj7a.99>.

Fools Mock at Sin

With the recent hysteria associated with a record-

breaking lottery jackpot, another modern pastor gives us an illustration of how some spiritual leaders are filled with a “not-so-spiritual” spirit.

Perry Noble, pastor of South Carolina megachurch NewSpring, stated, “If . . . [gambling] turns out to be sinful and wrong one day then I promise to tell God ‘I’m sorry.’ And, if you think this action will send me to hell, then I’ll most likely see you there.” In an interview filled with crude language, Perry gave a tacit, at best, acknowledgment of the way gambling has destroyed some lives. But since he saw the issue to be deeper than gambling, he had no problem with what or what not his actions may lead someone else to do.

Perhaps it would have been nice for someone ostensibly representing God’s will as it is revealed in Scripture to have used a little Scripture in his explanation. But Noble, like so many voices today, sounds much more like the spirit of this world and not so much like the Scripture and God he claims to represent.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/perry-noble-bought-10-powerball-lottery-jackpot-tickets-gambling-money-poverty-sin-154983/>.

John 3:16 Used for Hate

Leadership of the recent annual Montreat College Conference, sponsored by the PC(USA), declared the retreat’s theme to be “Reclaim John 3:16.” The underlying claim is that John 3:16 has been used by various people for “hate,

intimidation and fear.” When pressed, no examples were given to show how the verse was used in that way. The emphasis of the conference was to be on God’s love and inclusiveness.

“It seems to be *the* verse that is quoted a lot. We see it everywhere—T-shirts, billboards, homemade roadside signs, jewelry, tattoos. . . . It’s also a verse that has been used in damaging ways and ways of exclusion. . . . So how can we take it back?” Later they expressed what John 3:16 was all about. “It is actually a text about a God that *loves* and *gives*. It is a text that invites us to life.”

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pcusa-montreat-college-katie-cash-well-claims-john-316-bible-verse-hate-fear-154379/>.

Twisted Valor

Mohammad Anwar, a fifteen-year-old boy from Pakistan’s Okara district, attended a gathering lead by cleric Shabbir Ahmed. The cleric asked the crowd if anyone there had stopped praying or believing in the prophet Mohammad. According to the article, the boy had misunderstood the question and raised his hand. The cleric publicly accused the boy of blasphemy.

The boy went home, severed his own hand and brought it back, placing it on a plate in front of the imam to demonstrate the sincerity of his faith. His family expressed pride in their son for his show of sincerity. Police subsequently arrested the imam, but the parents did not press charges.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pakistani-boy-cuts-off-his-own-hand-after-muslim-cleric-accuses-him-blasphemy-155346/>.

Evangelical Confusion

Wheaton College and associate political science professor

NOTABLE QUOTES

Our lord the king cannot as a king have any power over this kingdom, temple, tabernacle, house and people of God in respect of the religion to God, because our lord the king’s authority is an earthly kingdom. . . . Further, he has no authority as king but in earthly causes. . . . Men’s religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.—Thomas Helwys

Try what you hear whether it be according to truth, and take nothing from any man until you have tried it and well digested it by a good understanding. Often examine yourselves and lean not to other men’s judgments; beware of falls; endeavor and see that your evidence be good, which is alone the Spirit of God with your own spirit according to the Scriptures. Be much in holy meditation; read the Scriptures carefully. Beware of neglecting or slighting any ordinance of Christ; remember His death often, but take heed lest you make an idol of men or ordinances.—James Manning

As the man began to lay the strokes upon my back, I said to the people, though my flesh should fail, yet God will not fail: so it pleased the Lord to come in, and fill my heart and tongue as a vessel full, and with audible voice I break forth, praying the Lord not to lay this sin to their charge, and telling the people I found He did not fail me, and therefore now I should trust Him forever who failed me not: for in truth, as the strokes fell upon me, I had such a spiritual manifestation of God’s presence as I never had before and the outward pain was so removed from me, that I could well bear it, yea, and in a manner felt it not, although it was grievous.—testimony of Obadiah Homes regarding his public beating for his Baptist convictions

Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring, for His grace and power are such none can ever ask too much.—John Newton

Let no man think to kill sin with few, easy, or gentle strokes. He who hath once smitten a serpent, if he follow not on his blow until it be slain, may repent that ever he began the quarrel. And so he who undertakes to deal with sin, and pursues it not constantly to the death.—Richard Baxter

Larycia Hawkins have captured national attention recently. Wheaton College Provost Stanton Jones recommended termination proceedings for Hawkins. Hawkins was initially suspended for comments made on Facebook that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The suspension was designed to provide a time when Wheaton and Hawkins could wrestle through the situation. Hawkins wrote a four-page defense of her statement that did not satisfy Wheaton officials. They desired to further clarify and work through the situation. Hawkins did not. Termination proceedings were recommended.

Wheaton officials subsequently received a letter of rebuke signed by 815 Wheaton graduates. “We, the undersigned, respectfully request that all termination proceedings against Hawkins cease immediately, that she be fully reinstated as a tenured associate professor of Political Science, and for administration to issue a public acknowledgment for the grave institutional missteps that have irreparably damaged Hawkins’ reputation and credibility among Evangelical Christians. Until full restoration and reconciliation are reached, each of us will prayerfully reconsider our commitment to financially support the mission of Wheaton College.”

They would later state in the letter, “This is not the Wheaton we know.”

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/wheaton-college-800-alumni-threaten-stop-financial-support-larycia-hawkins-same-god-professor-not-reinstated-155247/#jul7TmoWWJOd3SQ0.99>.

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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

Statistics tell us that Americans spend approximately \$8 kazillion at Christian bookstores every year. (In saying "\$8 kazillion," of course, I must admit that my goal here is not accuracy but reaching my word count.) Even if a good portion of those dollars go toward Joyce Meyer refrigerator magnets, Thomas Kinkadee coasters, and Joel Osteen portraits, we can be genuinely thankful that there are enough people in the US interested in the Bible to keep Christian bookstores afloat. Go to a Christian store in any non-English-speaking country and you'll see that we have an embarrassment of riches along with our embarrassment of schlock and kitsch.

I'd like to propose, however, that there's a major missing category of Bible study materials that Christian bookstores would do well to carry. These study materials are something you may never have thought of as a Bible-study resource. They're not even produced by Christians (usually). And yet they lay the foundation to what you do every time you read the Bible, teach a Sunday school lesson, or listen to a sermon.

Do I have you interested? Here's what I propose: one of the best things you could ever do for your Bible study is to read some books or take some courses on language and how it works. I'll give you one in particular: John McWhorter's *Myths, Lies, and Half-Truths of Language Usage*, a course put out by the Teaching Company.

Of course I don't endorse everything McWhorter says. He's not a Christian, and he assumes an evolutionary view of the formation of language. But I don't know of a distinctively Christian presentation of the same information, let alone one as entertaining and even brilliant as his. The guy is a wit, and he knows his stuff. He fills his lectures with interesting examples from languages all over the world.

He even talks a lot about the Bible. Here's an example: he explains why "ye" and "you" differ. It isn't just that one is singular and the other plural; it's more complicated than that. He also explains why "thee" and "thine" differ. I've spent more than thirty years in Bible-believing churches and many hours in Bible classes, and I believe I have heard precisely one careful explanation of why these words are used the way they are. McWhorter's was better. But you'll have to get the course if you want to know what he said!

Language is both a creation of God and something that God has, apparently, always used Himself. He chose to reveal Himself to us in language, and if you really want to know what He's saying, you need to know a little something about this special feature of God's image in you. Buy a good John McWhorter book or course to aid your Bible study.

Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. is a Logos Bible Software expert in Bellingham, Washington.



Answered Prayers and Open

About two and a half years ago, my wife and I became burdened for those who serve in our military. After taking some time to pray, we soon decided to pursue the military chaplaincy to see whether this was God's plan for us. After several interviews, a lot of paperwork, and a lot more waiting (we seem to do a lot of that in the military), we were excited to hear that our first duty station would be with 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune. Our family arrived in June and hit the deck running. Over the next few months, the Lord opened up opportunities to serve the Marines by leading Bible studies in the barracks, leading in prayer at various retirement and change-of-command ceremonies, and providing confidential counseling.

In mid-October our infantry battalion traveled to Camp Wilson in California. There we conducted five weeks of Integrated Training Exercises (ITX) along with air, armor, and logistic support from the division. Each day held many opportunities to mingle with the Marines and experience life with them, whether it was enjoying breakfast chow, riding in a dusty seven-ton truck, getting sick while riding an Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV), running with the machine gunners to the support-by-fire position, trying to keep up with the Marines in a five-mile run, or passing time in the crowded laundry room. They were all God-ordained opportunities to build relationships with the Marines and experience "shared suffering" as my battalion commander encouraged me to do.

There were also plenty of opportunities to hold Bible studies and services with the Marines in the field. Not including the Sunday services at the chapel, I led at least two-to-three field services with the line companies in between their training exercises. What better setting could there be to hear from God



than to be surrounded by His creation? Sleeping under the stars (we didn't have tents in the field) with the Marines also provided plenty of counseling opportunities. Many conversations started with, "Chaps, I've been wondering about . . ." or "I've been meaning to come by and talk to you about this."

A couple of funny stories stand out. On that first Sunday in California, some of the Marines and I saw a sign advertising a chapel service at 0800. Apparently, the former regimental chaplain had forgotten to take the sign down when he left. The incoming

regimental chaplain would arrive a couple of days later, but none of us knew that until 0800 rolled around and nobody was there to lead the service. It was a chaplain's dream come true—I simply stood up from my pew and said, "Well, let's have a service!" Just the day before on the airplane, I had been preparing a sermon from the Book of Psalms and was wondering how soon I'd be able to use it. Little did I know that I'd have an opportunity to preach that Sunday morning!

Another funny story happened a couple of weeks later. The AAV drivers who were supporting our battalion didn't have a chaplain, so I led two field services just for them. The day after one of our services, the sergeant said that




Opportunities



he had a “strange request” for me. After I said that I was happy to help, he asked if I would pray over their engine. They had tried their best to repair it, and they wanted to get back to Camp Wilson that night. All ten or so of those Marines gathered in the AAV, and I prayed a simple prayer asking the Lord to bless their efforts at repairing it. Then I was told to “stand back” as they started the engine, and it actually ran (the Lord is merciful)! They were all yelling and cheering. As they drove off, a corpsman (a Navy field medic who supports their battalion) told me that those Marines were crazy. When I asked why, he told me how the Marines said that the engine could “blow up,” but they just wanted to get back right away. Had I known that, I probably would have prayed that they would change their minds and stay the night! Two days later, I was happy to

see all of them back at Camp Wilson (all in one piece, too). You never know what will happen with the Marines.

Two days after our battalion got back to Camp Lejeune, we held a memorial service for one of our Marines who had died in a car accident. It was a great opportunity to preach God’s Word and to comfort the Marines with the God of all comfort. Minutes before the memorial began, the company commander asked if he could look over my sermon notes. After reading my outline, he told me, “You have it made, Chaps. Nobody can say it better than God does.” I couldn’t have said it any better than that Marine! The needs are great, but I thank God that He has provided His Word which is able to make all of us sufficient for the task at hand (2 Tim. 3:16–17).



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Running with Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus

Continued from page 7

the suffering of the cross, so we must endure in our race. We must not cast away our confidence even in the face of something like the cross.

Jesus also despised the shame. The culture Jesus lived in was similar to many non-Western cultures today in that the ultimate evil to be avoided was to bring shame on oneself and one's family. To be shamed was far more significant than we would think in our western mindset. And there was nothing more shameful than hanging exposed on a Roman cross. It was considered so degrading that no Roman citizen could be crucified. But Jesus despised present shame for the sake of the reward to come.

The One Enthroned at God's Right Hand. The reign of Christ is a theme throughout the book of Hebrews beginning in 1:3 and carrying on right to the end. The reign of Christ is a proclamation that Jesus really is better. It confronts readers with the reality that Jesus should not be abandoned for an easier way. But in this context it is a reminder that Jesus received the reward after enduring His race.

Christians in the present may be in the midst of suffering and shame. But when they look to Jesus they see not only that He endured through the same kind of trials but that He also received the promised reward. The resurrection and ascension testify to God's power to bring about ultimate victory over all opposition.

Conclusion

American Christians know little of suffering and shame for the sake of Christ. But if we are called to suffer

for Christ's sake, it would be easy to encounter that trial by sight alone. The trial is the painful reality, and the promises of God seem illusive and insubstantial. This passage challenges us to realize that it is the life lived by sight alone that is deceptive. Life lived by faith in the promises of God is the life that sees reality as it really is. This faith enables Christians to accept the theft of their property for Christ's sake with joy because our eyes are on a greater reward. As John Newton reminds us, "Fading are the worldlings' pleasures, all their boasted pomp and show; solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know."

Brian Collins (PhD, Bob Jones University) is an elder at Mount Calvary Baptist Church and a Bible Integration Specialist at BJU Press.

¹ William L. Lane, "Hebrews 9-13," *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard (Dallas: Word, 1991), 408.

² In Greek authors such as Herodotus and Homer, "a cloud was a common metaphor for a great throng of people" (Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 450).

³ In certain liberal theologies Jesus is made out to be nothing more than an example. These theologies deny that Jesus' death was a death in our place in which he bore the Father's wrath for our sin. Such theologies offer no hope of redemption. But their false assertion that Jesus was nothing more than an example does not negate the truth that in many ways Jesus is our example.



Mail Bag

(Continued from page 5)

2D MARDIV Battalion Chaplains. I still read with great interest the Chaplain Section in every issue of *FrontLine*. The Cause for which our Chaplains serve is far greater than any one endorsing agency. That note to Dr. Vaughn began a friendship and fellowship that has evolved into our partnership as members

of the International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers (ICECE). Those who hazard their lives to safeguard the freedoms we enjoy in this country are worthy of the untainted and unedited gospel of Jesus Christ. I praise God for the faithful ministry of our FBFI and AGC Chaplains in this great work.

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The Fruit of Fervent Prayer

Kate MacGregor (my mother) and Kate Morrison were next-door neighbors from 1913 until 1918. Both were from the Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Their husbands, Thomas MacGregor (my father) and Murdo Morrison, were both bakers, having learned their trade in the “old country.” All four had been saved while young and were dedicated to living for the Lord. The Morrisons had a baby boy, William, and by 1915 my parents had two little girls, Catherine and Alice. Catherine was two-and-a-half when Alice was born. My parents’ pastor called at the home for a pastoral visit after the birth of Alice. When the nurse opened the door, Catherine recognized him as their pastor and said, “Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin, and be washed in the blood of the Lamb.” To this the pastor replied, “Good advice, Catherine!”

The Morrisons took in a young businessman, Arthur Wilson, as a boarder. Each day “the Kates” had lunch together, alternating homes. Frequently they were enjoying Christian fellowship when Arthur came home from work, and they would witness to him of his need of accepting Christ as his Savior. One day he said to them that he didn’t want to be spoken to about his soul anymore. My mother replied, “Very well, Arthur, but we *will* continue to pray for you.” Soon after that, he accepted a job in Buffalo, New York, and was living at the YMCA. To show my mother how “religious” he had become, he sent her a book which he inscribed “To my friend, Mrs. MacGregor.” It was no solace to her, for the author was the very liberal theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick!

Mrs. Morrison went to be with the Lord during the flu epidemic of 1918. Mr. Morrison and William continued to be close to our family, which grew to include Norma, John, and me.

In the early 1920s Billy Sunday held a citywide revival in Buffalo. Arthur Wilson went to the meetings at the ball park out of curiosity and was gloriously saved! The same night another man was also saved—H. P. Blanchard. Mr.

Blanchard was married while Arthur was not, and as they were disciplined together, they truly became “brothers in the Lord.” Mr. Blanchard felt the Lord calling him into Christian service and desired to attend the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Wilson encouraged him to go and said that he would financially support him and his wife.

Sometime later, H. P. Blanchard wrote a gospel song entitled “My Heart’s Prayer,” which was his testimony of salvation. The music was written by Ralph E. Stewart, to whom we were introduced in the early 1930s when he was a representative for Moody Bible Institute.

Easter came early one year, and Niagara Falls was having a cold, blustery day. My sister Norma was a high-schooler, but, because of the holiday, she was working at the bakery with my mother. Because this was during the Great Depression, not many cars drove on Main Street, so Norma took special note when she saw a car stop in front of our bakery. A well-dressed man got out, and as he entered the store, he shivered and said, “Oh, what a terrible day!” My mother promptly replied, “Oh no! There’s going to be only one terrible day—the Day of the Lord!” The man, Ralph Stewart, responded, “You’re the woman I’m looking for!” He then told her how Arthur Wilson had shared his testimony with him and said that if he was ever around Niagara Falls he must be sure to look for the bakery and meet Mrs. MacGregor. It was a blessing for my mother to learn of the fruit of fervent prayer in the life of Arthur Wilson. Arthur Wilson influenced the life of H. P. Blanchard who in turn was a blessing to many others.

Mary and her husband, Fred, have served the Lord together during their sixty-seven years of marriage. For almost forty years, Fred pastored independent Baptist churches in London, Ontario, and New York State. He and Mary continue to serve the Lord as prayer warriors. During a recent illness Mary experienced the “Fruit of Fervent Prayer” as the Lord provided strength and healing.





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Rethinking America's Shrinking Christianity

Continued from page 16

whereas fully supported pastors often find it difficult to build deep relationships with unbelievers (since their “job” doesn’t require them to work alongside unbelievers), a part-time pastor has the benefit of interacting with unbelievers outside his “professional” role as pastor. Second (and this relates more to the strain on finances in general and not to the loss of full-time pastors specifically), churches will be more financially (read “kingdomly”) strategic in their use and construction of facilities. Do we really need all that glass and those chandeliers? Third, more ministry work must be spread throughout the people rather than concentrated in one person (the senior pastor). By necessity, lay leaders will be developed, and a more effective “equipping of the saints” will happen.

I am not trying to be prophetic, nor do I seek to idealize an obviously challenging scenario. I simply hope to demonstrate that it is not hard to see the potential kingdom benefits that could come as a result of losing cherished—but ultimately superfluous—luxuries.

Who Is the True Church?

There is a final reason that the American church will counterintuitively benefit from more challenging circumstances. It has always been true of the church under persecution. When Christianity loses favored status, the imposters become immediately obvious.

This isn’t to say that prosperity theology and seeker-sensitive churches will vanish. Actually, they’ll continue to do quite well. The difference is that they will have to increasingly distance themselves from biblical Christianity. If you’re willing to be honest about certain biblical passages, you’ll alienate your audience. As a result, it will become more obvious with time who has greater allegiance to the truth and who has more of an eye on their audience. The realignment has already begun.

That leaves a challenge for us as well. What group are we in? Where are our allegiances? Will we remain clear in our commitment to the truth, regardless of the cost?

Conclusion

Without a doubt, the changes on the horizon in America, are troubling. Like long-distance runners, we will need perseverance. In these challenging times, we may realize that some things that we have been holding on to are, in fact, holding us back. We need to carefully hear the words of the author of Hebrews to “lay aside every weight” so that we can run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Jonathan Threlfall serves as the youth pastor at Bible Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina.



¹ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

² Ibid, 3.





The Necessity of Hard Work

Our Lord Jesus Christ said in John 9:4, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work.” Our Lord is the only one who completed His work for mankind in its entirety—we will never be able to do that! I have known men who have told me that there was so much more they wanted to accomplish but knew they would never be able to do so. However, they were men who were hard workers, and they did get a lot of things accomplished. Romans 12:11 exhorts us to be “not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

It is very interesting to examine the lives of diligent workers. My father was such a worker; in fact, my wife used to say of him, “You would think it a sin to sit still!” The year my dad passed away, he had cut enough wood and stored enough coal to last my mom thirteen years! My mother was of the same nature. She had three sisters, and my grandmother never allowed the girls to have idle time on their hands. From the time they were little until they got married they were taught to be industrious; needless to say, my mother was always working. I never had a lazy mother who lay around the house all day. Her strong work ethic carried over into her service for the Lord; she taught Sunday school and went soul-winning every week for forty-five years, and she was a true prayer warrior.

I have a rich heritage from my parents, for they instilled the same work ethic in my brothers and me. Although my parents were not saved until I was seventeen years old, they had more sense in raising boys than most people do. They had us dig a basement under our house, dig water lines so we could have running water in our home, cut wood, and carry coal for our furnace. We also had a large vegetable garden to tend. We were constantly working—and we enjoyed it! My father taught us to work hard and fast, and that is still ingrained in me even to this day.

I took the same principle and applied it to my own sons. I wanted them to become hard workers, so I had them dig out a basement under our house in Starr, South Carolina. It took twenty years to finish it, since we were on the road

so much, but they did it. All of my sons are good workers, and so is my daughter, Jennifer. Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” I would encourage you as parents to start giving your children responsibilities while they are young. When we were on the road in our forty-foot-long trailer, which we pulled for twenty-eight years (and I do believe I am still sane), my wife assigned chores to each of our children. They took out the garbage, washed and dried the dishes, cleaned their rooms, and put away their clothes. They were not allowed to just throw their clothes on the floor or bed. If they did, Sharon would make them pay her so much money for each article of clothing they didn’t put away. This might be a good suggestion for you parents who have children who don’t put away their things. We were not trying to be mean; we were trying to teach them responsibility.

I am convinced that if parents were more involved in developing diligence and responsibility in their children, they would be less frustrated. If parents instill a good work ethic in the lives of their children, I believe it will carry over into other phases of their lives. But most of all, it will prepare them to be good workers for the Lord. Here are a few suggestions in training your children to be diligent workers. First, start out by giving them light work responsibilities. Second, commend and praise them for their work. Don’t be critical and come down on them for messing up what they were told to do. Third, reward them. For example, when my boys were young, we would work outside for a couple of hours, and then I would take them to a little country store and buy them a small treat.

We want to make a positive impact on our children’s lives; we can do that by setting a good example of hard work ourselves. Remember, we are working for the Lord, so let us do our work with all our might for our Heavenly Father!

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



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