

TABLETALK

FROM LIGONIER MINISTRIES AND R.C.SPROUL | NOVEMBER 2015 | 53

THE CHRISTIAN



SEXUAL ETHIC

Courage and Compassion

Homosexual sin is a grievous and heinous sin. While it is indeed true that all sexual immorality is sin—adultery, fornication, pornography—homosexual sin is different. It is a more heinous and grievous sin because, as the Word of God makes clear, homosexual sin is contrary to nature (Rom. 1:26). Homosexual sin strikes against God's created order in every way and mocks God's design for procreation, thus making homosexuality logically self-defeating. Those who suggest the Bible is not clear about homosexual sin have never read the Bible or have not been given the ears to hear what the Bible plainly teaches.

The Bible is clear, so we must be clear. We cannot and must not waver in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition. Although the world is changing, the Word of God is not. We must stand our ground on the unchanging Word of God in the midst of an ever-changing culture. For even if the whole world says homosexuality is acceptable, we must stand our ground on the authority of God's Word and insist that it is in fact unacceptable and unconscionable. We must speak the truth even if it means persecution and imprisonment. We must insist that homosexual sin is wrong, and like all sins, sexual or otherwise, it is deserving

of God's righteous wrath and condemnation.

Make no mistake, this is not hate speech; it is love speech. We speak of the sinfulness of homosexual sin, sexual sin, and all sin not out of hate, but out of love. In fact, the most hateful thing we could do is not call sin what God calls sin. That would certainly

**THE WORLD
IS CHANGING,
THE WORD
OF GOD IS NOT.**

be the easier path for us, but it is not the path of truth that leads to forgiveness and freedom. We love homosexuals just as we love adulterers and all sinners, which is precisely why we must speak the truth in love to them, just as we need the truth spoken in love to us about our own sins. The Bible calls us to be righteously vexed by sin and to hate sin—our sin and the sins of the world. The Bible also calls us to love sinners and to pray that they would repent of their sins and trust Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of repentant sinners. If only more Christians demonstrated Christian love as they should by praying for the sexually immoral of this world, by calling sin what God calls sin, and by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the end that the sexually immoral might know their desperate need to repent and that, by the grace of God, they might cling to Christ and His righteousness. Then homosexuals might know how much we Christians love them. For we cannot love without speaking the truth, and we must not speak the truth without love. We must have compassion and courage as we live *coram Deo*, before the face of God, proclaiming His truth and His gospel to our homosexual neighbors, sexually immoral neighbors, and unrepentant, unbelieving neighbors, just as we preach the gospel to ourselves. **TD**

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PROVIDENCE AND CONTENTMENT

Blaise Pascal, the famous French philosopher and mathematician, noted that human beings are creatures of profound paradox. We're capable of both deep misery and tremendous grandeur, often at the same time. All we have to do is scan the headlines to see that this is the case. How often do celebrities who have

done great good through philanthropy get caught up in scandals?

Human grandeur is found in part in our ability to contemplate ourselves, to reflect upon our origins, our destiny, and our place in the universe. Yet, such contemplation has a negative side, and that is its potential to bring us pain. We may find ourselves miserable when we think of a life that is better than that which we enjoy now and recognize that we are incapable of achieving it. Perhaps we think of a life free of illness and pain, yet we know that physical agony and death are certain. Rich and poor alike know that a life of greater wealth is possible but grow frustrated when that wealth is unobtainable. Sick or healthy, poor or rich, successful or unsuccessful—we are all capable of growing vexed when a better life remains outside of our grasp.

Scripture prescribes only one remedy to this frustration: contentment.

Biblical contentment is a spiritual virtue that we find modeled by the Apostle Paul. He states, for example, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (Phil. 4:11). No matter the state of

his health, wealth, or success, Paul found it possible to be content with his life.

In Paul's era, two prominent schools of Greek philosophy agreed that our goal should be to find contentment, but they had very different ways of getting there. The first of these, Stoicism, said *imperturbability* was the way to contentment. Stoics believed that human beings had no real control over their external circumstances, which were subject to the whims of fate. The only place they could have any control was in their personal attitudes. We cannot control what happens to us, they said, but we can control how we feel about it. Thus, Stoics trained themselves to achieve imperturbability, an inner sense of peace that would leave them unbothered no matter what happened to them.

The Epicureans were more proactive in their search for contentment, looking to find a proper balance between pleasure and pain. Their aim was to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. Yet even achieving a goal in this arena can result in frustration. We might never obtain the aimed-for pleasure, or, having obtained it, we might realize that it

does not bring what we thought it would.

Paul was neither a Stoic nor an Epicurean. Epicureanism leads eventually to an ultimate pessimism—we can't get or maintain the pleasure we seek, so what's the point? The Apostle's doctrine of the resurrection and the renewal of creation does not allow for such pessimism. Creation "will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18–25; see 1

Cor. 15). Paul also rejected the passive resignation of Stoicism, for he was no fatalist. Paul actively pressed toward his goals and called us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, believing that God works in and through us to bring about His purposes (Phil. 2:12).

For the Apostle, true contentment was not complacency, and it was not a condition, on this side of glory, that could admit no feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction. After all, Paul frequently expresses such feelings in his epistles as he considers the sins of the church and his own shortcomings. He did not rest on his laurels but worked zealously to solve problems both personally and pastorally.

Paul's contentment pertained to his personal circumstances and the state of his human condition. Whether he suffered lack or enjoyed material prosperity, he had "learned" to be content wherever God placed him (Phil. 4:12). Note that this was something he learned. It was not a natural gifting but something he had to be taught.

What was the secret to contentment that he had learned? Paul tells us in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

In short, the Apostle's contentment was grounded in his union with Christ

and in his theology. He saw theology not as a theoretical or abstract discipline but rather as the key to understanding life itself. His contentment with his condi-

Paul was content because he knew his condition was ordained by his Creator.

tion in life rested on his knowledge of God's character and actions. Paul was content because he knew his condition was ordained by his Creator. He understood that God brought both pleasure and pain into his life for a good purpose (Rom. 8:28). Paul knew that since the Lord wisely ordered his life, he could find strength in the Lord for any and all circumstances. Paul understood that he was fulfilling the purpose of God whether he was experiencing abundance or abasement. Submission to God's sovereign rule over his life was the key to his contentment.

As we continue to wrestle with the desires of the flesh, we can be tempted to believe God owes us a better condition than we presently enjoy. To believe such a thing is sin, and it leads to great misery, which is overcome only by trusting in the Lord's sustaining and providential grace. We will find true contentment only as we receive and walk in that grace. **T**



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WHAT GOD *has* JOINED TOGETHER



by JOHN P. SARTELLE SR.

Eve stood before Adam, and he stood before her. God had made them for each other. As they observed one another, there was wonder. She saw that he was the same yet different. He saw that she was the same yet different. However, in their differences they fit each other. Their differences actually enhanced their relationship. They reveled in the Creator's design for their bodily union.

They would discover over the life of their marriage that there were other crucial differences between them. There were diversities in their emotional and mental processes. Daily, Adam saw that Eve contributed something that he did not. Likewise, Eve saw that Adam brought something she did not. Just as the differences in their bodies corresponded to each other, these other differences made them better as a couple.

Their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual union formed a single, strong foundation for their family. Children flourished as they were nurtured by the unique maleness and femaleness that had been joined together in their parents. That was God's plan. The family would be the cornerstone of civilization. That holy relationship of marriage—a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual union between one male and one female—is still the absolute norm instituted by the living God for all of civilization.

When mankind sinned, all of creation was profoundly affected. Satan and sin ripped at this basic relationship between husband and wife that formed the foundation of the home. Evil hammered at this cornerstone of civilization as Satan sought to warp and destroy God's creation. This continues today. In seeking to free itself from the beauty and the life-enriching paradigms the Lord designed, our secular world quotes its iniquitous master: "Hath God said...?" In its insidious rebellion, secular culture seeks to change the unchangeable and redefine not only the institution of marriage, but the very maleness and femaleness of individuals.

When Israel trivialized this covenant relationship by making it easy to set aside a husband or wife, Jesus spoke of the serious nature of their sin. The Pharisees and religious leaders of His day had twisted the Old Testament to provide easy divorces for any man who wanted out of a marriage for any reason. I will paraphrase Jesus' words in Matthew 5:27–32: "By the way, when you attempt to redefine the law and use it to throw away a wife or husband at your convenience so you can marry someone more appealing to you—that is nothing

but out-and-out adultery. Your effort to legalize it does not make it into something moral." Jesus was not setting forth a full treatise on marriage and divorce. He was talking about adultery—that was His subject. The Pharisees were saying,

Children flourished as they were nurtured by the unique maleness and femaleness that had been joined together in their parents.

"We would never commit adultery. We simply divorce our wives and then we are free to marry more desirable women." Jesus was saying, "That is still adultery. You tried to make it look right through a formal divorce, but it is still adultery."

Can the marital union, then, never be set aside? In that same passage (v. 32) and in other statements in the New Testament, divorce is set forth as an option when there is adultery or desertion (1 Cor. 7:12–15). Now, we may argue what constitutes adultery or desertion, but we cannot debate the truth that God allows divorce in such circumstances. If God condones divorce in some circumstances, it has to mean that in those circumstances divorce is not a sin. God cannot condone sin.

God Himself permits divorce for His people who live in a fallen world so that they might escape the habitual abuse from unrepentant mates who are destroying the holy union through adultery and desertion of the relationship. Divorce under such circumstances also

protects children who are being seriously harmed as they assimilate the evil example of a wicked father or mother. At times, Christians and churches have so misunderstood this issue that they have endangered lives by advising wives who are being systematically beaten and abused to remain in the marriage because they believe divorce is inherently evil.

Many churches make people who are divorced for biblical reasons feel like second-class Christians. A man or woman will say to me after they have been divorced, "I know that my divorce was a sin." I interrupt and say, "I thought you had biblical grounds for divorce." The person replies, "I did, but it is still a

We must once more set before the world the wonder of that physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual union that the Creator gave.

sin." Where did they get this unbiblical thinking? They got it from well-meaning churches and ministers who do not understand that divorce can be a right and holy choice when lives are being ruined.

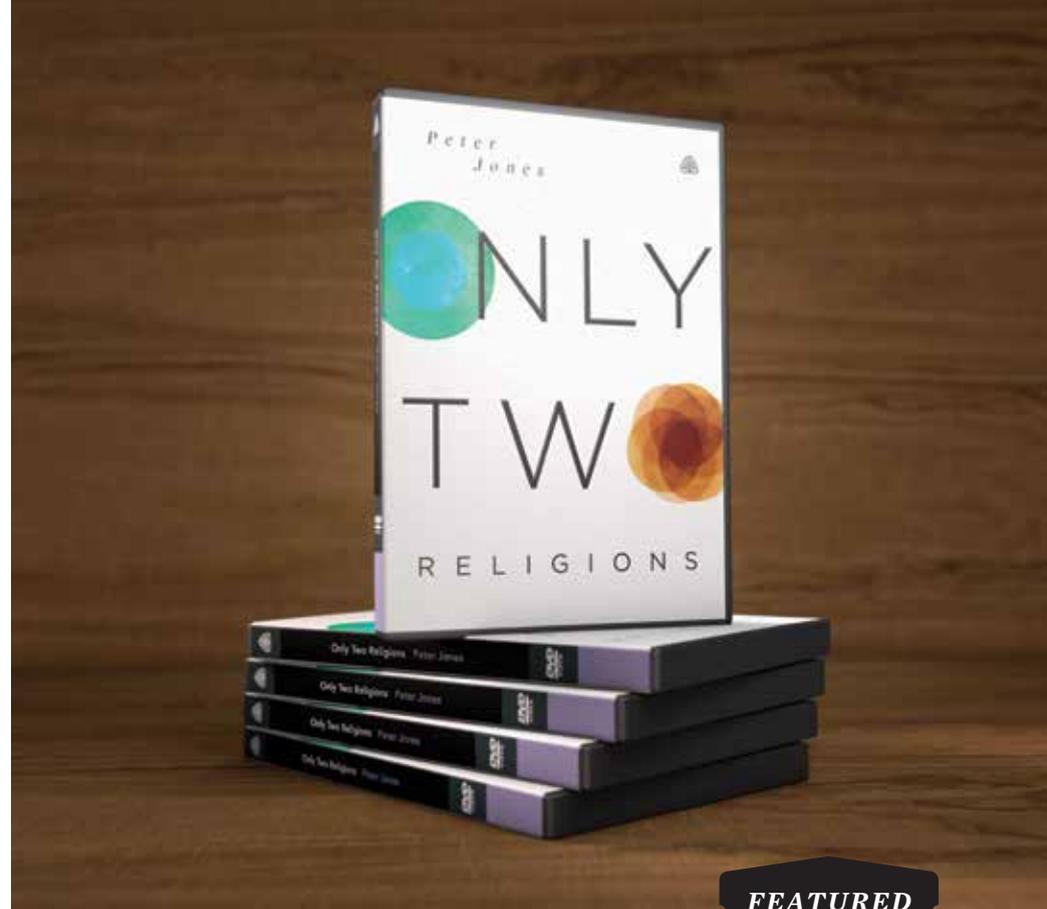
Just as the spouse of a deceased husband or wife is not "bound" and is free to remarry, the abused spouse who has been granted a righteous divorce is also free to remarry. Sometimes there is extreme emotional damage as a result of years of psychological or physical abuse. In those cases, it is advisable that the wronged individual go through an excellent counseling program that will promote healing

and enable him or her to build and form a healthy marital relationship in the future.

All of these issues have been debated over the centuries as the church has wrestled with living in decadent cultures. Long lists have been made about what is permissible in marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In the United States, we are living in a debauched society that is looking more and more like Corinth or Sodom and Gomorrah. How should we then live? How do we make decisions about marriage, divorce, and remarriage? We must return to the truth and beauty of God's original intent as He created Adam and Eve for each other. We must once more set before the world the

wonder of that physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual union that the Creator gave to be an immutable and incredible blessing to His creation. Even though we are still sinners, as husbands and wives living in His wonderful paradigm for marriage we still have the high standard of His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit transforming us from the inside out. Such marriages will be salt and light in this decaying and dark culture. Your godly home and marriage (where the man as husband and the woman as wife become one flesh physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually) will become a lighthouse that pierces the darkness and becomes a guiding beacon to the masses lost on the sea of twisted gender orientations and identities, meaningless and sinful sexual encounters, and marriages whose only goal is materialistic ascendancy. **T**

Rev. John P. Sartelle Sr. is senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Oakland, Tenn., and author of *What Christian Parents Should Know about Infant Baptism*.



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES
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THE GOSPEL

REMEDY *for* HOMOSEXUALITY



by JOHN FREEMAN

The Bible reveals that sex was created by God and is good. It was His idea. The very first recorded words of God addressed to mankind encapsulate the Bible's teachings on sex: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). This very positive command demonstrates that sex was meant to glorify God, cement the bond between husband and wife, be experienced exclusively

between one man and one woman in the marriage relationship, and propagate the human race.

On this side of the fall, sex and sexuality are distorted to lesser or greater degrees. However, today there is controversy about homosexuality raging in evangelical circles and, increasingly, in Reformed churches as well. Not only is homosexuality often presented as good but it is also presented as

something to be pursued with God's blessing. It is alarming that the acceptance of homosexual behavior among professing evangelicals is increasing. We hear from some people that the kind of homosexual relationships we see today (loving, monogamous ones) aren't addressed in Scripture. Although this trend seems likely to continue, these revisionist views must be rejected by followers of Jesus Christ.

God's Word is firm in its negative view of homosexuality and same-sex sexual desire. The Bible is the infallible standard by which we must view homosexuality and understand the gospel remedy for it. Unfortunately, the reliability of the Bible in this area has been questioned by many today who claim the Christian faith. Christians who view Scripture as authoritative and inspired must not accept this watered-down view of God's Word. The Bible reveals God's assessment regarding the problems of the human heart, homosexuality being one of many.

How are Christians to think about homosexuality? We need to understand it in three ways. First, homosexuality in Scripture is always spoken of in terms of an action—something done physically with another person, or an internal, active thought pattern of the mind and heart. The Greek word most often used to describe homosexuality in the New Testament is *arsenokoitēs*, which refers to a male lying with another male. Therefore, whenever it is mentioned, it's always defined in terms of an activity, a behavior, or a person who engages in that behavior of heart and body.

Second, homosexuality is labeled

as sin in every place it is mentioned. It's prohibited and is expressly seen as contrary to God's will. Scripture states this clearly in Genesis 19:4–9; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Timothy 1:9–10; and Jude 7. Romans 1:24–27 also describes the activity of heart-

The Bible is the standard by which we view homosexuality and understand the gospel remedy for it.

centered passion and lust, as well as the behavior. It references both men and women. The behavior is listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, where we also learn that it was the history of some Christians in the early church. Among those who had experienced salvation were former practitioners of homosexuality.

Therefore, not only is homosexual behavior of body and heart defined as sin, but it is also portrayed as a consequence and effect of the fall. Referring to the reality of sex gone awry, Leviticus 18:6–19 lists more than a dozen forms of sexual sin, including homosexuality and sex with animals. Again, the gravity of sexual sin, particularly homosexuality, is stated strongly in Romans 1:24–26 using vivid and stunning phrases such as "the lust of their hearts to impurity," "dishonorable passions," and having a "debased mind." That is in addition to the verses in Jude that speak of "perversion of the grace of God into sensuality"

and of people who “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire.” This latter designation is specifically tied to what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah.

But did God really have to convey that misusing sex in the aforementioned ways (and, by inference, the desires leading to that misuse) is prohibited and seen as sin? Of course. Our desires, especially our sexual desires, are never neutral. To see same-sex desire as neutral, especially when that desire either objectifies the other person sexually or sees the person merely as an object of sexual passion, is to misunderstand the depth and intricacy of sin. In Scripture, the heart is often seen as the seat of our desires. In Mark 7:21, Jesus describes the heart as the seat of all sexual immorality and sensual-

Our desires, especially our sexual desires, are never neutral.

ity. These propensities are portrayed as evil things that come from within. He is talking about desire, whether the object of that desire is someone of the opposite sex or the same sex. James 1:14–15 tells us we are lured and enticed by our desires and that desire gives birth to sin. Desire is not an impartial part of our being, but rather a very active part of it.

Admittedly, these views of Scripture are widely rejected. There is an overarching factor in the attempt to legitimize homosexuality biblically. Simply put, in today’s culture, our sociology

is increasingly interpreting, defining, and determining our theology. What do I mean by that? There was a time when believers routinely looked to the Bible both to know how to think about issues of life and to find solutions to the dilemmas they faced, including issues surrounding sex and sexuality. No more. Today, the impact and influence of one’s social network and experience with friends and family have displaced what the Bible might say on this topic. Another term to understand this transfer of authority and credibility away from God’s Word to personal experience is cultural accommodation. Today, it seems that many people believe that the Scriptures must bow to our experiences or those of others.

We must also note that homosexuality is never described in Scripture as a condition or state of being. Contrary to the modern idea of an innate homosexual “orientation”—a term only frequently used in the last twenty-five years or so—this concept is not found in Scripture. It’s assumed in the Bible that we can become inclined or “oriented” to anything to which we continually give our minds and hearts. Do something in thought or action enough times and over a long enough period, and it will become ingrained in us.

However, we have to be careful of simplistic thinking here, especially when we think of our responsibility—something many don’t believe they have when it comes to their same-sex desires or behavior. We are the product of complex interactions of many factors over many years. Why are some prone to any number of psychosocial persuasions, including anger,

depression, or chemical dependency? Here is the answer: we do not always choose our struggles or temptations, although we bear responsibility for what we do with them. They develop in us through a complicated interaction of temperament, internal and external influences, and our own hungry, broken, and sinful selves.

We easily and by nature cooperate with these influences so that habits of heart and behavior become strong and ruling. In one sense, we are the sum of thousands of small decisions we have made. We have cooperated with our cultivated desires. So, despite the external factors that may have been in play in the development of those temptations we find particularly enticing, we are still responsible for leading godly lives, including in the area of sexuality.

Finally, we need to understand that God offers forgiveness, a clean record, and restoration through Jesus Christ for *all* repentant sinners, including those who have a history of homosexual behavior and other sins. He not only forgives us as we are prone to misuse His gift of sex and sexuality, but His grace actually “trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11–12). This does not necessarily mean that we can pretend as if we hadn’t misused sex as part of our history or that illicit sexual desires will not continue to trouble us or be a source of temptation, but it does mean that the grace of God gives us power for transformed living as followers of Jesus Christ. He enables us to resist temptation and live unto His glory.

Christ mediates this grace and empowers believers, but the church, the body of Christ, also plays a crucial role. I overheard a pastor once say, “Repentance is killing that which is killing me without killing myself.” I don’t know anyone who can do that all

The call of the church is to offer support and encouragement to those who experience same-sex attractions.

by himself. Learning to walk in obedience and put to death our sin and our sinful nature is never something to be attempted alone or in isolation. Biblical change is a community activity. The call of the church is to offer support and encouragement to those who experience same-sex attractions and other sexual temptations. Walking with those who are tempted in this way means we help bear the burdens of their struggles and temptations, offering friendship and fellowship, and helping them to believe for the first time or to re-believe the gospel every day. That’s what Christ does for us and what we need to do for others in dealing with sexual sin. In so doing, we will also be reminded that we, too, are forgiven for our transgressions. **T**

John Freeman is president of Harvest USA (harvestusa.org), a Reformed ministry aiding individuals affected by sexual sin. He is author of *Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex*.



Sex within a Context

R.C. SPROUL

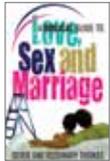


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The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert

ROSARIA C. BUTTERFIELD



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Overcoming Sin and Temptation

JOHN OWEN

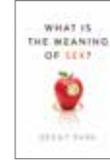


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DENNY BURK



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KEVIN DEYOUNG

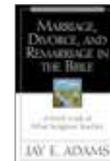


Many people want to introduce confusion into what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, but its message regarding homosexual conduct is consistent and clear. Rev. Kevin DeYoung looks at the teaching of the Bible regarding homosexual practice and how we are to present it to others.

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JAY E. ADAMS



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The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality

PETER JONES



Human sexuality and spirituality are inextricably linked, as our sexual expression is always an expression of our views of ultimate truth. To reach people in our sexually broken world, we must understand the spiritual roots of sexual sin, and this book considers this topic in order to help us think through how we can reach sexual sinners with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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R.C. SPROUL



Dr. R.C. Sproul's classic work on marriage has helped many people grow in their understanding of the purpose of marriage and develop a more intimate relationship with their spouses. He considers such topics as the origin of marriage, roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, the purpose of marriage vows, and several other topics.

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MINISTERING *to the* ABUSED *and the* ABUSERS



by SEAN MICHAEL LUCAS

It is a nightmare scenario for all involved: a man calls his pastor in tears and demands a meeting as quickly as possible. Thirty minutes later, he is in the pastor's office, confessing that his wife caught him touching their thirteen-year-old daughter in a sexual manner. He seems utterly distraught—until the pastor urges the man to call the child abuse hotline and self-report. Then, the abuser begins to hedge:

“Won't that destroy my family? Won't that cost me my job? Won't that destroy my reputation?” The man refuses and walks out of the office. Two weeks later, his entire family moves out of state to an undeclared location.

What's the pastor to do? All too often, the pastor does nothing—even though many states have sexual abuse reporting laws that require clergy to report such abuse even when pastor-penitent

privilege has been invoked. Likewise, the church's leadership does nothing, reasoning that the family has run away to another state, beyond the reach of their former congregation. And the result is that a sexual abuser gets away with his sin and crime and will continue to perpetrate that sin until he is finally caught by the authorities.

Think about the child involved—what is the church saying to her in this instance? Think about the wife and other children; the man himself and his immortal soul; the new community to which he has moved his family—what is the church saying to these parties? Think about the church and the gospel—what is the church saying about them?

In each instance that the church fails to confront sin, and especially disruptive sexual sins, we are saying something very straightforward: we love ourselves, our comfort, our reputations more than God, the gospel, and others. That's what happens when we see no evil.

Of course, there are countless other situations in which our churches and our leadership see no evil:

- When the prominent financial supporter leaves his wife for another woman and the church fails to discipline him, letting him “resign” his membership instead;
- When the cardiologist threatens his wife with a gun, later claims he “was just joking,” and suffers no consequences;
- When the middle-aged mother of three decides to leave her husband, her home, and her church simply

because she is not happy and no one contacts her.

In each of these ways and in countless others, when the church fails to pursue individuals with gracious and loving formative and corrective discipline, we

When the church fails to confront sin, and especially disruptive sexual sins, we are saying something very straightforward: we love ourselves, our comfort, our reputations more than God, the gospel, and others.

do spiritual damage and actually betray the gospel.

So, what do we do about this? How might our churches shine as lights in the middle of admittedly difficult, complex, and messy situations? How do we transition from being people who see no evil and love our own comfort to being people who love Christ and His people regardless of the cost to us?

PLAN AHEAD

Churches often fail to do the right thing—both ecclesiastically and civilly—because they haven't thought through in advance how to proceed in specific situations. We can't wait until the nightmare scenario unfolds. If we do, we'll be sure to deal with it inappropriately. Rather,

we need in advance to have clear, written processes to follow.

For Presbyterian churches, there is a sense in which that has already been determined for us. In the Presbyterian Church in America, for example, we have our denomination's Book of Church Order, which lays out a disciplinary process. For independent churches, which do not have denominational rules of discipline, there needs to be a clear, written process of church discipline. Regardless of denominational context, as church leaders we have to be determined to follow the process—no matter who is involved (Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Tim. 5:21).

We have to admit, however, that we might need other protocols in place to help guide responses to specific situations. For example, when there is a suspicion or admission of child abuse, church leaders need to have and follow specific guidelines for reporting it to the appropriate civil authorities. In order to develop such protocols, it will be nec-

with the state in these matters is appropriate and biblical (Rom. 13:1–7).

BE FIRM YET GENTLE

The Apostle Paul urges us to restore sinners gently (Gal. 6:1). Such gentleness is not opposite to firmness and determination; rather, it stems from recognizing that we, too, are sinners. Such recognition should save us from self-righteous bluster or arrogant anger. To be sure, with sins such as child abuse there is an appropriate righteous anger over the sin and its long-term effects. Still, it is the kindness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Even as we deal gently and firmly with perpetrators, we are seeking their repentance and ultimate restoration.

Often, though, we fail to show similar compassion toward the victims. Churches regularly make the news for failing to deal compassionately with women who divorce their husbands who are caught viewing child porn or for looking the other way when patterns of child abuse are uncovered. Other churches that refuse to stand up for women who are physically abused by their husbands or for children who are sexually abused by their fathers go unnoticed. Where is the compassion for these victims? As churches, we must be determined to demonstrate compassion to those who have been sinned against by being determined to do to them as we desire others would do for us (Matt. 7:12).

LEAD AND ENGAGE WITH THE GOSPEL

Both the perpetrator and the victim of sin need the same thing: the gospel of Jesus. Those who commit sexual sins—whether sexual immorality, adultery, or even sexual abuse—need to hear the gospel. The

entire point of discipline is to confront the sinner with the claims of Christ, to call for repentance, but also to seek new patterns of obedience that can come only as the sinner runs daily to Christ.

Often, those who commit messy and heinous sins believe their sins are too great to forgive. They need to be reminded that “there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent” (Westminster Confession of Faith 15.4). Such genuine repentance is drawn out by the “apprehension of [God’s] mercy in Christ to such as are penitent” (WCF 15.2). How great is God’s mercy in Christ? So great that He sent His one and only Son to die for sinners—and that death is sufficient to cover *all* our sins, even the most heinous ones.

Victims, too, need the gospel of Jesus: that Jesus is a Savior who does not break the bruised reed or quench the smoldering wick (Matt. 12:20); that He identifies with the hurt and broken and grants liberty to those oppressed by sin (Luke 4:17–21); and that He likewise asked, “Why?” when the pain and godforsakenness was overwhelming (Matt. 27:46).

But victims of sin also need to know that Jesus does more than identify with us in our hurts—He actually has done something about them. Through His resurrection, He is able to bring new life and new hope in the present as well as the future. There is power to move forward through the pain they know. In addition, the gospel provides us with the basis for forgiveness, knowing that we, too, have committed heinous sins against God (Eph. 4:32).

BE PREPARED FOR THE LONG HAUL

This is actually the most difficult thing of

all. As ministry leaders, we like to believe that when we intervene, work through a disciplinary process, and engage with the gospel, we’ve “fixed” the situation. But it doesn’t work that way. Especially with situations where there is significant betrayal—as in a long-term adulterous

Jesus does more than identify with us in our hurts—He actually has done something about them.

relationship, divorce, or sexual abuse—it might take months and years of gospel application to see healing and hope.

Such situations often involve financial support (if the repentant perpetrator loses his job; if there is a divorce), long-term counseling or therapy (which may or may not be covered by insurance), or sustained, regular accountability meetings. These things cost pastors and ministry leaders time, effort, and emotional energy.

And yet, God through His Spirit not only sustains us to love in these ways but also points us to the final goal of it all: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). To see sinners reclaimed, victims restored, and both on their way safely to heaven—what more could a pastor or church desire? **T**

Dr. Sean Michael Lucas is senior minister of First Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg, Miss., and associate professor of church history at Reformed Theological Seminary. He is author of *For a Continuing Church*.

Even as we deal gently and firmly with perpetrators, we are seeking their repentance and restoration.

essary to work with a local attorney to ensure that the church complies with the relevant state reporting laws. Having such a written protocol takes the guesswork out of reporting. In many states, the requirement is that church leaders report the matter as soon as it is discovered, and then allow the appropriate authorities to investigate and determine whether a crime has been committed. Working

MINISTERING to the SEXUALLY BROKEN



by ROSARIA CHAMPAGNE BUTTERFIELD

Coming to Christ is the ultimate reality check, as it makes us face the fact that our sin is our biggest problem. Every day, a believer must face the reality that original sin distorts us, actual sin distracts us, and indwelling sin manipulates us. This distortion, distraction, and manipulation create a wedge between us and our God. We are in a war, and the sooner we realize it, the better.

Sexual brokenness comes with boatloads of shame, as sexual sin is itself predatory: it hounds us, traps us, and seduces us to do its bidding. Sexual sin won't rest until it has captured its object. When our conscience condemns us, we sometimes try to fight. But when shame compels isolation, we hide from the very people and resources that we need. We white-knuckle it until Satan deceptively promises that sweet relief will come only from

embracing that lustful glance, clicking that Internet link, or turning off the lights to our bedrooms and hearts and embracing the fellow divine image-bearer that God forbids us to embrace.

We sexually broken sheep will sacrifice faithful marriages, precious children, fruitful ministries, productive labor, and unsullied reputations for immediate, illicit sexual pleasure.

We may pray sincerely for deliverance from a particular sexual sin, only to be duped when its counterfeit seduces us. When we pray for deliverance from sin by the atoning blood of Christ, this means that I know the true nature of sin, not that I no longer feel its draw. If you want to be strong in your own terms, God will not answer you. God wants you to be strong in the risen Christ.

People who are sexually broken—you and I—need to know in a deep way the following scriptural realities if we are to find freedom in Christ and minister to other sexually broken people:

GOD'S LOVE

God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). Christ's death is personal. It is "for us." If you are in Christ, His atoning love comes with the power to save you from your sin and from your guilt. Sexual sin produces three things that push God's love away. First, its practice over time sears the conscience, making us numb and dumb to the beauty of holiness. Second, because sexual sin flourishes in secret, it isolates us from the family of God. Third, sexual sin usually involves another person, and therefore it draws someone else into sin, thus increasing sin's expanse and harm. If you suffer under the weight of sexual

sin, come to Jesus, because His yoke is rooted in God's love. God is love and He is for you. He is advocating for you. He wants you to know His love.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy

Christ's death is personal. It is "for us."

upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin (Ps. 32:3–5). We live in a world that increasingly teaches the idea that self-forgiveness resolves shame. The idea of self-forgiveness comes from a false and bereft anthropology of personhood. We did not make ourselves, and we therefore cannot forgive ourselves. Because God is for you, He wants to forgive you and restore you. He loves a broken and contrite heart.

GOD'S HEALING THROUGH CHRIST

He sent out His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction (Ps. 107:20). He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Ps. 147:3). Through His blood, Christ satisfied God's justice. In this supreme act of love is the solution to the nagging guilt of sexual sin. By His stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:3).

GOD'S PROVIDENCE FOR YOUR PAIN

Blessed be the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor. 1:3–4). Sexual sin has consequences that we cannot control and don't even see until the Holy Spirit un-scales our eyes. Sexual sin is a ruthless taskmaster. Abortion requires the death of an unborn child. Homosexuality requires the condemnation of God's creation ordinance. Adultery requires the betrayal of vows before God and the destruction of "one flesh." Pornography requires sex slaves and casts women and children in the sex trafficking industry. When believers commit sexual sin, we spit in the face of God. When believers repent and forsake sexual sin, we are restored.

God's providence has a place for your pain. Because you see what others

able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13). We in the church are each other's way of escape. God has already prepared a way of escape, through His Word and His Spirit, and also through the body of Christ and the simple practice of hospitality. The open door to your house and your heart is some brother or sister's way of escape.

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold, now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." (Mark 10:29–30)

Jesus speaks here of the family of God whose love and presence and kind company are what the Lord uses to return "a hundredfold" whatever you had to leave to come to Christ. The gospel is costly. And it is worth it.

But these scriptural principles are not cue cards. You cannot minister to the sexually broken until you have imbibed God's Word, drinking long and hard from its deep wells. Our sexually broken neighbors do not primarily need to be tutored in the Christian worldview; they need to be brought to the foot of the cross. Before we can do this, we ourselves must "profit from the Word" (to borrow the title of A.W. Pink's book). We must know for ourselves that repentance is the threshold to God. **T**

Dr. Rosaria Champagne Butterfield is a pastor's wife, mother, homeschool teacher, and author of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* and *Openness Unhindered*.

Sexual sin has consequences that we don't even see until the Holy Spirit un-scales our eyes.

blinded by sin cannot see (yet), you are a signpost to God Himself. You see the blood on your hands, you feel the lifting of its penalty and guilt, and you work as God's ambassador.

GOD'S PEOPLE

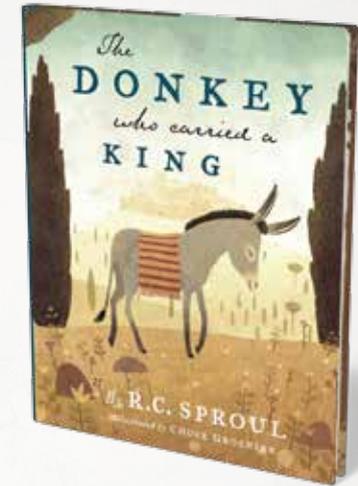
No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be

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WHAT the FUTURE HOLDS



by DENNY BURK

President Obama was correct when he said the Supreme Court's gay marriage decision landed like a thunderbolt. The decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized gay marriage nationwide, is indeed a watershed in our national life. Although a majority of Americans now support gay marriage, many of us regard this decision as a moral and judicial tragedy.

From a legal standpoint, it represents five unelected justices' imposing on the nation a new definition of marriage. The judgment is not rooted in sound legal principle but in the opinions of five lawyers arrogating to themselves the right to enact social policy. The Supreme Court has no right to redefine marriage for all fifty states, but that is exactly what it did.

From a moral standpoint, the decision is a complete subversion of the good,

the right, and the true with respect to marriage. Marriage is the covenant union of one man and one woman for life. Its connection to procreation and children has been revealed to us in nature, reason, and common sense. The Bible further reveals that marriage is an icon of the gospel—a symbol of Christ's covenant love for His church (Eph. 5:31–32).

The court's decision attempts to turn all of that upside down. As a result, it stands against reason and common sense. More importantly, it stands against the purposes of the One who created marriage to begin with (Gen. 2:24–25).

A NEW REALITY

Although I am disappointed with this decision, I remain confident that Christians will continue to bear witness to the truth about marriage—even if the law of our land is now arrayed against us. Still, many Christians are left wondering how to move forward into this new reality.

I am a pastor, and this question is exactly what I have heard from the people in my church. Our members by and large don't have questions about the Bible's teaching on homosexuality and marriage. They get that. Nor do they have questions about their obligation to love their neighbors, to seek their good, and to be at peace with everyone (Mark 12:29–31; Luke 6:33; Rom. 12:18). They get all of that as well.

Their question is how to live out what Jesus has called them to be when people treat them with hostility. I recently talked to one church member whose boss is gay. About half of her coworkers are also gay. They are her friends, and she loves them. She wants to keep a relationship with them, and she hopes to remain a

part of their lives. But she's concerned that her Christian beliefs on marriage and sexuality will alienate them once they become known. The last thing on her mind is waging a culture war or winning a debate with them. She just wants space

Christians will continue to bear witness to the truth about marriage—even if the law of our land is now arrayed against us.

to be their friend, even if they ultimately disagree about these fundamental issues.

I could tell other stories of brothers and sisters in Christ who are not only concerned about maintaining relationships with friends at work, they are also concerned that they will face professional suicide if their Christian views become known among their coworkers. Again, they don't want to pick a culture war fight with anyone. But neither do they want to face losing their job or a reprimand in their HR file when they fail to show up for the office party for their coworker who just married his same-sex partner. They are trying to figure out how to be faithful to Jesus, a faithful friend, and a faithful employee when those obligations seem to be in tension.

That is the challenge that I'm seeing among our members. What they are wondering is whether their Christian faith will be tolerated in the public space. And I'm not talking about any desire on their part to engage in aggressive and obnoxious proselytizing. They are wondering if a genuine pluralism will exist in

post-*Obergefell* America, or if Christian views on sexuality and marriage are now being excluded from our national life.

I am so grateful for these dear brothers and sisters in my church. None of them have expressed any thoughts of forsaking Jesus' teaching because of these difficulties. They are going to walk with Christ no matter what the cost. I praise God for that. But still, I am concerned for them, and I am praying for them. They are silent casualties on the frontline of a culture war they don't want to be in. They just want to follow Jesus in peace. And as the implications of *Obergefell* trickle down into their lives, I pray that they will be able to do just that (1 Tim. 2:2).

INCREASED OPPOSITION

Christians are beginning to realize that their place in American life is now being adjudicated in the court of public opinion.

Christians are beginning to realize that their place in American life is now being adjudicated in the court of public opinion.

ion. And it is not at all clear whether this will end well for the Christian church.

Earlier this year, we saw the governors of Indiana and Arkansas abandon Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA) in their states. It was a signal moment in our national life that revealed how profoundly America has changed in its attitudes about homosexuality, how out of step evangelicals are with the new sexual orthodoxy, and how willing many

Americans are to punish evangelicals for their transgressive beliefs.

We saw two Republican governors back away from state RFRAs that would have been completely uncontroversial just ten years ago. We saw a national media snarkily dismiss our first freedom in the Bill of Rights with scare quotes or as "so-called" religious liberty. We saw politician after politician either unwilling or unable to make a coherent case for religious liberty. And we saw countless talking heads denigrate religious liberty as a euphemism for bigotry and discrimination. *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni wrote that Christians should be "made to take homosexuality off of its sin list." It is no wonder that Nicholas Kristof has said that "evangelicals constitute one of the few groups that it's safe to mock openly."

Religious liberty has taken an epic beating in American life, and it feels like we're just getting started. And the focus of the attack seems to be on evangelicals. Evangelicals are beginning to feel open disdain from our cultured despisers, who find our ancient faith to be freakish and discordant with post-sexual-revolution America. There is no "silent majority" for Christians to appeal to for succor. Evangelicals are a bona fide minority when it comes to our commitment to Jesus' teaching about sexuality. It's not merely that people don't like our *views*. It's also that people don't like *us* because of our views. In fact, a recent poll has found that there are more people who view gay people favorably than there are that view evangelicals favorably.

RETREAT OR ENGAGE?

Without question, evangelical Christians face a new reality in post-*Obergefell*

America. And they are wondering how to move forward. They hear some leaders counseling retreat and disengagement from the culture. They hear other leaders say that we need to engage the culture war with the kind of politicking that marked the old Moral Majority of the 1980s.

Neither option really captures what Jesus taught us about our enduring relationship with the world. John 17 records the words of Jesus' prayer just before He was handed over to be crucified. His prayer focused not only on the eleven remaining disciples, but also on all those who would believe in Him through His disciples' testimony. In short, Jesus was praying for us.

Among other things, Jesus prayed that we would be in the world, not of the world, for the sake of the world.

1. Jesus prayed, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. . . . As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (vv. 15, 18). This means that disengagement from the world is not an option for Christians. He has sent us *into the world* knowing full well that we will face opposition: "In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world" (16:33).
2. But being in the world does not mean being of the world. In John's gospel, "world" is not a generic word for planet earth. It's a technical term denoting humanity in its fallenness and rebellion against God (see also 1 John 2:15-17). So when Jesus sends us into the world, He knows that He's sending us into a realm of active rebellion against His Father's

purposes. But His expectation is that our presence in the world will be a "sanctifying" influence. Why? Because our allegiance to Jesus and His Word "sanctifies" us in the

Opposition from the world is the norm, not the exception. And we know that we will overcome in the end because Jesus did.

midst of the rot (John 17:16-17). And that is the point.

3. We are in the world yet not of the world for the sake of the world. Jesus says that He sends His sanctified disciples into the world so that "the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (v. 23). Ultimately, our sanctification in the world is for a mission: to show the world—in all of its fallenness and rebellion—that God sent His Son to die for sinners.

Yes, we face a new reality in the aftermath of *Obergefell*. But we know how to move forward into this new reality because Jesus has already given us our marching orders. He has shown us that opposition from the world is the norm, not the exception. And we know that we will overcome in the end because Jesus did (16:33). 

Dr. Denny Burk is professor of biblical studies at Boyce College and associate pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. He is author of *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* and coauthor of *Transforming Homosexuality*.



SHOULD I ATTEND A HOMOSEXUAL WEDDING?

Why might a Christian refuse to attend, cater, or participate in a same-sex marriage ceremony? For simplicity's sake, let's assume this is a discussion among traditional Christians who believe—as the church has always believed and as most of the global church still

believes—that same-sex behavior is sinful and that marriage is a covenantal, conjugal union of a man and a woman.

With that clarifying comment, we can address the question head-on: Why would a Christian feel conscience bound not to attend or participate in a gay wedding? It's not because of bigotry or fear or because we are unaware that Jesus spent time with sinners that leads us to this conclusion. It's because of our desire to be obedient to Christ and because of the nature of the wedding event itself.

A wedding ceremony, in the Christian tradition, is first of all a worship service. So if the union being celebrated in the service cannot be biblically sanctioned as an act of worship, we believe the service lends credence to a lie. We cannot in good conscience participate in a service of false worship. I understand that does not sound very nice, but the conclusion follows from the premise, namely, that the "marriage" being celebrated is not in fact a marriage and should not be celebrated.

Moreover, there has long been an understanding that those present at a marriage ceremony are not just casual observers, but they are witnesses who

are granting their approval and support for the vows that are to be made. That's why the traditional language speaks of gathering "here in the sight of God, and

in the face of this congregation." That's why one of the sample marriage services in the Presbyterian Church in America still has the minister say:

If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be wedded, let him now declare it, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

Quite explicitly, the wedding is not a party for friends and family. It's not a mere ceremonial formality. It is a divine event in which those gathered celebrate and honor the "solemnization of matrimony."

Which is why—as much as I might want to build bridges with a lesbian friend or reassure a gay family member that I care for him and want to have a relationship with him—I would not attend a same-sex wedding ceremony. I cannot help with my cake, with my flowers, or with my presence to solemnize what is not holy.

In taking such a position, I've often heard things like this in response:

But Jesus hung out with sinners. He wasn't worried about being contaminated by the world. He didn't want

to turn people off to God's love. He was always throwing open the floodgates of God's mercy. He would say to us, "If someone forces you to bake one cake, bake for him two."

Okay, let's think through these objections. I mean actually think for a few sentences, and not just with slogans and vague sentimentality.

Jesus hung out with sinners. True, sort of (depends on what you mean by "hung out"). But Jesus believed marriage was between a man and a woman (Matt. 19:3–9). The example of Christ in the Gospels teaches us that we should not be afraid to spend time with sinners. If a gay couple next door invites you over for dinner, don't turn them down.

He wasn't worried about being contaminated by the world. That's not the concern

He was always throwing open the floodgates of God's mercy. Amen. Let's keep preaching Christ and preach as He did, calling all people to "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

If someone forces you to bake one cake, bake for him two. This is, of course, a true and beautiful principle about how Christians, when reviled, must not revile in return. But it hardly can mean that we do whatever people demand no matter our rights (Acts 4:18–20; 16:35–40; 22:22–29) and no matter what is right in God's eyes.

A wedding is not a dinner invitation or a graduation open house or retirement party. Even in a completely secular environment, there is still a sense—and sometimes the wedding invitations say as much—that our presence at the event would honor the couple and their marriage. It would be difficult, if not impos-

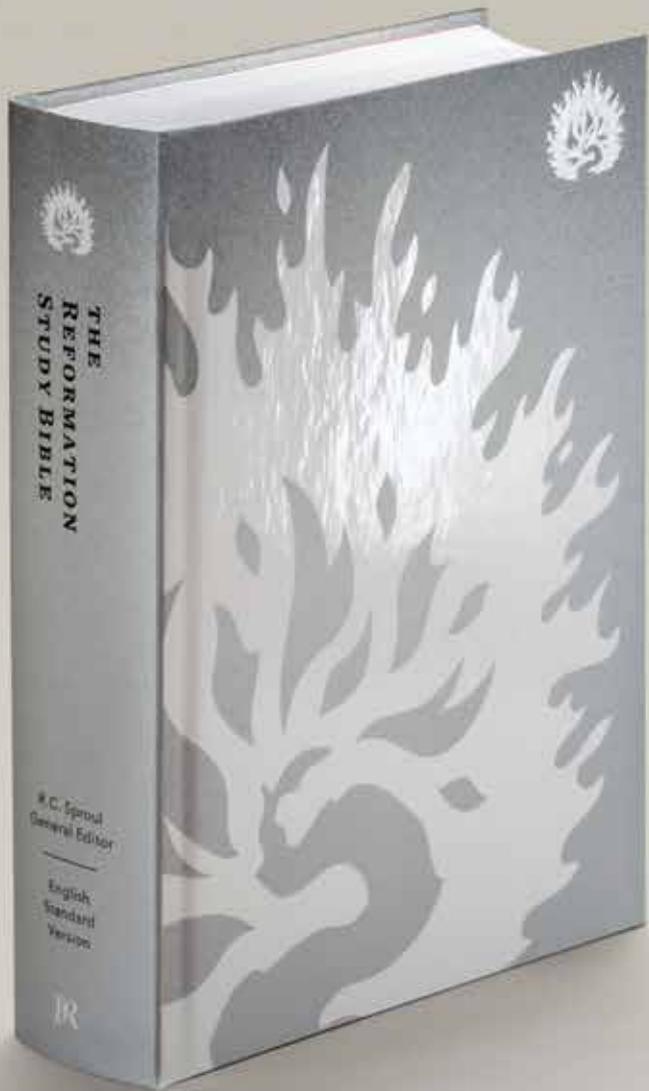
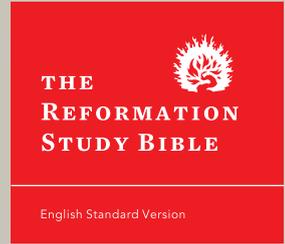
WE CANNOT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE PARTICIPATE IN A SERVICE OF FALSE WORSHIP. I UNDERSTAND THAT DOES NOT SOUND VERY NICE, BUT THE CONCLUSION FOLLOWS FROM THE PREMISE, NAMELY, THAT THE "MARRIAGE" BEING CELEBRATED IS NOT IN FACT A MARRIAGE AND SHOULD NOT CELEBRATED.

here. This isn't about cooties or sin germs. We have plenty of those ourselves.

He didn't want to turn people off to God's love. But Jesus did so all the time. He acted in ways that could be unintentionally, and more often deliberately, antagonistic (Matt. 7:6, 13–27; 11:20–24; 13:10–17; 19:16–30). Jesus turned people off all the time. This is no excuse for us to be unthinking and unkind. But it should put to rest the unbiblical notion that says if someone feels hurt by your words or unloved by your actions that you were ipso facto sinfully and foolishly unloving.

sible, to attend a wedding (let alone cater it or provide the culinary centerpiece) without your presence communicating celebration and support for what is taking place. And, as painful as it may be for us and for those we love, celebrating and supporting homosexual unions is not something God or His Word will allow us to do. **T**

Rev. Kevin DeYoung is senior minister of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Mich. Rev. DeYoung blogs at The Gospel Coalition and is author of *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*



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INTO THE WORD

STEWARDING OUR TREASURES

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:24 that we “cannot serve God and money,” His point being that God must be first in our affections. Indeed, if we are not careful, our material goods can become ends in themselves, and we will make getting more material goods the purpose of our lives. Money is a cruel master; when it is our chief end, it continually holds out the promise of satisfaction but never delivers. However, money and material goods can be incredible servants. When we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we can use His material blessings to do great things for His glory.

As we have worked our way through the Wisdom Literature this year, we have seen how it approaches money and stewardship from several different angles. To get a better understanding of what the rest of Scripture says about these important topics, we will begin our month with a series of studies based on Dr. R.C. Sproul’s

teaching series *To Whom Much Is Given*. After that, we will continue our devotional study of the Old Testament Wisdom Books, covering such topics as faith, humility, divine sovereignty, productivity, sexual purity, and several others. **T**

“TO THE MOST OF US [GOD] HAS GIVEN SOMEWHAT MORE THAN IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR OUR ACTUAL NEEDS. BUT WHETHER IT IS MUCH OR LITTLE, WE MUST GIVE AN ACCOUNT FOR IT ALL!”

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WEEK OF NOVEMBER 1 ► **LUKE 12:34**

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 8 ► **PROVERBS 28:27**

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 15 ► **ECCLESIASTES 11:5**

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 22 ► **JOHN 4:24**

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 29 ► **SONG OF SOLOMON 3:5**

TOTAL COMMITMENT AND GENEROSITY

MON | NOV

2

ECCLESIASTES 11:1-2 “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.”

All or nothing—that is the commitment our Lord demands. Love with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength is the only appropriate response to the only true God, who is the Creator of all (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 22:37–38). It is also the right way in light of the unpredictability of our lives. Tomorrow is not guaranteed to us; today might be the last day we have to serve God. We cannot think that putting off total commitment now means we will get another chance to commit ourselves to Him in the future.

Scripture exhorts us to full commitment to God in many different ways, and the book of Ecclesiastes does so by emphasizing the vanity or fleeting nature of life (Eccl. 6:12; 9:9; 11:8). The idea that life passes quickly lies in the background of today’s passage, wherein we are told to “cast [our] bread upon the waters” so that we will find it after many days (11:1). This image comes from seafaring commerce, where ships are sent out to sell goods and receive a return. In the ancient world, it could take a long time to gain a profit from overseas trade because travel was slow and laborious. But the merchant had to take the risk and send all his goods to other ports if he was to survive. He had to go “all in,” as it were, on his venture; otherwise, he would not benefit. Essentially, the Preacher here exhorts us to commit ourselves totally to the enterprise of serving God. Life is short, and there is no time for procrastination. We must serve the Lord fully today if we are going to serve Him. There may be no tomorrow for us, as death comes quickly to all.

The commercial imagery has also led commentators to see in today’s passage an exhortation to generosity and to trusting the Lord with our finances. So, Ecclesiastes 11:1–2 includes financial matters within the scope of its teaching. We are to invest in the kingdom (cast our bread), knowing that the returns God provides will far outweigh our sacrifice (v. 1).

Moreover, as we are able, we are to help those who are truly in need. Today’s proverb includes a call to “give a portion to seven, or even to eight” (v. 2), a metaphor exhorting us to give cheerfully and eagerly to help those in need. In light of the text’s commercial metaphors, verse 2 also encourages us to work zealously with all our might. We must be generous and work hard, for we do not know “what disaster may happen on earth.” Events to come might result in our having less to give or might make it difficult to profit from our labor, so we must work and give while we can, before unanticipated problems force us to cut back. 

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

God will have all of us or He will have none of us. There is no such thing as halfhearted commitment to the Lord. Until the Lord returns, we will fall short and sometimes try to hold some things back from His control. But true Christians will have the direction of their lives oriented in the main to serving God with all that they are. They serve Him eagerly, and they are continually repenting for whatever they might try to hold back from His lordship.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Kings 17:8–16
Malachi 3:6–12
Mark 10:29–30
Ephesians 5:15–16

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Jeremiah 37–38
Hebrews 2

TAKING CARE OF HOME

TUE | NOV

3

GENESIS 2:15 “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

Of the many topics covered in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature, economics stands out as a particular focus. The book of Proverbs, especially, has much to say about wealth, poverty, and related issues, but these themes also appear in Ecclesiastes and Psalms. Job tells the story of a man who had to deal with the loss of his wealth, and the Song of Solomon frequently refers to luxuries that were available only to the king and perhaps a few of the richest members of society.

Yet the biblical teaching on economics and the stewardship of our resources is not limited to the Wisdom Books. Many of Jesus’ parables, for instance, use illustrations drawn from commerce. Thus, if we want a better understanding of the scriptural view of wealth, poverty, and related topics, we need to look at what the entire canon has to say on these issues. Over the next few days, we will take a break from our studies based on the Wisdom Literature in order to look at some of the main points that other biblical books make regarding economics and stewardship. Dr. R.C. Sproul’s teaching series *To Whom Much Is Given* will serve as the basis for these studies.

Typically, we think of money whenever economic topics arise, and for good reason. After all, politicians, commentators, and others routinely tell us the costs to fund government programs, the raising of a child, and so on. However, the science of economics involves more than just dollars and cents, for economics deals with the management of all of our resources.

The English word *economy* comes to us as a transliteration of the Greek term *oikonomia*, which means “house law” or “the affairs of the house.” During biblical times, these affairs of the house often were not managed by the head of the house but rather a steward, typically a household servant who did not own the home’s resources, but who was entrusted with their care. Joseph, for example, was in charge of Potiphar’s resources even though Potiphar was their true owner (Gen. 39:1–6). Much of the biblical teaching on economics comes to us through the paradigm of the master and the steward. God owns everything in creation, even the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10), but He has given human beings the responsibility to manage it for His glory. Ever since Adam was placed in charge of the garden (Gen. 2:15), our task has been to preserve and increase God’s resources. 

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Proverbs 20:21
Matthew 24:45–51
1 Corinthians 4:2
1 Peter 4:10–11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Jeremiah 39–41
Hebrews 3:1–4:13

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

Whether macroeconomics or microeconomics, the science of economics from a biblical perspective is about stewardship. Ultimately, everything that we own belongs to God. He graciously gives it to us for us to manage. Thus, we are responsible to use His resources to provide for our families, and we are to protect and increase what the Lord has given to us (Lev. 19:23–25; Prov. 13:22; 1 Cor. 9:7). God will hold us accountable for what we do with His creation.

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VALUING GOODS AND SERVICES

WED | NOV

4

LUKE 12:34 “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Regrettably, there is much misunderstanding of economics in our day, and that leads to shallow thinking about economic issues. In many cases, our political rhetoric assumes that large companies are the enemy. Candidates repeat mantras such as “people, not profits,” the assumption being that if you are out to make a profit, you cannot possibly care about people, and that the only party to profit in a transaction is the seller.

In our fallen world, some individuals exploit other people for personal gain. However, it is false to assume that being motivated by profit always entails overlooking others and that the only person who ever profits from a business transaction is the seller. Let us consider a barter transaction. John the chicken farmer needs a pitchfork to do his work, but he does not know how to make one. Aaron the pitchfork maker needs a chicken to feed his family, but he does not know how to raise chickens. So, they agree to trade a chicken for a pitchfork. In this trade, both parties profit. John gets something he needs—a pitchfork—and so does Aaron—a chicken. Furthermore, each person has done something good for his neighbor; he has looked out for his neighbor’s interests by using his talents to produce something the neighbor needs. Though he benefits, he has done something good for the other person.

Today, we commonly use currency in economic transactions, so the mutual benefit is harder to see at first glance. When Kevin pays five dollars to Thomas the almond grower for a bag of almonds, we might think that only Thomas has profited. But this is not the case. Kevin valued his five-dollar bill, but there came a point when he valued almonds more than he valued keeping his money. He willingly exchanged that five-dollar bill for something he valued more, and because he received something he valued more highly, he profited. Another person, such as Robert, might not value almonds as much, and so he keeps his five dollars. All of this shows the subjective theory of value, an important economic concept. Economically speaking, we do not all value the same things in the same way, but that is OK. It makes possible a diverse economy where all people have a chance to use their talents to produce things that others value and to use their income to purchase things they value.

This is not subjectivism, for while we may put varying values on different material things depending on our tastes, we may value nothing higher than we value God (Ex. 20:3). And if our heart is making Him our treasure, we can know that we value Him more than all else. 

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

Our subjective valuations can also come into play in how we show that we value God above all else. Some may prize one-on-one ministry so highly that they forgo a lucrative secular career for the simple life of a missionary. Others who value God’s kingdom equally highly may put less value on personal missions work. Thus, they become entrepreneurs and financially support many missionaries. There are many different ways to show that we value God and His kingdom above all else.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 5:7
Proverbs 10:16
Mark 10:17–31
Acts 19:11–20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Jeremiah 42–43
Hebrews 4:14–5:10

BUILDING WEALTH FOR GOD’S GLORY

THU | NOV

5

ROMANS 7:4 “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”

Both human experience and Scripture (for example, 1 Cor. 12) tell us that the talents and interests of human beings may vary greatly from one person to another. Since it is also true that we are typically most productive when we are free to make use of our talents and pursue a career that aligns well with our interests, it is no surprise that free economies tend to display more productivity in terms of goods and services than economies that are organized according to governmental fiat. When people are free to pursue their interests and profit from their labor, it is amazing to see just what men and women can accomplish in terms of innovation and the building of wealth.

Such increased productivity—in a free-market economy—benefits people at every level of income, not merely those who gain the most wealth. Though the wealthy and powerful sometimes exploit those weaker than they are, it is simply not the case that all wealthy people build their riches on the backs of the poor and the middle class. In fact, history shows us that people who figure out ways to grow their wealth often do so in a way that raises the standard of living for many others. Consider Henry Ford, whose use of the assembly line revolutionized industry, made him very wealthy, and improved the lives of many people in the United States and around the world. Before Ford came on the scene, automobiles were prohibitively expensive for most people, but this changed when Ford was able to lower drastically the costs to produce a car. Mass production allowed Ford to build automobiles for a fraction of what it previously cost to manufacture vehicles; this lowered the price of automobiles for consumers. Ford sold more than fifteen million Model T cars, and in so doing he became fabulously wealthy. But others benefitted as well. Consumers who never would have been able to afford an automobile otherwise were able to purchase a car and enjoy all of the attendant benefits. Thousands of good-paying jobs were also created through Ford’s work.

All of this is to say that building wealth through increased productivity and helping others is a good thing. And this is equally true for Christians. God redeemed us so that we could bear spiritual fruit for Him (Rom. 7:4); this fruit comes as we serve the Lord and our neighbors. The more productive we are and the more wealth that we build, the more we have to invest in God’s kingdom and help other people in Jesus’ name. 

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

Pursuing increased productivity and wealth can be motivated by selfishness, but it does not have to be. We who know the Lord and want to serve Him and others can do much more for the kingdom if we increase our productivity and wealth. When we seek first the kingdom of God, our pursuit of productivity and the building of wealth are holy endeavors that enable us to support the work of the church and assist many people who have great financial needs.

INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE

FRI | NOV

6

MATTHEW 25:14-30 “He who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’” (vv. 20–21a).

Profit-making, as we have seen in our study of biblical economics, is not inherently evil. In fact, it can greatly benefit others and society at large as people produce affordable goods and resources to serve their neighbors. People who seek a profit can transform limited resources into vast sums that can be used to help others and support God’s kingdom.

The idea of limited resources is an important one to keep in mind. No one person owns everything, so that means each of us must steward a finite amount of resources. Some people are wealthier than others, but even the wealthiest individuals must choose where to allocate their funds. A dollar spent in one place is a dollar that cannot be spent elsewhere, so we are called to be wise with our material goods. However, that we each have a finite amount of resources at our disposal does not mean we are bound to a certain net worth or can never earn more. Our individual resources will always be finite in the sense that none of us will ever have everything in creation at our disposal; nevertheless, the amount that we do have can be increased. We can acquire more resources than we currently have, though as finite beings we will never gain everything. If nothing else, our deaths put an end to our ability to invest and grow our personal resources.

Speaking of investing, the Bible commends the proper investment of our resources to gain more wealth, and it warns us in many places of the dangers of seeking fast gain or a “quick buck,” as it were. Today’s passage, for example, calls us to invest all of our resources—including our time, our money, and our talents—in order to earn a return for the sake of our Master, namely, God Himself (Matt. 25:14–30). The Lord will commend us if we take what He has given us and increase it for the sake of His kingdom. Other texts such as Proverbs 13:11 tell us that if we gain wealth hastily, we will end up losing it. Patient investing develops in us the skills necessary to maintain and increase our resources over the long term. Impatience that leads to such things as get-rich-quick schemes or taking other foolish risks with our funds does not lend itself to the discipline needed to grow wealth permanently. What can be earned quickly can be lost just as fast as it was gained.

In essence, the Bible commends delayed gratification. Fools spend all that they have now, with no regard for the future (Prov. 20:21). Those who patiently invest and spend less than they earn build lasting wealth that can help others for a long time to come. 

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

No matter how much one earns or already possesses, it can be increased through patient and wise investing. Heavy consumer debt incurred because of our impatience creates a great burden on our ability to invest and grow our resources for the sake of our families, the church, and providing for the poor. Thus, we should endeavor to invest our funds wisely and avoid foolish financial decisions that would harm our ability to fund the work of the church and assist others.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Proverbs 22:7; 28:20
Luke 12:48b

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Jeremiah 46–48
Hebrews 6:13–7:10

THE WEEKEND

Jer. 49–Lamentations 2
Hebrews 7:11–28

Churches That Want to Lose People

J. D. GREEAR

It’s easy for us church leaders to get excited about the wrong things. We dream of all the people God might bring to our church, and we rejoice if God brings that growth. But if we’re really concerned with seeing God’s kingdom expand, we should be less excited about the people we are gaining, and more excited about the people we are losing.

Of course, we have to lose them for the right reasons—not by being inflammatory or heretical, but by sending them out on God’s mission. The New Testament strategy for completing the Great Commission isn’t addition—as thrilling as that can feel—but multiplication. This is no easy lesson for those of us in ministry to learn. Kingdom multiplication comes at great cost to us. And if we want to see ministry multiply, we have to take our hands off of our desires and empower our people to go out into the world.

Success in ministry happens not when we hoard what God has given us—and that includes our people—but when we are willing to send out our best, to give our most dedicated members and most gifted leaders away. Bringing in large groups of people to hear a message is good; training up disciples and sending them out is far better. We must engineer our churches to build up and send out leaders.

Sending has always been at the heart of the church’s identity, but far too many churches in America have forgotten what Jesus told us about the success of the church. Sending capacity, not seating capacity, is the heart of the church’s greatness. Inherent in the call to follow

Jesus is a call to mission, and to be called to Him is to be called to His mission. If a church is not engaging in mission, it really has no point in existing.

In other words, sending should be written into the very DNA of our churches. God didn’t create the church to hash out the exact timing of Jesus’ second coming or to get together and bemoan the worsening condition of society. He created the church to send the church.

In our day, this has become more important than ever. Even those in our own backyards will likely have to be reached outside the church. The “nones” in Western society (those who check “none” in surveys regarding religious affiliation) grow each year at an astounding rate. “Nones” don’t casually make their way back into church because the pastor is engaging or the music is cool. They have to be reached where they already are.

To reach people where they are, we have to be willing to take our hands off of our greatest resources: our people. This will hurt. But as Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24). The kingdom of God works on the principle of the harvest: we reap only as we send out; living comes by dying; gaining comes by losing. It’s time for us to recover the terrifying and exhilarating joy of sending—the joy of losing. 

Dr. J.D. Greear is pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh, N.C. He is author of several books, including his newest, *Gaining by Losing*.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE LIVE IN POVERTY?

MON | NOV

9

DEUTERONOMY 15:11 “There will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”

Economic discussions must deal with the subjects of wealth and poverty, so it is no surprise that the biblical teaching on economics has much to say on both of these issues. What might catch some people off guard is the fact that Scripture never says that being wealthy is a sin in itself, and it never says that poverty is an inherently righteous condition. The *love* of money is the root of all evil, not money per se (1 Tim. 6:10). Rich and poor alike can love money, but they can also be driven by something other than a love of money. Wealthy people can be out for only themselves and to amass as much as they can because they have made wealth their god, but poor people may also love money as their god and be motivated to sacrifice their integrity for the sake of escaping their condition. Similarly, people may love God above all else even though they are rich, just as people may love God above all else even though they are poor. Abraham, one of the wealthiest men of his era (Gen. 13:2), and Jesus, who had nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58), exemplify this attitude.

The Lord does not choose people for salvation based on their net worth, but Scripture nevertheless depicts Him as having a special concern for the plight of the poor. Today’s passage, for example, tells us that God expects His people to be generous and help those who are in need of the basic necessities of life (Deut. 15:11). But as the Bible also calls us to walk wisely, we must also know that truly helping the poor requires an understanding of why people live in poverty. If we do not take this into account, our helping may actually hurt them.

God describes four categories of poor people in His Word. First, some individuals live in poverty because of some calamity or disaster. Orphans and widows who live in poverty do so because a tragedy has left them without a breadwinner (James 1:27). Others live in poverty on account of being exploited by criminals (Lev. 19:15). The third category of impoverished people is made up of those who refuse to work (2 Thess. 3:10). Finally, some people are poor because they have given up a secular career to go into full-time ministry. Consider, for example, the medical missionary who left a lucrative practice to serve overseas. Each group needs a different type of assistance. Orphans and widows may need permanent financial assistance. The exploited need help navigating the justice system. Those who refuse to work require church discipline and encouragement to find a job, and those who go into full-time ministry deserve our prayers and financial support. 

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

To be wise stewards of God’s resources, we must provide real help to people who are truly in need. Many well-intentioned people support programs that do not provide truly helpful assistance to the poor, and others refuse to help the poor because they think that everyone who suffers in poverty has brought it on through laziness. Let us seek to be wise in how we provide for those in need, and may we never turn away someone who truly needs our help.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Proverbs 18:9
Ezekiel 18:10–13
Romans 15:22–29
1 Timothy 5:3–16

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Lamentations 3–4
Hebrews 8

GENEROUS GIVING

TUE | NOV

10

PROVERBS 28:27 “Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.”

Dr. R.C. Sproul has frequently commented on the distinction between *believing in* God and *believing* God. His point is that in many respects, it is easy to believe that the Lord exists and to believe in what both nature and Scripture tell us about His attributes. There is so much evidence for our Creator from both of these sources of divine revelation that we must exert tremendous effort to deny what we know to be true about God. When it comes to our daily trials, however, actually believing that the Lord will do what He has promised is more difficult for us. We are tempted to walk by sight and not by faith, and even the most faithful among us has had doubts that the Lord will do what He has said He will do.

This should not be, for the same Bible that we trust to tell us truths about God also assures us that the Lord will be faithful to what He has pledged. He has said that He will save all who call upon the name of Jesus (Acts 2:21). Furthermore, God has sworn to keep all of His promises to give Abraham many descendants and a good land (Gen. 15; Heb. 6:13–20), and He has pledged to supply our needs as we are generous with what He has given us (2 Cor. 9:10–11).

Today’s passage expresses our generosity and trust in God’s provision in proverbial form. Although the Lord is not mentioned specifically in the verse, the immediate context of Proverbs 28:27 gives us ample reason to infer that His presence is assumed in the proverb. After all, verse 25 speaks of trusting in the Lord, which is the characteristic of the person who stands in antithesis to the “greedy man” who “stirs up strife.” Verse 27 speaks of generosity, which is the opposite of greed, so we understand that the person who is generous with his money is generous because He trusts in the Lord. In other words, he feels free to give to the poor because he knows that God will reward this generosity and meet his needs. The generous person will not lack the necessities of life.

On the other hand, the one who “hides his eyes”—ignores the plight of the poor—will suffer “many a curse” (v. 27). Those who are not generous and who do not help, insofar as they are able, those who are truly in need reveal hearts that do not really trust in God to provide for them. They hold their money back because they believe it is up to them to guarantee that they will have everything they need. Such people are cursed because they are trusting in themselves, not in the Lord. 

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 37:21–26
Proverbs 14:21, 31;
19:17; 28:8
Philippians 4:14–20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Lam. 5–Ezekiel 1
Hebrews 9

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

Many pastors and teachers have suggested that we take a look at our checkbooks and bank statements for a true measure of where our trust lies. If we cannot find evidence of generous giving to the kingdom of God and those who are truly in need, we may be lacking the trust in the Lord that we profess. Let us strive to be generous with what we have, trusting in God to supply our every need.

WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL



ECCLESIASTES 11:3-4 “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth, and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.”

If we were honest with ourselves, most of us would admit that we think we are captains of our fate and masters of our destiny. We do what we can to control our circumstances, sometimes in godly ways and sometimes in an ungodly manner. Often, we go hours or even days without thinking about the fact that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass (WCF 3.1; see Eph. 1:11). When things do not go as we have planned, we might become depressed or angry because we have lost our sense of control.

Of course, our plans are not irrelevant, and the Lord has entrusted us with a measure of control over our lives. However, all of this takes place within the scope of His eternal plan, and this plan includes events that, from our perspective, we accurately predict as well as events that are unpredictable from our vantage point. That reality seems to be what is assumed in today’s passage.

Note the parallels between verses 3 and 4. Rain clouds are in view in verse 3 and in the statement “regards the clouds” found in the agricultural metaphor of verse 4. Such clouds evidence our ability to predict some things with relative accuracy. When we see rain clouds on the horizon, we know it is going to rain, and we can take the appropriate steps to prepare. But verse 3 also talks about a tree that is falling to the ground, and this is parallel to “observes the wind” in verse 4. Here we see the unpredictability of life. As Jesus would note centuries after the Preacher wrote Ecclesiastes, we do not ultimately know where the wind comes from, when it will come, where it will go, and what it will do (John 3:8a). When the wind blows, it can do things we had not expected, like knock over trees that we thought could withstand the mightiest of storms.

In sum, life is both predictable and unpredictable for human beings. We do not know creation exhaustively, and we lack the power to make everything go the way we want. If we were to dwell on only that reality, we would become paralyzed. We would wait for the moment at which we knew our plans would work out perfectly (predictability) but never move because we can never know the perfect time and season (unpredictability). Like the farmer who does not plant until conditions are ideal in every conceivable way, we would not reap (Eccl. 11:4). The only solution is to trust in the providence of God, the One “who makes everything” (v. 5) and works through what we do to fulfill His purposes. 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

The providence of God is the only foundation upon which we find confidence to act in this unpredictable world. Knowing that the Lord is in control—and that we are not—actually frees us to act, for we know that no failure of ours can derail His plan. That He is in control also gives an eternal significance to what we do, for what we do is incorporated into the all-comprehensive plan of the One who gives meaning to everything.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 56
Isaiah 44:6–8
Matthew 14:22–33
Luke 12:22–34

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 2–3
Hebrews 10

AN ANSWERED PRAYER



PSALM 116:1-9 “I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy” (v. 1).

What is repentance unto life? The Westminster Shorter Catechism addresses this issue, explaining that it is a turning from sin that is motivated by grief and hatred for the sin as well as an “apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ” (WSC 87). Knowing that God loves to show mercy to the penitent encourages us to confess and forsake our sin. A benefit or blessing that the Lord promises, namely, mercy to repentant people (1 John 1:8–9), is one reason we turn from our love of self and sin and begin to love our Creator.

Certainly, the Lord would deserve our love and honor even if He were not to give us blessings. Because of His holy nature, we owe Him all glory (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:11). Yet God shows Himself gracious and kind in that He gives us additional reasons to love and adore Him. One of these, as we see in today’s passage, is that the Lord hears and answers our prayers for mercy.

We do not know the circumstances that lay behind Psalm 116, but clearly God had saved the author from some great distress. It is possible that the psalmist was facing death, either from disease or at the hand of an enemy, for in verse 3 he speaks of being entwined in “the snares of death” and suffering anguish due to the “pangs of Sheol [the grave].” However, the language does not require that; it may just be poetic hyperbole describing a grievous but not life-threatening situation. Regardless, what the psalmist faced was severe and something from which he could not have rescued himself.

The psalmist called on the Lord and was delivered (vv. 4–9), and his love for God was thereby deepened. Perhaps if we were to call on our Lord more often, our love for Him would be strengthened as well. It is simple, after all, to affirm certain truths about God’s character—that He is loving, merciful, and powerful to answer prayer. But do we really believe these truths about Him if we do not regularly call on His name? Maybe the distress that we feel in this fallen world would be lessened if we were to call out to the Lord for deliverance. Praying to Him gives us the opportunity to see Him move in specific ways, with the result that our love for Him is increased, as well as our gratitude for His blessings, and both of these will drown out our doubts and discomforts. Let us pray regularly for God’s deliverance from both our major and minor difficulties that we may love Him all the more. 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

John Calvin comments on today’s passage that the distress of the psalmist “was removed from him, because he felt that God was indeed propitious towards him.” Knowing that the Lord has good things for His people and is eager to hear us is an encouragement for us to call out to Him, and His deliverance gives us further reason to love and worship Him. Regular prayer helps us remember that God is kind to us, and it helps us to develop an even deeper love for Him.

GREAT FAITH IN GOD

FRI | NOV

13

PSALM 116:10–19 “I believed, even when I spoke: ‘I am greatly afflicted’; I said in my alarm, ‘All mankind are liars’” (vv. 10–11).

Psalm 116:1–9 gives us an example of a godly man whose love for God was motivated in part by the fact that the Lord heard and answered his prayers. Indeed, our Creator is so kind not only to command us to love Him (Deut. 6:4), but also to give us reasons to love Him, including His mercy and faithfulness to us. Yet as we see in today’s passage, the psalmist did not give his love to the Lord merely to get a blessing in return. His love for and faith in our Maker was real even in seasons when he was not experiencing the fullness of God’s blessing.

Consider verses 10–11 of Psalm 116. Perhaps the most important term in this portion of the psalm is the word “even.” It introduces a contrast, an action or state of mind that the psalmist had in a setting where that action or state of mind would not ordinarily be expected. As we see in verse 10, the psalmist believed even when all he could say was that he was “greatly afflicted.” In other words, his faith did not depend on the ease of his circumstances. He trusted in God even when, humanly speaking, he had no good reason to do so because the Lord was allowing Him to suffer. His plight was so bad that he could find no one on earth to trust, saying “all mankind are liars” (v. 11). Often, we take this verse as a statement regarding the universality of sin—all people are guilty of lying. Certainly, it is true that all people are sinners (Rom. 3:23), so it is appropriate to look to this verse as a confirmation of that teaching. In the immediate context, however, the focus is more on the perseverance of the psalmist’s faith. He was so steadfast in his trust that he continued to believe the Lord even when the deceitfulness of his fellow human beings might have led him to doubt that God could be trusted.

The psalmist’s confidence in the providence of God enabled him to maintain his faith during his trial. He understood that the Lord does not haphazardly call us to suffer. The death of His saints is precious in His sight (v. 15)—each believer’s death is not overlooked, and God is so concerned about it that He puts great value on the passing of everyone who trusts in Him. In other words, He is attentive to His people and does not allow them to die at the wrong time; we go to our deaths when He has determined it is fitting. If this is true for our deaths, how could it be any different for the suffering that does not lead to death? We can trust the Lord in our pain because we know He has a purpose for it (Rom. 8:28). **TL**

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

Knowing that our deaths are precious in God’s sight encourages us to trust Him in our difficulties. We die at the point that the Lord has determined to be the right and most valuable time, so no believer dies at the wrong time. In any suffering, then, we know that the Lord has a good purpose. John Calvin comments, “Let us hold fast . . . that the death of the faithful, which is so worthless, nay, even ignominious in the sight of men, is so valuable in God’s sight.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 56:3–4
2 Timothy 4:18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 7–9
Hebrews 11:17–40

THE WEEKEND

Ezekiel 10–14
Hebrews 12–13

He Came for Sinners

GUY M. RICHARD

It is easy for many of us to become so overwhelmed with our sins that we lose heart in the Christian life and begin to doubt whether we are Christians at all. We become easily discouraged with particularly stubborn sins because we do not seem to be able to gain victory over them. We see precious little growth in our lives. And no matter how much we struggle against our sin, we still find Paul’s words in Romans 7:15–20 to be true of ourselves: we do not do the things that we want to do, and, instead, we do the things we do not want to do.

For these reasons, we ought to be grateful for passages such as Luke 5:31–32 that remind us that Jesus came to call sinners—not righteous people—to Himself. I find that to be tremendously encouraging because I know that I qualify. I am a sinner. And I am the kind of sinner that Jesus is talking about here.

Jesus is not talking about “sinners” generally or universally in Luke 5:31–32. All people are sinners in this general or universal sense, as Paul tells us quite clearly in Romans 3:9–20. Jesus is talking about a specific group of sinners in Luke 5, namely, those who acknowledge their sin and long to be healed and to turn away from their sin. We know that, because in the context of Luke 5, Jesus is responding to the Pharisees, who “grumbled” that He and His disciples were eating and drinking with “tax collectors and sinners” (v. 30) instead of associating with more respectable kinds of people (like themselves). Their question (and their grumbling) indicates that they did

not consider themselves to be sinners. They were “righteous.” Even though they were sinners every bit as much as were the “tax collectors and sinners” and needed the healing of the Great Physician every bit as much as those other sinners did, the Pharisees did not believe it. They were uninterested in healing and repentance precisely because they saw no need for them. And Jesus’ point is that He did not come to call this kind of “righteous” person. He came to call those “sinners” who know that they are sick and need to be healed by the doctor.

And that ought to make this passage even more encouraging for you and me. When we are overwhelmed with our sins and tempted to lose heart or are burdened by particularly stubborn sins or discouraged at what seems to be a slow growth rate in our Christian lives, we need to remember that Jesus came to call people just like us—sick sinners who desperately need the healing of the Great Physician.

Samuel Rutherford once said that you and I are “at the worst” sinners, and sinners are “nothing to Christ.” The reason that sinners are “nothing” to Christ is because He came specifically to call sinners to Himself, to heal us of our spiritual “disease,” to work in us that which is pleasing to Himself. No matter how dark our sins may be, we know that Jesus really is able to wash us whiter than snow. **TL**

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HUMILITY OF UNDERSTANDING

MON | NOV
16

ECCLESIASTES 11:5 “As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.”

Without a doubt, we live in an era that possesses more knowledge about the world than any other previous era. In fact, our understanding is growing so fast that some thinkers have said the sum total of human knowledge is doubling every twelve months or so. Many others have suggested that it will not be too long before our knowledge is doubling every twelve hours.

We should be amazed at and grateful for the advances in science and technology that have made it possible to gain more insight into the world and how it works. At the same time, however, we must recognize that this increase in understanding has had a downside. We have seen a sharp downgrade in ethical wisdom; many people today know a lot of facts but often have shallow and pliable ethical standards. Moreover, we have seen a tendency to forget the wisdom of the past. Our culture often acts as if we are morally and intellectually superior to the generations that came before us simply because we have a greater number of known facts at our disposal. One must look high and low to find humility of understanding—the recognition of human limitations in what we know and the affirmation that human beings will never know everything that can be known.

Such recognition can occur only when we remember the “God who makes everything” is incomprehensible (Eccl. 11:5). We “do not know [His] work,” not in the sense that we are completely ignorant of what He does or who He is; rather, the true knowledge we have of the Lord is always limited by our finitude. Authentic understanding of Him and His ways in this world is possible, but this knowledge will never be comprehensive. We know this both from God’s Word (Rom. 11:33) and from the natural world. After all, though science has made many discoveries, with every discovery we learn just how much we do not yet know about creation. Even our understanding of human development in the womb, though it has increased since the Preacher’s day, continues to present mysteries to us (Eccl. 11:5).

The good news is that we do not need comprehensive knowledge of God and His ways to trust Him. His Word is sure and His covenantal promises must come to pass. Matthew Henry comments on today’s passage, “We doubt not of the birth of the child that is conceived, though we know not how it is formed; nor need we doubt of the performance of the promise, though we perceive not how things work towards it.” 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

The only sure way to gain humility of understanding is to know the character of God. When we begin to grasp the immensity and incomprehensibility of the Lord, we begin to see our place in this world and we are forced to acknowledge our limitations, and acknowledging our limitations is part and parcel of true humility. If we want to cultivate the virtue of humility, we must know the character of God.

FOR FURTHER STUDY
Job 11:7–9
Psalm 145:3
2 Corinthians 2:9–11
1 Timothy 6:13–16
THE BIBLE IN A YEAR
Ezekiel 15–17
James 1

THE TREASURE OF GOD’S WORD

TUE | NOV
17

PSALM 119:161–68 “I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law” (vv. 162–63).

Armies in the ancient world, just like many armies today, did not simply leave the city after the battle was over. Instead, they would take booty or spoil or treasure from the city. This wealth could include things such as silver and gold, valuable livestock, precious jewels, and other treasures, and the prospect of gaining such riches could be a valuable incentive to encourage soldiers to join the fight. Enjoying access to a large amount of treasure could change one’s life, so there was great rejoicing on the part of an army when it discovered a great deal of wealth after a battle. This was a reality even for the armies of Israel. God permitted them on many occasions to possess the treasure they found after an expedition (Deut. 20:14b).

In light of this background, we can see that the Word of God is described in today’s passage as nothing less than a great treasure. The psalmist remarks that he rejoices at the Lord’s Word “like one who finds great spoil” (v. 162). His response to the Scriptures indicates their tremendous value. They are to be treasured just as one might treasure a financial windfall that improves one’s economic status forever. Yet ultimately, Psalm 119 reveals that God’s Word should be treasured far more than material wealth. The psalmist sees the law of the Lord as better “than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (v. 72). This sentiment finds support in the teaching of Jesus. Even the finest earthly treasures are susceptible to theft and destruction. In other words, they do not last forever. However, the treasures we store up in heaven can never be lost (Matt. 6:19–21). If we build our lives on the solid foundation of God’s Word, the rain and winds may come, but they will not take away our reward (7:24–27).

That God’s Word is eternal explains why those who love it have “great peace” and “do not stumble” (Ps. 119:165). The surety of the Lord’s promises means that He will not and cannot fail to vindicate His servants (135:14). Others who endeavor to do what is right but do not love God’s Word are apt to fail when the pressure is on to do what is evil. They have no confidence that they will be rewarded for righteousness in the end, so it is easier to give in and compromise their principles. Those who love the Lord’s Word, on the other hand, are in a better position to stand for what is right and true. They know that any suffering they face for doing so is but temporary, for God will bless them in the end. 

FOR FURTHER STUDY
Job 23:11–12
Psalm 19:7–10
Mark 13:31
1 Thessalonians 5:24
THE BIBLE IN A YEAR
Ezekiel 18–20
James 2

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

If we are wise, then we will treasure the Word greatly just as the author of Psalm 119 did. Wise people put the most value in those things that endure, and nothing is more enduring than the Word of God. After all, it comes from and is sustained by the eternal Lord of creation. With the many distractions life sends our way, it is easy not to treasure God’s Word, so let us pray that the Holy Spirit would enable us to see the true value of the Scriptures.



**IN-
DEPTH.
IN-PERSON.**



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JOYFUL LIVING IN LIGHT OF DEATH

WED | NOV
18

ECCLESIASTES 11:8 “If a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.”

When we are young, it seems as if we will live forever. Our vigor is easily renewed. We believe that it is all but certain that there are many years ahead of us. Death is a foreign reality, something that happens only to the aged, people who are so much older than us that we hardly imagine that we are likewise drawing ever closer to our final breaths.

As we get older, however, things begin to change. The years seem to pass by more quickly. We do not bounce back from illness and injury like we used to. We see people of our own generation die. The idea that death comes to us all moves from the realm of theory to reality.

In light of our own mortality, the Preacher who wrote Ecclesiastes exhorts us to a two-fold way of living. First, we are to rejoice in the years of life that we do have (Eccl. 11:8a). The fact that we will die is not meant to put a damper on the life that we do get to live. To eat, to drink, and to rejoice in our labor is God’s gift to us (3:13). Life with the spouse whom we love is likewise a precious thing to be treasured (9:9). Although Scripture paints the life to come in heaven as more wonderful than we can possibly imagine (1 Cor. 2:9), it does not tell us the joys of our life in the here and now are worthless. These joys are part of the vanity of the present life (Eccl. 11:8b), that is, they are fleeting and sometimes unpredictable. Yet we are to find appropriate pleasure in them as part of fearing God and keeping His commandments (12:13–14). The Lord does not call us to a rigid asceticism that casts a suspicious eye on those things in creation that bring us delight; rather, He exhorts us never to put these things first in our hearts (Ex. 20:3).

Still, as we are called to enjoy our present lives, we must not forget that death is coming. The Preacher’s second exhortation is to “remember that the days of darkness will be many” (Eccl. 11:8a). The “days of darkness” refers to the time spent in the darkness of the grave. We rejoice in light of knowing that death is coming. Then, we will not rejoice with our wives or in our eating and drinking, for we will have died and will have no access to earthly pleasures. Therefore, we should rejoice not in trivialities but in what provides lasting joy. More importantly, we must prepare for our deaths, knowing that we will meet our Maker and that we will be commended for rejoicing only in those things that He blesses. 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

Matthew Henry comments on today’s passage, “Notwithstanding the long continuance of life, and the many comforts of it, yet we must remember the days of darkness, because those will certainly come, and they will come with much the less terror if we have thought of them before.” If we are unprepared to meet our Creator, death will be a terror for us. But if we think on our deaths, realize our sin, and turn to Christ, we will not be afraid.

FOR FURTHER STUDY
Deuteronomy 12:18b;
16:14; 26:11
Philippians 4:4
Hebrews 9:27–28
THE BIBLE IN A YEAR
Ezekiel 21
James 3

THE MESS OF PRODUCTIVITY

THU | NOV
19

PROVERBS 14:4 “Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.”

As many of us learn early in life, growth and progress are seldom tidy affairs. Just consider the raising of children. Diapers, the challenge of keeping a house clean when toddlers are present, disciplining teenagers who think they know better than Mom and Dad—these are all messy things. Yet they indicate that much is going on at home. Children are growing and learning. Life is happening. Slowly but surely, boys and girls are becoming productive young men and women. Think also about the pains of a growing church. Parishioners must adjust to new pastors and staff members who are hired to help run the church. Tight budgets are squeezed further as money is shifted around to pay for new buildings and programs. Conflicts in the congregation increase as more and more people join the church. The church is ministering to more people, but not everything about it is pretty.

In this fallen world, problems are present even when things are moving forward and productivity is increasing. That is the message of today’s passage. During biblical times, the ancient Israelites placed great value on oxen. The book of Leviticus indicates their importance to the sacrificial system, and passages such as Deuteronomy 25:4 tell us that these animals were a key part of agricultural production. The second half of Proverbs 14:4 confirms this. The strength of an ox brings many crops. More plowing and harvesting can be accomplished, increasing the yield of the field and the growth of a household’s wealth. However, this growth comes at a price. An ox must be fed and watered. It must be housed in a shed during storms. It leaves waste that must be cleaned up. In other words, for all the benefit that an ox provides, this animal brings with it much cost and mess.

So, as the first half of Proverbs 14:4 reveals, the only way to have a clean manger is to not have many oxen. And yet, if one ox can bring so much productivity, many oxen will bring even more. Essentially, this proverb reminds us that if we want to advance, if we want to grow our wealth or anything else, there will be some untidiness about it. It will require responsibility in taking care of all our possessions. Things may get messy at times. Somewhat paradoxically, a big mess can be desirable, not because it is in itself something to seek but because it may indicate the presence of healthy productivity. 

FOR FURTHER STUDY
Exodus 18
Proverbs 27:23–27
John 15:1–2
Acts 6:1–7
THE BIBLE IN A YEAR
Ezekiel 22–24
James 4

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

We can be tempted to give up when dissension and misunderstanding abound or we are facing many other problems. While we do not want to minimize our difficulties, we should also take care to look around us and see if our issues are part of the messiness of growth. Problems faced by a growing congregation or maturing family are often from the devil as he endeavors to put an end to God’s work. Let us not be thrown off course by his evil plans.

JOY AND JUDGMENT

FRI | NOV
20

ECCLESIASTES 11:9-10 “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (v. 9).

In Ecclesiastes 11:8, the Preacher exhorts us to rejoice and enjoy the various pleasures and joys of life, for God has given us an allotted period of time, this present life, to show our gratitude for our gifts. Death is coming, when the enjoyment of what this world has to offer will no longer be possible. Although the full witness of Scripture shows us there are great joys to be had in heaven and that to depart this life and to be with Christ is far better (Phil. 1:23), the joys of this life are not to be despised.

Today’s passage expands upon this point by emphasizing that the joys commended by the Preacher are joys that are rooted in the heart (Eccl. 11:9). God does not commend a superficial joy and happiness; rather, the kind of joy that pleases Him is heartfelt rejoicing, joy that is rooted in the innermost core of who we are. We learn from this that biblical piety includes joy; it is not antithetical to it. Though Christians do not pretend that life is free of difficulty, neither do we approach living in a dour, joyless, and soulless manner. Biblical faithfulness is not characterized by a list of what we cannot do. Instead, it is a life of freedom for holiness, liberty to be who God made us to be as image-bearers who take delight in Him and in His creation (Gal. 5:1).

In short, the Preacher commends true liberty. This is not the freedom to fulfill every conceivable desire, for sin is slavery (John 8:34). The liberty that brings joy is freedom to do good, a freedom that nonbelievers do not have. None but those whom God has regenerated can do what He considers good fully and completely, and even we who have new hearts fall short as long as we live in this fallen world (1 John 1:8–9). But in any case, that the Preacher commends the joy found in doing what the Lord considers good is confirmed in his caution that God will bring all of our rejoicing into judgment (Eccl. 11:9). To rejoice in what the Lord forbids is sin; to take joy in what He approves brings glory to Him. As one commentator has said, “Joy was created to dance with goodness, not alone.”

This type of joy cannot exist with “vexation in the heart” (v. 10). As commentators note, the idea here is keep cynicism from taking root in our hearts. We should never become so jaded that we are not open to the joys that the Lord has for us. Let us set vexation aside that we might enjoy God’s gifts and be a delight to others. **T**

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

The media often depicts Christians as joyless, judgmental individuals who avoid pleasure at all cost. We know that this is a gross caricature, especially in light of the Bible’s teaching that we are to rejoice in what God has given. Sadly, however, many Christians’ behavior has led to the impression that we are joyless people. Let us rejoice in what is good that unbelievers may have no legitimate cause for this caricature.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Job 5:2

Hebrews 12:15

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 25–26

James 5

THE WEEKEND

Ezekiel 27–29

1 Peter 1–2

All You Get Is Everything

OWEN STRACHAN

“**B**lessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). In these words, the very first of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, the Son of God makes an impossible promise: if you acknowledge that you have nothing, you will gain everything.

To be poor goes against the grain of the human heart. We do not naturally want to show our poverty. If at all possible, we dress ourselves up, even if only for a time. The cost of others’ seeing our distress is too great for almost any of us to bear. The pride and self-preserving instinct of the human heart strives at all costs to avoid looking weak and penniless.

How remarkable, then, that the nature of Christian faith is admitting weakness. The God who calls us to repentance calls us simultaneously to lowliness. We have learned to preserve and present ourselves, but the compassionate Christ looks weary sinners in the face and leads us to drop the charade. All inflated reputations crumble before God; all burnished brands blow away with the wind. When we come face-to-face with the living God, we recognize that we are poor, and that we have a tremendous need that we cannot satiate.

But the bad news stops here. When the Lord brings us low, He also lifts us up. We gain the “kingdom of heaven,” a phrase so grand that it sounds preposterous. Many of us have trouble receiving a sweater without some misgiving; how on earth can we be expected to possess the heavenly kingdom? We naturally fight against the truth of how bad we are, on the one end, and how

good God is, on the other. In these few words, Jesus frames both realities, putting the accent on the gift of heaven.

The key to understanding this exalted promise is in the person who makes it. Long before He spells out what His cruciform death will mean for sinners, Jesus was teaching the doctrine of exchange. The sinner gives God only their sin; God gives the sinner all things in Christ. All the privileges and rights and delights of heavenly life are ours. Like a long-awaited heir, the sinner who trusts Christ inherits a kingdom.

Strange as it may be, our hearts will struggle to hold this holy water. We will forget it. We will disbelieve it. We will wander in our affections, seeking to build earthly kingdoms on our own terms. The way out of such sin and sorrow is precisely the way into heaven: it is to confess our poverty of spirit.

If we feel lowly as believers, we should not fight this sense. We are the people made glad by news of our weakness. We do not need to keep up appearances as our unsaved neighbors must. We have no delusions of grandeur. We can work profitably in the Lord’s vineyard, but even if our efforts are richly blessed, we build no new kingdom. We inherit one. There is nothing lacking in it. In the economy of God, all the repentant sinner gets is everything. **T**

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OUR DUTY TO REJOICE IN OUR KING

MON | NOV
23

PSALM 149 “Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!” (v. 2).

What do you think of when you hear the word *duty*? Many of us would likely think of something we have to do but do not want to do. “Do your duty,” we have been told, often by people who know that our heart is not in doing what we are supposed to do. Many of us also think of duty as something that is owed. That can make the prospect of doing one’s duty even less appealing. Most of us don’t like owing anything to anyone.

Scripture abounds with the notion of duty. For instance, the Ten Commandments are set up as laws that the Israelites had to obey because God had redeemed them from slavery (Ex. 20:1–17). The structure of many of the New Testament Epistles is similar. In a book such as Romans, there is first a recounting of all of the things Christ has done for us (Rom. 1–11) and then several chapters of ethical instruction (chaps. 12–16). The implication is that we have a duty to live according to those ethics because of Jesus’ work in our behalf.

Certainly, the Word of God would have us do our duty regardless of whether we feel like it, but one of the wonderful blessings of our Lord is that He makes our duties into delights. That is one of the lessons we can learn from today’s passage. We see in Psalm 149 that we are to “rejoice” in our King (v. 2). We are to take great joy in Him, our Lord and Maker. This is not optional. It is commanded and given to us as one of our duties.

Yet the Lord would not have this be a matter of drudgery. It would have been enough simply for Him to order us to rejoice and be done with it. However, that is not what He does in today’s passage. He provides us with good reasons to find our joy in our Creator. We read, for example, that “the Lord takes pleasure in his people” (v. 4). The all-sufficient God, who has no need of anything outside of Himself to be content and to enjoy a perpetual state of bliss, has chosen to find His pleasure and joy at least partly in those whom He has saved. There could be nothing more wonderful than that. Moreover, the Lord has granted us to share in His work. Though we are unworthy, we will take part in God’s execution of His vengeance (vv. 6–9). Surely, it is cause for us to rejoice that we will share in the Creator’s work.

God commands us to rejoice in Him and gives us the reason and power to do so. In his sermon “Jubilee Joy—or, Believers Joyful in Their King,” C.H. Spurgeon writes that God “would have His people happy and, by His Grace, He makes them so! We rejoice in our King because our King makes us rejoice! . . . Blessed religion, in which happiness has become a duty!” 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

All of us go through periods where we may not really feel like rejoicing in the Lord. At such times, we should rejoice anyway, and we should fulfill our duty to seek our joy in Him. But we should also look to have this joy flow from hearts that really want to do it, not begrudgingly or reluctantly. We can cultivate in ourselves this desire by thinking on all that the Lord has done for us and by remembering that He takes pleasure in us, His people.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 25:9
Joel 2:18–27
Luke 10:21–24
Romans 5:11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 30–31
1 Peter 3

WISDOM AND THE FORBIDDEN WOMAN

TUE | NOV
24

PROVERBS 7:1–20 “Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ and call insight your intimate friend, to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words” (vv. 4–5).

Life in this fallen world means that we will face sinful temptations of various kinds, and the Bible notes that one of the most powerful of these is the temptation to sexual immorality. David’s life is an implicit warning to us in this regard. If he, one of the godliest people in ancient Israel, could commit adultery (2 Sam. 11–12), then surely we should not think that such a sin would be impossible for us to commit. When it comes to the power of this temptation, however, the book of Proverbs stands out in its depiction of how powerfully enticing sexual sin can be. In fact, the prologue of the book (chaps. 1–9) repeatedly warns against the power and destructive nature of the adulteress.

Today’s passage is one of the clearest warnings from this prologue concerning adultery. Yet before mentioning the adulteress specifically, the opening verses of this passage exhort the reader to search after wisdom as an intimate friend and bind the commandments on the fingers and heart (Prov. 7:1–4). We see here a call to take the lessons of Proverbs and internalize them, to memorize these wise sayings. Knowing and believing these teachings, we read, is the way we will be kept “from the adulteress with her smooth words” (v. 5). Sin is seductive and deceptive, especially sexual sin, and the only way to stand fast against it is to know the truths of divine wisdom before we enter into the arena of temptation. Given the teaching of the rest of Scripture, we can broaden the instruction in Proverbs 7:1–5 to cover all of God’s Word and all sin. That is, the key way to be prepared to resist temptation is to know and trust in the Word of God. Deuteronomy 6:1–9, for example, calls us to put the law of God on our hearts and to have it on our minds and in our speech at all times. When Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan successfully, He did so by His knowledge of biblical content and its true meaning (Matt. 4:1–11). If even the Savior resisted temptation by knowing the Word of God, how much more do we need this knowledge?

The remainder of today’s passage focuses on the smooth speech of the adulteress and the promises that she cannot fulfill (Prov. 7:5–20). Of special note here is her reference to having made sacrifices and paid her vows (vv. 14–15), a reference to the idolatry of the nations that incorporated cult prostitution into the worship of their gods. By yielding to the adulteress, the young man would be joining a cult prostitute in idolatrous worship. 

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 23:17–18
Proverbs 23:26–28
Micah 1:2–7
Revelation 17

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 32–34
1 Peter 4

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

The temptation to sexual sin does not, in our day, always present itself as a temptation to idolatry. However, the Bible’s teaching on sexual sin makes it clear that sexual sin is not only a sin against the body, but it is also a sin against the Lord. To lie with one who is not one’s lawful spouse is to forsake our union with Christ and be joined to another (1 Cor. 6:15–20). We flee sexual sin not only to protect our families but also to protect our very souls.

THE GATEKEEPER OF DEATH

WED | NOV
25

PROVERBS 7:21–27 “Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death” (v. 27).

Satan is a clever foe, and one of his greatest strategies is to make sin seem right and desirable. We see this all the way back in Eden, where he denied the prospect of death for eating the forbidden fruit and instead set the fruit forth as the means of becoming like the Lord (Gen. 3:1–5). Furthermore, we see the attractiveness of sin even in our own experience. Rarely do we encounter a temptation and say something like, “This is really going to hurt, but I’m going to do it anyway.” Instead, we give in to temptation because it promises pleasure. We believe the lie that the sinful behavior in question really is not all that bad—and, in any case, no one will find out about it.

The adulteress of Proverbs 7 sets the prospect of sinning in secret before the young man, using smooth and deceitful words to entice him to lie with her. She makes sin seem as attractive as possible, a delight to the senses and an act that her husband will never hear about (vv. 14–20). Sin hides its ugliness and destructive power behind a facade of beauty, and while this is true of all transgression, it is particularly true of sexual sin. Illicit sexual encounters, pornography, and so forth come to us—at least initially—not as things that bring death and destruction but as good and beautiful things.

It is all a meticulously crafted lie, as today’s passage emphasizes. The foolish young man who heeds the call of the adulteress will find nothing but destruction in her arms. He will stumble into her trap as an unsuspecting animal is captured by the slaughterhouse or the hunter’s snare (vv. 21–23). Only those who are prepared beforehand and know her wily ways can hope to escape. The father in this passage is warning the son now, before it is too late. The son cannot hope to resist her if he starts down the path to her house, for she has been an instrument of death to the souls of a veritable army (vv. 24–26).

Death comes to all who give in to an adulterous woman or a man who is an adulterer (v. 27). Adultery and sexual immorality leave disease and destroyed families in their wake. Even worse, as Jesus teaches us, they will bring those who engage in them impenitently straight into hell (Matt. 5:27–30). Such sins—indeed all sin—must be avoided at all costs, and the way we do that is to be alert lest we allow a temptation to blossom into fuller evil. Matthew Henry comments, “The flames of lust, if not quenched by repentance and mortification, will burn to the lowest hell. Therefore stand in awe and sin not.” 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

In our society, which glorifies sexual pleasure as the greatest good of all, we face many external pressures to fall into sexual immorality. Understanding that the promises of sexual sin are false ones, therefore, requires continual immersion in the Word of God and reminders that our Lord blesses only those relationships sanctioned in His Word. Let us endeavor to meditate on God’s truth so that we will not believe the lies of sexual sin.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Leviticus 20:10–20
Proverbs 2
Ezekiel 23
2 Peter 2:4–10

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 35–38
1 Peter 5

A COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP

THU | NOV
26

PSALM 132:1–10 “I will not enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob” (vv. 3–5).

David stands out in Scripture as “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), so if we want a model of what it means to love what the Lord loves, we will not go far wrong if we seek to learn our piety from David’s example. Of course, David was not a perfect man, as seen in his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam. 11–12). Yet when Nathan the prophet confronted David for his transgression, David agreed with the prophet that what he did was evil, and he threw himself on God’s mercy. He reflected what God loves by loving the truth enough not to hide his sin any longer and by loving divine mercy enough to believe that the Lord really does pardon those who forsake their sin (Ps. 51). This is what it means to be a person after God’s own heart.

That David was a man after God’s own heart is also seen in his commitment to the Lord’s worship. Because there is nothing more wonderful than the glory and holiness of the Lord (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 29:2), God seeks the exaltation of His name around the world. This benefits His creatures, for in worshiping Him they discover their true purpose and experience His blessed presence. It follows, then, that those who are committed to the worship of our Creator are men and women after His heart, for they have the same priorities that He does.

Psalm 132:3–5, in particular, illustrates David’s commitment to the praise of our Maker and King. As we see, finding a fit habitation for the Lord was so important to David that he vowed not to sleep until God had a house. We find the background of these verses in 2 Samuel 5–6, where we see that among David’s first actions was to bring the ark of the covenant—the footstool of God’s throne—to Jerusalem, the city the Lord chose for the permanent dwelling of His special presence under the old covenant (Deut. 12:1–28). David could not rest until God had a proper sanctuary where His people could worship Him in truth, and this desire was not quenched after he brought the ark to the city. Instead, he made it his aim to build an even grander temple for the Lord, although God told him this goal was to be fulfilled by his son Solomon (2 Sam. 7:1–17).

Under the new covenant, one of the primary ways that we show the same kind of commitment to God’s worship that David had is to live as temples that are fit for divine habitation. We are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16–17), and holy lives form the environment in which the Lord is glad to dwell and through which He is most rightly worshiped. 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

Augustine of Hippo comments on today’s passage: “Dost thou wish to be a place for the Lord? Be thou poor in spirit, and contrite, and trembling at the word of God, and thou wilt thyself be made what thou seekest.” In His grace, God calls us to Himself and chooses to dwell within us. We never have to fear that He will leave us, but we make ourselves vessels that are more fit for His presence as we pursue lives of holiness in faith and repentance.

A THRONE AND TEMPLE IN ZION

FRI | NOV

27

PSALM 132:11-18 “There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine” (vv. 17-18).

Right worship and everlasting authority are inseparable, as we learn from God’s covenant with David. The Lord removed David’s predecessor, Saul, from the throne of Israel when Saul acted rashly and did not worship God in the appointed manner (1 Sam. 13:8-15). Moreover, God confirmed His rejection of Saul when the king did not kill Agag as he was supposed to (chap. 15), thereby reflecting a heart not intent on worshipping the Lord. David, on the other hand, was made a party to an everlasting covenant with God on account of his commitment to the worship of Lord (2 Sam. 7:1-17). God promised that David would never fail to have a son on the throne of Israel, that his authority would be exercised forever.

In the Davidic covenant, we see the interplay of conditionality and unconditionality with respect to the kingship of Israel. Certainly God was not obligated to choose David’s line, nor was He obligated to grant him a perpetual reign over His people. This choice was by grace and guaranteed by the Lord’s gracious decision to swear an oath, as today’s passage indicates (Ps. 132:11). Yet, we also see conditional aspects of this covenant. Psalm 132:12 also tells us that the sons of David have to keep the Lord’s covenant regulations if they are to sit on the throne. The Davidic covenant is unconditional—David cannot fail to have a son on the throne—and yet it is also conditional—only the obedient son of David will sit on his throne forever.

This apparent paradox is resolved in Christ, the son of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:1-4). Being the eternal second person of the Trinity, His reign is necessarily eternal. Yet Jesus also enjoyed exaltation as the God-man to an everlasting reign on David’s throne because of His perfect obedience to His Father’s commands (Phil. 2:5-11). As a man, Jesus kept the Lord’s covenant. Thus, we can be confident in the psalmist’s declaration that God’s chosen king will rule from Zion, and we will worship Him forever (vv. 13-18).

Until Christ returns, enemies will rebel against His rule, but their eventual defeat is sure (v. 18). John Calvin comments, “The . . . people of God will never enjoy such peace on earth as altogether to escape being assaulted by the variety of enemies which Satan stirs up for their destruction. It is enough to have it declared, upon divine authority, that their attempts shall be unsuccessful, and that they will retire eventually with ignominy and disgrace.” **T**

CORAM DEO



Living before the face of God

God’s promises to David are sure, and this is good news for us. Because Christ surely reigns over all creation, we will surely reign with Him as Scripture has told us (2 Tim. 2:12). This means that any defeat that the kingdom of God seems to suffer in this present age is not really a defeat at all. The Lord will reign victorious, and all His and our enemies will acknowledge this reign. In Him we can endure any hardship or attack that we and the rest of His church suffer in the meantime.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 89:35-37
Revelation 5:9-10

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Ezekiel 39-40
2 Peter 2

THE WEEKEND

Ezekiel 41-44
2 Peter 3-1 John 1

The Answers Are in the Front of the Book

DEREK W. H. THOMAS

One sometimes gets the impression that the Bible doesn’t make it easy for someone just to pick up and read. Let me be more specific: the New Testament starts off with some difficult paragraphs. Editors can get a little snippy about “backstories” that bog down the first chapter of a book. We can imagine an editor saying to a prospective author submitting a first novel, “What the reader wants is the plotline, and this doesn’t happen until well into the third chapter.”

Take Matthew, for example. The first book of the New Testament begins with several paragraphs of “begats” and “begottens.” Seriously? Yes. Instead of a nice story about a manger and Bethlehem and angels and the baby Jesus, Matthew gets into genealogy and ancestry.

Why does Matthew do this? Is it because first-century readers were easier to please than twenty-first-century ones? Hardly. Matthew is telling us that if we are ever going to understand who Jesus is, we cannot simply make a beeline for Mary, Jesus’ mother, and Joseph, the adoptive father. No, we have to go back—a long way back—into the Old Testament. The story of Jesus begins with David and Abraham: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1).

Why David? Because God made a promise to him that his kingdom would be universal and eternal (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:3-4, 20-29; Isa. 9:6-7).

Why Abraham? Because God made a promise that through the patriarch

blessing would come for the whole world (Gen. 12:1-13; 22:15-18).

Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God made a promise to bless the entire world—it would have cosmic parameters, a blessing that would last for all eternity. Note that at the end of Matthew’s introduction, he cites a passage from Isaiah that states that the Messiah will be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). Yes, despite the claims of philosophical and semantic naysayers, Isaiah did intend to say “virgin” and not simply “young woman.”

A lesson follows immediately: Matthew is saying that you cannot understand the story of Jesus (or the New Testament) without understanding the story of the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament, including Jesus, makes any real sense.

A quick question, then: How much time are you (or your church) giving to the Old Testament? Your daily devotional reading should include the Old Testament (as well as the New). Your diet of sermons and Sunday school instruction should have ample reference to the Old Testament, too. Without it, you are going to have a very deficient understanding of Jesus and the gospel. And perhaps, not only deficient, but degraded. **T**

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AWAITING GOD'S DELIVERANCE

MON | NOV
30

PROVERBS 20:22 “Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.”

It has been said that “revenge is sweet.” This statement captures how we may feel when someone has wronged us and we are out to see the perpetrator earn his comeuppance. Being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), we have an innate sense of justice because He is just, and so we desire for wrongs to be righted.

Yet because we are sinners, we are apt to overcompensate for how we are wronged by others. Caught up in the heat of the moment, we can repay the evildoer far more than he is actually owed when our anger gets out of hand. Scripture recognizes this truth implicitly in the principle of “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Prov. 21:24), which limits the repayment of wrongs so that one does not take an arm, leg, and eye for an eye and a life for a tooth. Furthermore, we are not only prone to overcompensate for being wronged, but we must also note that our pursuit of vengeance can never fully satisfy us. We cannot make others answer perfectly for their crimes; that is the prerogative of God alone.

Such principles undoubtedly lay in the background of today’s passage. Proverbs 20:22 calls us not to act hastily to repay the evil done against us personally; rather, we are to wait for the Lord’s deliverance. Given that this proverb appears in a book that is concerned to help us rightly deal with fools (26:4–5), the focus of the proverb we have chosen for today’s study is to not seek vengeance for the insults and other personal wrongs that the fools whom we know may commit against us. It is not a principle that is supposed to guide the judicial system, for the Lord specifically instituted government to punish evil (Rom. 13:1–7). But the principles that God revealed for the government, such as “eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” are not to be applied to every single offense we endure. Jesus Himself tells us this in His teaching against retaliation in Matthew 5:38–42. It is not wrong to pursue justice or to repay criminals for their offenses; the point is that judicial principles should not be applied to every minor personal encounter we have with an enemy.

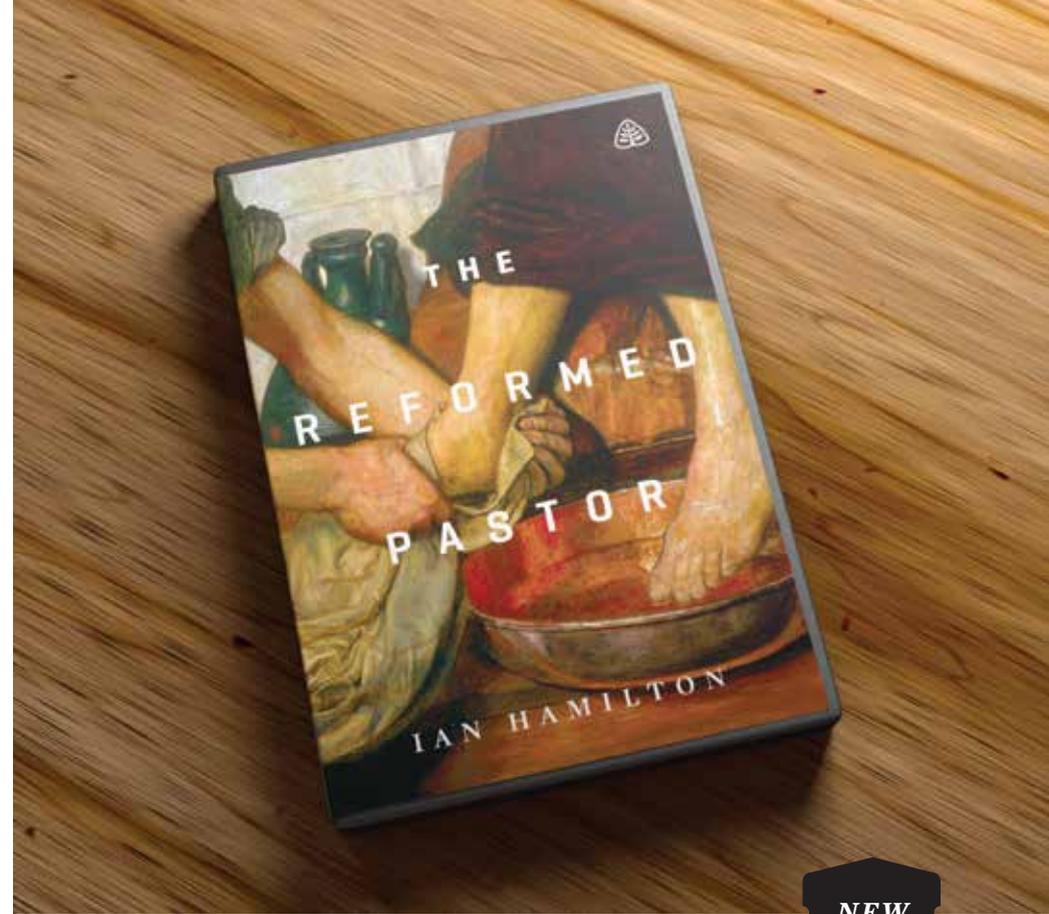
When we experience a wrong that is relatively insignificant in the grand scheme of things, we are not to seek vengeance. We are unlikely to get it anyway, and if we do, it will be less than fully satisfying because only God judges perfectly. Trusting the Lord to repay our wrongs also helps us avoid bitterness. If we believe that He will finally set things right, anger will not consume us when those who wrong us seem to escape what they are due. 

CORAM DEO  *Living before the face of God*

Christians are to be known for their love for their enemies and for each other (Matt. 5:43–48; John 13:34–35), and such love does not seek vengeance for every wrong that is ever done to us. Of course, this is difficult, as we all seek to be repaid for the evil we experience. However, if we trust in the Lord for vengeance and pray that He will make us patient with sinners just as He is patient with sinners, the Spirit will enable us not to seek vengeance when it is not appropriate to do so.

FOR FURTHER STUDY
Deuteronomy 32:35–36
Isaiah 35:4
Romans 12:14–21
Hebrews 10:30–31

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR
Ezekiel 45–46
1 John 2



NEW

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SIN, REPENTANCE, AND WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Our smallest offense deserves the full wrath of God. That's hard to hear if we forget that God has not only covered our sin in Christ but also allows us to approach Him continually to receive that grace anew. We also know that God is holy—set apart in His perfection, glory,

and majesty. We are sinners who sin every day. Our sin should grieve us but not condemn, because we serve a God who is good and gracious but also holy and just. So, what are we to do with this enigma of our sinfulness and God's holiness that clings so close to us? Repent and receive God's amazing grace.

GOD, THE BOOGEYMAN?

There it is again. That eerie dark shadow lurking in the closet. He seems so unpredictable. What might he do next? What might happen? Will he jump out and get me?

Those used to be my terrified thoughts as a young child. I would fearfully snuggle into my bed, waiting for the boogeyman to jump out of the closet and get me. When I became a Christian, I realized that much of the way I related to God was with that childlike fear of the boogeyman. I felt like I didn't have much control over my life, but instead of realizing I was in the hands of a good and loving Father, I viewed Him as tyrannical. He had all the control, I thought, but the only love He showed was on the cross (which of course would have

been enough). I really did think God was like the boogeyman hanging out in my closet, just waiting for the right moment to punish me or cause some harm.

How sad. If we only know God as the sovereign ruler of the world, then we might make the same mistake I did as a young Christian. It wasn't until I understood the great love of God that I began to see His ways as good and loving. Yes, even those tough things in our lives come from God's loving hand (1 Peter 1:3–9; Heb. 12:3–17). We can rest in the knowledge that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways, and yet He is still thoughtful of man (Ps. 8:4; Isa. 55:8).

We see evidence of this in Isaiah 55, which begins with an urgent call for us to come and drink: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (v. 1). God delights in meeting our needs (spiritual and otherwise). We have a Father who invites us to the throne of grace to receive help in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). And though I didn't fully grasp the significance of the cross as a young Christian, I now understand that God displayed His ultimate love for us through the sacrifice of His Son on our behalf. Is there a greater love than that?

God is not the boogeyman. He is the

sovereign, loving, awesome God who came to redeem a people for Himself. He is good and loves us relentlessly. So, in response to our knowledge of His loving character, we discipline ourselves to repent daily of the sin for which Christ has already died.

WALK IN THE LIGHT

One of the many side effects I've experienced from getting older is an inability to see the road while driving at night. Everything glows. If it rains, it's as if someone is shining a bright light in my eyes. Like the responsible adult that I am, I have yet to go to an eye doctor. So, I'm driving around in the dark, blind as a bat.

Thankfully, we don't have to do this as Christians. We've seen the light. The gospel has shined light into darkness. And this light isn't disorienting; it's a

WE CONFESS OUR SINS TO GOD—ACKNOWLEDGING OUR GREAT NEED FOR HIM TO TURN US FROM OUR SIN—AND WHAT DOES HE DO? HE DOES WHAT HE'S ALREADY DONE—POURS OUT THE GRACE WE NEED TO CHANGE. HIS WRATH WAS RESERVED FOR JESUS. WE DON'T RECEIVE PUNISHMENT OR WRATH FOR OUR SINS—WE RECEIVE GRACE.

gift of grace that purifies and guides us.

But perhaps you've been walking around like you are still in the dark. God calls you to walk in the light. To walk in the light means to walk in the goodness and grace of God, living a life that is reflective of the Savior, and walking in a manner worthy of the gospel. Repentance is one of the clearest ways to walk in this light. The Apostle John tells us, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). To walk in darkness is either to walk with the knowledge of sin and ignore it or to

walk as if we are completely without sin, never repenting (1 John 1:8). The grace of God allows us to not only acknowledge that we continue to struggle with sin, but also to turn from our sin.

We see clearly that our walking in the light isn't perfect—not even close. We will never reach perfection on this earth. That's why repentance is such a beautiful gift from our God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Oh, what grace. We confess our sins to God—acknowledging our great need for Him to turn us from our sin—and what does He do? He does what He's already done—pours out the grace we need to change. His wrath was reserved for Jesus. We don't receive punishment or wrath for our sins—we receive grace. There are, of

course, consequences for sin, but even so, our standing before God doesn't change.

God is sovereign and rules over all. He is holy, yet because of Jesus we can approach Him. Run, don't walk, to the throne of grace. Don't walk like a blind man while you can walk in the light that is available to you. Walk in the light. Confess your sin and receive grace. There is no condemnation for you. 

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THE ESSENTIAL MARKS OF A PREACHER

“**H**ow shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14). With airtight logic, the Apostle Paul sets forth the indispensable human link in fulfilling the Great Commission—the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In so doing, he instructs us in the way of the kingdom,

testified that he ministered as one “under compulsion,” fearful of God’s judgment if he did not preach.

In his *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon argued,

“The first sign of the heavenly calling is an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work. In order to be a true call to the ministry, there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling to others what God has done to our own souls.”

Those who have been most used of God carried this weight of the soul. Men such as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Spurgeon owned this inner compulsion that, like an artesian well, continuously poured power and urgency into their ministries.

The preacher may not feel every Sunday what Richard Baxter felt when he famously resolved “to preach as a dying man, to dying men; as one not sure to ever preach again.” But the one called of God knows a constant, ongoing desire for the work of ministry.

A HOLY LIFE

First Timothy 3:1–7 offers a clear and nonnegotiable list of character qualifications for the ministry. This list is prescriptive, not descriptive; it is regulative, not suggestive. In summary, the minister of God must be above reproach.

that in every generation God is calling out preachers to serve His church.

Paul’s timeless question is especially relevant for the twenty-first-century church. Evangelical churches are in the midst of a massive generational transition, with vacant pastorates and empty pulpits dotting the landscape.

Vacant pulpits ought not induce the wringing of hands. Christ is building His church. He does not hope for ministerial volunteers; He sovereignly sets apart pastors to serve His church and preach His gospel.

Nonetheless, the church is to call out the called, and every qualified man of God should consider if God is calling him to pastoral ministry.

How might one know if God is calling him to the ministry? There are four essential marks.

A BURNING DESIRE

The leading indicator of a call to ministry is a burning desire for the work. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul begins the list of ministry qualifications by asserting, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” In fact, Paul

Before a church evaluates a pastoral candidate’s gifting or talent, it must first evaluate his character. To be sure, for a man aspiring to ministry, it may help to be winsome, to be eloquent, or to possess a magnetic personality. Yet, before one looks for these secondary—and tertiary—strengths, one must first meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3.

What is more, the 1 Timothy 3 qualifications do not simply represent a one-time threshold to cross. Rather, they are a lifestyle to be maintained, a character to be cultivated, and an ongoing accountability to God’s Word and God’s people. One’s call to ministry is inextricably linked to one’s biblical character. The two cannot—and must not—be decoupled.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF 1 TIMOTHY 3 ARE A LIFESTYLE TO BE MAINTAINED, A CHARACTER TO BE CULTIVATED, AND AN ONGOING ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD’S WORD AND GOD’S PEOPLE. ONE’S CALL TO MINISTRY IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO ONE’S BIBLICAL CHARACTER. THE TWO CANNOT—AND MUST NOT—BE DECOUPLED.

A SURRENDERED WILL

The Apostle Paul was set apart from his mother’s womb and testified that he “became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me” (Col. 1:25). Paul chose to preach because God chose him to preach. Every call to preach originates in heaven. Our response is total surrender.

In fact, “surrendering to ministry” used to be common parlance in evangelical churches. We would do well to recover that phrase, because that is how one enters the ministry—through surrender. God’s call to ministry comes with the expectation that you will go whenever and wherever He calls you. His ministers

are His agents, deployed for service according to His providential plan.

AN ABILITY TO TEACH

Finally, the one called to the ministry must be able to teach the Word of God. In 1 Timothy 3, this is the distinguishing qualification between the office of the deacon and elder. There are a thousand ways a minister can serve the church, but there is one, indispensable, and nonnegotiable responsibility—to preach and teach the Word of God.

Does the preparation and delivery of sermons fulfill you? Do the people of God benefit from your ministry of the Word? Does your church sense your gifting and affirm your ability to preach or teach about God?

CONCLUSION

Any man can choose the ministry, and too many unqualified men have. Only a select few are called by God. Discerning between being called of men and called of God is urgently important.

If God is calling you to be His servant, then realize, in the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “the work of preaching is the highest and greatest and most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” If God has called you to be His preacher, never stoop to be a king of men. **T**

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THE GOSPEL FOR THE HOPELESS

TT: WHAT IS “WHO WILL STAND”? WHAT LED YOU TO START THIS MINISTRY?

JB: I’ve been ministering at the Orlando Women’s Center for eleven years. I’m blessed beyond anything I could have imagined as I have been able to see God turn the hearts of hundreds who saw no hope. I started the website whowillstand.net to encourage other men to “adopt” their local abortion clinics and see the Lord work there as He does here.

TT: WHAT IS A TYPICAL DAY OF MINISTRY LIKE AT THE ABORTION CLINIC?

JB: We pray for those on their way to the clinic, asking God to work on their hearts. When they arrive, we introduce ourselves, letting them know we are here for them and that God sent us to call them to trust Him. We give them the “In the Womb” tract and a card to the local crisis pregnancy center, which will do an immediate ultrasound. God turns many hearts right away.

When others go into the clinic for their paperwork, I preach. The building is twenty-five feet from the sidewalk. They hear every word. God uses His Word to move people’s hearts and open ears. Usually within an hour, someone begins asking questions or chooses life. We stay until the end. We have seen some literally “get off the table” and come out. God doesn’t work on our timetable.

TT: WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTION EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS HAVE ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN WHO PROCURE ABORTIONS?

JB: That they don’t know what they’re doing. God has written His law on everyone’s heart. That’s why they’re so angry to find us here. Second Timothy 2:25–26 says, “In humility [correct] those who are

in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (NKJV). People come in knowing what they’re doing, yet are spiritually blind, caught in a trap laid by the devil.

Baby sacrifice has been with us throughout history. There’s a demonic battle that has gone on since the days of Baal worship. Ephesians 6:12 says, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.” We come with the only answer to spiritual blindness: the gospel (Rom. 1:16). The Lord in His grace goes to the “gates of hell,” calling them to repentance. People respond to this almost every day.

TT: IN THE CHURCH’S RESPONSE TO THE ABORTION CRISIS, WHAT HAS THE CHURCH DONE RIGHT? WHAT HAS THE CHURCH DONE WRONG?

JB: I’m blessed to be a member of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla., which has organized prayer support as well as Bible studies and groups that pray for the ministry at Orlando Women’s Center. All our pastors—R.C. Sproul, Burk Parsons, Don Bailey, and Kevin Struyk—preach against abortion, encouraging us to fight. They encourage us to get out on the street to love our neighbors and plead the cause

of the widow and orphan. They even come to encourage us on the street. The students of Reformation Bible College are also encouraged to come. There’s not an hour that Orlando Women’s Center is open that a member of Saint Andrew’s isn’t there. When a woman chooses life, she’s turned over to a group of ladies from the church. They love and encourage her and see what her needs are. Sometimes a deacon is needed to see what kind of material needs there may be. We also have baby showers, etc. Many of the women live far



ILLUSTRATION OF JOHN BARROS BY NOUNIA FOR TABLETALK MAGAZINE

John Barros

is director of Who Will Stand, a ministry dedicated to giving a voice to unborn children in Orlando, Fla. Each week, more than one hundred babies are killed at the Orlando Women’s Center. Every morning, Mr. Barros offers truth and love to abortion-bound mothers and fathers. He and his team pray, preach, and offer alternatives to the patients of OWC, including free sonograms, medical care, and safe housing. Members of the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF), Mr. Barros and his wife, Vicki, have been involved in full-time sidewalk ministry outside the abortion clinic since 2010. In addition, Mr. Barros is a chaplain at the 33rd Street jail in Orlando.



from the church. We pick them up on Sunday mornings for worship. Saint Andrew's serves them both physically and spiritually. We host a Bible study for those who have had an abortion and have come to Christ but wrestle with guilt.

Sadly, I think most churches don't do anything. Francis Schaeffer said, "Every abortion clinic should have a sign in front stating, 'Open by the permission of the church.'" If the church were to rise up with a united front, would there be any more abortions? Dr. James Pendergraft,

life. God shows us that these little babies are precious gifts that He has a claim on.

The church also has an obligation to serve the parents. If we want these babies to live, we must help with spiritual and tangible needs. Our deacons do the "nuts and bolts" work with those who need help—coming up with budgets, helping them to find services, and looking for jobs.

The church serves those who have had abortions by telling them the truth. If God has granted them repentance, they need to know that they're forgiven, that 1 John 1:7

"We come with the only answer to spiritual blindness: the gospel. The Lord in His grace goes to the 'gates of hell,' calling them to repentance. People respond to this almost every day."

the owner of the abortion clinic where I minister, said, "If it wasn't for the evangelical church sending me their daughters, I'd be out of business." Most people who come to kill their babies claim to be Christians. The church needs to repent of our apathy.

TT: HOW CAN CHRISTIANS AND CHURCHES SERVE WOMEN WHO ARE THINKING ABOUT HAVING AN ABORTION? HOW CAN THEY SERVE WOMEN WHO HAVE ALREADY HAD AN ABORTION?

JB: First, the church needs to preach truth. Proverbs 6 says God hates the hands that shed innocent blood. It's not a political theory of abortion that God hates. It's the "hands," the people involved in killing vulnerable babies. God is the author of

tells us the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us of all sin, including the sin of abortion.

TT: WHAT OBJECTIONS DO YOU HEAR MOST OFTEN FROM MEN AND WOMEN WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO PERSUADE THEM NOT TO PROCEED WITH AN ABORTION? HOW DO YOU ANSWER THOSE OBJECTIONS?

JB: First, "'Thou shall not judge' and you are judging me." I tell them I love them and am there not to judge but to warn and help them. The close second is, "This is my choice, my legal right." I explain that God's law prohibits the murder of babies, that just because something is legal under man's law doesn't make it right.

TT: SUPPOSE A LOCAL CHURCH WANTS TO DO MORE TO COMBAT ABORTION AND MINISTER TO THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERING GOING THROUGH WITH AN ABORTION. WHERE DO YOU START?

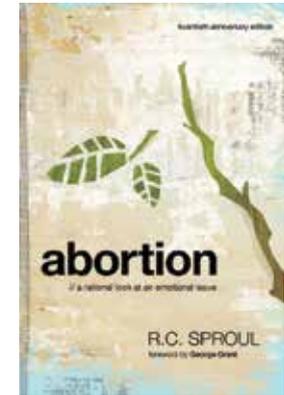
JB: The first step would be to find out when they're open. Go before the clinic opens, offering help when the women arrive. I use the "In the Womb" tracts and a flier from a local crisis pregnancy center. Every abortion mill is different logistically, so they would have to adapt. I have some friends who minister at a clinic where they have to be some distance away. God's been good; they see fruit even under these conditions. The main thing is to let the women know you love and care about them. The rest will fall into place.

TT: TELL US ABOUT SOMEONE TO WHOM YOU HAVE RECENTLY MINISTERED WHO HAS BEEN CHANGED BY THE GOSPEL.

JB: Last week, a young lady named Jenny pulled in. I offered her some brochures. She rolled down her window, and I told her about this place and that we could help. She listened as I warned her about what God says about abortion and how He sent me to call her to trust Him. She trembled, saying, "I'm not doing this." I called the others to pray with her. After that, she wanted to talk more, saying she's a Christian who'd fallen into sin. Her mother is a believer, and she was afraid to tell her of her baby. I said she could have gone to other clinics in Orlando, but God sent her to this one so that she could hear Him say, "Trust Me." She sobbed uncontrollably and said she'd woken up that morning praying that God would send someone to stop her. She and her boyfriend later went to True Life Choice and had an ultrasound. They saw their baby together, and God touched her boyfriend too.

She called later, still nervous about her mother. I put her in touch with a dear lady in the church who agreed to go with

Jenny to tell her mother. Before she could get there, Jenny called, grateful for our prayers and saying she'd told her mother and that everything went well. On Sunday, Jenny and the girl's mother came to Saint Andrew's to worship. Her mother thanked me for saving her grandbaby. I reminded her that only Jesus has the power to save. There is nothing like this ministry. **TT**

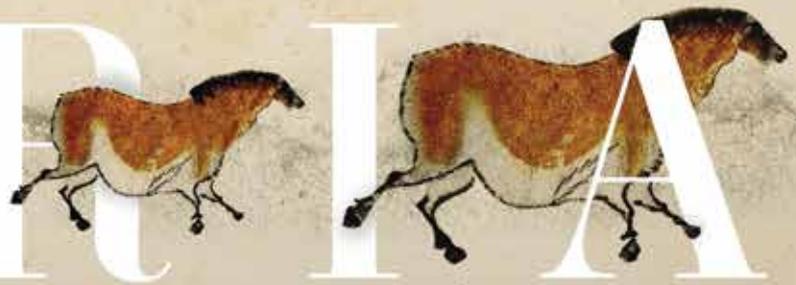
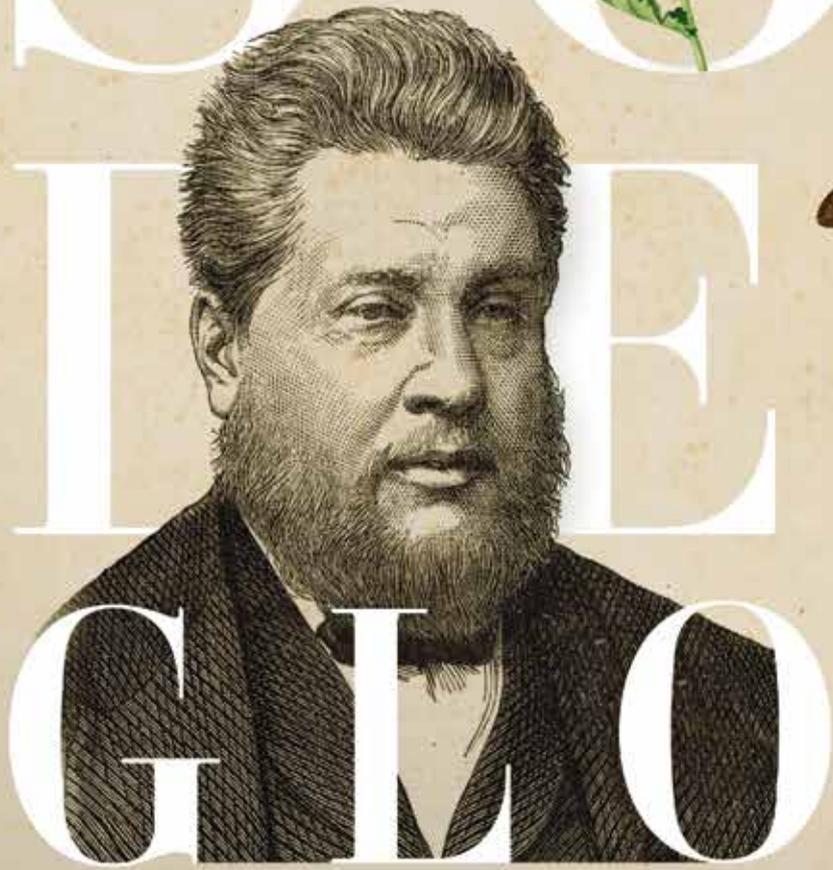


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THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

It was during the last quarter of the second century in the eastern Mediterranean, possibly in the city of Alexandria, that a man by the name of Diognetus met a Christian author as well as some other believers. It is not surprising that as Diognetus spent time with this man and the others,

he began to ask them questions: *What do you Christians believe about God? Why do you reject the gods that other Greeks and Romans worship? Why do you Christians use the Jewish Old Testament even though you're not Jews?* And Diognetus was amazed when he saw the way these Christians related to one another, for it was evident that they loved each other like people in the same family were to love each other. Why was that?

Simple though these questions might seem, they actually touch on utterly central matters: Who is the God that Christians worship, and what difference does this worship make for daily life? A number of discussions about these subjects ensued, and it became very evident that Diognetus was earnest about knowing the Truth. The Christian author decided, therefore, to write to his unbelieving friend and explain in a fairly succinct form what Christians think about these matters.

The resulting letter, which historians now call *The Letter to Diognetus*, is a veritable gem of early Christian apologetics.

Beyond the fact that the author obviously benefited from a superb education and that he knew portions of the New Testament extremely well, scholars have

no real idea as to who wrote this letter.

IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

The author of the letter notes that, unlike the Jews, Christians are not to be distinguished from their fellow Greeks and Romans by virtue of their geographical locale, distinct language, or various unique customs of dress, food, and other matters of daily life. When it comes to all of these things, they lived like the other citizens of the Roman Empire. Yet, their Christian commitment did draw certain lines of demarcation between themselves and their surrounding culture:

They live in their own native lands, but as sojourners; they share all things as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. . . . They marry, like everyone else, have children, but they do not expose their infants. They share a common table, but not the marriage bed. They are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They spend [their days] on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. (Letter to Diognetus 5.5–9)

Here the New Testament language of sojourning and heavenly citizenship is pressed into service to affirm the paradox of Christian existence. The Christian life is one that was similar in so many ways to the mores of Greco-Roman society, but in certain key areas—notably with regard to the treatment of children and sexual expression—it bore witness to a completely different ethic.

ON ABORTION AND SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Although abortion did take place in Greek and Roman culture, it was not a common solution for unwanted children, since it posed a huge danger to the life of the mother. Hence, the preferred method to solve the problem of unwanted progeny was to leave them in the street after birth. There, they would die of exposure or be picked up by slave traders or brothel owners—or thankfully, in some cases,

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS ONE THAT WAS SIMILAR IN SO MANY WAYS TO THE MORES OF GRECO-ROMAN SOCIETY, BUT IN CERTAIN KEY AREAS IT BORE WITNESS TO A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ETHIC.

babies were picked up by Christians and raised in believing households. Greeks and Romans saw nothing wrong with the practice of exposure, but Christians rightly knew that such an ethical stance was tantamount to murder.

The other key area in which these Christians differed from their culture was with regard to sexual expression. Many Greco-Roman pagans saw nothing wrong with casual sex with those who were not their spouses—the use of slaves in this way was extremely common. But this was not the Christian way. The church was not hesitant to affirm the goodness of sex, but it had boundaries—namely, marriage between a husband and wife.

THE GROUND OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

Further on in the letter, the anonymous author grounds these vital ethical perspectives in the cross. The letter says:

[God] himself gave his own Son as a ransom for us—the Holy One for the godless, the Innocent One for the wicked, the Righteous One for the unrighteous, the Incorruptible for the corruptible, the Immortal for the mortal. For what else was able to cover our sins except his righteousness? In whom could we, who were lawless and godless, have been justified, but in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange! O the inscrutable work of God! O blessings beyond all expectation!—that the wickedness of many should be hidden in the one Righteous Man, and the righteousness of the One should justify the many wicked! (Diognetus 9.2–5)

The author is overwhelmed by what took place at the cross—lost in rapture, awe, and praise, as Charles Wesley might put it.

This is why Christians live lives of sexual purity: having experienced God's holy love for them, they can do nothing else but “imitate his [i.e., God's] goodness” (*Diognetus* 10.3). Though wholly counter-cultural in its day, this expression of sexual purity won many to Christ. May it do so again. ■

Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin is professor of church history and biblical spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He is author of several books, including *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*.

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