



ESSAYS ON REVIVAL
In Wrath May God Remember Mercy

Allen M. Baker III

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Revival
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BOOK COVER

The Connecticut River valley, which is captured beautifully in the book cover photograph, was the place of mighty movements of God in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Men like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Asahel Nettleton, David Brainerd, Lyman Beecher, and James Brainerd Taylor all preached in the towns up and down the Connecticut River. God poured out His Spirit there in great power, bringing conviction of sin and conversion to thousands. May our great God do the same again in our day.

“View south from Sugarloaf Mountain, Deerfield MA” by John Phelan is licensed CC BY 3.0 / Edited

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forward	Pg viii
The Folly of Leaving Your First Love	Pg 1
Election and Evangelism	Pg 5
Slaves of Christ	Pg 11
Joy All the Time	Pg 14
Perfection	Pg 17
Are You Known in Hell?	Pg 20
The Trial of Riches	Pg 23
Wrong Notions	Pg 26
How Dark the Gold Has Become	Pg 29
We Must Have Revival	Pg 33
How We Are Saved?	Pg 37
Muslim Prayer in the City of Thomas Hooker	Pg 40
Doers of the Word	Pg 43
Evangelical and Reformed People in Hell	Pg 47
Holy Ghost Fire	Pg 50
The Fulness of the Spirit, Desperately Needed	Pg 55
Pursuing a Personal Inquisition of the Heart	Pg 59
See Them as God Sees Them	Pg 63
Read, Weep, and Pray	Pg 67

Taking a Nip of the Spirit	Pg 71
Men with Breasts	Pg 75
Desperation and Hope	Pg 78
A Divine Swagger	Pg 82
We Must Have Evangelists	Pg 85
We Still Need Revival	Pg 88
Will We Pay the Price for Revival?	Pg 91
The Prayer of Faith	Pg 94
You Will Go to Hell	Pg 97
Pray Like Elijah	Pg 101
A Terrible Presumption	Pg 105
Slackness of Service	Pg 109
You Will Die in Your Sins	Pg 112
Neglecting Your Soul	Pg 118
Careless Men	Pg 121
Rejecting God's Word	Pg 125
Why Is This Happening to Us?	Pg 128
What's the Least You Can Believe?	Pg 131
Must You Earn the Right to Be Heard?	Pg 134
Confusion in the Congregation	Pg 137
Scripture Saturation	Pg 141

Meditation	Pg 144
Adoration	Pg 147
Supplication	Pg 150
Sanctification	Pg 154
Propagation	Pg 157
Proclamation	Pg 160
Consecration	Pg 164
Going to the Streets	Pg 167
Revival Combat	Pg 171
Evangelize or Perish	Pg 174
The Catalyst for Revival	Pg 178
Who Can Endure the Day of His Coming?	Pg 181
God Still Kills People	Pg 184
The Kind of Preaching We Need	Pg 187
Preaching that Brings Revival	Pg 190
Coffee with Jesus?	Pg 194
Me and My Vineyard	Pg 198
What God Rules America?	Pg 202
Greed and Avarice	Pg 206
The Wrath of Almighty God	Pg 210
Worshipping the Beast	Pg 214

FORWARD

What follows are sixty-two of my weekly devotionals written from 2010 through 2012. The theme unashamedly is revival. My first two books, *Seeking a Revival Culture: Essays to Fortify an Anemic Church* and *Revival Prayer: A Needed Paradigm Shift in Today's Church*, take up this theme of revival from different perspectives. *Seeking a Revival Culture* makes the case for revival from a largely historical perspective. *Revival Prayer* does so from the necessity of earnest, white-hot prayer, stemming from an intolerable burden—an intense agony, grief, alarm, and concern at the status quo in our personal lives, in the church, and in the world. This latest book, however, seeks to appeal to the heart of the reader. The United States of America, founded so clearly on the Puritan vision of a “City on a Hill,” has squandered God’s marvelous beneficence. We now find ourselves in an unprecedented moral decline which includes statism and socialism, same-sex marriage, a potential melt-down of the U.S. dollar, and a weakening geo-political position in the world. And the church seems utterly incapable of arresting the slide to Sodom. Preachers generally seem unwilling to address the hot button issues of the day, and the people in the pew seem to be at ease in Zion, perfectly content to go to church on Sundays to be entertained but unwilling to seek God in heartfelt repentance and prayer. They also seem reluctant to engage in personal, intentional evangelistic outreach. We are losing our young people to the world and the millennial generation in the church generally has no problem with same-sex marriage and socialism. Indeed, they seem oblivious to our perilous condition. So *Essays on Revival: In Wrath May God Remember Mercy* is a cry for earnest pursuit of the Holy One, believing that without true revival our nation is doomed to mediocrity or worse. I pray God will use what follows to move you to “give God no rest until His name is a praise in all the earth.”

*“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love”
- Revelation 2:4*

THE FOLLY OF LEAVING YOUR FIRST LOVE

By 1630 Scotland was in need of another revival, a time of visitation by God when a whole community is soaked with His presence. Such had occurred five years earlier in the town of Stewarton under the ministry of David Dickson, and that revival no doubt influenced and moved the people of nearby Shotts, not far from Glasgow, to seek a similar blessing. In accordance with the Scottish Presbyterian tradition of seasonal communion services, Shotts set aside several days in June for people from surrounding communities to come together for soul-searching preaching, calling them to repentance and conversion. A few godly Scottish women of royalty who were sympathetic toward Puritan reformation and revival prevailed upon the local pastor at Shotts, John Home, to invite two powerful Scottish preachers for the occasion—David Dickson, whom God had used so remarkably a few years before at Stewarton, and seventy year old Robert Bruce, a man whom some said was the human instrument God had already used to bring conversion to thousands of people. Instead of the usual plan to end the services on Sunday with communion for those who could give evidence of true conversion, the leaders decided to stay another day, closing with a service of thanksgiving on Monday.

That Sunday evening a number of ministers, elders, and leading women, including both the Marchioness of Hamilton and Lady Culross, met and prayed through the night for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people who would gather the next day. We do not have a record of the prayer meeting but we do know they prayed all night, no doubt asking for the Holy Spirit to visit them powerfully in this last service of the communion season. After the prayer meeting, each having gone his own way for personal devotional time, Lady Culross closed the curtains on her bed and for the next three hours could be heard praying earnestly, with great liberty in the Spirit. At the end of this time she called on Pastor Home and strongly urged that he invite young John Livingston to preach the last service.

Livingston was only twenty-seven years old and not ordained, though his lack of ordination was no fault of his own. Archbishop William Laud, who was determined to root out Calvinism in England and Presbyterian Scotland, considered Livingston a dangerous man and was therefore unwilling to ordain him. Known throughout the region

as a powerful preacher of the doctrines of grace—the question of ordination notwithstanding—Livingston was nonetheless mortified at the prospect of preaching before such a large crowd on such a solemn occasion, and before these older men, Dickson and Bruce, whom God had so powerfully used the previous days and for many years in the past. But he agreed, and then proceeded to go out into the fields to pray and prepare his heart to preach. On such occasions, Livingston says, he spent little time in preparing his mind, in thinking through what he was to say. Instead he focused on his heart, seeking to fill himself up with Christ, trusting the Holy Spirit to prompt him with what he ought to say, asking for the Spirit’s presence and power. This time, however, the more he prayed and thought through his daunting task, the more terrified he became. He felt totally inadequate and utterly weak. Finally he decided that he could not go through with his preaching and began walking away, in the opposite direction from the town, passing several who were coming for the thanksgiving service. As he walked away from the town of Shotts he sensed the Holy Spirit being grieved over his flight, impressing upon him that he was not trusting God. He became fearful of God’s chastisement and repented, literally turning around and walking back to town.

Over one thousand people gathered for the service, coming from many miles away. They sat on the grass that sloped down to the Kirk, a sort of natural amphitheater. Livingston took as his text Ezekiel 36:25-26: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” He spent ninety minutes unpacking the meaning of the text, seeking to bring conversion to the lost, warning them of the wrath of God. At one point in his sermon rain began to fall and the people instinctively drew their coats over themselves to protect themselves from the rain. Livingston noticed this and leaped on it to make a graphic illustration which the Holy Spirit brought with great power upon the hearers: “What a mercy it is,” he declared, “that the Lord sifts that rain through the heavens to us, and does not rain down fire and brimstone as He did on Sodom and Gomorrah.” As Livingston was moving to the application of his sermon, warning people to flee from the wrath of God, exhorting them to believe the gospel, he says that he had a freedom and liberty, a melting of his heart, such as he had never before experienced. His application and exhortation continued for another hour. Eyewitnesses claim a strange and unusual emotion came over this vast congregation. God came down through the

preaching of the gospel and an estimated five hundred were converted that day. Three young men on their way to Edinburgh for some fun stopped at Shotts to rest their horses and decided to attend the preaching service. They were soundly converted and remained faithful followers of Christ for the rest of their lives. John Livingstone, while a powerful preacher, much used of God, said that only one other time in his entire ministry, did he experience anything like what happened at Shotts that day, June 21, 1630.¹

Indeed, the histories of Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland, and the United States are replete with remarkable visitations of the Holy Spirit. Indeed the vestiges of the East African revival are still very much with the brethren of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and southern Sudan. While recently in Uganda for ministry we met with the Bishop of the Mbale Diocese who showed us statistics of numerical growth. The Diocese now has 214,000 adult members, an increase of 80,000 in seven years! The first three hundred years of Christendom had a strong and vibrant church in North Africa. It is no more, having been over run by Islam. Western Europe and the United Kingdom now face the judgment of God through Islamanization. The United States cannot be far behind. And though this remarkable revival culture pulsates throughout East Africa, I warned the brethren when there that the seeds of judgment are blowing in the wind for them as well. I said, “You probably do not believe this can happen to you, but those living in seventeenth and eighteenth century America, England, Scotland, and Wales could never have fathomed it either.”

Paul planted the church at Ephesus on his third missionary journey between 53 and 56 A.D., and wrote his marvelous circular epistle around 62 A.D. Jesus rebuked the church at Ephesus before 70 A.D., saying that they had left their first love, calling them to repent and do the deeds which they did at first, declaring that He would remove the lamp stand (the church) out of its place if it did not repent.² How quickly the church had fallen!

In Psalm 85, perhaps written around 430 B.C., the Psalmist prays, “Wilt Thou be angry with us forever? Wilt Thou prolong Thine anger

¹ *Scotland Saw His Glory*, page 111ff, compiled and edited by Richard Owen Roberts.

² I prefer the earlier date of authorship of the book of Revelation. Even if one takes the later date, around 90 A.D., the point is still strongly made, that the church of Ephesus returned quickly to folly.

to all generations? Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Show us Thy lovingkindness , O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation. I will hear what God the Lord will say; for He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones, but let them not turn back to folly,” (Psalm 85:5-8). God had been remarkably gracious to his idolatrous people, warning them for centuries, sending one prophet after another, calling them to repentance. They continued in their recalcitrance and God sent them away in Assyrian and Babylonian exile, graciously fulfilling His prophecy through Jeremiah that after seventy years of exile He would bring them back into the land of Judah. Still, some one hundred years after the return, they were returning to folly, having given their children in marriage to pagans. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were beside themselves in grief (Ezra 9:3, Nehemiah 13:23ff).

Have we not done the same thing in the western world! In our pride and arrogance, have we not left our first love! Have we not squandered the riches of covenantal love, the doctrines of grace, and fornicating with the harlot of modernity! Why should we expect a free pass from the One who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)? We have forgotten the One who has blessed us with our wealth and prosperity. We have exchanged the worship of the God of Israel for the god of science, pop psychology, and deistic moralism. Consequently we are utterly bankrupt. We have shamelessly incurred mountains of debt, leaving it for our children and grandchildren. We slaughter the innocent. We tolerate wickedness and perversion that would make the ancient Greco-Roman world blush.

Is there any hope? Yes, there is always hope in Jesus. The question, however, is whether or not we are willing to pay the price to see that hope realized. I have my doubts, but I press on in hope that God will mercifully awaken us before it is too late. I purpose to lay out in these chapters, from Scripture, what must be done to reverse our spiritual declension. It will require a major paradigm shift in the church. It will mean that “business as usual” will no longer work. “O Lord, wilt Thou be angry with us forever? Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” I suggest that revival will come, that God desires to do another great work, if we will but do what He commands us to do. May God light a fire in our hearts, moving us to a holy zeal for His glory and the expansion of His kingdom! O Lord, in Thy wrath, would Thou remember mercy, (Habakkuk 3:2).

February 11, 2010

“Oh that they had such a heart in them that would fear Me”
-Deuteronomy 5:29

ELECTION AND EVANGELISM

On October 23, 1740, after preaching the previous weekend in Northampton with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, the great eighteenth century evangelist, made his way south along the Connecticut River to Hartford, then Wethersfield, and finally to Middletown. Nathan Cole, a farmer near Middletown, vividly records the excitement and power of Whitefield’s ministry on that occasion.³ Cole had been an Arminian (an eighteenth century theological liberal) who believed he could save himself by his good works. He became troubled in his soul when he heard Whitefield at the meeting house in Middletown say that the gospel was offered freely to all men, even though all were totally unable to embrace Christ, that they could do nothing to save themselves, that only the electing grace of God could render them acceptable to a holy God. Cole was convinced of his lost condition and was terribly convicted of his sin, and came to believe the doctrine of election, that he was utterly lost unless God chose to save him. He later found peace with Christ, left the established church, and joined a small group of believers called New Lights in nearby Kensington.⁴

What do we mean by the doctrine of election and how does it apply in the proclamation of the gospel? First, by election we simply mean that God, according to His mere good pleasure and sovereign will, chose from all the peoples of the world, a peculiar people to be His own before He made anyone or anything. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* puts it this way, “Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the

³ See Arnold Dallimore’s marvelous two volume biography on George Whitefield, published by Banner of Truth. This vivid story is told on page 541, volume one.

⁴ “George Whitefield Comes to Middletown.”

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creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.” Chapter III, paragraph 5.5

They did not choose Christ, rather He chose them, and appointed them that they should bear much fruit, and that their fruit should remain (John 15:16). Paul the Apostle repeatedly teaches this doctrine (Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:29-30, 9:14-24, 2 Timothy 1:8-9) as does Peter (1 Peter 2:9-10), and Jesus (John 6:35-39). It is not merely that God foreknew those who would choose to follow and obey Him, rather it is that in spite of our rebellion and hard-heartedness, even though we would do nothing to deserve it, God, by a free act of His grace, according to the secret counsel of His most holy and wise providence, chose a people for Himself from all the peoples of the world, making us into one family of God, transmuting time, space, ethnicity, and religion (Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-12)

Second, Jesus illustrates in John 6 how the doctrine of election can be used powerfully to saving effect, especially with the smug and self-righteous. This is how Whitefield used the doctrine of election, resulting in Nathan Cole’s conversion. We read in John 6 of the vast crowd following Jesus from one miraculous event and preaching service to another. After He fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, they marveled. Jesus sent His disciples in a boat to the other side of the sea while He remained behind to pray. While they were rowing with great difficulty He came to His disciples on the water, calmed the Sea, and rode with them to the other side. When the vast crowd realized that He somehow had made it across without a boat, they took small boats and went as quickly as they could to find Him. John tells us that Jesus knew they wanted to make Him their king, but He resisted their fleshly overtures (15). Jesus rebuked them, saying that they were laboring only for the bread which perishes (26-27). He tells them that they must do the works of God, and the work of God is to believe in Him (28-29). They wanted the bread but not the bread giver. He told them that Moses was not the one who fed their forefathers in the wilderness, rather it was God, and that He, Jesus, was the manna that had come down out of heaven from God (32-33). Jesus knows they were pursuing Him with wrong motives. They were merely entertained by Him, not really seeing their need to “eat of His

⁵ The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the doctrinal standard for many Reformed churches and denominations, was written by a number of Puritan theologians from 1643-47 by an act of the British Parliament.

flesh and drink of His blood” (52-58). He tells them that not one, including each of them, would come to Him unless the Father draws them (44). The Greek words here could be translated, “No one comes to Jesus unless the Father drags him.” He declares that the electing grace of God the Father is the initiator of salvation. He chooses, and they in turn believe. Note the remarkable union of God’s electing grace, the incarnation of Jesus, and the fullness of salvation wrought by God on our behalf. In John 6:37-39 we read, ”All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day.”

The Father chose. The Son came to die for those whom the Father chose. The Holy Spirit gives grace to the elect to believe. And none who come to the Father will be cast out. The response to all this was that Jesus’ followers considered this (unless you eat of My flesh and drink of My blood you have no life in yourselves, 53) a difficult saying, wondering who can listen to it. Jesus knew they were stumbling at the intimacy required in following Him. Instead of doing what so many preachers and churches do today, in order to attract the lost or to keep them coming to church, Jesus turned up the heat even more. He said, “Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you here who do not believe,” (6:61-64). John notes that Jesus always knew that some would reject and betray Him. That’s why Jesus said to them, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father,” (65).

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The electing grace of God must naturally follow the utter sinfulness of man. Unregenerate man must be brought to see that he brings nothing to the table of salvation. Man has a rebellious, blind heart that is unwilling to come to God. He has a guilty and offensive record that renders him utterly odious to the Holy One. And he has an unholy and unproductive life that makes it impossible to commend himself to the One with whom we all have to do. And what is God promising in His electing grace to His people? He promises three things—a new heart, a new righteousness, and a new holiness. We have seen earlier that man is unwilling to come to God. He is commanded to circumcise his

heart, to make for himself a new heart (Deuteronomy 10:16, Ezekiel 18:31) but He cannot do it. The fall into sin by our parents, Adam and Eve, rendered us ineffectual in a spiritual sense. The fall also brought the awful reality of original sin. Both David and Paul speak of it (Psalm 51:3, Romans 12:1-2). And original sin naturally led to actual sin, that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10ff).

So God, in His marvelous electing grace promises to do what we can never do—give us new hearts that love God and hate sin. Consider briefly a few passages that note this promise. “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever,” (Deuteronomy 5:29). This is the command we all face but we cannot obey it due to the corrupting power of original sin, and the stultifying presence of actual sin. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart,” (Deuteronomy 6:5-6). Many of us glibly say these words without understanding the implications. All people, but especially the self-righteous, like the elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son, must be brought to a deep awareness of their failure to keep this commandment. “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer,” (Deuteronomy 10:16). The Old Testament bloody rite of circumcision which removed the foreskin looked forward to the day when Jesus would offer up His body to the bloody cross to take away the reproach of our sin. They were to clean up their lives—to remove the wickedness of their hearts, no longer in pride to stiffen their necks against God’s call upon their lives—but they could not do it. Something miraculous, far beyond their ability or imagination, must happen to them.

“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Or else My wrath will go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds,” (Jeremiah 4:4). Not only is Moses calling the sons of Israel, about to enter the Promised Land, to circumcise their hearts, but the great prophet of the seventh century B.C. is sounding the same alarm. Judah was facing the impending doom of Babylonian judgment and they must repent, but they could not. A contemporary of Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel, says that God promises to do what He commands us to do. “I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit

within them. I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,” (Ezekiel 11:19). And he also says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh,” (Ezekiel 36:26). God the Father, in His electing grace, stoops to our utter weakness, and promises us a new heart to love one that loves Him and hates sin. This is the doctrine of regeneration. Jesus says that unless we are born again we cannot see the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3ff).

God the Father also addresses our second major problem—our guilty and offensive past. If God were to mark our iniquity, none of us could stand innocently before Him. All will stand before the judgment seat of Christ on that great day (2 Corinthians 5:10) to give an account of our deeds done in the body, and all will see their own guilt and condemnation. None will be able to explain adequately their culpability (Romans 3:19). But God the Father promises us a new righteousness. Righteousness means obedience to the Law of God. We are commanded to love God with all our being, to circumcise our hearts, but we have failed miserably. We need right standing before God and that only comes through a perfect obedience or righteousness. God does what we cannot do. In prophesying about the coming Messiah, Jeremiah says, “In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely and this is His name by which He will be called, the Lord our righteousness,”

(Jeremiah 23:6). This righteousness which God gives us is what theologians call an “alien righteousness” because it comes from outside of us. Ezekiel promises the same thing saying, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols,” (Ezekiel 36:25). This is the doctrine of justification, declared by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, witnessed throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 6:9, 15:6, Job 1:1, Psalm 37:39), and expounded in its fullness by the Apostles (Acts 2:38ff, 10:43, 15:11, Romans 4-5).

And finally God also addresses our third major problem—our unholy and unproductive life. The problem with most presentations of the gospel is that they do not deal with regeneration on the one hand, and the required consequent holiness on the other. Peter commands that we are to be holy, even as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Paul told the Corinthians that they were to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1); and he told the Romans to put to death the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13).

Not only does God the Father promise in His electing grace a new heart, He also promises a new righteousness. We have no righteousness in ourselves. Our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). There is none righteous, not even one (Psalm 14:1). If God were to mark our iniquity not one could stand before Him. Jesus obeyed the law perfectly and this perfection is given to us by faith (Romans 4:1 ff, Ephesians 2:8-9), a faith that God Himself gives to us. He takes the guilty record book of sin we all have and nails it to the cross of Christ, giving us in its place the righteous record book of Jesus (Colossians 2:13-14, 2 Corinthians 5:17). Jeremiah prophesies the promise of righteousness given to us in Jeremiah 23:6. Ezekiel does the same by saying that God will sprinkle clean water on us, and we will be clean, that He will remove all our iniquity.

And finally the electing grace of God promises a new holiness. The reason so little impact is being made through Christianity is because people really don't understand how far they have fallen from God's perfection and holiness. We are to be holy, even as God our Father is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16). God begins a work of sanctification or progressive holiness in all His blood bought people the moment they are saved. A true believer will act differently because he has the holiness of Jesus indwelling him. In Ezekiel 36:27 the prophet says that He will put His Spirit within His people that they may walk in His statutes. Could it be that so little societal impact is being made by the church because so few true Christians reside in the church? When the church looks like the world, when the church seeks to use worldly means to garner attention and attract people, then the church lacks spiritual power and holiness. The presence of genuine, Biblical holiness in a community of believers would send a powerful message to unbelievers. The very fact that the believers in Rome went to the garbage dumps of the city to rescue infants left there to die, taking in the helpless and discarded, eventually overcame the prejudice so many had against them, bring untold multitudes from the Roman Empire into Christ's kingdom.

The benefit of God's electing grace is to humble man and to exalt God. When believers truly understand that the entirety of their salvation, from beginning to end, is of God; and when unbelievers see that they are utterly lost, beyond hope in themselves, being stripped of their smug self-righteousness, then and only then will God smile with

salvation on multitudes; for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

April 1, 2010

“James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” - James 1:1a

SLAVES OF CHRIST

In Revelation 1 the Apostle John had a vision of the glorified and risen Christ, seeing Him dressed in a robe reaching to His feet, girded across his chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like wool, like snow. His eyes were a flame of fire and His feet were like burnished bronze which are made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand were seven stars and from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and His face was shining like the sun in all its strength. John, when seeing this awesome and glorious vision, fell at Jesus’ feet like a dead man (Revelation 1:13-16). The glorified Christ personifies the vision He has for His church, and that vision includes the holiness of His people and the propagation of the gospel to all the nations of the world. His white hair symbolizes His holiness and we are to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16). His eyes are like laser beams that see into the hearts of every man, performing laser surgery to eradicate the cancer of sin that robs Him of His glory in His people (Hebrews 4:13). His feet move swiftly to bring salvation to all who believe and judgment to all who do not (Isaiah 52:7-10, Nahum 1:2-3, 15). His voice roars with the glorious gospel proclamation, like the mighty roar of Niagara Falls (Ezekiel 43:2). The seven stars in His right hand are the angels or messengers of the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 1:20) which are called by Him to take the gospel to all the nations (Luke 24:45-49, Acts 1:4-8). The sharp two-edged sword is His holy word that saves and sanctifies on the one hand, and judges and condemns on the other (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, Romans 10:13-17, Revelation 19:15, 21, 2 Thessalonians 2:8). The shining of Jesus’ face represents the glory of God that is to shine on all the people of God (Numbers 6:24-25, 2 Corinthians 3:12-18).

The one who wrote the epistle of James is not James, the son of Zebedee, or James, the son of Alphaeus. He is the younger brother of Jesus, who earlier, along with his other relatives, had thought Jesus to be insane (Mark 3:21), who had mocked His claims of Messiahship (John 7:5). But James saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7) and everything changed for him. He became a well respected leader in the early church (Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18, Galatians 1:19, 2:9), and was martyred, sentenced to death by stoning, though apparently this was thwarted. Finally he was thrown from the temple and beaten with a

club until he died. Most scholars believe the Epistle of James was the first book written in the New Testament canon, perhaps written as early as 40 to 44 A.D., certainly before Paul began his ministry in Antioch, culminating in his first missionary journey (45-48 A.D.) and his second and third missionary journeys to Europe and Asia Minor, modern day western Turkey (circa 50 A.D.).⁶ Many scholars believe James wrote early because there is no reference to the Jewish/Gentile controversy of Acts 15 or Galatians. The Epistle of James is also very Jewish (words like synagogue, royal law of liberty, early and late rain, Abraham, Rahab, Elijah), suggesting the church had not yet expanded to the Gentile world. Finally, James is writing to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad. These are Jews who had converted to Christianity, perhaps when in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, having listened to Peter preach the gospel. They also may have been part of the *diaspora* mentioned in Acts 8:1ff.

Note what James the brother of Jesus, the one who thought his brother insane, who mocked His claim to being the Christ, calls himself—a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. At least four types of slaves existed in James' day—criminals, those who worked the fields, those who served in households, and those who served in imperial palaces. Though the degree of hardship would vary according to the kind of servitude in which a slave lived, the common denominator in all of them was ownership. They did not have freedom. They were owned completely, in every way, by their master. James is calling himself a slave of God, a slave of his brother, One whom he now calls the Lord Jesus Christ! James knows he has no rights. He belongs lock, stock, and barrel to Jesus.

This concept of slavery, that you have been bought with a price, the blood of Christ, means you are not your own, that you belong to Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), that you are to glorify God with your life. James wrote his Epistle to draw the church back to the revival culture of Acts 1-12. He has a zeal for Biblical holiness, something that was already waning in the lives of these Jewish believers. The theme of James' epistle is holiness or sanctification. We so easily return to the folly of our former lives (Psalm 85:8), much to our detriment and the weakness of the church. James calls us to look at every trial with joy. He moves us to be doers of the word, not merely hearers. He rebukes us for showing partiality to the wealthy or well connected. He exposes

⁶ *Halley's Bible Handbook*, page 559.

our hypocrisy of faith. He reveals our impotence, made manifest in our inability to tame our tongues. He makes known the source of our quarrels and conflicts. He declares our arrogance. He judges our injustice. He unveils our prayerlessness.

On the one hand, we are justified by faith, through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Our sins are taken from us as far as the east is from the west. Praise the Lord! But on the other hand God calls us to be holy, to obey Him, and none of us does that as we ought. The writer to the Hebrews says that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Our weakness in the American church can be traced back to our lack of experiential, practical holiness. The world does not take us seriously because we are not taking God's call to holiness seriously. We are failing in our two fold purpose as the church—to propagate the gospel to the world and to obey Him in all we do. Failure by one church or a group of denominational churches causes Jesus to remove His Spirit's presence and power, to vomit us violently out of His mouth (Revelation 2:5, 3:16).

Are you a slave of Jesus? If you are in Christ, if you are a true Christian, then you must answer, "Yes." You have no option. You are drafted into Christ's army. Your job, therefore, is to obey Him in all He commands, drawing upon the life of Christ within you (Romans 6:1-13, Colossians 3:1-5). You have no choice but to surrender everything to Jesus—your time, money, health, reputation, family, job. You do not belong to yourself. You belong to Jesus. Begin everyday with these words, "Jesus, You own me. I belong to You. Here's my life. Take me, use me today as You will. Give me the grace to sacrifice myself for You and others, to deny my own desires for self-aggrandizement."

April 22, 2010

“Consider it all joy” - James 1:2

JOY ALL THE TIME

William Carey, the father of modern world missions, was born into a poor family in Northampton, England in 1761. He had no formal education but taught himself to read and write and mastered Latin by the age of twelve. He began his trade in his early teens as a shoemaker and was born again at eighteen. He soon began to preach in his spare time and quickly became fluent in New Testament Greek, Old Testament Hebrew, Dutch, and French. He married Dorothy Plackett when he was twenty years old. William and Dorothy could not have been more different. She was six years older than he and illiterate, signing her name with an X. By his late twenties Carey was a full time Calvinistic Baptist preacher with a growing burden to reach the “heathen”. When at a pastoral meeting one day he spoke of his passion and an older minister said, “My dear Carey, when God wishes to save the heathen He will do it without you.” Carey, however, could not dampen his earnest desire to take the gospel to the nations. When he wrote a lengthy paper with a lengthy title—*An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathen in Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practical Ability of Further Undertakings Are Considered*⁷—those in attendance listened politely and then went onto other business. At the end of the meeting, however, William asked, “Is there nothing going to be done again?” From this a motion was passed to study the matter further. Only after a few months did anyone take up the issue. When John Thomas came to the meeting, after returning from India and his work with the East Indies Company, talking about the Hindu millions living in ignorance, squalor, and unbelief, laying out his burden for their salvation, William Carey suddenly said, “I will go.” Within two years William Carey and his wife Dorothy, along with their three young children, and a few others sailed for India. Carey was thirty-one years old. He died forty-one years later, never having returned to England. He learned Sanskrit, Bengali, and Hindustani and translated the Bible into these and three other Indian languages, and partially into twenty-nine more. He was a preacher, scholar, evangelist, and linguist, mightily used of God. After ten years in India he presented a speech in Sanskrit to the

⁷ In *William Carey: The Father of Modern Missions*, by Basil Miller, page 36.

intelligentsia of India, and they were awed by his mastery of their ancient language. He taught for the last thirty years of his life at the Fort William College, training hundreds of future Indian leaders. He stopped the Hindu practice of annually throwing young children into the Ganges River as sacrifices. He stood against the evil of “widow burning”. When husbands died their wives were burned alive on their funeral pyres. Eventually the practice was outlawed by the government.

His life was filled with untold sorrow and hardship. Their first two years in India were incredibly difficult. He quickly ran out of money and his family lived in squalor. Their five year old son, Peter, died of dysentery, and Dorothy suffered an emotional and mental breakdown, from which she never recovered. She died after ten years of insanity. Carey remarried but his second wife was an invalid, confined to a wheelchair. In 1812 his entire warehouse, full of printing presses, type, and unpublished manuscripts was destroyed by fire. He responded with joy, believing God would bring good. He lived out the command of James to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials.

What about you? Can your spouse, children, parents, or closest friends say that your life is characterized by joy? What is Biblical joy? It does not depend on circumstances. Habakkuk, though facing the destruction of Judah, was able to say, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, though there be no fruit on the vine, though the yield of the olive should fail, though the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, though there be no cattle in the stall, I will exult in the Lord my God. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation,” (Habakkuk 3:17-19). Biblical joy is an inward exultation based on a gift received or to be received.⁸ The gift received or to be received is the fullness of salvation (Psalm 47). Joy is tied to the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and it comes largely through suffering (Philippians 3:10, Acts 5:41).

When James commands us to consider⁹ it all joy, he does not command us to feel joy. A woman who loses her young husband in an

⁸ Henry Krabbendam’s unpublished *Commentary on James*, page 374.

⁹ An aorist ingressive verb form which expresses a state or condition, *A Manual of the Greek New Testament*, page 196, Dana and Mantey. To *consider* means to think according to facts, not according to one’s inward feelings (Philippians 2:3). See *Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 276.

automobile accident will not feel joy. She will feel sorrow. James is not saying that other Biblical emotions are not acceptable—things like love, peace, patience, righteous anger. He is not saying that everything that happens in life is good. God blessed my wife and me with six children. Three of them are living and three are not. It is not good that three died (two at five months in the womb, one at six weeks outside the womb), but God turned it to good (Romans 8:28).

Biblical joy is an inward exultation, a peace, a confidence, that God will bring good, that His comforting presence is enough. It looks to the fullness of our eternal salvation—God’s electing grace, the propitiating death of the Lord Jesus, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the glory of a full salvation that justifies, sanctifies, adopts, and one day will glorify us. It is like the young mother who willingly and joyfully undergoes the pain of child birth, who after the baby is placed on her chest, weeps with joy. She glows at the beautiful gift God has given her and her husband.

How can you get there? Admittedly we fall short of what God commands. You get there by embracing the *telos*.¹⁰ James says that the testing of our faith produces endurance, that endurance is to have its perfect result, that we may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Jesus says the same thing (Matthew 5:10-12). So does Paul (Romans 5:3-5) and Peter (1 Peter 1:3-9). Embrace the journey! Believe God is working in you to do and to will for His good pleasure, for your growth in holiness. And you must delight in the gift (Ephesians 2:8-10). Every aspect of your salvation, from beginning to end, is from God. You are His workmanship (*poema*, our word for poem) which God prepared beforehand for glory. Joy comes as you step back and take it all in—you are a work in progress, one which God will surely complete. The finality of your gift to be received on that great day is glory beyond your wildest dreams.

May 6, 2010

¹⁰ A Greek word which means perfect. It is an end, an objective. When you go into a meeting you have at least one objective you hope to accomplish in the meeting. This is the *telos*.

“ . . . and let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” - James 1:4

PERFECTION

Jim Elliot was born into a godly family in 1927 in Portland, Oregon. While at Wheaton College in 1948 he wrote, “God makes His ministers a flame of fire. Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of ‘other things.’ Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be aflame. But flame is transient, often short-lived. Canst thou bear this, my soul—short life? In me there dwells the Spirit of the Great Short-Lived, whose zeal for God’s house consumed Him. And he has promised baptism with the Spirit and with Fire. ‘Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.’”¹¹ Jim was dead eight years later at the age of twenty-eight—martyred, along with four others, by the Auca Indians in Ecuador, as Elliot and his friends sought to bring the gospel of Christ to them.

God calls us to consider everything in life with joy—the hard times and the good times. The motivation for such joy is the knowledge that this works endurance in us, and this endurance is to have its perfect result so that we may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. God wants to work perfect endurance in you so that you may have perfect holiness. If you do not learn to consider all things joy, then the ravages of time and circumstances will wear you down, causing you to limp along, barely, if at all, making it to heaven (Hebrews 10:36-39). Perfect endurance is the catalyst that brings perfect holiness. Jesus said that a man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

Some more modern translations of the Bible¹² render the Greek word *telos* in James 1:4 as mature or whole. This is inaccurate, as other translations ably note.¹³ The word means perfect, without blemish, flawless. Jesus commanded the same thing of His disciples (Matthew

¹¹ *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot*, by Elisabeth Elliott, page 58.

¹² *The New International Version, The New English Bible, and The Message*, a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson.

¹³ *The King James Version, the American Standard Bible, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version.*

5:48). God means what He says. He commands perfect endurance that we may gain perfect holiness (see also James 1:25, 2:22, 3:2). The obvious fact that we cannot reach perfect endurance or perfect holiness in this life does not negate the command. Peter commands us to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Paul understood this too, proclaiming Jesus to the Colossians so that they would be complete (*teleion*) or perfect in Christ, testifying that he labored to this end, striving according to Christ's power that worked mightily in him (Colossians 1:28-29).

Think of it this way—a musician will work diligently, practicing many hours to memorize the musical piece she is to perform. She will learn every note. She will strive for utter perfection. The same is true with a theatrical performer. He will learn every line, every word of every song. He will seek perfection. If you are going into an important sales meeting you ought to know exactly where you are going with your presentation. You want to be perfect. The musician, theatrical performer, and sales person know they will not reach it, but they strive for it nonetheless; and that striving enables them to perform far better than if they had tried “to wing it.”

You need to strive for perfect endurance. Without it you sooner or later will quit. In a world of quitters you must never, never, never give up. You must not quit on your marriage. You must not quit on your children, your parents, your job, your financial situation. I am not saying there are never Biblical grounds for divorce. I am not saying you must always remain at your present job. I am saying you must actively and relentlessly pursue God's kingdom.¹⁴ Due to the glory of Christ's resurrection and your consequent union with Him, you must be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that you labor in the Lord is never in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

But you may say, “I have done all I can in my marriage. It's no use. My kids are gone. There's no hope.” You don't know that. Remember—nothing is ever wasted in the economy of God's kingdom. He works all things, even your paltry efforts, for good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

¹⁴ For a good synopsis of this, study the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and a full exposition of their meaning can be found in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, questions and answers 190-196.

In the modern evangelical and Reformed church world where people mistake the grace of justification for the holiness of sanctification, it is vital that we perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1). To be sure, we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus (Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-10), and this means a true believer can never lose his salvation. However, God also commands holiness in every area of life (1 Peter 1:15). God's love is multifaceted. First, He desires to be one with us and this occurs at conversion (John 17:21, Galatians 3:28). Second, He delights in those who are His, but He can also become displeased with us due to our sin (Isaiah 59:1-2, Ephesians 4:30, Hebrews 2:1-3, 4:2-4, 12:7-12). He will chastise His beloved.

I urge you to be zealous for the holiness of God in your life! Avail yourself the public and private means of grace—public worship, the preaching of the word of God, the sacraments, private and family devotional times, reading good Christian books. What would happen if we took seriously the call to perfect holiness? What would happen if we had a plethora of Jim Elliot's in today's church, men and women who from hot pursuit of Christ, having been filled up with the glow of Holy Spirit holiness, offered themselves up on the altar of God as a sacrifice to be consumed by Christ's zeal for His kingdom! You cannot do this in yourself. You cannot gain perfect endurance or perfect holiness. You don't even want to pay the price for it. But with Paul, can we not say, "Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from the body of this death! Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24-25). You must be holy, but you cannot be holy. Therefore you must thirst for holiness. But maybe you don't thirst. Maybe you are indifferent, even bored or ambivalent about seeking God. First, that's a dangerous place to be, but second, you must think again about the glory of God's full orbed salvation graciously given to you. So pray that you will thirst. Go to Jesus daily and pray, "Jesus, give me Your holiness. Give me a holy zeal and love for You and the propagation of the gospel." As you daily pray, you will then begin to thaw a bit. Eventually you will begin to shine with the Shekinah glory of God (Exodus 33:17ff, 40:34).

May 27, 2010

“I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”
- Acts 19:15

ARE YOU KNOWN IN HELL?15

Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was truly remarkable. I love reading about it in Acts 19. It always inspires me with what God can do through men filled with the Spirit who consecrate themselves to Christ, willing to live for Him and die for Him. Ephesus was notorious for pagan worship. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was there, the Temple of Diana, and people came from far and wide to engage in pagan ritual. The city was large, having a population of around 330,000, and its sports stadium, built by Nero, could seat twenty-five thousand. We know, both from secular history and the Biblical account in Acts 19, that Ephesus was overrun with demonic possession. Her sorcerers, as Shakespeare wrote, were “dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, soul-killing witches that deform the body.”¹⁶ In fact pagan and Jewish exorcists regularly plied their trade, seeking to deliver people from the terror of demons. Exorcists had developed a book of incantations they chanted when exorcizing demons, known in antiquity as the Ephesian writings. When the Holy Spirit began to convert large numbers of the people, some who were engaged in black magic, brought their books and burned them publicly. Luke tells us that the books were worth fifty thousand pieces of silver (Acts 19:19). Today that would mean \$25 million.¹⁷ Talk about a mighty societal impact!

Luke also tells us that Paul’s ministry was so powerful, accompanied by extraordinary miracles, that handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from Paul’s body and carried to the sick. Diseases and demons left the people. Apparently some of the Jewish exorcists were watching Paul and mimicked his words as he cast out demons. They thought they could do the same thing and said to the demons, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches” (Acts 19:12-13). Then Luke reports that a Jewish chief priest (probably an apostate Jewish priest) named Sceva had seven sons who sought to cast out demons, invoking the name of

¹⁵ I got the idea for this devotional from Leonard Ravenhill’s classic *Why Revival Tarries?*

¹⁶ See *Comedy of Errors* (Act I, Scene ii), a quote from Syracusan Antipholus.

¹⁷ *Acts: An Expository Commentary*, James Boice, Page 326.

Jesus and Paul. The chief demon spoke derisively to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” The man in whom the evil spirits resided jumped on the sons of Sceva, subduing and overpowering them, driving them from the house, both naked and wounded (Acts 19:15-16).

It is clear that Jesus and Paul are known in hell. The sons of Sceva were not. Are you known in hell? In other words—are you a threat to the devil’s status quo? Is Satan concerned about your prayers that move the Spirit to action, your holiness that upgrades your family and church community, your evangelistic work that depopulates hell, your preaching or teaching that humbles and debases men while exalting and praising Jesus?

Elijah is known in hell. He was a troubler in Israel to the hardhearted and worldly Jews who refused to repent and return to Yahweh. He was a troubler to Baal worshippers who persisted in leading Israel away into idolatry and sexual immorality. He was a troubler to Ahab and Jezebel who refused to repent and met horrible deaths. Elisha is known in hell. The young boys, driven by wickedness, mocked him, and were eaten by bears, exposing Satan’s scheme to mock the messengers of God. The demons which sought to keep Naaman in the darkness of leprosy could not stand against him. Jeremiah is known in hell. He constantly warned Judah to repent, and their hatred against him cost him freedom and brought untold sorrow. He did not quit preaching, even though Satan had blinded the eyes of the unbelieving. Daniel is known in hell. He refused to keep the status quo when realizing the utter depravity of the exiles and poured out his heart in confession, contrition, and supplication for another mighty movement of God. Isaiah is known in hell. His vision of the thrice holy God humbled him to the dust, moving him to say, “Here I am. Send me.” Ezekiel is known in hell. He warns Judah of impending doom, calling them to repentance, declaring to them their failure to speak out means the blood of the damned is on their hands. He would not relent in the face of Satanic deception. Habakkuk is known in hell. His perplexity over Nebuchadnezzar’s impending invasion of Judah, while devastating to him, nonetheless moved him to praise the Lord no matter what may happen. No self-pity there! And Zechariah is known in hell. He constantly prophesied of a better day for Israel, working against Satan’s chief tools of discouragement and accusation. They all preached fearlessly, calling the people to repentance, suffering the

rejection, ridicule, and degradation thrown at them by the prince of darkness.

Are you known in hell? Is Satan upset with you? Does he have his target painted on your mind, heart, and will? Is hell being adversely affected by your life and ministry?

These are the questions that ought to be periodically addressed by each of us, but especially by those of us who earn our living by preaching. What characterizes those known in hell? First, they know they are called by God to preach the gospel (Acts 26:16-20, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 9:16, 2 Timothy 4:1ff). Consequently a mantle of power and authority rests on them. They speak and live with a godly swagger, proclaiming the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31, Ephesians 6:19-20). They are willing to be fools for Jesus sake. They do not count their lives as belonging to themselves. They spend and are spent for the sake of the gospel. They know they are to labor to the very end of their days, giving all they have—body, mind, spirit, money, time, and energy. They are successful in their preaching and evangelistic ministry. That is, they see converts and people follow their lead (Philippians 3:17). When they leave this world there are more Christians than when they came in, and it is because of their gospel labors. They speak the truth in love. They don't water down application when preaching. They make soul searching, man debasing, hope building application, moving people to Christ for salvation and sanctification. Their ministries begin to erode and undermine the societal depravity that characterizes every community on earth. On the university campus, the gospel of Jesus becomes a point of discussion. The ethics of Jesus are taken seriously and people begin to jettison ungodliness. They inspire people to imitate Jesus, if not fully to live for Him. Their ministries experience serious opposition and attack from the world, and often from the church. They weep for the lost. They grieve over their own sin. They are humble, contrite, and tremble at God's word. They always are rejoicing, all the time, in every circumstance. They never give up. They live with heaven in full view. Their lives are rich with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Are you known in hell? Seek God earnestly until the devil knows and fears you. Nothing else matters.

June 3, 2010

“But the rich man is to glory in his humiliation” - James 1:10

THE TRIAL OF RICHES

Maybe you are like me—there are times when the supreme desire of my heart is to give myself wholly and unreservedly to Jesus, to hold nothing back, to be lost in the wonder of His glorious grace, to devote my waking hours to a hot pursuit of Him. But then I find myself caught up in taking care of my stuff—cutting it, mowing it, blowing it, watering it, sweeping it, moping it, repairing it, and calling the Salvation Army to take it away. It is true that God gives us all things richly to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). Every good thing bestowed comes from God (James 1:17). So we should be thankful for these material blessings. At the same time, can we not agree that these often mitigate kingdom zeal! And then I can become so easily sidetracked by my worldly affections. I tend to follow Alabama football (especially since they are so good right now) and the Boston Red Sox with too much zeal. When the Red Sox blow a late lead it bothers me way too much. And then I realize what a wimp I can be. I like my comfort. Trips to developing nations without the food I like, without hot showers, clean beds, or air conditioning reveal softness in my flesh I wish I did not have. When I have these conflicting emotions I become very frustrated. Why must the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things choke out the seed of gospel holiness (Mark 4:19)!

James commands us to consider all our trials with joy. I have written earlier about what this means so I shall not repeat it here.¹⁸ He begins with a general statement of trials (James 1:2), but he gets specific in James 1:9-11. He speaks of the trial of poverty and the trial of riches. There is a clear structure to James’ words. He is writing his epistle to move the church back to the glory of Pentecost, some twenty or so years earlier, a height from which they had fallen. He wants to see the church regain her pursuit of Biblical holiness and he lays out the pathway for this holiness in James 1, showing that trials and temptations are normative, and while God is present in every trial, it is also true that Satan is right there behind Him!

¹⁸ See my devotionals for April 29 and May 6, 2010 archived at www.pefministry.org

Why is wealth a trial? First, by wealth James does not merely mean financial wealth. He says in verse 9 that the brother of humble circumstances is to boast of his high position. Clearly he has more in mind there than financial poverty, for why would he say humble circumstances instead of poverty, if that is what he meant? Likewise, to follow the contrasting statements, he means here more than financial wealth, though this is certainly included. He ups the ante quite a bit on the danger of wealth in James 2 and James 5. But for now, he means riches of any kind. It could include one's looks, gifts, position, or health. You name it! But why is wealth a trial to endure? For at least two reasons! One, it can tempt people to think the temporal is all there is. Jesus is alluding to this in Matthew 19:23ff when in response to the disciples' dismay at the rich young ruler rejecting Christ's overture to sell everything and follow him, He says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven." If we are not careful, we can become like a newborn infant whose life is all about the present. As long as he has a clean diaper and his mother's breast he is "good to go." Wealth enables people to think that what they see now is all there is. That's because they can buy what they want. No need to wait! Jesus warned a man who was concerned about being ripped off by his brother to beware, to be on his guard against every form of greed, for even when one has a lot of stuff, his life still does not consist of his possessions (Luke 12:15). And second, wealth can deceive you, even moving some toward greed and oppression. The rich always face the temptation of thinking they received what they have by their sheer hard work alone. Plenty of people work hard but don't benefit financially like they do. James has harsh words for the rich who oppress the poor and we must be extremely careful that we do not fall into pride, greed, and insensitivity that can lead to oppression (James 5:1ff).

Alright then, what is the solution? How do we handle the trial of riches? James tells the rich man to glory in his humiliation. Why is he humiliated? Because he will not have his stuff for long! James says that like flowering grass his riches will fade away. If he learns what the poor man should know, then he can rejoice. Why? Because they are both in the same boat! But why should a rich man boast in such a humiliation? Because there will come a time when the tension and danger of pursuing the cares of the world, those things that mitigate kingdom zeal, will no longer be a distraction, and he will have what he really wants—the Lord Jesus in His fullness!

When will that be? Well, again consider my life as a paradigm for yours. I have all my stuff. I love to travel. I love my books. Now only God knows how and when I will die but there's a good possibility I will die after some prolonged illness. Most people die that way in our country. So, there I am—reduced to one room in my house. No more travel. No more preaching. No more reading. No more Red Sox baseball or Alabama football. Hopefully I will have my wife, children, and grandchildren around me, but even then, as the end draws near, these things will fade into the background. Then I will have what my regenerate heart has always longed for—the Lord Jesus standing in heaven, waiting on me, ushering me into His glorious presence forever. At that point the frustration of being sidetracked by lesser things will be over. Nothing else will matter!

How, then, should we live now? Francis Schaeffer used to say that only two things last for eternity—the Bible and the souls of people. So invest your life in both. Here's what I suggest. What do you want people to say about you at your funeral? These things come pretty close to what you really value. What is important *then* ought to be important *now*. Why not spend more time with God and less time with *American Idol*, more time with the Bible and less time with *People Magazine*, more time with your spouse and less time with your work, more time with your children and grandchildren and less time on your hobbies, more face time with your friends and less *Facebook*, more time helping the needy and less time helping yourself, more time giving your money away and less time hoarding it, more time serving others and less time serving yourself. Remember the obvious—you cannot take it with you, so rejoice and look expectantly to the day when Jesus will relieve you of these distractions and you will look fully into His wonderful face.

July 1, 2010

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” - James 1:16

WRONG NOTIONS

Henry Ward Beecher, born in Litchfield, CT in 1813, was the most famous man of the nineteenth century. His father was the prominent, last of the Puritan preachers, Lyman Beecher¹⁹, and Henry’s siblings accomplished remarkable things. One brother was a prominent theologian. A sister began a women’s school in Hartford, another sister was a leader in the women’s voting rights movement of the day, and of course, his most prominent sibling, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the early 1850’s. Henry was a gifted orator and pastor of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn. His salary from the church, when adjusted to present day dollars, was \$1.8 million per year, and he signed a book deal in 1865 to write a novel, the advance being the equivalent of \$3.4 million. When examined by Congregational pastors upon coming to take the Plymouth Church, he was asked if he believed in the doctrine of original sin. He said that he did not think too much about that since there was plenty of sin to go around today. When asked about the doctrine of predestination he said that he did not think too much about that either, preferring, instead, to think on the love of God. He was so winsome and so dynamic that the pastors accepted him, though some had reservations about his theological orthodoxy. He made even more money as an author and regular contributor to some of the largest newspapers in America. He traveled the country making speeches for which he also was paid handsomely. He had a summer home at Lenox, MA and regularly discussed philosophy and world events with his neighbors, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, leaders in the “free thought” movement of the day. Some say his sermons bore an uncanny resemblance to Emerson’s thought. While never proven, a cloud of serial, marital infidelity perpetually hung over him. In fact a civil trial for adultery in the late 1860’s caused a feeding frenzy by the tabloids of the day. One of his antagonists said that Henry preached on any given Sunday night to seven or eight of his mistresses from the congregation. By the end of his ministry he said that he did not believe God would send anyone to hell. The Old School Presbyterian

Unfortunately, near the end of his life and ministry Lyman Beecher left his Old School Presbyterianism, the theology of Jonathan Edwards and the seventeenth century Puritans, for the New School Presbyterianism of the New Haven Theology that, among other things, denied the doctrine of original sin.

Princeton Review wrote that the Beecher children had done more to eradicate Biblical Calvinism in their day than any other people.²⁰

James, the half-brother of Jesus, admonishes us saying, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” This verse serves as a transition between what James has said earlier about trials and temptations and what follows concerning the doctrine of God (every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation) and the doctrine of salvation (in the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth). Bottom line—wrong notions about sin, salvation, and God can bring eternal perdition. By wrong notions I mean this. We tend to believe that we can sin and be forgiven easily. Sin, however, has an enslaving dimension and one ought never to assume that repentance is an easy thing to do, for Paul says that it is a gift from God (2 Timothy 2:24-25). And sin is not merely outward action. Jesus constantly addressed this with the Pharisees who thought they were righteous because they did not commit murder or adultery (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28). One can sin in thought as easily as he can in bodily action.

We also deceive ourselves by wrong notions of salvation. So many people with whom I speak the gospel are trusting in their perceived goodness, hoping their good outweighs their bad, as a ticket to heaven. Paul, however, says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Many today also inter-mingle justification with sanctification. Justification, receiving the imputed righteousness of Jesus by faith, is a glorious doctrine, and it means that the believer is eternally accepted by the Father, that he can do nothing to gain, maintain, or lose his eternal salvation. But many proponents of *sola fide*²¹ carry this notion of God’s love and acceptance over into their sanctification, the need to grow in holiness. They say, “Isn’t it wonderful to know that God is never angry with me again. . . I don’t have to attend worship, meet daily with God, tithe, or make much progress as a father or husband because God loves me and will never let me go.” Yes, it is true that God loves His children, but just like a loving father who is displeased, angry, and thus will discipline his disobedient child, God will do the same with us (Hebrews 12:9-10). A

From Debby Applegate’s *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*, published by Doubleday.

A Latin term, used by theologians, which means only by faith. It refers to our justification by faith alone.

true believer ought to be a better spouse today than he was last year, a better worker, a better neighbor, a better church member. And wrong notions about God can also be deadly. Some believe that God is grace only, that it is “His job to forgive people”, that He will therefore save all but the really bad people. Others believe He is impotent, not really able to do anything about the wickedness and violence in our world. And others believe He is imperious—tyrannical, unkind, and cruel.

Wrong notions can bring eternal perdition. James says that a man who restores one who has erred or gone astray—who allows himself to be deceived by wrong notions of God, salvation, or sin—will save that one’s soul from death. The death of a soul means the second death (Revelation 20:13-15), being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. This is serious business. What is the remedy for wrong notions about God, salvation, sin? We need a Biblical and experiential knowledge of the doctrine of God and salvation. Head knowledge is a start but it is not enough. The truth, as it is in Jesus, must grip our hearts—moving us to zeal for God, increasing our faith, and sending us into the world to serve others in the name of Christ. When Jesus told Pilate that He came to testify to the truth (John 18:38), Pilate mocked Him by asking, “What is truth?” That is the issue. We do not find soul saving, sanctifying truth outside of Scripture. You must never jettison the authority of Scripture. James puts forth his command in the present tense. In other words—never allow yourself to be seduced, led astray, given to error when it comes to God, salvation, or sin. I fear for people like Bart Ehrman²² and Henry Ward Beecher. Can people who write, speak, believe, and act so contrary to the Scripture expect to find a seat at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-10)! Seek the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:7), draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). You ought to want to finish well, not bringing shame to Christ or His gospel, not doing anything that would cause your family or friends to stumble due to your hypocrisy or apostasy. Gain a growing and transforming knowledge of God through His word. Jesus, after all, is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

August 5, 2010

A former evangelical and graduate of Wheaton College, who has written extensively on perceived errors in the New Testament canon. See his Misquoting Jesus as an infamous example of theological apostasy.

“How lonely sits the city,” - Lamentations 1:1

HOW DARK THE GOLD HAS BECOME!

The Apostle John’s vision of the glorified Christ reveals the Son of Man’s zeal for His glory and the work of His church. He is clothed with a robe, reaching to His feet, girded across His breast with a golden girdle. His head and His hair are white, like wool, like snow—thus proclaiming His righteousness and holiness. His voice is like the sound of many waters, portraying the mighty power of His gospel to be preached to all the nations. The sharp two-edged sword is the word of God that defends against ungodly accusation and destroys His enemies with gospel power. The seven stars in His right hand are the messengers of the seven churches, sent by Christ to make disciples, a multitude which no one can number, from every tongue, tribe, and nation. The Shekinah glory is on His face, the glory of the Spirit that fell at Pentecost.²³ Following this revelation of King Jesus, we find that Jesus gives letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Only two received a clean bill of health in His examination. Ephesus was charged with leaving their first love and threatened with losing the lamp stand (the church); and Laodicea was accused of being lukewarm and in danger of being violently rejected by Jesus. Bottom line—any church’s failure to carry out Christ’s two-fold mission—to save the lost and to sanctify or make holy the believer—will lose Jesus’ presence and power. Oh sure, the people can go through the motions and continue their programs and perhaps even draw large crowds with much activity, but the real party is over. We repeatedly see God’s rejection of His covenant people in the history of redemption. In Moses’ day, God gave His people over to the wilderness because of their unbelief (Numbers 14:22-23). In the day of the Judges, He raised up wicked kings because His people forgot Him (Judges 2:11-15). He brought the Assyrians and Babylonians due to Israel’s idolatry (2 Kings 17:6, 25:1ff). God brings judgment on His covenant people’s rebellion and unbelief. We see the same thing throughout church history. The strong vibrant church in North Africa in the pre and post Nicene period²⁴ was over run by Muslims by the end of the first millennium. The same happened in Palestine and Jerusalem. Western Europe is becoming Muslim, and the United States may not be far

See Revelation 1:12-16.

The Council of Nicea met in 325 A.D. and formulated the Nicene Creed, a document that helps us understand the two natures of Christ, being God and man.

behind either. Churches that fail to evangelize and grow in holiness are good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men (Matthew 5:13).

Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, a series of five Hebrew poems, to express his profound sorrow at the invasion of the Babylonians, the promised judgment of God upon their failure to carry out His marching orders (1 Kings 9:6-9). One cannot miss the profound grief and sorrow in his poetry. In Lamentations 1:1-5 we find Jeremiah lamenting the loss of Judah's privilege (verse one) . . . He cries out at their loss of peace (verse two) . . . He grieves their loss of freedom (verse three) . . . He weeps over the loss of worshippers (verse four) . . . And he woefully acknowledges their loss of God's glory (verse five). Indeed, how dark the gold has become (Lamentations 4:1)! The former glory has been tarnished by the idols of pleasure, materialism, and selfish preoccupation. The beautiful city of Zion lay in ruins at the hands of godless and impetuous people (Habakkuk 1:1-11).

Surely we can see the parallel in our day with the western church! Our inner cities are consumed with corruption, violence, and poverty. The mayor of Hartford was recently convicted of corruption and the vast majority of Hartford's children are malnourished. We throw millions of dollars annually at the problems there but nothing seems to change. Our churches are losing members and influence in the world. We have some wonderful exceptions but generally the God-centered preaching that exalts Christ and debases man is losing ground. Christians are regularly excluded from the convocation of ideas. We are chastised for entering the public arena and we are so wimpy that being faithful until death (Revelation 2:10) rings hollow. I doubt that most of us can be faithful even until ridicule. We are moving from freedom to servitude at the hands of our federal government. Those of you over the age of sixty—did you ever believe you would live to see such vast government encroachment? The enemies of Christ and His cross are overtaking us. If Christ has such power, then why are militant atheists like Hitchens and Dawkins winning a hearing? Why do Americans seem to have this strange death wish to get in bed with Islam, seeking appeasement like Europe with Hitler in the 1930's? It is insanity, madness! The church has become largely irrelevant to our society. As long as we "stay on the reservation" and sing our praise songs and preach our nice, little sermons the world does not mind. The moment however that we speak out against diminishing freedom, same sex

marriage, or abortion we are told to get back where we belong, the reservation.

The church of Jesus in the western world must wake up before it is too late. What must we do? Briefly, I mention three things. First, we must see our own guilt. John Murray said that while Pentecost is never repeated, it is also never retracted.²⁵ The book of Acts is normative for the church. What goes on there ought to go on today in our churches—things like mighty prayer, mighty preaching, mighty conversions, mighty assemblies, mighty holiness, mighty grass roots evangelism, mighty compassion, mighty societal impact, mighty leadership, and mighty combat. When I first became a Christian I witnessed to everything that moved. Then I embraced the Five Points of Calvinism and my evangelistic zeal waned. I am not saying that Calvinism thwarts evangelistic zeal. It should not do so, but in my case I allowed a wrong understanding of it to work negatively on my mind and will. Only within the last several years has it come back through the example of PEF²⁶ men like Mark Grasso, Bill Iverson, Henry Krabbendam, and Dick Fisher. If we see a mighty work of God in our day then He is the author of it. If we see nothing happen in our day, then we are to blame. The first, fundamental issue is our guilty silence and unbelief. Second, we must gain an intolerable burden for the glory of God. Isaiah had it (Isaiah 64:1ff). So did Moses (Exodus 34:29ff), David (Psalm 2), and Paul (2 Corinthians 4:6). When John Hyde came to India in 1892 he saw very little happening with the Hindu populace. His sense of desperation for the glory of God to be made known to the people was so overwhelming that he began to pray all night several times a year. Finally others joined him and mighty conversions followed, as many as twelve hundred per year—converted, baptized, and admitted to local churches. And third, we must acquire an indomitable hunger for the salvation of souls. Jeremiah had it (Jeremiah 15:16) and Jesus expected it of His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20, John 10:14-18). Howell Harris was converted in 1735 at the age of twenty-one and began immediately to preach the gospel in one-on-one venues, as well as in the open air, first before hundreds and then

Collected Writings of John Murray, volume 3, Banner of Truth, page 211.
Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship www.pefministry.org

before thousands. His life was marked by a profound zeal for the salvation of sinners.²⁷

Are you guilty of not engaging in regular personal evangelism? Are you ambivalent about the glory of God coming upon whole communities or nations? Are you truly burdened for the lost to be saved? If not, then you must repent by running from your sin and running to Jesus for His grace of forgiveness and holiness leading to boldness and efficacy in gospel ministry. Without it the western church is dead, even as she lives. Will you repent of your guilty silence, your mitigated zeal, your diminished passion?

August 12, 2010

For a fascinating and edifying look at powerful gospel ministry, I commend The Banner of Truth's two volume work entitled The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales.

“Renew our days as of old” - Lamentations 5:21

WE MUST HAVE REVIVAL!

John Girardeau, the Old School Presbyterian 28 minister from Charleston, SC, in 1851 turned down the opportunity to pastor a large Presbyterian church in order to begin a church with African slaves, out of Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston. Girardeau’s methodology was to hold a weekly prayer meeting, to divide the congregation into classes of fifty each so that accountability and pastoral needs could be adequately addressed, and to preach the word of God with power. The church began with thirty-six members and by 1860 there were six hundred members and over fifteen hundred attending both the morning and afternoon services. His congregation of slaves, who largely were not allowed to learn to read or write by their masters, learned by rote memory the *Shorter Catechism* of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*; and his congregation built the largest church building in Charleston at the time. Almost all the members were African slaves. Girardeau rejected any semblance of a business plan. He sought the unction of the Spirit upon his preaching and God answered powerfully. When revival came to New York City through the noon day prayer meetings led by Jeremiah Lanphier, the revival began also to spread throughout America, Wales, and Northern Ireland. As the nation moved closer and closer to war and secession Girardeau’s people also longed for revival. So they began a prayer meeting in 1858, praying every night for several hours, over many weeks. They asked for him to preach to them but he refused, waiting instead for the Spirit first to visit them. One evening, while he was praying, Girardeau says that he felt something like a lightening bolt rush through his body, head to foot. He stood in stunned silence for a few minutes. He then led in a hymn and said that preaching would begin the next night. The people sat down in their seats, waiting for him to begin preaching that very moment. He then knew the Spirit had come upon them as well! The preaching and praying lasted that first night until midnight with much weeping—some wept for their lost souls, while others wept for the joy of their salvation. Large numbers

These preachers held firmly to the doctrines of grace, affirming God alone to be the author of salvation, while denying that man had any part in it whatsoever. Consequently, they eschewed the “new methods” of men like Charles Finney.

of blacks and whites were saved during these many weeks of preaching; and churches throughout Charleston were built up by the revival.²⁹ Many of those saved in the revival preaching of Girardeau died a few years later as they marched off and faced the awful guns of war.

In concluding his five poems of lament due to God's judgment on Judah's recalcitrance, Jeremiah makes an appeal to God, "Restore us to Thee, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old," (Lamentations 5:21). He is asking God to remember them, to restore the "glory days" of life under King David. The Psalmist asked for the same thing, "O God, restore us, and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved," (Psalm 80:3). Can we not agree to ask, likewise, for God to renew our days as of old! Do we not desperately need a fresh visitation of the Spirit upon us! While circumstances have changed, can we not agree that the same kind of Holy Spirit anointed ministry as they had in Girardeau's day is still needed! What are we to do?

Bottom line—we must have revival or we will perish. What must we do to see it? As I have mentioned before³⁰ we must come to grips with our guilt. We have failed to seek God as we ought. We have failed to pray, to evangelize, and to speak the word of truth to one another. We have imbibed of worldliness and materialism, worshipping the god of peace and affluence. We must gain an intolerable burden for the glory of God. We will not gain this until we see our guilt and repent of our sin. And we must possess an indomitable hunger for the salvation of souls. We must see the fire and brimstone. We must smell the hellish sulfur. We must hear the agonizing cry of the damned. We must lament how our blessed Lord's name is besmirched by those who deny His deity, who say He is only one of many saviors. But we must also be willing to pay the price for revival, and that means revival prayer. Daniel prayed twelve hours (Daniel 9:21). The one hundred and twenty prayed for ten days (Acts 1:9, 24). Anna prayed for fifty years (Luke 2:36-37). If we are unwilling to set aside at least twelve hours to pray, then we do not mean business with God! We must regain a Biblically structured ecclesiology. By this I mean all believers must

Douglas Kelly, *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South, Banner of Truth*, pages 130-134.

See my devotional from August 12, 2010, entitled "How Dark the Gold Has Become," archived at

<www.pefministry.org>

see their need to evangelize (Acts 8:4).³¹ To fail here is to be disobedient to the Great Commission. We all are to speak the word of God to one another, teaching and exhorting one another (Ephesians 4:25). And all are to serve others, putting their needs before our own, what Francis Schaeffer called “living in community” as followers of Christ (Galatians 5:13). But while all are to do these three things, it is also true that God gifts some as evangelists, some as teachers, and some as deacons (Ephesians 4:11, Acts 6:1ff). Knowing and using our spiritual gifts is a vital and worthwhile pursuit. And there are three offices within the church—evangelist, elder, and deacon—and all three are vital to the welfare and growth of any local body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Timothy 3:1ff). And for every one evangelist there ought to be two elders to teach Biblical truth, and three deacons who are there to minister to the physical and material needs of these new converts. That’s because new converts from “the world” often need lots of help learning how to alter their lives more into conformity with the teaching of the Bible.

But we must also seek God for revival preaching. *Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship* men like Bill Hill, Ben Wilkinson, and Arnie Maves in the 1950’s and 60’s were the backbone of this vital ministry that no doubt brought thousands into the kingdom of God. Other twentieth century Reformed men like Martyn Lloyd-Jones and A.W. Tozer saw the need for revival preaching and regularly practiced it. As Francis Schaeffer exhorted us ³² we must unashamedly and unreservedly proclaim Biblical truth to our post-Christian culture. By revival preaching I mean the Spirit anointed proclamation, exposition, and application of Holy Scripture that debases man and exalts Christ, that calls people to faith in Jesus, that calls people to gospel holiness. The revival preacher preaches for a verdict, seeking to drive men to Jesus for salvation and sanctification. Peter at Pentecost, Paul at Ephesus, Jonathan Edwards at Enfield, and George Whitefield at Philadelphia are all examples of revival preaching. God has always used it to bring revival, and we must have it again.

Francis Schaeffer makes the same point quite emphatically, *Death in the City*, page 122.

Again see Schaeffer’s *Death in the City*, a series of lectures he first gave at Wheaton College in 1968, calling us not to accommodate to the culture but to proclaim propositional truth, what he called “true truth”, announcing the judgment of God on a people who had turned their back on Reformation teaching.

I say we must have revival or we will perish under God's wrath. Is this too strong a statement? No! Look at church history. When the church no longer acts like the church—evangelizing, teaching, and serving the needy then Christ takes the lamp stand out of its place and moves on to another venue in the world. He left the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and He is presently leaving the United States. We must have revival. We must be willing to pay the price. We must seek God in revival prayer. We must have a Biblical, ecclesiastical structure. We must have revival preaching. We must! We must! We must! But we cannot. In our flesh dwells no good thing. We want our comfort, not the glory of God. And we certainly do not have the ability to bring conversions and the gospel transformation of our culture. Therefore we must thirst for God, and we won't do this unless the Spirit shows us our sin of unbelief and worldliness, unless He makes known to us our idolatry. But when we thirst, then we will be moved to pray earnestly, and when we pray earnestly God will give us the grace to shine with the glory of Jesus on our faces and lives. I urge you to see your sin of guilty silence, of worldliness, of worshipping before the god of comfort and affluence. And I urge you to repent, and seek Jesus for the outpouring of His Spirit on your church, community, nation, and world. We must have revival or we will perish!

August 19, 2010

“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures”
- James 1:18

HOW ARE WE SAVED?

At 4 a.m. on March 28, 1979, reactor two at the Three Mile Island nuclear facility, ten miles from Harrisburg, PA, malfunctioned. A valve which allowed water into the core of the reactor in order to cool the uranium fuel rods failed to open, causing the temperature of the rods to rise to a dangerous level. Thankfully, the problem was caught in time, preventing the rods from “melting down”. If that had happened, the rods, having reached a temperature of 2700 degrees Celsius, would have sunk fifty feet into the ground, causing massive radiation explosions and contaminating the underground water and atmosphere for many miles. The reinforced-concrete, golf-ball like containment building over the nuclear reactor also prevented seepage of radiation into the atmosphere, thus narrowly preventing a catastrophe of monumental proportions. Don’t you know that many of the people living near Three Mile Island breathed a heavy sigh of relief, thanking God for preserving their lives! Don’t you know the joy of deliverance gripped them! Some seven years later (April 26, 1986) at Chernobyl, a town eighty miles north of Kiev in Ukraine, fuel rods in one of the reactors began to melt down due to an alarming increase in temperature. The containment building shattered, allowing radioactive contamination to enter the atmosphere. The Soviets tried to cover up the disaster but two days later scientists in Sweden detected massive levels of radiation coming from the east. Scientists in Scotland noted radiation levels ten thousand times higher than normal. The World Health Organization estimates that two hundred times the radiation level of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki entered the atmosphere. Thousands died then, and in succeeding years countless others suffered from birth defects and early death from cancer due to the radiation.³³ Don’t you know that many of the survivors of Three Mile Island felt compassion on those in Ukraine who died from the Chernobyl meltdown!

From a paper entitled “Nuclear Disasters and Accidents,” from <www.library.thinkquest.org>

In a far greater way, if you as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ do not have profound compassion on the lost in our world, then you have no idea from what you have been saved. James, in order that his brethren would not be deceived by misunderstanding God's purpose in trials and temptations, lays down the doctrine of God³⁴. Now he takes up the doctrine of salvation, namely how are we saved and what difference it makes. He puts forth three glorious and vital statements. First, he says that God, by a sovereign act of His grace, regenerates people—in the exercise of His will He brought us forth. By this James lays down two components of this glorious salvation. He elects, or chooses His people from before the foundation of the world, to be His own (John 6:37-40, Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:29-30). That is, He did so in the exercise of His will. You had nothing to do with it. You were not looking for this. Neither was I, but God had mercy! God has loved you, if you are in Christ, for as long as He has existed. God also regenerates His people (Ezekiel 36:26, 37:1ff, John 3:5-7, Titus 3:5). James says, "He brought us forth." You were utterly corrupt in your nature (Genesis 6:5, Psalm 10:6-11, Jeremiah 17:9). You had nothing to offer God (Isaiah 59). You justly were heading for eternal perdition (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) but God had mercy (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Dear Christian—you were far worse than you can possibly imagine. You had a cobra heart (Psalm 58:4), an excrement past of guilt and shame (Philippians 3:8), and a poisonous life (James 3:6) that rendered you utterly unacceptable to God. As much as I love my grandchildren if one of them fell into a latrine pit and came running to me for comfort I would not touch him until I had hosed him off with water. Why, then, do you think God would have embraced you in the excrement of your original and actual sin? Never cease to marvel at the profound work of grace in your life.

Second, James states how God brings forth His electing and regenerating grace—through the word of truth. James later exhorts us to receive the word implanted which is able to save our souls (James 1:21), and Paul defines the word of truth as the gospel (Colossians 1:5), calling us to teach it accurately (2 Timothy 2:15). Consequently preaching and evangelizing are God's means of bringing His elect unto salvation. There is no substitute for it (Romans 10:9-13). We were like men who had drowned in the ocean, having our flesh eaten by scavenger fish, our bones having fallen to the ocean floor thousands of feet below, only to have those bones miraculously re-fitted with

See my August 26, 2010 devotional "The Immutability of God" archived at <www.pefministry.org>

sinew, muscle, organs, skin, blood, and breath, being brought to life anew. Never underestimate the miracle of God's redeeming grace, brought forth by faithful men and women who showed you Jesus!

And third, note that God's purpose for His electing and regenerating work is His own glory, and He receives it by promoting Biblical holiness in His people—that we might become a sort of first fruits among His creatures. James has in mind the first fruits of a farmer (Exodus 23:19) who gives his first and best to God. James is exhorting these dispersed Jewish believers to be godly examples to the rest of the world, they being the first recipients of God's mercy on the day of Pentecost (James 1:1, Acts 2:1ff). God is all about our holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Peter 1:14-16). So, your eternal salvation, from beginning to end, is a work of God's sovereign grace.

Most of you know this, but here's the vital question—what difference is it making in your life? When you realize how corrupt you were, how much you deserve God's eternal damnation, then can you not be marked with increased joy, compassion, confidence, humility, and holiness!

Indeed James' call to consider all things joy, for the brother of humble circumstances to glory in his high position, and for the rich man to glory in his shame, all point to this marvelous truth—that God's electing and regenerating mercy has come to us. You have escaped hell, having your sins taken from you. Rejoice in the Lord always! And because you have received mercy and compassion, can you not therefore, show compassion and mercy to others in need. And since you have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens to God, can you not therefore approach the throne of God with boldness (Hebrews 4:14-16). Should not your entire life be marked by confidence! Not confidence in yourself, but confidence in the God who went to great lengths to save you from yourself. And can you not live with profound humility before God and people. You are no better than anyone. You did not decide for Christ. He chose you, regenerated you, justified you, and adopted you into His family. Never forget the magnitude of His redeeming grace. And can you not, therefore, seek after Biblical holiness! You have the Spirit of the life in Christ Jesus indwelling you (Romans 8:2), the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4), thus you can walk in Biblical holiness, thus assuring yourself that you have belonged to God from all eternity (Ephesians 4:1-4, 1 John 3:19-20).

September 16, 2010

*“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people”
- Proverbs 14:34*

MUSLIM PRAYER IN THE CITY OF THOMAS HOOKER

In taking John Winthrop’s Puritan vision of a “city on a hill” westward from Boston to the Connecticut River valley, Thomas Hooker in 1634 brought a full orbbed, Calvinistic theology to the founding of Hartford. The city I call home (okay, actually I live in West Hartford right next door) has made the news again. The Hartford City Council recently voted, in an effort to “show solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters” to ask Muslim Imam’s to open their Council meetings with prayer. The Council has received many irate phone calls and what one local news affiliate calls “hate emails”, and thus is reconsidering its position, perhaps having, instead, an interfaith prayer. Some oppose the Muslim prayer idea on the basis of separation of church and state. Others say that since we are a Christian nation, founded on Judeo-Christian values, then we ought to continue with “Christian” prayers.

Get ready America—this will soon be coming to your community. Why do I say that? As I have said for many years now—New England in general and Connecticut in particular are the exporters of ideas. That’s their greatest commodity. Every major thought movement in America began there and made its way to the rest of the country. This is true with the Calvinism (1630 to 1750) of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards; the Arminianism (1750 to 1800) of Charles Chauncey and Jonathan Mayhew,³⁵ the Unitarianism (1800 to 1850) of William Ellery Channing and the fall of Harvard in 1804,³⁶ the Transcendentalism (1850 to 1900) of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson; the Theological liberalism and political activism (1850 to 1960) of Horace Bushnell and Henry Ward Beecher; the recent codification of gay marriage; and now having Muslim Imams praying at City Council meetings.

³⁵ George Marsden takes up this issue in his *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. By Arminianism theologians of the day meant a departure from Calvinism, especially on the doctrine of original sin and salvation by the grace of God alone, page 433ff.

³⁶ See my book *Seeking a Revival Culture: Essays in Fortifying an Anemic Church*, page 8.

How did we get to the place where Muslim Imams are asked to pray at Hartford City Council meetings? There can be no question that the Christian worldview was the moving force of American thought leading to the founding of our nation.³⁷ By Christian worldview we mean seeing all of life through the lens of Holy Scripture—declaring our greatest problem to be the fall into sin, bringing original and actual sin; the result of the problem being pride, selfishness, greed, and all manner of wickedness in any culture; and the remedy being regeneration through the work of the Holy Spirit as He applies the work of Christ’s atoning death and resurrection to His elect. It means that the Bible must be the foundation of law for any just society,³⁸ and that the God-centered Biblical faith of the Reformation ought to impact every area of culture.³⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville observed this some sixty years later when he wrote, “America is still the place where Christian religion has kept the greatest real power over men’s souls.”⁴⁰

So what happened? Simply put—America has lost its Christian consensus. Though various polls report that something like forty-one percent of Americans claim a born again experience, this overstates the case significantly. Probably no more than eight percent of Americans are truly born again—who believe in a Triune God, the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ, a literal heaven and hell, the exclusivity of Christ, that Jesus is the only way of salvation.⁴¹ As our Christian consensus began a slow process of erosion, going back to at least 1750, other world views have come in to take its place. Ideas have consequences and they do not remain in a vacuum. The very fact that the Hartford City Council opens their meetings with prayer, the very fact that we still have a chaplain of the U.S. Senate who opens

³⁷ Gregg Singer makes this undeniable point in his *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, page 284.

³⁸ British jurist and Christian, William Blackstone, in his famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, written between 1765-1770, presupposed that the Bible is the base for law, “The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures . . . no human laws should be suffered to contradict these,” as noted by John Whitehead in *The Second American Revolution*, page 31.

³⁹ See *Lectures on Calvinism* by Abraham Kuyper.

⁴⁰ *Democracy in America*, page 291.

⁴¹ Noted by Political Research Associates, Summer, 2003, <pra.publiceye.org>

every Senate meeting with prayer ought to astound us. These are relics from the distant past when a Christian consensus was easily and unreservedly accepted by the populace, even if the majority were not true followers of Christ. That has all changed now due to secularization and modernity. We assume we have a God-given right to liberty and democracy founded on the Christian worldview, but this is a faulty assumption, as any survey of world history will show. Christianity was predominant in the Middle East and North Africa until the end of the first millennium. Then Islam took over. Christianity through the Reformation in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe was a tour de force that changed the world for good. Secular humanism now rules the day and Islam is not far behind. And the strong vibrant Christian faith on which this great nation was founded is crumbling under the weight of Statism, a worldview that looks to the government as her savior.

What is the solution? What should we do about Imams praying at City Council meetings? Will demonstrating, writing “hate e mails”, or hating Muslims change anything? None of these are worthwhile. In fact they will only add to our demise. The only hope for America is a true, Biblical, God-centered, Christ-exalting, man-debasing, heaven sent revival where by God’s grace we see a visitation of the Holy Spirit that converts millions of Americans. And by conversion I do not mean political conservatism. Idolatry on the left or right is still damnable. We must have a return to the revival culture of the Acts of the Apostles where there was mighty praying, mighty preaching, mighty conversions, mighty assemblies, mighty holiness, mighty generosity, mighty grass roots evangelism, mighty societal impact, mighty leadership, and mighty combat. We must start with the awareness that we, the church, are totally responsible for the demise of Christianity in our culture. We have done this to ourselves. There is nothing gained by hating atheists, Muslims, or any other group. We have lived smug, materialistic lives devoid of prayer and true, Biblical holiness. We have imbibed of the very thing about which Jonathan Edwards warned us—believing that man is innately good and thus can be improved by education, politics, and self-actualization. Until we realize that we are guilty, that we have denied Christ by going after the harlot of worldliness, and until we repent and seek God earnestly for a true, Biblical revival, then we will continue our demise into irrelevance and oblivion.

September 9, 2010

“*Become doers of the word*” James 1:22

DOERS OF THE WORD

Jean Jacques Rousseau, one of the major architects of the French Enlightenment and consequently the French Revolution, was born in Geneva in 1712. He grew up in a Calvinist home and attended church regularly, later converting to Roman Catholicism so that he could stay in the good graces of his adulteress. Geneva, of course, was the home of John Calvin, the great theologian and pastor who had such a profound impact on Europe in the sixteenth century and beyond. Rousseau, however, rejected the faith of his fathers. His life ended in utter ruin. He fathered numerous illegitimate children and abandoned each of them. His writings moved people further and further from God, and closer and closer to anarchy.⁴²

James is all about our growth in holiness. He calls us to more and more godliness as we progress in this life. He tells us in chapter one of his epistle that the word of God is vital in promoting Biblical holiness. *He brought us forth through the word of truth* (verse 18). *In humility receive the word of God implanted which is able to save your soul* (verse 21). And now he tells us that we are to become doers of the word. The *New American Standard Bible* translates this *prove yourselves to be doers of the word*, but the Greek verb is more accurately translated *become doers of the word*. This is a present tense, middle voice, imperative mood verb—meaning this is a command which we ourselves, not simply other people, are commanded to do all the days of our lives. There is no option. To become doers of the word has the idea of progress, of teachableness, of being correctable. James is not negating the importance of hearing the word of God. By all means, we ought to read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate upon it. We ought to listen to sermons and we ought to read good Christian books that help us grow in holiness, that inspire us to walk in the ways of Christ. But to stop here, to not move forward to obey what we know, is the height of folly. He says that a man who is not a doer of the word is one who deceives himself. The Greek word here means to deceive

⁴² For a fascinating and sobering look at where Rousseau’s thinking took him, see Paul Johnson’s *Intellectuals*. There are numerous other stories of men who similarly made shipwreck of their lives by their militant unbelief.

by false reasoning, and was used in the secular culture of James' day to describe a librarian who made wrong use of written documents.⁴³

James illustrates his command by saying that a man who is only a hearer of the word is like one who looks at his natural face in a mirror. Once he has looked at himself and gone away he immediately forgets what kind of person he is. The emphasis here is folly. How foolish for a man to do that! A few weeks ago I awoke one morning, looked in a mirror, and found unsightly bumps on my forehead, the left side of my face swollen, and my left eye swollen shut. I could have said, "That's a bit unusual. Oh, whatever."⁴⁴ The word of God is a mirror that shows us our condition before the Holy One of Israel. When it shows sin, when it commands a particular action, then it is utter folly to hear the word and walk away, not acting on what we know. We are to heed the dreadful example of King Saul who twice was spared his life by David, who promised great things when seeing his sin, but who continued on the path to destruction (1 Samuel 24, 26).

God is telling us through James that we are to obey all His commands. By all means, become hearers of the word of God. Study your Bible. Memorize and meditate on Scripture. Read and listen to God-centered, Christ-exalting sermons. Read good Christian books, especially biographies of great Christians. These always inspire me. But don't stop there. Become a doer of the word. There is a real sense in which you should not read another chapter of the Bible, memorize another verse of the Bible, read another Christian book, or listen to another sermon until you obey what you already know.

To be a mere hearer of the word, to neglect the call to obey it, is sheer folly. I once had a case of malaria while in Africa. We did not have mosquito nets then, but now we do. What folly, then, if I neglected to take my anti-malarial medication and chose not to sleep under a mosquito net. Not acting on God's word is a far worse folly! Are you presently a hearer of the word only? Are there areas in your life in which God is speaking to you, and you are not acting upon them?

⁴³ *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, by Moulton and Milligan, page 487.

⁴⁴ For the record, I had a slight case of shingles. The Lord was very gracious to me. I did not suffer like so many others I know.

And what is God commanding you to do? The commands are many and, of course, can be boiled down to the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5), or even further to two commandments—to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39). Whenever you read the Scriptures or a Christian book, I suggest you use the acrostic SPECK to ask yourself five questions—

- Is there any *sin* to avoid?
- Is there any *promise* to claim?
- Is there any *example* to follow?
- Is there any *command* to obey?
- Is there any new *knowledge* I need to heed?

Then what? The commands of God, though we are called to obey them, are impossible for us in our flesh. Clearly the unbeliever cannot do them, though he is commanded to obey (Ezekiel tells the people of Judah to make for themselves new hearts, Ezekiel 18:31); and it is also true of us. Paul says the very thing he wants to do he does not do because of sin that indwells him (Romans 7:20). What must we do then, to obey all the commands of God? You must abide in Christ (John 15:5-7). You must draw near to God (James 4:8). You must seek the Lord (Isaiah 55:7). But how do you do these? Your soul is like a bucket with holes in it. When you keep your bucket under the river of God's grace—a river filled with the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:8-10) and the living water of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38) then you are filled with the Holy Spirit and you can obey God. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death (Romans 8:2). The spirit gives life to your mortal bodies (Romans 8:10-11). In other words when we do not resist the Spirit, when we do not quench Him, when we are filled with Him, then He overcomes the power of indwelling sin and temptation. Your indwelling sin and the temptations of the world are simply too much for you if you are not abiding in Christ. How do you keep your bucket under the river of Christ's blood and the Spirit's living water? You do so by faith. Francis Schaeffer wrote that true spirituality is living in Jesus moment by moment.⁴⁵ As you go through your day, pray, think on God, ask for His presence and power, confess and repent of your sin as the Spirit brings these to your mind. Call out to Jesus, asking

⁴⁵ *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment*, Francis Schaeffer.

Him for His wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (2 Corinthians 1:30).

The entire earthly life of the Lord Jesus was marked by obedience to His Father, of becoming a doer of the word (He learned obedience from things which He suffered, Hebrews 5:8). The ordeal of Gethsemane was far more horrid than we can imagine. Many believers and unbelievers have died heroically. Aristotle took the hemlock without complaint. Ridley was burned at the stake for his faith. So why then was Jesus fearful of dying? Why did He wrestle with His heavenly Father over it? Because it was a death unlike any other in history! He was taking the wrath of God upon Himself. He was experiencing the divine dereliction.⁴⁶ He obeyed and took the wrath of God upon Himself so that our just condemnation would be removed. You can obey, you can become a doer of the word because you have the indwelling Holy Spirit. You have the new life in Jesus. Keep your bucket submerged in the river of His grace, flowing with the blood of Jesus and the water of the Spirit. As you do, you will become a doer of the word and not a hearer only.

October 7, 2010

⁴⁶ A phrase used by Geoff Thomas in a sermon entitled “Gethsemane”, www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk

“If anyone thinks himself to be religious and does not bridle his own tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless”
- James 1:26

EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED PEOPLE IN HELL

I fear for some who hold to the essentials of evangelical faith. More specifically, I fear for some who know the *Westminster Confession of Faith* like the back of their hand, who have read the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin, who embrace the five solas of the Reformation.⁴⁷ I fear they may end up in hell. Why would I say this? After all, these are not godless, pagan types who mock God. They are not adulterers, fornicators, liars, thieves, or homosexuals. We know those who persist in these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul made that clear (1 Corinthians 6:11-12). I fear this because of the sobering words of James.

If anyone thinks himself to be religious—we typically think of religion in pejorative terms (Jesus’ perpetual problems with the Pharisees and Sadducees, for example), but that is not how James is using the word here. It refers to the outward display of the Christian disciplines—things like public worship (Hebrews 10:24-25, Matthew 5:23-24), keeping the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), honoring authority figures (Romans 13:1ff), and reading and acting upon the word of God (James 1:22-24). *Does not bridle his tongue*—James uses this same terminology in chapter three, referring to the fact that we all stumble in many ways, but if one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. He also illustrates this with a horse in whose mouth a bit is placed so that the rider can direct it wherever he desires. So, unbridled speech is wild, uncontrollable speech. I have been both to Saratoga, New York and Cumberland Island, Georgia. Both places have beautiful horses. The thoroughbred horses that run at Saratoga are a marvelous sight. Such power and grace! They can run a mile in two minutes. The horses on Cumberland Island are likewise beautiful, but are unbridled, incapable of being trained. They are wild horses. The power of the thoroughbred

⁴⁷ A term that represents a summary of the basic teaching of the Reformation, using Latin terms—Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), Sola Fide (by faith alone), Sola Gratia (by grace alone), Solus Christus (through Christ alone), Sola Deo Gloria (for the glory of God alone).

horses is kept under control by the jockey who pulls the reins as he wishes. The power of the wild horses on Cumberland Island is untrained, lawless. There is power but there is also the potential for destruction. One never knows what these wild horses will do when one encounters them there.

The use of the tongue is a recurring theme in James (James 2:1-3, 14-16, 3:1-12, 4:11, 13, 5:9-12). Thank God that James is not referring here to a slip of the tongue. If that were so, none of us could stand. Instead he means a habitual lifestyle of unbridled, uncontrolled speech. Why is this dangerous? One reason is found in the text but there are at least three others as well. Unbridled speech deceives the speaker. James tells us that one engaging in it, though he is religious, will find his religion worthless when he stands before God on that great day. Jesus said something similar (Matthew 7:21-23). So did Isaiah (Isaiah 1:10-17). He may know his Bible and theology well, but he will still end up in hell! Unbridled speech is also dangerous because it destroys other people (James 3:5-12), it displays the true spiritual condition of one's heart (Matthew 15:18), and it declares judgment (Matthew 12:36-37). If Paul says the unrighteous, those who are sexually immoral, will not inherit the kingdom of God; then why does James say those who sin with their tongues, something that seems hardly on par with Paul's list, will also go to hell? Because *acceptable sins* are just as damning as *unacceptable* ones!

This begs a question, doesn't it? What are the characteristics of unbridled speech? I could mention many. The book of Proverbs alone is full of them. But consider these four as a starter. You are guilty of habitual, unbridled speech if your words are constantly devious, divisive, or profane. *Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put devious lips far from you* (Proverbs 4:24). *The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverted* (Proverbs 10:32). *Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "Was I not joking?"* (Proverbs 26:18). You are guilty of unbridled speech if you are consistently deceitful, what we may call a pathological liar. *The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them* (Proverbs 11:3). You are guilty of unbridled speech if you are a grenade thrower, if you make a habit of stirring up trouble at family gatherings or public meetings by saying wrong things at the wrong time with the wrong tone. Think of our soldiers going door to door, trying to root out the

enemy. They sometimes throw a hand grenade into an adjoining room, wait for the explosion, and then see what they find. Some people seem to get a kick out of dropping bombs at Thanksgiving and Christmas family dinners. *With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered* (Proverbs 11:9). *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger* (Proverbs 15:1). And you are guilty of unbridled speech if you make a habit of talking too much, of monopolizing conversation, of not allowing others a chance to speak. *The wise of heart will receive many commands, but the babbling fool will be thrown down* (Proverbs 10:8). *When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise* (Proverbs 10:19). *Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him* (Proverbs 29:20).

Does this describe you? Surely we are all guilty of these things from time to time, and we must certainly repent of them, but if these define you, then you are in big trouble. What must you do? You must examine your heart to see if you are truly in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Your speech declares the condition of your heart (Matthew 15:18). Even if you are a true believer the profane, vicious, divisive, bomb throwing speech that sometimes comes from your mouth is telling you that things are not right in your soul. Sin is controlling and dominating you. What then? Repent (Mark 1:15). Change your mind. Think differently. It is not okay to continue this way. You cannot say, "I just like to tell it like it is." That's no excuse for ungodly speech! Then you must come clean with God, confessing your sin, asking God the Holy Spirit to apply the blood of Christ for cleansing (1 John 1:8-10). And finally, you must walk in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-20). How do you do that? Remember that you have a Savior who spoke only pure, undefiled words, all His earthly life. These beautiful, life-giving, edifying, grace filled words were summarized when He hung on the cross. He said, *My God, My God. Why hast Thou forsaken Me? Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. Today, you will be with Me in Paradise. Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit. Mother, behold your son. Son, behold your mother. I am thirsty. It is finished.*

Because Christ is your life (Colossians 3:4), because the old man is dead (Romans 6:5-7), because you are able to put on the new man (Ephesians 4:22-24), because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2)—

you can walk in holiness. You can speak edifying words (Ephesians 4:29). You can speak words of grace (Colossians 4:6). Don't be one of those who are horribly surprised on that terrible day when they hear, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. I never knew you (Matthew 7:23).

October 14, 2010

“And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them” - Acts 2:3

HOLY GHOST FIRE

If Brett McCracken’s observation is correct—that seventy per cent of those age eighteen to twenty-two, who grew up in the church, leave it never to return again,⁴⁸ then surely we can agree that the evangelical church is in big trouble. Ever since the late 1970’s when evangelicalism began to suffer the loss of members, she has tried numerous schemes to stop the bleeding. First it was the church growth movement with its emphasis on homogeneity, that we ought to worship with people “just like us.” Then came the seeker friendly movement with its use of drama and “how to”, psycho-therapeutic sermons, seeking to reach the Baby Boomer generation who was bored with church. Then came, for a brief period of time, the Emerging Church movement which sought to connect the Generation X culture with the ancient past. And now we have hipster Christianity where pastors don metro-sexual dress, sport \$80 haircuts, and use shocking speech and address even more shocking topics from the pulpit in order to reach the Millennial generation.

In each of these movements there can be no doubt that some were truly converted, and surely mega-churches, for good or for ill, have come out of all these approaches. The question, however, is this—are these offerings of strange fire to the Lord? God was terribly displeased with Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s sons, when they brought their strange fire on the altar (Numbers 3:4). He killed them on the spot. There are at least three underlying false assumptions in each of these movements. Consequently the embrace of any or all of them will fail to bring the substantial, Biblical growth evangelicalism wants and needs. What are they and what is the remedy? First, each of these movements assumes a Pelagian view of original sin, believing that mankind therefore was not corrupted by Adam’s fall into sin. In other words, man was completely free to choose or reject the overtures of the gospel. The Semi-Pelagian (modern day Arminianism) does not go that far. It says that while man was definitely and adversely affected by Adam’s fall, he still has some ability to decide on his own free will to follow Christ. The moment one takes this position is the moment he becomes a pragmatist in gospel work. If unregenerate man has the key to the

⁴⁸ *Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide*, Brett McCracken.

jailhouse of his sin in his pocket, then we ought to use any method necessary to coerce or seduce him to use it. So, anything goes in church services with entertainment, music, sermons. If a sixty year old pastor wants to reach the Millennial and X generations then why not bring his wife on the platform, having a bed there as a prop, and talk openly and specifically about sexual intercourse, urging the married couples to engage in that activity every night for a week?⁴⁹

The second false assumption is that the word of God preached is insufficient to get the job done. No evangelical pastor will admit this of course, but this is the practical outcome. Therefore sermons are becoming shorter and shorter, more and more devoid of solid Biblical exposition and content. The emphasis in many churches seems to be on the unbeliever, “dumbing down” the sermon in order to appeal to him, leaving the rest of the congregation spiritually malnourished. No wonder, then, that the problems of marital infidelity, divorce, wayward children, and varied addictions are as rampant inside the church as outside it.

And the third false assumption is that the word of God is sufficient. “Al, what are you saying? Are you contradicting yourself? Didn’t you just say that many today believe the preached word is insufficient? Which is it?” Here’s what I mean—some who hold to the sufficiency of the preached word of God believe that is *all* that is required, that all a preacher needs to do is stand up, open his mouth, after studying well and preparing a good, solid Biblical sermon, and all will be well, that God will bless the simple preaching of the word. Sounds good, doesn’t it? But this also is a faulty assumption. I hear it all the time from Reformed types. This, however, was not enough for Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, or Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Did they believe in the total inability of man to believe the gospel? Absolutely! Did they believe in the complete sufficiency of Scripture? Yes, of course. But they also believed in the preached word energized by the Holy Spirit. Their preaching and their lives were marked by Holy Ghost fire. What is that? John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, said that One was coming who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). Isaiah said that an angel came and touched his depraved mouth with coals of fire from the altar

⁴⁹ A television preacher, who will remain anonymous, urged this on a recent program.

(Isaiah 6:6-7). The men on the road to Emmaus, after hearing Jesus open the Scriptures to them about Himself said that their hearts burned within them (Luke 24:32). Malachi said that the coming of the Lord would be like a refiners fire (Malachi 3:2-3). Applying the words of the Psalmist, the writer to the Hebrews says that God makes His messengers a flame of fire (Hebrews 1:7, Psalm 104:4) Paul tells us that we will be saved by fire (1 Corinthians 3:15). Hebrews exhorts us to worship the Lord with reverence for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). And Luke says that one of the manifestations of the coming Holy Spirit was tongues that resembled fire (Acts 2:3). This was the fulfillment of John's words (Luke 3:16).

What does this mean? Fire in the Bible is symbolic of three things—purity, power, and passion. Isaiah is purified by altar coals. Jesus' baptism of the Spirit and fire promises the coming power of God. And God's messengers are a flaming fire, filled with passion to take the gospel to the nations. By all means, we ought to reject Semi-Pelagianism and what comes from it; but we must also reject the notion that all we need is the sufficiency of the Scripture. We need both the Scripture and the Spirit. We need to take up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17) but we must also pray with all perseverance and petition in the Spirit for all the saints, that the word may go forth with boldness (Ephesians 6:18-20). How do we get there? We must have Holy Ghost fire. We must have the unction of the Spirit (1 John 2:20). There is only one way, and that is earnest prayer and supplication, pouring out our hearts to God in repentance, asking for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), seeking His presence and power until we get it (James 4:8). If you are a preacher then make this your highest priority in ministry. If you support your preacher in prayer, and surely you should do so, then pray that the unction, Holy Ghost fire, will come with fullness in purity of motives, power in preaching, and passion in pursuit of ministry. I know—it looks strange, decidedly uncool in our day when hip and laid back is in—but we ought to go to church and watch our pastor burn with Holy Ghost fire as he stands to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. This is not a casual thing. This is not a “maybe you ought to think about it” proposition. This is life and death (2 Corinthians 3-4). Our words are a savor of life unto life or death unto death (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Samuel Chadwick said that when the church talks a lot about its problems, when conferences increase then she is in trouble. She is

looking to activities to overcome the lack of true spiritual power. “We are acting as though the only remedy for decline were method, organization, and compromise.”⁵⁰ Surely we can do better. Surely we must do better. We must have Holy Ghost fire!

October 21, 2010

⁵⁰ Samuel Chadwick, *The Way to Pentecost*, page 7.

“Again he measured a thousand cubits, and it was a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be forded” - Ezekiel 47:5

THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT, DESPERATELY NEEDED

I have traveled countless times over the dam at Jinga, Uganda, the source of the Nile River, on my way to the eastern part of the country. There is a hydro-electric power plant there that supplies a large amount of the electricity for the country. I am told that when the Nile River is high, when there has been plenty of rain, which is usually the case, then the turbines turn easily and there is plenty of electrical power for that region of the country. However, if the water level is low, then the turbines turn sporadically and little power is produced. The country must then ration electrical power.

The church of Jesus in the western world strikes me to be like the Nile at Jinga when the waters are low. There is little power. This ought not to be. Ezekiel is prophesying better days for the nation of Judah that is in the midst of being taken away into exile by the Babylonians. In line with Joel’s prophecy that God would pour out His Spirit on all mankind (Joel 2:28), Ezekiel is also given a vision by God of water flowing from the eastern side of the temple. It begins only ankle deep. Then a thousand cubits from the temple, the water is knee deep. Then another thousand cubits and it reaches the loins. Then it is over his head, preventing Ezekiel from fording or walking through the river. It is so deep that one can only swim to make his way across it. God goes on to say that the water flows into the sea, making it a fresh water lake that yields fish to eat.

Water, as symbolic of the Holy Spirit’s cleansing and sanctifying power, is a prevalent theme in Scripture. Isaiah proclaims, “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters,” (Isaiah 55:1). Jeremiah rebukes Judah for having committed two evils, saying that they have forsaken Him, the fountain of living waters, and they have hewn for themselves broken cisterns that cannot hold water (Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13). God promised that mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water, and a spring will go out from the house of the Lord to water the valley of Shittim (Joel 3:18). When a person touched a corpse in an open field, then the priests were instructed by Yahweh to purify them with

flowing water (Numbers 19:17). Yahweh prophesies that He will sprinkle clean water on His people and they will consequently be clean, that He will cleanse them from all their filthiness and from their idols, giving them a new heart and a new spirit so that they will walk in His statutes (Ezekiel 36:25-27). Jesus told the Samaritan woman that if she drank the water He had, then she would never thirst again (John 4:14). And Jesus proclaimed, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water,” (John 7:37-38).

All these prophecies were fulfilled at Pentecost, after Jesus’ ascension, after He had told the disciples that He was sending forth the promise of the Father upon them; but they were to wait in the city until they were clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). And He also told them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Pentecost has come and gone, and while Pentecost is never to be repeated it also is never retracted. We have the Holy Spirit. We ought to see much more power and efficacy than we do today. If I was to ask, “Do you believe that Jesus is more powerful than Mohammed?” then you would surely reply, “Of course He is.” If I was to ask, “Do you believe that Jesus is stronger than the secularism that floods the west?” you would say, “Yes, no doubt about it.” Why then do we see so little power? Why do we see so few conversions? Why are so many of our church members ambivalent about personal holiness? Why do so many hold their time and money selfishly? Why are we so worldly and materialistic? Why do preachers labor in ministry with so little progress in congregational holiness? Why is the church plagued with apathy and ignorance? Why do so few of our people meet regularly and consistently with God in private and family devotional times? Why is the church so generally devoid of powerful prayer? Why do so many come out for a fellowship dinner but so few for revival prayer? Why do so few fathers intentionally labor to produce kingdom disciples, future Jesus men and women? Why are we so weak, timid, lethargic, and ambivalent?

In a revival culture—where there is mighty praying, mighty preaching, mighty conversions, mighty assemblies, mighty holiness, mighty generosity, mighty personal evangelism, mighty societal impact, mighty leadership development, and mighty battles with the world, flesh, and devil—where there is a palpable sense of the Spirit’s presence and power, the waters flowing from the throne of God are deep, mighty, rushing, vibrant, productive, and fruitful. In a revival

culture of swiftly flowing Holy Ghost power people listen to the word preached and act upon it. People evangelize and many are truly saved. In a revival culture people hold their money, time, and worldly possessions very loosely, willingly giving them up for those in need. In a revival culture people cannot help but speak of Christ to their neighbors.

In other words, this is the fullness of the Spirit. This is different from the filling with the Spirit. Paul makes this present tense command (Ephesians 5:18), meaning this is to be a continual pursuit. This is something we are repeatedly to do. We need this because we sin and fellowship with God is broken (Isaiah 59:1-2). But the fullness of the Spirit is something more pervasive, more enduring, more permanent, and more powerful, something that describes ones life. Luke tells us that Barnabas was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:24) and he gave all his possessions away for the sake of the gospel and the covenant community (Acts 4:36-37). Luke also describes Stephen as being full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5), and when he made his powerful defense before the Sanhedrin and they were cut deeply in their hearts, they stoned him to death. Luke then tells us again that Stephen was full of the Spirit (Acts 7:55). Simon Kistemaker writes that Barnabas' fullness of the Spirit made possible the presence of the Holy Spirit and complete trust in Jesus that furnished him with serene stability, genuine love for his fellow man, and unparalleled dedication to the work of the Lord.⁵¹ It was a state of being for him. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin notes that since all who hear the gospel do not commune with Christ, we must look higher as to the reason for it—namely the secret energy of the Spirit by which we come to enjoy Christ and all His benefits.⁵² The Holy Spirit is the power source for Christian living and ministry. We would do well to tap in daily to our power source so that the glory of God may come upon us.

Some say to me, “I want to believe that we will experience this revival culture you talk about but I fear that we will never see it.” I know. I wonder about that myself. I wonder if we are willing to pay the price on a congregational level, on a denominational level. And perhaps we

⁵¹Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, Acts*, page 421.

⁵² *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book, III, chapter one, page 537.

are not, but one thing is sure, one thing I want you seriously to consider—you can personally have this revival culture every day in your own life, even if others around you do not pursue it. How? Ask for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Seek Him until you find Him (Matthew 7:7). Draw near to God (James 4:8). Believe you have His presence and power (Hebrews 11:1). Do not grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Go forth humbly but confidently believing that He will give you what you need for that very moment (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

October 28, 2010

“Watch over your own heart with diligence, for from it flows the springs of life” - Proverbs 4:23

PURSUING A PERSONAL INQUISITION OF THE HEART

I have known men who began well, who began their careers and families with a steadfast commitment to honor God, to be faithful to their wives and children, and to keep a lid on their fleshly desires. Sadly, many of those men, as their careers wind down and they move into their retirement years are divorced, estranged from their children, and giving little evidence of the commitment to Christ they so long ago professed. I have often wondered, if asked to preach their funerals, what I would say. Would I tell their loved ones and friends, “Yes, I know he was a Christian and I can give you Biblical assurance that he is now with Jesus.” Would I be able to say that?

What went wrong? How did this happen? And what can I say to instruct you so that the same does not happen to you, so that you finish your race well without bringing shame to Christ, your family, or yourself? Solomon is instructing his son on how to live in the midst of a plethora of temptations, not the least of which are lurid women and bad friends. Within this context he tells his son what he must do, how he must do it, and what results from it. Note first of all his instruction. “My son, watch over your own heart.” By *heart* he means the very citadel of his soul, the gateway to the rest of his body. A citadel is a military fortress which serves to protect an army and the people they serve. We know the heart is key to Biblical holiness from what follows in the succeeding verses where Solomon speaks of the eyes, the mouth, and the feet, calling us to discipline these members of our bodies, something Paul also told the Romans to do (Romans 6:12-13). Jesus told us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37). Joel says, “Rend your hearts, and not your garments,” (Joel 2:13). David says, “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee,” (Psalm 119:11).

To watch over one’s heart is to pursue a personal inquisition of the heart. David asked God to search him, to know his heart, to try him and know his anxious thoughts, to see if there is any hurtful way in him, and to lead him in the everlasting way, (Psalm 139:23-24). And in order to pursue this personal inquisition of the heart you must know yourself well, your sinful proclivities, your patterns of recurring sin,

those things that seem constantly to bring you down. A recovering alcoholic knows he cannot be around alcohol or anyone who drinks. He must stay away from them. A man who is tempted to sexual sin while on business trips must ask his friends to pray for him, even to check in with him each night in his hotel room, or if possible and practical to take his wife with him. A man tempted to spend money frivolously learns that he cannot carry a credit card with him, except perhaps his business credit card, that he must pay cash for only what he needs.

And how can you guard your heart, the citadel of your soul? Solomon says we do it with all diligence. I suggest three things, the first of which I have just mentioned. First, you must nightly pursue a personal inquisition of the soul. By this I mean, at the end of the day, as you prepare for bed that night, ask yourself a series of questions like these—“how have I sinned in my speech today, how have I sinned in my thoughts, what have I done contrary to God’s law, what are the deep seated idols that manifest themselves in sinful values, words, and deeds?” And when the Holy Spirit shows you your sin, be quick to humble yourself, to confess it as sin, to ask Jesus for His grace and holiness, and once again to claim Christ’s mercy and renewal. Second, you must daily pursue a personal visitation of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us to not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), to not grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Just as a man who offends his wife with unkind speech finds a wall of separation between them, so our sin breaks fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:1-2, Psalm 66:18). You are still married and you still love your wife when there is tension, but you nonetheless know things “just aren’t right.” And so it is with God and our sin. Your sin brings a degree of separation from Him which can lead to a lack of power over sin, a decrease in passion for Christ and His kingdom, and a downgrade of purity in thought, word, and deed. So each day, when you detect that God is far away from you, when you sense dryness or coldness to the things of God, then be very quick to repent, to ask for the Spirit’s filling.

And third, you must regularly pursue personal holiness for without this you will not see God (Hebrews 12:14). It is wonderfully and gloriously true that no one can snatch the believer from God’s hand (John 10:28-29), that nothing will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39), and that we are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

that we will receive an inheritance that will not fade away (1 Peter 1:3-4). But it is also true that one who goes on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth will find that there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain, terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire that will consume God's adversaries; that while one who sets aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses, so one will incur a stricter judgment who tramples under foot the Son of God, who ignores the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who insults the Spirit of grace, for it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:26-31).

This means, my dear friend, that you should ask God to keep you from presumptuous sins (Psalm 19:13). Do not presume upon God's grace. Your decision for Christ, your emotional experience, your knowledge of God and salvation may not mean anything. "You believe that God is one. You do well, but the demons also believe and tremble," (James 2:19). Well, then, how can you know that you are a true Christian? How can you be sure that you will finish the race well? A seldom discussed, but vital principle is that your assurance of salvation goes up or down with your obedience. In 1 John 3:17-22 the Apostle says, "If any among you has the world's goods and sees a brother in need and closes his heart to him, then how can the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us love, not in word or tongue, but in deed and truth. By this (by our love in deed and truth, by our obedience to God's law) we will know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before God in whatever our hearts condemn us for God is greater than our hearts and He knows all things." On the one hand, the Christian knows he belongs to God because his sin condemns him. He knows he is guilty. Those about whom I worry are the professing Christians who never admit wrong doing, who never apologize, who are always in the right, who walk aimlessly and blindly through this life, giving no evidence of humility or meekness. John goes on to say, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." So, on the other hand our obedience causes our confidence, our assurance that we truly belong to God, to increase. Note also that the true believer can be displeasing to God, that He may frown upon our actions, values, and attitudes, something I hear some pastors today say is impossible.

So my dear friend, will you nightly pursue a personal inquisition of the soul, will you daily pursue a personal visitation of the Spirit, and will you regularly pursue personal holiness? Run back to Jesus in sincere repentance, claiming His blood for your forgiveness and the Spirit's presence and sanctifying power. You will need to do this daily, many times each day, and in so doing you will finish your race well, hearing those blessed words, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," (Matthew 25:34).

December 30, 2010

“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication” - Zechariah 12:10

SEE THEM AS CHRIST SEES THEM

Unless you live in New England and have come here from some other place where the vestiges of a Christian consensus still remains (like the southern or mid-western United States, for example) you cannot appreciate the darkness of this place. Before I go further you must understand that the congregation we serve here in West Hartford is the friendliest and most loving church Wini and I have ever served. Why? Because they have the Spirit who sanctifies! Having said this however it still seems that a spirit or influence of unbelief hangs over New England like a dark cloud. I see it in the stinginess of unbelieving people. Connecticut gives the least per capita to charitable causes while having the highest per capita income in the nation. I see it in people who claim to be open and affirming, where they proudly say their pastors are homosexual, but who regularly prejudge people different than they. By this I mean people there tend automatically to “write off” anyone who is conservative in his views on moral and political issues, or who is an evangelical. They seem to group us all together as mindless, intolerant, hateful people. I hear about it in the workplace. People who have lived here all their lives, who have moved to the Bible belt, and then return here for work tell me the difference is night and day, that the work environment here in New England can be oppressive. One of our members told me how one Monday morning, while strolling through his office, he casually asked a fellow worker, “How was your weekend?” to which she replied, “I don’t discuss my personal life at work!”

The question, however, is how did it come to this, and what is the remedy? New England was established by the Puritans who were part of the *Great Migration* from England beginning in 1630 during the Puritan Revolution, a time in which the God-centered, Christ-exalting preaching and lifestyle of these godly people was sweeping over England, and washing onto the shore of the Massachusetts Bay. Within eight years the Puritans established Harvard for the training of young men in the gospel ministry. By the middle of the eighteenth century they had also established Yale, Dartmouth, and Princeton, all for the same purpose. So there was a deep and earnest desire for quality education, something which New England still holds dear. By

1750 however things began to change and Jonathan Edwards of Northampton saw it coming. He wrote his most famous treatise *Freedom of the Will* in an attempt to plug the hole in the dike which threatened to inundate New England. His message of the utter and complete sovereignty of God was ignored or mocked by the pastors of Boston and by the late eighteenth century the Unitarianism of William Ellery Channing who grew up in Newport, Rhode Island listening to the preaching of Samuel Hopkins (a disciple of Edwards) was picking up steam, resulting finally in 1804 in the Chair of Theology at Harvard being filled with a Unitarian. So in their pride and smugness many New Englanders have continued to embrace education, learning, and intellect while eschewing the godly foundation put down by our Calvinistic forefathers. From there New England moved onto the transcendentalism of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the liberal theology of Horace Bushnell and Henry Ward Beecher, and the social liberalism which is leading the way in our country with things like abortion, same sex marriage, and an unfriendly business environment of high taxation that drives businesses from the Northeast in droves. All of this is terribly sad to me, heartbreaking really.

So, how should I, how should you view the smug, prideful New Englander who mocks Christ and the authority of Scripture? After all, one could say, “New England, you have had your day. You squandered all that God gave you, and you ought now to stew in your own juices.” God, of course, could have said that to the nation of Judah after her idolatry. He sent her numerous prophets and she rejected them all. Finally He brought the Babylonians upon them who led them into exile for seventy years. But God was filled with mercy and loving kindness. He promised better days through Zechariah who gives one Messianic prophecy after another. In the text noted above the Lord Jesus is saying, some four hundred and fifty years before His incarnation, “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication.” We know Jesus is speaking here because He then says, “They will look on *Me* whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for *Him*, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over *Him* like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” They will weep tears of sorrow and gloom (Amos 8:10) because of their own sin of crucifying the Savior; but also tears of profound joy for being recipients of His unparalleled mercy (Psalm 126).

So what is Jesus promising Judah and the covenant people of God? He promises to pour out (see Ezekiel 39:25, 28-29, Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17, 33) His Spirit on all flesh. This glorious prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. He promises to pour out a spirit of grace and supplication. Some translations use a small s (spirit) and others use a capital S (Spirit), meaning the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew text is not clear here, but that really does not matter. The effect is still the same. God gave the *influence* of His Spirit or actually gave His Spirit, made manifest in grace and supplication. Supplication means lamentation (Jeremiah 31:3, 9) or deep consolation and compassion (Exodus 34:6-7). In other words, Yahweh looked upon His smug, unrepentant, and distressed covenant people with mercy and compassion. He would show them Jesus and this applies not only to the physical descendants of Abraham who believe in His Son, but also to the Gentiles, making them all the one people of God (Genesis 12:1-3, Galatians 3:9, 29).

So what are we to do with the smug New Englander or the smug southerner or mid-westerner, for that matter? May God give us a spirit of grace and supplication! May He give us a profound love for the difficult, prejudiced, and cold people we daily encounter! How do we get there? I suggest, first, that you remember from where you have come. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, you were children of wrath, headed for perdition, but God, rich in mercy, because of His great love for you, made you alive together with Christ. For by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1-5). My dear friend, can you not glory in your privileged position as the blood people of God! Second, understand where you are. You are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). Your citizenship is in heaven from which you eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of your humble state into conformity with the body of His glory (Philippians 3:20-21). You, therefore, are more than a conqueror through Christ who loves you (Romans 8:37). And third, you need to dwell on where you are going. In the ages to come God promises to show you the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us who are in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7). Paul puts it another way when he tells the Corinthians that eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man all that God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). God sees the idol worshipper of Zechariah's day, the self-righteous person of Jesus' day, and the prideful person of our day as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36), as chicks without a mother hen (Matthew 23:37), as helpless and discarded children (Ezekiel 16), and as debauched younger

brothers (Luke 15:11ff). My dear friend, look on Jesus whom you pierced with your own sins, and humble yourself under His mighty hand. Surely He has poured out on you a Spirit of grace and supplication. Should we not, can we not do the same for others?

January 6, 2011

“Yet she became an exile, she went into captivity; also her small children were dashed to pieces at the head of every street”

- Nahum 3:10

READ, WEEP, AND PRAY

In His mercy Yahweh sent reluctant Jonah in the eighth century B.C. to preach His unfathomable mercy to the Ninevites, and they repented, experiencing an unprecedented heaven sent revival (Jonah 3:5-10). Now however, some one hundred and thirty years later, after the fall of the city of Thebes on the Nile, Nineveh (in ancient Assyria, near modern day Mosul, Iraq) is once again in trouble. There is the threat of the Medes (modern day Iran) on the one hand and that of the Babylonians (modern day southern Iraq) on the other. The revival fire she experienced from the preaching of Jonah has died out and Nineveh has become merciless, imperialistic, deceitful, and ruthless militarily and materialistically (Nahum 3:1-4). Consequently the prophet pronounces judgment on her, declaring to the city that Yahweh is a jealous and avenging God, avenging and wrathful, One who takes vengeance on all His adversaries, One who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Nahum 1:2-3). He reminds them of the destruction of Thebes which confidently believed Ethiopia and Egypt would save her. She, however, had gone into exile and captivity, and her small children were dashed to pieces by the invading hoards and her honorable men were sold into slavery by lots. He then says that the same awaits Nineveh. She is too far gone. There is no relief. Her wound is incurable (Nahum 3:11-19).

“Her small children were dashed to pieces.” I weep when I consider the woeful trends in today’s youth culture.⁵³ My dear friend—read what follows and weep, using it to drive you to pray and disciple your children and those of your church, for they are inundated with unprecedented evil. Indeed they live in a profoundly dangerous world. Covenant children are daily being dashed on the rocks of modernity, and we must arise and take hold of our children, holding them dear to our hearts, training them and preparing them to be children of light, above reproach, blameless and innocent, living in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they appear as lights

⁵³ I am indebted to Walt Mueller, founder and President of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding www.cpyu.org for bringing these disturbing trends to light.

in the world, holding fast the word of life so that you may have confidence at the end of your life that you did not run in vain nor toil in vain (Philippians 2:14-16).

What are these disturbing trends? One, your children see between 3500 and 5000 advertisements per day, carefully designed by marketers who seek to create a continuous need in your children for their product, to give them a sense of self-worth. Thus they tend to seek the temporal over the eternal, the material over the spiritual. Two, age compression is a reality. Everything happens at younger and younger ages. Marketers employ this technique to expand their markets to younger and younger consumers. Have you noticed how six year olds now dress and act like eighteen year olds? Three, your children have media savvy. Ask any American ten year old to program the family's new entertainment system. No problem. Children between the ages of eight and eighteen spend almost eight hours a day with computers, television, movies, Ipods, etc. And they mainly do it alone in their rooms. Seven of ten children have televisions in their bedrooms, away from the rest of the family. Four, child and sexual abuse are rampant. Between three and ten million children annually are exposed to domestic violence. The safety and warmth of the home is sadly lacking in far too many homes in America. Five, the age old problem of peer pressure has morphed. It used to be that an adolescent boy may be coaxed by his peers to look at *Playboy* and they did so while feeling terribly guilty, knowing they were doing something forbidden. Today, however, your covenant child is faced with peers who encourage him in behavior they do not deem wicked. Big difference! Six, our covenant children live in a culture that deems materialism admirable and desirable. More and more teens work and often have more disposable income than their parents. Often their indulgent parents shower them with new automobiles when they turn sixteen and give them anything they want. They are ignoring the words of Jesus who said that not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions (Luke 12:15). Seven, fellatio is a serious problem, especially among middle school students. Fifty-five percent of boys and fifty-four percent of girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen have engaged in it. When asked if they think this is sex, they say, "No." Why? Because you cannot get pregnant doing it. Eight, depression is pandemic with teens. The peer pressure, the mixed signals from parents, friends, culture, and the media prevent far too many children from knowing how to navigate their way through the deep and troubling waters of adolescence. Some eighteen percent of

teens report symptoms of depression and many of them regularly take anti-depression medication. Nine, most covenant kids are really no different in values, attitudes, and behavior than non-Christian children. We see this, of course, in the greater covenant community where professing Christian adults say one thing but do and value another. Our children are excellent mimics.

All of this, of course, is terribly pessimistic, so I leave you with one positive characteristic. Mueller also notes that today's teens are more aware of a deep hunger for something more. We know, at the end of the day, that we all are idol makers and consistently exchange the truth of God for a lie and worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). Sometimes, however, and this seems to be one of those times, the sheer folly of our existence drives many to reconsider their values and behavior. More and more young people are asking the question, "Is this all there is? Surely there must be something else."

What does this mean for you as parents, grand-parents, or future parents? You must pray earnestly to God for your children and grandchildren.⁵⁴ You ought to be on your knees regularly, desperately, fervently, and hopefully all your days you have them. You must intentionally instruct them in the Biblical faith. Start with the *Children's Catechism* and move up to the *Shorter Catechism*. Regularly have family worship of some form or fashion.⁵⁵ Teach your children daily in the ordinary events of life. And model a sacrificial, kingdom dominated lifestyle before them.⁵⁶ They need to see you sacrifice your time and money for the kingdom of God. They need to

⁵⁴ I commend to you a wonderful resource written by my friend Pam Ferriss, along with Kathryn March and Susan Kelton entitled *My Grandmother is Praying for Me* <www.mygrandmotheris.com>. In the book each day of the year has a Proverb and follow up prayer, asking God to build within our grandchildren that particular character quality. It also gives a practical suggestion on how a grandmother can build this into her grandchildren. This, of course, can be used by any parent or grandfather as well.

⁵⁵ The best thing written, in my mind, on the topic is Terry Johnson's *The Family Worship Book*. One of the problems most of us have in this regard is knowing what to do or how to do it in family worship. Terry lays it all out for you.

⁵⁶ Since I seem to be on a roll for recommending good books on the topic, you should also read Charles Dunahoo's *Making Kingdom Disciples: A New Framework*.

see you on your knees in prayer. They need to see you bear up under hardship with joyful submission to God. In short, they need to see a life poured out in making them kingdom disciples.

To be sure, the trends of our youth culture are troubling and terrifying but your children need not be part of the norm. They can walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

January 27, 2011

“But someone may well say, “You have faith, and I have works”
- James 2:18

TAKING A NIP OF THE SPIRIT

With some fifty percent of Americans claiming to have had a born again experience, and with thirty percent saying they are evangelicals⁵⁷ should we not expect a mighty societal impact resulting in a more just society, the abolition of abortion, and the rejection of same sex marriage, just to name a few things? And should we not also expect fewer divorces among us? Should we not expect our children to live out their profession of faith, to walk in a manner worthy of their calling? Sadly this is not the case, which begs the question—why not? Could it be, on the one hand, that we have an ill-informed faith in our country? By this I mean at least two things. First is unbiblical faith (any religion or philosophy outside the pale of Christianity) like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, animism, or the enlightenment, Darwinian world view. And second is a heretical faith (any offshoot of Christianity that is anti-Trinitarian, that denies the hypostatic union⁵⁸, and that denies the five *solas* of the Reformation⁵⁹) like Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Roman Catholicism.⁶⁰ And on the other hand we have an unreformed faith.

⁵⁷ It is no longer easy to determine the definition of an evangelical but historically it has meant one who believes in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, Jesus as the only way of salvation, heaven for those who believe on Christ and hell for those who do not.

⁵⁸ From the Greek *hupostasis*, meaning substance or essence, that Jesus is of the same divine essence or substance as the Father and the Holy Spirit, though He also became human flesh. He is the God-Man. He has two natures, both divine and human. See the *Desiring God* website for a simple explanation of the topic, “What Is the Hypostatic Union?”, December 11, 2007.

⁵⁹ *Sola Scriptura* (only Scripture is authoritative), *Sola Fide* (justified by faith alone), *Sola Gratia* (justified by the grace of God alone), *Solus Christus* (saved only by Christ), *Soli Deo Gloria* (all for the glory of God).

⁶⁰ I am not putting Roman Catholicism on par with Mormonism or the Jehovah Witnesses. I have many Roman Catholic friends who seem to have saving faith, but we still ought to realize that the five *solas* of the Reformation and the counter-reformation Council of Trent still remain at odds with one another after nearly five hundred years of controversy, that the Roman Catholic Church’s anathema on the Reformation still stands.

I mean two things here as well. First, many evangelical churches are man-centered or Arminian, believing the fall into sin did not completely eradicate man's ability to reason his way to God, or to have the ability to choose Christ on his own free will initiative. I suggest that a man-centered faith is an unreformed one that leads to shallowness and superficiality in one's understanding of what God has wrought in salvation. Are there exceptions to this? Of course there are but this seems to be the rule. And then unreformed churches can in fact have a God-centered faith but regrettably this faith is often an empty one. That is, we know our doctrine, we glory in studying and reading it, in teaching it, but it seems not to transform us into humble, gracious, and kind people. I have known my share of those who are "Reformed and mad about it" or who are "grace based and overbearing with it."

James and Paul, contrary to what Martin Luther thought, are not at odds with each other. Paul, writing Galatians around 49 to 51 A.D., was dealing with the Judaizers who claimed that the Gentiles in Galatia had to become Jewish to be saved. Paul comes down hard on this, saying that anyone who preaches a different gospel is anathema (Galatians 1:9). James, on the other hand, writing some ten years earlier, long before Paul is on the scene, is dealing with antinomianism (those opposed or against the law of God, who believe they can go on sinning because they have God's grace). Paul says that man is justified by faith alone, while James says faith that justifies never stands alone. Paul is all about the root of faith and James wants to see the fruit of faith. Paul is all about saving grace and James is against cheap grace. Paul says that there is no pre-conversion fruit that saves while James says there must be post-conversion fruit that proves we are saved.

Bottom line—our problem in the evangelical church comes down to this—true faith is a living faith that transforms mind, emotions, and will. True faith begins and ends in the heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27). The prophet Ezekiel lays out the gospel paradigm we see developed in greater detail in the New Testament, namely regeneration (the heart of stone is replaced by a heart of flesh), justification (I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be cleansed), and sanctification (I will put My Spirit within you so that you obey My commandments). To go further, living faith always transforms our mind, emotions, and will (Romans 6:17). Paul says that we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), meaning that we begin to see the Triune God, the world, man, ourselves, and the eschaton (end times) from God's

perspective. And this living faith also transforms our emotions. With the Psalmist we consider God's presence as the loveliest of all and we desire to be there at all times (Psalm 84). We thus are able to rejoice in the Lord no matter what happens (Philippians 4:4-5), to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials (James 1:2-4). Finally, this living faith transforms our wills. We are able and willing to give our bodies as living and holy sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2).

And this true and living faith which James demands from us comes alive through the ministry of the Spirit. Paul commands us continually to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), comparing it with drunkenness. Now we know that an inebriated man thinks, talks, walks, feels differently. He is under the influence of a foreign substance. Likewise one who is filled with the Holy Spirit thinks, speaks, walks, and feels like God. I have also suggested earlier⁶¹ that the fullness of the Spirit is something worthy of our pursuit. Barnabas and Stephen had it (Acts 11:24, 6:5), and this fullness describes or characterizes these two men. It was a state of being, a way of life with them. We need the filling but we also desperately need the fullness of the Spirit. This is what makes our dead faith a live one. We see the fullness of the Spirit portrayed throughout the book of Acts and in the epistles where we are told to speak truth to one another (Ephesians 4:15), to show mercy to others (Acts 11:29), and to share the gospel with the lost (Acts 8:1ff).

How do we get to the fullness of the Spirit? The filling of the Spirit is to the fullness of the Spirit as drunkenness is to alcoholism. A man drunk with wine is temporarily under the influence of alcohol which alters his thinking, speaking, walking, and feeling. The alcohol eventually leaves his body and he returns to normal. One can be filled with the Spirit in the same manner, but due to sinful rebellion, lose the Spirit's influence. The alcoholic, on the other hand, is satiated with alcohol. He must drink. He is physically addicted to the alcohol and goes into withdrawals if he is denied it. Furthermore, his life is characterized or dominated by his addiction. He cannot be understood apart from it. And he must take a "nip" every few hours. So no matter where he is, at work, in a meeting, on a trip, he finds a way to get a quick nip to keep him going. The more he drinks the more he craves another drink.

⁶¹ Page 51 of this book.

My dear friend, we gain the fullness of the Spirit, a life characterized by joy, boldness, and efficacy in ministry when we crave the Spirit like an alcoholic craves another drink. How do we get there? As we drink more and more frequently of the Spirit (John 7:37-39, Isaiah 55:1-3) then we crave Him more and more. So, purpose to take a nip of the Spirit throughout the day. Come to see how desperate you are for His presence and power. Come to see the beauty of drinking deeply from the living water of Jesus that flows within you. As you do, then your life will increasingly be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). This kind of true and living faith, to which James is calling us, alone will transform us and make the societal impact we all long to see.

February 3, 2011

“Only be strong and courageous” - Joshua 1:7

MEN WITH BREASTS

We seem to be like the proverbial frog in the pan of water on the stove. As the water is slowly heated the frog is unaware of his perilous condition until it is too late and he is boiled to his death. We seem to be like fish in water. They do not know their environment because they have never known anything else. The feminization of men in the western world is a stark reality that many fail to see. It is so much a part of our culture that younger men in particular largely do not see it. If C.S. Lewis wrote of *Men with Chests*⁶²

I suggest we now have a culture of men with breasts, men who act more like women than men.

As God called Joshua to take over for Moses, as he was to lead Israel into the Promised Land, He told him to be strong and courageous, that the ground of his confidence was the fact that as He had been with Moses, so He would be with Joshua. It is time for men to be strong and courageous, but in order to be that we must see the rampant feminization of the western man. What are the characteristics of men with breasts? I list nine of them in no particular order. One, sentimentality. Men seem to live on their feelings, being far too subjective, eschewing the necessity of objectivity. Men are told from childhood to “get in touch with their feelings,” to express how they feel to other men, to bear their souls, to let others know their fears, struggles, and failures. Listen to the way many men speak today. They say, “I feel good about my job. I feel good about my marriage right now.” Two, role-reversal. Moses in Genesis 1 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 both make clear that the wife is the helper of her husband. He is to tend the garden. He is to lead the family. In other words the husband is the provider and the wife is to assist him in his labors, freeing him to go out into the world and make a living for his family. Today, however, I see many couples who have this reversed. The husband is his wife’s help mate. So, men stay home from work to babysit the children while the wife does her thing. Men who get home late from a trip and have an early morning meeting the next day are expected to stay up for an hour or two with a sick child while the wife sleeps. I know this may be controversial and by all means, husbands

⁶² See his essay entitled *The Abolition of Man* in which Lewis takes up the issue of emotionalism at the expense of objective reality.

and fathers are to sacrifice for their families, but I wonder how much of this is fueled by couples seeing the husband as the one to help his wife in her role. Three, aversion to duty. We often hear today that a man ought to find a job he truly loves and do it, even if it puts a financial hardship on the family. I am all for men finding jobs they truly enjoy but what if that is not a possibility! Then what? Most men of the World War II and Korean War generations stuck with hard or boring work because they understood duty. They knew they had to provide for their families. Four, irresponsibility. This goes back to Adam's sin in the garden when he blamed Eve for his disobedience. Men have been doing it since, but now many take it to a higher level. Young men delay entry into the work force so they can "hang out" in Aspen for a year or two. They delay marriage because they don't want the responsibility, putting hardship on women whose child-bearing clock is ticking, who find it necessary to enter the job market when really what most of them want is to have children and rear them. And many men today expect their wives to work outside the home, to provide a second income so they can enjoy the finer things of life. I have never said that women cannot or should not work outside the home (some really love it) only that their primary responsibility is the home. Unfortunately women who work outside the home are expected to work inside the home too.

Five, selfishness. It seems that many men today are all about their hobbies, sports, guy time, and television programs. They seem to think they can come and go as they please. If one tendency is effeminate aversion to duty then another is machismo, assuming they can run roughshod over their wives. Six, emotionalism. This is similar to sentimentality but with this difference—emotionalism is a state of being where a man is dominated by his feelings. He cannot seem to get past them. He is depressed. He is fearful and anxious. He feels bad about himself. He is paralyzed with fear. He cannot seem to get going in the morning. He wallows in his misery and looks for other men who will commiserate with him. Men's groups like these remind me of the women in *Jerry Maguire* who are weeping and bearing their souls to one another in their support group. Men who indiscriminately "bear their souls" do not inspire leadership in their wives and children. Leadership can be a lonely existence. Sometimes a man must suffer alone, pouring out his soul to God, his only refuge and strength. Seven, transference. Again, this is similar to irresponsibility but with a deeper meaning. I have long observed that men who became addicted to pornography, alcohol, or drugs in their teen years seem to have their

emotional development arrested at the very time they began their addictions of choice. So forty or fifty year old men who began taking drugs at fifteen still act like fifteen year olds, and one of the ways this shows up is an unwillingness to accept rebuke, criticism, or to own up to one's sinful living, just like fifteen year old boys. They are masters, yea have finely developed over the years, the art of transference, blame shifting. It is always the wife's fault, the boss's fault. This is so terribly effeminate! Eight, an aversion to pain and self-discipline. The effeminate man will do anything to avoid the pain of hard work, making the hard choices, telling his children "No." He is undisciplined in his eating and sleeping habits, sloppy in his dress and speech, inconsistent in personal and family worship. He prefers to let his wife do the hard things with the children. He sleeps in while she gets up early to feed the children. He watches television at night while she reads to them and tucks them into bed. And nine, abandonment. While this unfortunately and dreadfully has been true in the African American and Hispanic communities for some time due no doubt to the ravages of a failed welfare system which castrates men—this is most certainly also true in the white community today. Men regularly leave their wives and children for other women, telling themselves that their wives do not understand them, don't meet their emotional and physical needs, convincing themselves that the children will be okay with this, that they surely want to see their daddy happy. Men also abandon their families for money, caving into the corporate ethos of giving one's life for the sake of the company, telling themselves that they must work these ridiculous hours in order to provide well for their families. Do you not see this in today's men? Why is this so and what is the remedy?

February 24, 2011

“You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” - James 4:2a-3

DESPERATION AND HOPE

In the context of our ministry in West Hartford, I live with a constant two-fold state of desperation and hope. At least ten to twelve of us are committed to times of weekly, fervent prayer for revival, and while we see God convert a few people here and there, and while we have a loving and gracious congregation, it still seems that very little has been accomplished for the kingdom of Christ. We have tried numerous evangelistic outreaches. We have sent post cards to thousands of homes near the church meeting place, inviting people to church, and not one person has attended a worship service because of these overtures. Our radio ministry reaches thousands of people and some have come to Christ and joined the church, but still this seems to be a pittance. The lack of interest in the gospel, the paltry number of conversions, and the hard-heartedness of the people here make me desperate. If, however, all I have is desperation then this would lead me to depression, a desire to quit, to give up. If I have only hope, then I would become a kind of Pollyanna, just figuring that some how, some way everything will work out just fine. Neither are Biblical responses. We need both desperation and hope.

Here's where prayer comes into the picture. In addressing the question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you", James gives four reasons for them. The first is hedonism. He says, "Is not the source of your quarrels and conflicts your pleasures (*hedonon* is the Greek word) that wage war in your members. Hedonism is an all consuming desire for self-gratification (Galatians 5:16, Luke 8:14, 2 Peter 2:13). This is what we see with Achan in Joshua 7:16ff who saw the things on the ban, desired them, and took them. It is like David who saw Bathsheba, desired her, and took her (2 Samuel 11:1ff). Hedonism is the actual receipt of the desired pleasure. The second cause of quarrels and conflicts is *epithumia* or lust. You lust and do not have so you commit murder. You desire and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel. Lust is deformed desire, a perverted passion. It is what Shechem felt for Dinah when he raped her (Genesis 34:1ff). It is the murderous revenge Jacob's sons (Simeon and Levi) felt toward Shechem when they murdered him and all the men of their town (Genesis 34:25ff). But a third cause of quarrels and conflicts is lack of

prayer. We have not because we ask not. Have you ever considered that your marital conflict, your problems with your children, or the problems in your church are because you do not pray! When I counsel a married couple in marital trouble, I always first ask, "Do you pray daily as a couple?" Not surprisingly the answer is, "No." But you may say, "I pray for my marriage and my children all the time." Okay, but perhaps the quarrels and conflicts are because you fail to pray correctly. That's the fourth cause of conflicts. "You ask and you do not receive, because you ask with wrong or wicked motives so that, for the purpose of, spending it on your own pleasures." The Greek verb for ask *aiteo* is in both the active and middle voices in verse 3. You ask and do not receive (present tense, active voice). But James quite emphatically⁶³ also says, "Because you ask (present tense, middle voice) with wrong motives (literally with wickedness, see James 1:21, *kakos*). Furthermore James adds a purpose clause, saying, "in order that you may spend it on your *hedonais*." Have you ever taken an inventory of your prayers? Perhaps you are praying with self-gratification as your driving motive. For example, a wife who prays for her drunkard and verbally abusive husband to be saved in order to bring peace to her life, is praying selfishly. A father who never attends the weekly church prayer meeting but who then attends because his son is diagnosed with a brain tumor is probably praying selfishly. He just does not want to see his son die. A man who prays for a well paying job may be praying selfishly. He should ask himself, "Why do I want this job? Is it to make myself feel good? Is it to make money to gain or maintain a lavish lifestyle?" If single, why do you pray for a spouse? Is it to make you feel better about yourself? If you want deliverance from a horrid work environment, then ask yourself why? Is it merely to relieve your stress level? Have you considered the sanctifying aspect of your suffering? If you pray selfishly then God will not hear your prayer. Well, He may hear it and He may answer but you will not like what He does. Sometimes He gives us our selfish desires and sends leanness to our souls (see Israel requesting a king, 1 Samuel 8:4ff; and Israel wanting meat to eat, Numbers 11:1ff, Psalm 106:13-15).

⁶³ The middle voice is a most distinctive phenomenon of the Greek language. Nothing like it exists in the English language and cannot be accurately translated. The middle voice is that use of the verb which describes the subject as participating in the results of the action. See Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, page 156-157. In other words we do not receive from God because we, yes we ourselves, make selfish requests.

How can we maintain the proper Biblical balance of desperation and hope? How can you persevere in a difficult marriage, with troubled teens, with a stagnant community or church? You must pray in faith (Matthew 21:22). You must really pray. By this I don't mean a few minutes on the way to work in your car. By really praying I mean at least four things. First, you must pray with a kingdom focus. What's that? A good place to begin is praying the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Ask God to work in you a passion for His passion—that His name be glorified in everything you do, that you desire the salvation of the nations, that you learn to submit cheerfully to God's will in your every circumstance, that you can become content with only the barest of necessities, that you daily and graciously forgive others who wrong you, that you are so zealous for God's glory you ask Him not to expose you to any sordid temptation lest you fail the test and bring shame to His name. Second, learn to pray with a zealous persistence. Ask, seek, knock (Matthew 7:7-11). We tend not to pray with zeal and persistence unless we know our true desperation. If you pray only a few minutes per day, if you find yourself falling asleep when you pray, then surely you are not sensing your desperation, and you lack zeal. If your ten year old son is diagnosed with a brain tumor then you do not fall asleep while praying for him. Likewise, when you truly consider the lost condition of so many in our world then your prayers will have a fervency and persistence about them. Third, learn to pray word driven prayers. John says, "This is the confidence we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us," (1 John 5:14). You have no assurance that God will give you that specific job you want. You can be sure, however, that if you pray, asking Him to meet your every need in Christ Jesus, if you pray asking Him to sanctify you in truth, if you pray that you will know the height and depth and breadth and length of His love, then you can be sure He will answer. We pray for only a few minutes at a time because we pray our pet phrases—God be with John . . . give traveling mercies to Janet . . . help Bill through his surgery—and thus we quickly run out of material. If however, we pray the word of God we can go on literally for hours. And fourth, learn to pray Spirit saturated prayers (Ephesians 6:18-19). This never comes with only a few minutes in prayer. This means to pray until you pray. Pray until the Spirit comes upon you. Pray until you sense the glory of God's presence, until the door, as it were, of the throne room of God is closed behind you.

If you pray in this way then you will have power in your life. You will be able to live with desperation and hope. You will live realistically, seeing the desperate need of people and your inability to affect any change whatsoever; but you also will be able to live with a quiet confidence and expectancy in what God can and will do.

March 31, 2011

“Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus”
- Acts 4:13

A DIVINE SWAGGER

We all know that Peter had been an abject coward. While Peter was standing by the fire, as Jesus was on trial before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, a little girl challenged him on three occasions, accusing him of being one of Jesus’ men. Peter vehemently denied knowing Jesus at all. Now, just fifty days later, after the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, he stood and preached Jesus to the multitude, watching with awe and wonder as three thousand were saved that one day. Then a few days later, as he and John were on their way to prayer at the Beautiful Gate at the Temple in Jerusalem, Peter heals a man lame from birth. A crowd gathers in amazement and Peter seizes the opportunity to preach to them as well. Many are converted. Now the Sanhedrin, the religious and political leaders of Jerusalem, are incensed and have these two men arrested, placing them in prison for a night, hoping to scare some sense into them. Luke tells us that there was something about Peter and John that arrested the attention of the Jerusalem power-brokers. At first it was mystifying. After all, these were unlearned (literally the Greek word is *idiots*) and untrained men with a country, Galilean accent. They had no formal training, no university degrees. They had not imbibed of the Hellenistic, sophisticated culture of the day. They were, however, men with a divine swagger. They were bold, fearless, not intimidated in the least. They were undaunted by position or power. They had come to the big city—sort of like Slapout, Alabama meets New York City—and were flourishing.

After studying Peter and John for a while it finally dawned on the Sanhedrin where they had seen them. These men had been with Jesus. The Sanhedrin had a real problem. Indisputably, the lame man had been healed. It was a miracle and everyone knew the words of Peter and John brought the healing. So they dismissed the two to figure out what to do with this problem. The Sanhedrin moved into damage control mode. It looked like the whole city would go after these two unlearned fishermen and their Galilean savior. So, hoping that a night in jail and a stern warning to quit preaching Jesus would make them go away, the Sanhedrin summoned Peter and John and gave them the

mandate not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But the divine swagger was fully in operation. Peter and John in full agreement with each other responded by appealing to the conscience of these religious power-brokers. The Sanhedrin knew that God's law always supersedes man-made law. Peter and John would not quibble with them, but neither would they submit to them. Instead they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard," (Acts 4:20). Luke goes on to tell us that after threatening them further the Sanhedrin sent them on their way. They had no choice. Peter and John were innocent of wrong doing. Besides, the crowd was glorifying God for this amazing miracle.

What is it that so disturbs unbelievers about some Christians? Why are the nations in an uproar and why are people devising vain things? (Psalm 2:1-2). It happened with Jesus. Repeatedly the Pharisees were enraged at His words and actions (Mark 2:16, 3:6, 12:13, John 8:59, 10:31). It happened with Stephen as he made his defense before the Sanhedrin. They stoned him to death (Acts 7:54-60). It happened repeatedly to Paul. Everywhere he went, especially on his first missionary journey, he was beaten and jailed (Acts 13, 14). Jesus told us to expect it (John 15:19). So did Paul (2 Timothy 3:12).

Admittedly, not all Christians are despised by others, but that also raises the question—why not? After all Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness," (Matthew 5:10). And if Paul says that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, then surely the absence of persecution and rejection deserves an explanation. Here it is—the Sanhedrin and all religious people, whatever their stripe, when coming face to face with Jesus or those filled up with Jesus, spew hatred. Being in the presence of holy people galls them, convicts them, makes them terribly uncomfortable. The religious and self-righteous person, when confronted with Jesus or someone consumed with Jesus sees himself weighed in the balance and knows he is lacking. And the converse is also true—self-righteous or religious people who do not see Jesus in a professing believer will not in the least bit feel intimidated or uncomfortable. As in Jesus' day the sinner, the one who knows he is not right with God, will be drawn to Jesus; and they likewise will be drawn to one who is filled up with Jesus.

Now, back to Peter and John for a moment—instead of the Sanhedrin’s mandate intimidating and silencing Peter and John it had the opposite effect. It motivated them to preach Jesus even more. They could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard, which also begs the question—what had they seen and heard? We have not the time or space here to elaborate but consider momentarily a few examples. They saw Jesus as Creator and Sustainer. They heard Him say that before Abraham was born “I Am,” (John 8:58). Paul later writes that all things have been created through Him and for Him, that in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16-17). They saw Jesus calm storms and direct fisherman to fish in certain places, noting that even the seas, winds, and fish obey Him (Luke 5:5-10, 8:22-25). They also saw Jesus overcome the fall into sin. The disciples knew the fall was a reality. They saw it everyday in death, disease, and Roman oppression. They knew that while man came from the dust; due to the fall, he returned to the dust in death, his body decaying in the ground (Genesis 2:7, 3:19) They knew that the serpent, due to tempting Adam to sin, was judged and made to crawl on his belly (Genesis 3:14). John saw Jesus stretched out on the ground, His hands and feet pierced with nails, and then the cross was lifted up for all in the vicinity of Golgotha to see. They also saw Jesus as the Redeemer, the One who by His death and resurrection purchased redemption for His people (Ephesians 1:7-8, Colossians 2:13-14). No doubt both Peter and John then understood Jesus’ earlier words, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself,” (John 12:27-33, also John 3:14-15). In fact John says that they then realized Jesus was referring to His death.

So of course they had a divine swagger. They could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard. Should we be any different? Is your life characterized by a divine swagger—confidence (Acts 4:13, 29), boldness (Acts 4:31, Ephesians 6:19-20), inexpressible joy (1 Peter 1:8, Philippians 4:4-7), and power and authority to affect change in people by what you say and do? (1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13, 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

How do we get there? Regardless of our education, culture, or lack thereof we gain the divine swagger by “being with Jesus”. There is no substitute. You must go deeply with Jesus. Your trials and tribulations may be the catalyst to drive you there, reminding you of your desperate condition without the Spirit’s sanctifying presence and power. You can have this divine swagger. There is no reason not to have it. You can have revival every day in your heart. Seek Him! Seek

Him! Seek Him! Draw near to God and He promises to draw near to you (James 4:8).

June 2, 2011

“And He gave some as evangelists” - Ephesians 4:11

WE MUST HAVE EVANGELISTS

There is a plethora of good Bible teachers and preachers in the Reformed denominations of our day, and for this we ought to be thankful. We tend to attract men who love the Bible and theology and who, consequently, are gifted in communicating both. As important as this is, however, we still must have evangelists. Though in the past it is largely true that church plants were more effective in evangelism than long established churches, my cursory (admittedly not a detailed or scientific survey) look at church plants today suggests this is no longer the case. We seem to be better at church transplants than church plants. In other words, the vast majority of people attracted to church plants in the Reformed community are coming from other churches. We seem only to be shuffling the deck, as it were. And while these church plants, as well as more established churches with good or great preachers, sometimes grow to become large and very effective churches, the truth still remains that we are not seeing many conversions. So a church that is dominated by teaching or preaching, while appearing to be a lively and growing body, actually has the seeds of death in it, already working to bring down the ministry of that church. What then is missing? We must have evangelists. To be sure, all pastors are to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). I have said many times that every pastor needs a “fishing hole” and he needs to fish weekly. He needs to be out witnessing the gospel at least for an hour or two every week. Having said that, however, it still remains a Biblical maxim that the church needs evangelists to labor beside the pastor in his role. These evangelists, in turn, take people with them to the streets or door to door, or equip them in how to conduct home evangelistic Bible studies.

Paul the Apostle lays this out in Ephesians 4:11-12, saying that God gives to the church, according to His sovereign plan, apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Their job is to equip the saints so that they in turn may do the work of ministry. By that Paul means the building up of the body of Christ. A church dominated by a strong teaching or preaching ministry, without the presence of an evangelist laboring equally alongside the pastor, is already dying. Like a homosexual couple which cannot propagate, churches without evangelists cannot bring spiritual babies into the church body. The seeds of death are already there. On the other hand a church dominated

by an evangelist, without the strong teaching and preaching ministry to build up the saints, is a shallow church. The emphasis is on evangelism to the detriment of growing in grace. And a church ought to have a vibrant mercy ministry, but interest does not come easily if the pastor is an evangelist or teacher. An evangelistically gifted pastor or a gifted teacher/preacher must also have a mercy ministry man beside him too. A church dominated by mercy ministry begins to sound like a social gospel church. The sharp edges of Christ's penal substitutionary atonement are rounded off. In a compassionate desire to serve the poor the tendency, proven time and again in church history, is slowly but surely to move away from gospel proclamation which stresses the death and resurrection of Christ as the means by which the Father's just wrath and condemnation for our sin are removed. We see this today in the strategies often used to minister to the poor. It seems that many go into *the hood* first to give medical treatment, to teach children to read, to mentor young men, etc. While certainly commendable, deeds of mercy, if not driven by gospel proclamation of man's need for a Savior and the Father's providing of One, will eventually drive out gospel work altogether.

So we must have evangelists—men who are specifically gifted by God to speak to people about their souls, showing them that Jesus is the only means of salvation, pressing them to repent and believe the gospel.

But where are the evangelists and how do we find them, train them, and deploy them? Paul tells the Romans that they have gifts that vary according to the grace of God given to them, that they are to exercise their gifts accordingly (Romans 12:6-8). So God gives specific spiritual gifts to His people according to His sovereign plan, and the depth or breadth of these gifts will vary, again according to God's will (one may have the gift of teaching but perhaps not in the depth or breadth of R.C. Sproul). So, where are the evangelists? How do we find them? Well, consider this—how does one know if he is a good baseball player? He plays the game and his talent becomes obvious to him, his coaches, and his teammates. One has to get on the field, play the game, and the gift for baseball becomes obvious. Likewise, we find evangelists by urging believers to go into the streets, as it were, and do the work of evangelism. The gift soon surfaces, and one knows he has the gift of evangelism if he is unstoppable in his use of it. That is, he does not have to “get over the hump”. He does not have to “make himself do it”. He just does it. He wants to evangelize. A preacher has

no problem preaching. He loves it. Likewise, an evangelist has no hesitation in evangelizing. He wants to engage people in the gospel. He lives for it!

So, practically speaking, how do you find evangelists? Here's what we do at our church in West Hartford, Connecticut. We have had evangelists come to our church for an annual intensive in evangelistic outreach. We urge our people to go out on the streets of West Hartford to watch our evangelists share the gospel. We find that evangelists pop up, they rise to the surface, just like a quality baseball player in Little League becomes obvious to those who watch him. I remember watching Adam Everett (for years, one of the best shortstops in Major League Baseball) at the age of ten. It was clear, even at that age, that he had a very special talent. And while everyone is to share the gospel the evangelists in your church are the ones who will be the most productive and most willing. Find them and turn them loose. Don't hold them back by asking them to chair committees or to do administrative work. They are a prized asset in your church. Set them free to do what God has gifted them to do.

And another thing—I tell evangelists that they often seem strange to many in the church. They sometimes come off as “loose cannons”, and the church leadership tends to hold them at a distance, not fully embracing them. This is a big mistake! You ought to thank God profusely if He sends evangelists to your church. Urge your pastor to make full use of them. They will bring vibrancy to your church that may be missing. Yes, it can be messy because converts they bring to church come with “baggage”, but new born babies coming into a family can be messy too, altering sleep patterns, demanding much time, but what married couple does not rejoice at this new little “inconvenience!”

July 28, 2011

“Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again” - Psalm 85:6

WE STILL NEED REVIVAL

After the third General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in 1975, William Hill, the then recently retired Director of the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF) and one of the major players in founding the PCA, and a much used revival and evangelistic preacher for over forty years, wrote an article in January, 1976 in the old *Presbyterian Journal* entitled “We Need Revival”⁶⁴. He was concerned about disturbing trends he was seeing in his new denomination. While it seemed true that the vast majority of those in the PCA were “born again” Hill was concerned about dead orthodoxy, something Nelson Bell (former Presbyterian missionary and the father of Ruth Bell Graham, Billy’s wife) warned against. See if these words, written over forty years ago, don’t still ring true! Bell said that dead orthodoxy reveals itself in:

- lack of love between Christians
- worldliness in the church
- ignorance of God’s word
- prayerlessness
- over emphasis on church organization
- spiritual power failure
- lowered standards of morality.

Hill continued in his article to say that many in the PCA believed they were already in revival, but he called this delusional. Hill then says, “. . . the answer to the church’s problem is revival—that we are not ‘already in it,’ and that without it we will degenerate into an ecclesiastical machine grinding out materials, spewing forth pronouncements, fussing over theological distinctions, and languishing in barrenness and sterility.”

It grieves me terribly to say, that with a few wonderful exceptions, this is the PCA of our day, and this is the Reformed and evangelical church in America as well. In the latest available figures⁶⁵ the PCA reported 5441 adult professions of faith in 2009, and this represents a small but steady decline since 2005. Admittedly, these statistics may not tell the

⁶⁴ Noted in *Watchman, Tell It True*, by Otto Whitaker, page 456.

⁶⁵ www.pcaac.org/statistics.htm

whole story. Our church in West Hartford has seen a few hundred professions of faith but not all of these “land” in our church, and this may very well be true in other churches. But this still raises the issue— why do we see so little conversion growth in the PCA, an average of less than four adult professions of faith per year, per congregation? I suspect the same thing can be said of most other Reformed and evangelical churches in the western world. And the total contributions, for all causes in the PCA in 2009 shows a per capita giving of only \$2592. For a denomination primarily composed of middle or upper middle class professionals, this seems woefully lacking.

What is our problem? In an article written in 1949, Ruling Elder Chalmers W. Alexander of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi⁶⁶ said, “The plain, blunt truth is that we church people, year after year, slowly but surely, have been compromising more and more with worldliness until the Holy Spirit simply does not see fit to use us as human instruments through which to bring about revival in the church. Alexander goes on to illustrate his point by saying a drainage pipe was no longer draining properly, the pipe being obstructed by shrubs and plants that had grown through it. Likewise worldliness and self-indulgence have so clogged our lives that the Holy Spirit simply does not pour through us with great power. He further says that the right place for a boat is in the water but the wrong place for water is in the boat. The church being in the world is her proper place but the world being in the church is deadly.

If Alexander in 1949 is castigating the church for worldliness, self-indulgence, and the toleration of evil; and if in 1976 Bill Hill is calling the compromised church to see the need for revival, then surely we can agree this is needed today! What must we do? Consider the words of R.A. Torrey who said that the prescription for revival at any time, in any church, in any community or city is this:

- First, let a few Christians (they need not be many) get thoroughly right with God themselves. This is the prime essential! If this is not done, then the rest of what he would say would come to nothing.

⁶⁶ <<https://continuing.wordpress.com/2011/06/12/be-honest-now/>>

- Second, let them bind themselves together in a prayer group to pray for a revival until God opens the heavens and comes down.
- Third, let them put themselves at the disposal of God to use them as He sees fit in winning others to Christ.⁶⁷

Bottom line—unless we see our worldliness, pre-occupation with self, and the toleration of evil in the church and world; unless we repent, and seek God, then we will never see revival. I fear that we are so worldly, so already and dreadfully compromised, so in bed with the harlot of Babylon, that we cannot and will not pull away from those things which are killing the church and bringing God’s certain and terrifying judgment on the world! What needs to happen? Judgment must begin with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). We must get the log out of our own eyes before we can see clearly to get the speck out of the world’s eye (Matthew 7:13-14). And this begins with soul searching, gospel preaching pastors who fearlessly and without compromise eschew the world and by word and deed, move their congregations to do likewise. Preacher, unless you and I get ourselves right with God through repentance, being terribly burdened by the state of Christ’s bride—the lack of love for one another, materialism, ignorance, prayerlessness, unnecessary church and denominational bureaucracy, absence of the Spirit’s anointing, and toleration of evil—then we cannot expect revival. We must have revival preaching, what Richard Owen Roberts called preaching to persuade and convince, preaching for a verdict. Bill Hill said that any preaching which does not call men to repent and believe *now* is not preaching. Mere instruction is not enough. God knows we have plenty of instruction going on!

Here’s what I suggest—get right with God. Ask God to show you the ugliness of your worldliness and compromise. Repent. Make changes, whatever they must be. Ask God to give you a few people in your church with the same experience. And then pray earnestly, humbly, and desperately. Finally, ask God to use you with the lost. Expect Him to do so.

August 11, 2011

⁶⁷ Ibid.

*“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night for the slain daughter of my people”
- Jeremiah 9:1*

WILL WE PAY THE PRICE FOR REVIVAL?

How many of us can honestly say that the sentiment of Jeremiah in the text above characterizes our lives? The grief and anguish the prophet felt over the recalcitrance of Judah screams from every page of his masterful prophecy. “Cut off your hair and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the bare heights, for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath,” (Jeremiah 7:29). “O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived . . . I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me,” (Jeremiah 20:7). “Behold I am watching over them for harm and not for good, and all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt will meet their end by the sword and by famine until they are completely gone,” (Jeremiah 44:27). Do you weep over the shallowness, powerlessness, worldliness, and perverseness in the church of Jesus? Do you really believe those without Christ go to hell when they die? Do you weep buckets of tears over evil within the church, at how easily and casually we tolerate evil?

I pray and work for revival. I hope you do too, and certainly we must continue to do so by God’s grace. However I must say a haunting doubt is lodged within my heart and mind and it is this—God will not bring revival to the western church in our generation. Why do I say that? Consider these two reasons. First, a look at twentieth century Christianity shows that we have not experienced true revival (millions of conversions resulting in societal transformation) since 1904 (the Welsh revival). Why will things be any different today or in the future? What has changed? What must change to make the ground of the church conducive for such a harvest? And second, the Scriptural precedent for revival is lacking. And what is that precedent? It is a deep seated grief, urgency, and intolerable burden over the state of the church in our day. Nehemiah had it (Nehemiah 1:4ff, 13:25ff). So did Ezra (Ezra 9:3-4) and Daniel (Daniel 9:1-19). No doubt some today have the same burden and urgency but our great nemesis, the affliction of affluence, is killing us! Our affluence enables us to have and use many good things which become the enemy of the best things. We love our children and have available all manner of coaches and teachers to grant them the opportunity to become great scholars,

athletes, or musicians. So we enroll them in every imaginable after school and evening program. The speed of light electronic communication has exponentially speeded up turn around on business deals, causing many of our employers to demand or expect 24-7 contact with customers or clients. We have hundreds of television stations and on demand movies to suck up our evening hours. In short, we are very, very comfortable and we worship at the altar of comfort, affluence, and peace.

So here's my question—how likely then are we to pay the price for revival? What is that price? Think of it like this—in the late 1950's, 1960's when Bill Hill and PEF evangelists like Sam Patterson, Arnie Maves, Preston Sartelle, Buck Mosal, Reuben Wallace, Ben Wilkinson, et al held evangelistic meetings they pressed the Elders of the churches to at least six months of earnest prayer by the hosting church, asking God to cleanse them and to convert the lost whom they would invite and bring to the meetings. Finally eight days of preaching would commence with a kick-off meeting of preaching on Saturday night, followed by Sunday morning and evening preaching, followed by Monday through Saturday early morning Bible study, followed by preaching Monday through Saturday night, followed finally by preaching on Sunday morning and evening. The PEF Evangelists believed this saturation of the word of God through Spirit anointed preaching was necessary to break the hard, proud hearts of the hearers. Typically the evangelists did not see a breakthrough until Thursday or Friday night. What do you think would happen today if I or some other revival or evangelistic preacher, before agreeing to come to a church for preaching, insisted on this kind of schedule! I suspect most Pastors, Elders, and church members would say, “Are you kidding me? I cannot possibly commit to all of that. I have far too many other things to do?” See what I mean! We don't even know what the cost is, and when we are told what it is, we are very unlikely to pay it. Hence my pessimism at the prospect of revival, any time soon, in the west.

When, in the late nineteenth century, John Hyde went to India as a missionary to the Hindus he saw very little happen for a number of years. The hardness of the ground moved him to desperation in prayer. He began to spend long hours in prayer and God began to meet him very powerfully. He gathered a number of fellow workers together, urging them to believe God for one hundred converts the first year. God gave them one hundred. He then suggested they trust God the next year for three converts per day. God gave them one thousand for

the year. This continued for many years, and “Praying Hyde” became synonymous with fervent, earnest prayer. Samuel Chadwick⁶⁸ tells the story of J. Wilbur Chapman praying with Hyde on one occasion. in England. Chapman says that Hyde locked the door to their room and they both went on their knees. For at least five minutes there was complete silence. Hyde said nothing. Then, as hot tears ran down both their faces, Hyde simply said, “Oh God!” For at least another five minutes, dead silence, tears still flowing. Finally, as he sensed the Spirit’s presence, Hyde put his arm around Chapman’s shoulder and began to pray from the heart, what Chapman called, “Such petitions for men as I had never heard before. I arose from my knees to know what real prayer is.”

John Hyde ministered the gospel to Hindu people and saw thousands of conversions. He was willing to pay the price of earnest prayer—long, long hours of prayer. Until we are truly desperate, until we want Christ’s glory to be made known in the church and world more than anything else, until we repent of our indifference, of our being ashamed of the gospel, until we repent of our cowardice, then we shall not have revival. We are simply kidding ourselves. And if we do not want revival, if we do not want the glory of Christ to come upon people and nations, then we are terribly shortsighted and selfish, like the man dying of thirst, struggling in the desert beside another dying man. He sees water nearby and drinks until he is completely satisfied, filling his water bottle to stand him in good stead as he continues on his journey, never once telling the other man where the water is, never once offering him a cool drink in the name of Jesus. Unthinkable! Yet this is precisely what we do when we hoard Jesus to ourselves, when we are content to let the world go to hell while we bask in the glory of our own salvation, living oblivious to the multitudes which live near and far, who perish for a lack of knowledge, who drink daily from the well of unbelief. May God have mercy on us! May He stir us to action! May we pay the price for revival!

August 18, 2011

⁶⁸ *The Path of Prayer*, pages 91-92.

“. . . and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is sick”
- James 5:15

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

Samuel Chadwick⁶⁹ tells the story of George Mueller, the 19th century man of great faith, who housed, fed, and clothed hundreds of orphans in Bristol, England for many years, never once asking anyone for any help whatsoever. On one occasion Mueller mentioned to A.T. Pierson that there was no food to feed the orphans for the next morning. Mueller was not the least bit concerned, though he had no idea how the food would come. But he prayed with Pierson and then went to bed, convinced that God would provide what was necessary. As Mueller awakened the next morning he found that a store owner had been prompted by God, in the middle of the night, to bring food to Mueller’s orphans. He brought enough to feed them for a month. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1), that without faith it is impossible to please God, that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you,” (Matthew 7:7). He also said, “And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive,” (Matthew 21:22). Furthermore, Jesus said in John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.” And He said, “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be made full,” (John 16:24).

James tells believers if they are sick to call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over the sick person, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer of faith will restore him. The elders of our church regularly remind our people of this call and many of our sick people have asked us to pray over them and to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. I could tell you many stories of direct, divine healing. However, not everyone we pray over and anoint with oil is healed. Some never get better. Some die from their ailment. What is the prayer of faith? How do we engage in it? And how do we reconcile these amazing prayer promises from Jesus with the sober reality of unanswered prayer?

⁶⁹ Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer*, page 88.

Lenski reminds us that this promise is closely connected with “if the Lord wills” (James 4:15) and the two-fold condition of offering what James calls effective prayer by a righteous man (James 5:16).⁷⁰ And other commentators stress the necessity of lively faith⁷¹. These reminders are all well and good but they do not, I suggest, get to the heart of the issue. In a sermon from John 4:22-24 entitled “Praying in the Spirit,”⁷² Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that our greatest lack at this present time is our inability to pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). The Doctor goes on to tell us that we are far too mechanical, formal, and external in our prayer and worship, that instead we need the prayer of faith. And how does he define it? He calls it a gift from God, a prayer that God the Holy Spirit gives us. There is, therefore, a certainty concerning the answer to that prayer. Samuel Chadwick says something similar when he writes that the prayer of faith has both assurance and confirmation.⁷³ In other words, the Spirit gives a strong assurance that God will answer a specific prayer and later the answer is confirmed by God giving what He already promised.

I realize this makes some of us who love our Reformed theology nervous. It sounds too “charismatic”, too subjective. And to be sure this can be and has been abused many times over the years. Due to the sinfulness of men it is very easy to find televangelists and others saying that God gave them a word of faith in prayer, telling them to ask for \$1 million for their ministries. And we very easily, without paying the price of earnest, persistent, relentless prayer, can convince ourselves that God will answer a very specific prayer we have conjured up in our fleshly, prideful minds. Even Chadwick, a godly man of great faith, sometimes misread what he thought God was doing. He writes of being convinced of a man’s healing for which he and others prayed but the man died and they were stunned. Having said this however, we ought never to discount the divine impression God can give people in prayer. There are many instances of this throughout church history. Lloyd-Jones himself was convinced by God that his church, Westminster Chapel, London, would not be

⁷⁰ R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: Interpretation of James*, page 663ff.

⁷¹ *Matthew Henry Commentary*, volume 6, page 999, Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, page 176.

⁷² Lloyd-Jones, *Living Water: Sermons from John 4*, page 88ff.

⁷³ Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer*, page 104.

destroyed by Nazi bombing in World War II and it was spared. A small group gathering to pray in Ulster, Northern Ireland in 1859 was given a prayer of faith for revival. So were the slaves in John Girardeau's church in Charleston, South Carolina that same year. Evan Roberts in 1904 received a strong impression from the Lord that revival was coming to Wales and it did shortly thereafter.

So, what is the prayer of faith? It is a gift from God, a divine impression, a very strong assurance that a specific prayer will be answered; and the answer comes later with great clarity. Obviously this is rare but we ought to seek God earnestly in effective prayer, living righteously (as believers who are walking in holiness, keeping short accounts with God, turning away from sin, not harboring sinful practices in our lives, Isaiah 59:1-2). Effective prayer, among many things, is kingdom focused (you must ask what is on God's heart, Matthew 6:9-15, 33), word driven (you must pray according to God's will and His will is displayed in His word, 1 John 5:13-14), and Spirit directed (you must be filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18, Romans 8:26-27, John 14:16). Why do we not receive direct answers to our prayers? Sometimes we are in sin and the Spirit is grieved and will not answer (Psalm 66:18). Repentance is necessary. Or maybe we ask with wrong motives, to spend it on our pleasures (James 4:3). Perhaps we fail to persist in prayer, giving up far too easily (Luke 11:5-8). Sometimes we merely go through the motions and fail to pray with desperate earnestness (due to his circumstances David was often forced to pray with earnestness, Psalm 3, 4, 63). And it may be that we simply lack child-like faith (Matthew 18:3). Young children never doubt their father's provision and care. Neither should we doubt God's provision of basic food, shelter, and clothing, but our assurance of God's love, provision, and protection ebbs and flows with our obedience (1 John 3:18-21). When you are not walking with God your faith decreases, doesn't it?

Here's the bottom line—pray regularly, faithfully, earnestly, persistently. Live or walk in obedience. Pray what is on God's heart. Pray in the matchless name of Jesus. Pray the word of God. And pray believing He will answer. This means, as you meet the conditions of prayer, then you should expect God to answer very specifically. May God raise you up as a modern day George Mueller to see Him do great and mighty things which are above and beyond anything you can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20-21).

September 1, 2011

“Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals⁷⁴, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” - 1 Corinthians 6:9b-10

YOU WILL GO TO HELL

A professing Christian husband and father leaves his wife of thirty years for a young woman the age of his daughter. A Sunday School teacher is obsessed with his favorite sports team, going into short term debt to make trips all over the country to watch his team play. A college student heavily involved with the local collegiate ministry regularly has sexual intercourse with his girlfriend. A young man attends church regularly but frequents gay bars, looking for gay men, and goes home with them. A seeming loving and well adjusted lesbian couple, who know the Bible well, claim to love Jesus. An elder in a church regularly cheats on his income tax and steals money from his company. A young mother who teaches children’s church constantly badgers her husband for a bigger house, a nicer car, better clothing and runs up huge credit card bills trying to satiate her covetous and idolatrous lifestyle. A pastor preaches fine sermons but drinks himself drunk every night. The point man for your church plant becomes dissatisfied with the pastor’s performance and slanders him, sowing seeds of discord among the brethren, finally splitting the church and driving the pastor out of town. And the biggest giver to your church, a man well respected for his work as a financial planner is convicted of a ponzi scheme which cheated people out of millions of dollars.

What do these professing Christians have in common? They are all going to hell! “Wait a second Al. Aren’t you going too far? Don’t we all struggle with sin, perhaps even the ones you mention here? What about ‘once saved, always saved?’ What about passages like, ‘And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish,’ (John 10:28). ‘There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,’ (Romans 8:1). ‘Nothing shall separate us from the love of God,’” (Romans 8:38-39). I know. They are wonderful, aren’t they? But then what about,

⁷⁴ The first term translated homosexual is *malakoi* and relates to men or boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually. This word connotes passivity and submission. The second word translated sodomites is *arsenokoitai* and it refers to men who initiate homosexual practices. Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: First Corinthians*, page 188.

“For this you know with certainty, that no immoral, or impure person, or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God,” (Ephesians 5:5). “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries, “ (Hebrews 10:26-27). “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you were saved, *if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain,*” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). Yes the sovereignty of God in eternal salvation is a glorious truth, but you must always keep this in tension with man’s responsibility.⁷⁵ In other words, a professing Christian who lives unrepentantly in sexual immorality, impurity, or covetousness will go to hell. Any professing believer who goes on sinning willfully, blatantly, brazenly, without remorse, failing to bring forth fruits of genuine repentance (Matthew 3:8) will go to hell.

Paul is not saying that if anyone has ever committed adultery, fornication, homosexual acts, etc. then he is hopeless and will go to hell. Not at all! Praise God. Hallelujah! What a Savior! He goes on to say that such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11). God has saved and transformed many such people over the years. Maybe you are one of those who have been washed, justified, and sanctified. But the apostles, the prophets, and the Lord Jesus Himself all say that a professing believer who lives in unrepentant sin is lost and on the road to perdition (Isaiah 5:14, Ezekiel 32:21, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 11:23).

Surely this evokes fear and concern for all who read these words! If not, then you are really in trouble. If so, then there is hope for you. But if you are calling yourself a Christian and sin consciously, willfully, brazenly, and unrepentantly, and if you persist to live this way, then you will go to hell! Your profession of faith means nothing. You are deceiving yourself. A true believer will make progress in gospel holiness.

⁷⁵ See A.W. Pink’s *Exposition of Hebrews*, volume one, page 167.

What then must you, as a professing believer, do to keep yourself from hell? The writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us encourage⁷⁶ one another day after day, as long as it is still called today, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,” (Hebrews 3:13). Indwelling sin and the temptation of the world, the flesh, and the devil are constantly at work in us, causing us to believe that repentance is easy, that God is all grace and mercy, that God is never angry with His children, that a decision for Jesus is all that matters, that working out one’s salvation with fear and trembling is not in the Bible, that one can sing about Jesus and talk about Jesus while living in abject rebellion against His law and still go to heaven. Not going to happen! You need someone in your life who will ask you the hard questions, who will “get in your face”, who will not let you get away with anything. And you need this person every day. Not once a week. Not once a month, but every day you live. Why? You have an amazing ability to deceive yourself, to convince yourself that you are above the Law of God, that you ought to have that other woman because your wife is not “meeting your needs,” that you can steal from your company because it is not paying you what you are worth, that your absentee father drove you to drunkenness and that you cannot help it. If you do not have that person who, like Nehemiah, will pronounce curses upon you, who will pull your hair out, who will pummel you (Nehemiah 13:25) when you fall into the folly of sin (Psalm 85:8, Proverbs 5:23) then you could be lost forever (Hebrews 6:4-8, 10:26-39). In other words, you need someone in your life who will practically work in you the fear of God, someone who will say, “What are doing? Have you lost your mind? Do you understand what this relationship with the other woman will do to your wife, your children, and your eternal destiny?” Do you have someone like this in your life? If not, then get one quickly! Men, this is particularly necessary for you. Women tend to have women in their lives, but men tend not to have men in theirs.

And what if you presently are living in unrepentant sin? You must repent now! Repentance is not merely saying you are sorry for your “mistake.” True Biblical repentance means grief and sorrow for sin against a holy God. It means confession, contrition, and restitution. A man who lives with his adulteress and continues to go to church gives no evidence of true faith. He will leave the woman and go back to his

⁷⁶ The Greek word here is *parakaleo* and means to call to one’s side, to appeal to, to urge, to exhort, to encourage, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, page 622.

wife (if she has not already divorced him), if she will take him back, or he will go to hell when he dies. “Be sober minded as you ought and stop sinning for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame,” (1 Corinthians 15:34).

September 15, 2011

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain” - James 5:17a

PRAY LIKE ELIJAH

Have you considered the possible cause of the recent hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis? Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Jesus told the church at Thyatira that if they refused to repent of their immorality He would bring them into great tribulation (Revelation 2:22). Both Isaiah and Amos tell us that God, not the devil, is the author of calamity (Isaiah 45:6-7, Amos 3:6). This does not mean those who suffer from calamity are themselves necessarily wicked. God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). Yahweh told His people that obedience to His covenant would bring blessing (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) but disobedience would bring curses on them, their possessions, and their land (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Surely we ought to take seriously God’s declaration—He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Could He be resisting us by bringing hardship upon us?

To be sure—we live in a time of untold perversion, depravity, and ungodliness, both in the church and in the world. But so did Elijah. He burst on the scene of Israel’s history without fanfare, unannounced (1 Kings 17:1), challenging their harlotry with Baal and Asherah (the fertility god and goddess of the Sidonians). Both were brought to Israel by wicked Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Sidon. She was earnest, zealous, and effective at drastically altering the religious landscape of the nation. She even killed the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kings 18:4). Before long Israel was totally consumed with Baal worship (1 Kings 16:31-34). But Elijah, that man of God, who feared no one but God⁷⁷, prayed earnestly that it would not rain and God heard his prayer, bringing famine upon the land. He prayed again and the sky poured forth rain and the earth produced its fruit. Elijah prayed in this manner as a direct affront to the false god of Baal. The people

⁷⁷ While it is true that many English translations have 1 Kings 19:3 saying, “And he (Elijah) was afraid,” this more accurately should be translated “And he saw.” See Dale Ralph Davis’ commentary *The Wisdom and the Folly*, page 261.

believed that Baal sent the rain at the right time to bring their prosperity. Yahweh, the true Creator and Sustainer, by withholding rain, proved Himself to be the first mover in the weather, and in every thing else. As Elijah surveyed the situation, as he saw untold depravity, debauchery, and declension, he called upon the Lord to show that He alone is God. This episode preceded the great confrontation between Yahweh and the prophets of Baal with the same outcome (1 Kings 18:37-38). As you likewise survey the moral and spiritual declension in our day, should you do less than Elijah! When evil flourishes pray like Elijah.

What is Elijah-like prayer? It always exalts God. After meeting the widow at Zarephath and promising her a godly provision of food for the duration of the famine, Elijah raises her son from the dead. At this point the woman knows that Elijah is from God and that the word of the Lord is in his mouth (1 Kings 17:24). She is clear about who the true God is. Elijah-like prayer also debases man. Both Ahab and Jezebel met horrific deaths through God's judgment upon them. Ahab died by a "random" arrow, bleeding to death in his chariot (1 Kings 22:34-35); and Jezebel was thrown down from a high place, her blood spattering against the wall, her flesh devoured by ravenous dogs (2 Kings 9:33-36). Be sure of this—whatever a man sows, this he will also reap (Galatians 6:7). And Elijah-like prayer is offered in faith, with an assurance that God will answer. At some point that prayer is confirmed by a specific, concrete answer. God brought famine. God raised up the widow's son. God brought fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. God brought rain and the land flourished again.

If you are praying in faith, according to the will of God (learning to pray the word of God, its promises and recorded prayers), if you are obeying God, if you are confessing your sin and repenting, then you can be sure God will answer you. Jesus told us to have child-like faith. A child without fear jumps off a diving board into the arms of his father waiting in the deep end of the pool. He never doubts his father's care. If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the Father give good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11).

And what does Elijah-like prayer accomplish? It always reveals the supernatural. Elijah prayed and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. He knew God would hear him. When you pray like Elijah you will see miracles happen. What kind of miracles?

Regeneration! Anytime anyone is saved it is a miracle of God's grace for none seek for God, all have turned aside, all are dead in their trespasses and sins (Romans 3:10ff, Ephesians 2:1-3). Revival! Your own dull, lethargic spiritual life will spring to life with renewed fervor and zeal (Psalm 85, 126). Holiness! Louie Zamperini's story is one of the most beautiful, powerful, and compelling illustrations of God's miraculous, preserving, and saving providence I have read in some time.⁷⁸ When converted he never experienced another flash back from the horror and suffering of the Japanese POW camps of World War II. He put away his alcohol forever. Elijah-like prayer also glorifies God. After fire came down from heaven the people cried out, "Yahweh is God!" We need not only to reject the false gods of our day (Buddha, Allah, Mammon, to name only a few) but also to recommit to our belief in all the attributes of the true and living God—His holiness, justice, goodness, wisdom, mercy, grace, wrath, and love. And Elijah-like prayer always prevails in the church and world. After seeking God in Beersheba, all the way to a cave on Mt. Horeb, Elijah hears a still small voice of God, telling him to return to Syria in order to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha who will be His instruments of judgment on wicked Ahab, Jezebel, and recalcitrant Israel (1 Kings 19:4ff).

Matt Bennet, the Director of *Christian Union*, a college ministry at Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Dartmouth told me several months ago that his staff at Princeton began praying two hours per day a year and a half ago. The students are also praying an hour per day. *Christian Union* at Princeton now has over three hundred and fifty students involved in weekly, intensive Bible study and they saw nineteen conversions last year alone. That's Elijah-like prayer with Elijah-like results!

How do we get there? In three words—consecration (Romans 12:1-2), concentration (Matthew 6:33), and exaltation (Ephesians 1:3-14)! Surrender everything to Jesus, and why not! Look at all He has given you in eternal salvation. Be done with lesser things. Focus your heart, mind, and will on giving your time, money, and talents to the expansion of the gospel in your community and world. And constantly keep the praise of God on your lips, remembering that God has been infinitely rich in mercy to you.

⁷⁸ Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken* is a thrilling and powerful story. You must read it.

Many misquote 2 Chronicles 7:14 by saying, “If My people, who are called by My name . . .“ This quote is not what the text says. To get the full context you must begin at verse 13, “*If* I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or *if* I command the locust to devour the land, or *if* I send pestilence among My people, *and* My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and heal their land.” In other words, God is the one who shuts up the heavens so there is no rain. He is the one who sends locusts (does not an economic downturn qualify as a modern day locust infestation) to devour the land. He is the one who sends the pestilence of STD’s and AIDS! But here’s the glorious promise—when we acknowledge that God is the one who has brought this upon us, and we then humble ourselves and pray, and when we seek His face and turn from wickedness and perversion, then He promises to hear us, to forgive us, and heal our land.

Our only hope, to arrest the disfavor of the Holy One, is bowing down before Him, owning up to our sin in the church of Jesus, seeking Him with all our hearts, surrendering ourselves to Him, being desperate for a visitation of the Spirit. Will you pray like Elijah?

September 22, 2011

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” - Romans 8:1

A TERRIBLE PRESUMPTION

Paul’s marvelous proclamation is most often terribly misunderstood. I have been guilty of misunderstanding it myself. Romans 8 is not grounded in justification but sanctification. (If you would rather not follow this technical language then skip down to paragraph three). To be sure Paul lays down the glorious truth of our justification by faith alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone in Romans 3:24-5:21, illustrating it with the life of Abraham, leading him to write, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Romans 5:1). He goes on from there to teach the imputation of Adam’s sin (Romans 5:12-14), comparing and contrasting the first and last Adam (Romans 5:15-19). And Paul concludes this section by writing, “And the law came in that the transgression might increase, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” (Romans 5:20). Paul, the great teacher and apostle, anticipates the two objections which so many have voiced since then. It goes like this, “Paul, if this is true, then it sounds like the more we sin then the more God’s grace is given to us. So why shouldn’t we continue to sin as much as we want?” And the second objection is this, “Paul, this sounds like the law is a terrible thing, accomplishing the very opposite of God’s intention. Instead of it making me holy it incites me to sin,” (Romans 7:5, 8, 11). Paul addresses the first issue in Romans 6 saying, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it,” (Romans 6:1-2). And he takes up the issue of the law in Romans 7 saying that while the law is good it nonetheless incites us to sin because of the inward corruption of indwelling sin. “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin . . . But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good . . . For the good that I wish, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me,” (Romans 7:14, 16, 19-20). Paul clearly is addressing sanctification, not justification, in Romans 6-7.

So when Paul asks the question, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” He answers, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25). From there he announces that there is

therefore (summarizing what he has just said in Romans 6-7) now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. What does Paul mean by condemnation? Both John Murray and William Hendriksen suggest Paul goes beyond justification, that his emphasis here is sanctification.⁷⁹ But how do we know we are in Christ Jesus? How can we be sure we no longer are under condemnation, no longer under the enslaving power of sin? Very important questions indeed! Paul goes on in verses 2-11 to say that the true believer has the Holy Spirit indwelling him. He no longer walks according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. He proves this by saying that those who are in the flesh, unbelievers, set their minds on the flesh and they live according to the flesh. Then those who are of the Spirit, true believers, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. In other words, a true believer is one who has the Holy Spirit indwelling him, giving him the ability to overcome sin, to make progress in holiness. ⁸⁰

Here's the bottom line in this admittedly lengthy and complicated statement—one proves he is no longer under condemnation, no longer under sin's enslaving power, when he walks in a manner worthy of his calling (Ephesians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Colossians 1:21-23). In other words, if you obey God then your assurance of salvation is made stronger. Your indwelling sin is so strong, as is the temptation of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that you cannot walk in holiness without the indwelling Holy Spirit. You need to be filled with the Spirit daily. If you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you, then according to Romans 8:2-11 your life will change. You will grow in likeness to Christ. Without this growth in holiness no one should have assurance that he has escaped condemnation. You have every reason to believe, if you walk in gospel holiness, that there is no condemnation for you. You have every reason to believe that you are in Christ Jesus. If,

⁷⁹ Murray says, "*No condemnation* is not only freedom from the guilt but also freedom from the enslaving power of sin," *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, page 275. Hendriksen says, "For Paul *no condemnation* means freedom not only from sin's guilt but also from its enslaving power," *The New Testament Commentary: Romans*, page 245.

⁸⁰ These terms are taken from Greek grammar and they refer to the indicative and imperative mood. The indicative mood is the mood of certainty, declarations of certain straightforward facts. The imperative mood, on the other hand, is the commands, the duties, the obligations God puts upon His people. The imperatives generally follow the indicatives in Paul's letters.

however, you do not walk in obedience, if you continue to presume upon God's grace, then you may be making a terrible presumption.

What does this mean practically? We ought to put away, once and for all, the terrible presumption of claiming Christ as our Savior while still living in abject disobedience to His commands. A true believer has the Holy Spirit indwelling him. He has newness of life. He is no longer under the dominion of the devil or flesh. He ought to be making progress in gospel holiness. If he is not, if he is content to languish in disobedience, then he may be making a terrible presumption. He may be applying *no condemnation* to his frivolous, carnal, and flippant behavior, while failing to realize that if anyone is in Christ, then he is a new creation. The old has passed away, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is why we cannot say someone is a Christian fornicator, a Christian homosexual, a Christian thief, a Christian drug dealer, or a Christian liar. These terms are mutually exclusive.

It's like this—we all need a balanced diet of lean animal proteins, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and non-fat dairy products. Too much, too little, or anything unhealthy can prove harmful. We also need a balanced diet in the Christian life. We need the proper balance between the indicatives and imperatives of Scripture. The indicatives are the glorious proclamations of all God has done for us in Christ Jesus (see Romans 1-11 and Ephesians 1-3 as just two examples of the benefits of our salvation). And we certainly ought to rejoice and glory in our union with Christ, His electing love, and His propitiating and expiating death, to name just a few wonderful indicatives. But coming from the indicatives are the imperatives—commands we must obey, directives we must follow, duties we must accomplish. The good can be the enemy of the best. It is good to bask in the glory of all we have in Christ, but it is bad if this does not translate into spirituality or piety. A man who glories in Christ's atoning death yet who also beats his wife is not giving evidence of *no condemnation*. A true believer has the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus in his soul. He will get better. He will make progress. I am calling you to a balanced Christian life—love the indicatives but obey the imperatives. Living only the indicatives can lead to sluggishness, lethargy, like eating too many carbohydrates and falling asleep at your desk after lunch. Living only the imperatives can lead to harshness and pride, gaining a false sense

of spirituality because you are dutiful, like eating too many proteins and having liver problems.⁸¹

You most certainly can rejoice in *no condemnation* as long as you are walking in the Spirit. A continual failure to obey God's law will rob you of joy, peace, and power and may very well give evidence that you really had no true spiritual life in the first place.

October 6, 2011

⁸¹ Article on Hepatic Encephalopathy, the National Library of Medicine
www.nlm.nih.gov

*“Cursed be the one who does the Lord’s work negligently, and
cursed be the one who restrains his sword from blood” - Jeremiah
48:10*

SLACKNESS OF SERVICE

Yahweh speaks through Jeremiah the prophet to Moab, a wicked idolatrous nation to the east of Israel, which had a long history of causing God’s people trouble. He pronounces woes upon them, “Devastation and great destruction: Moab is broken, her little ones have sounded out a cry of distress,” (Jeremiah 48:3-4). He says that a destroyer will come to every city, so that no city will escape (Jeremiah 48:8). After this word of judgment God then says, “Cursed be the one who does the Lord’s work with slackness⁸² or deceit, and cursed be the one who restrains his sword from blood.” Obviously Yahweh is warning those prophets and men of God who seek to do God’s work to give it their all, to be zealous, to fulfill their calling, to take the sword out of its sheath and use it, to be bold and relentless.

In 1 Kings 20 we find wicked King Ahab of Israel has run into trouble with Ben Hadad of Syria who claims that he will take Ahab’s silver, gold, children, and beautiful women (1 Kings 20:3). A couple of battles ensue and Ahab routs Ben Hadad’s army, killing 100,000 Syrian soldiers (1 Kings 20:29). Later Ben Hadad is given into the hands of Ahab who makes a covenant with him and lets him go (1 Kings 20:34). In other words, Ahab was slack. He was negligent. He did not finish the job which God had given him. Consequently a prophet spoke to Ahab saying, “Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people,” (1 Kings 20:42). Ahab was killed in a third battle with Moab by a random arrow, and his people were later routed by the Assyrians and taken into captivity.

Are you slack in the service of Jesus? Are you negligent, careless? Are you unwilling to “take your sword out of its sheath” and use it? The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). We are to take up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Gideon used the sword of the

⁸² A transliteration of the Hebrew word is *remiyah* and can be translated treachery, deceit, guile, slack, slothful. It is used in Job 13:7 and Psalm 52:2 and is translated in the *NASB* as deceit or deceitful.

Lord to rout the Midianites (Judges 7:14, 18, 20). If we are to slay the giant of Islam, militant atheism, secularism, and the love of pleasure then we must repent of slackness. We must garner up the courage to use the sword of the Lord with power.

Jesus was mighty in word and deed (Luke 24:19). We need to be like Jesus. How do we become mighty in word and deed? We must seek the Lord and his strength. We must seek His face continually (Psalm 105:4). What does that look like? Perhaps many who read what I now write will dismiss me as legalistic, that I am putting burdens on people which they cannot endure. But stay with me! Matt Bennet⁸³ put this question to his staff, “Suppose a student from your ministry at Princeton said, ‘I believe God will place me in a position of influence in my career. In order to prepare me adequately for this role, please tell me how much time you think I should spend per day with God in prayer and His word. And I don’t just mean now but every day when I leave college and enter the business or political world. Please don’t dismiss my question as legalistic. If I went to the golf coach at the university and asked him how much time each day I would need to devote to golf in order to be a great player, he no doubt would tell me exactly how many hours it would take, and what drills I needed to do to accomplish excellence.’”

How many hours per day praying, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on God’s word will it take to make you mighty in word and deed? How much time do you spend in the word and prayer now? Early Christians prayed and read the Scriptures three hours per day (9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m.). William Wilberforce, the man who singlehandedly dismantled the slave trade in the British Empire prayed from 5 to 6 a.m., from noon to 1 p.m., and from 5 to 6 p.m. He also regularly recited all 176 verses of Psalm 119 on his walk home each evening from Parliament.

Let’s be honest with ourselves—are we not slack, negligent, careless, or lazy in the pursuit of God! God pronounces curses on His servants for their slackness. Don’t dismiss this by saying, “Well Jesus fulfilled the law so this no longer applies to me.” To say this is to cut the guts

⁸³ *A Seeking God Lifestyle*. This is a Bible course manual from Christian Union www.christian-union.org that lays out necessary disciplines if we are to see God’s face and smile on our lives and ministries. I am indebted to Matt concerning much of what follows.

out of the Old Testament. The curses of covenantal disobedience and the blessings of covenantal obedience still apply today (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-14). As we survey the present state of evangelicalism and note our inability to affect and transform our culture through the gospel, we must ask ourselves this question—isn't Jesus more powerful than Islam? Isn't He more powerful than secularism and militant atheism? And you no doubt will answer, "Yes, of course He is," but if this is true, and surely it is true, then why are we so powerless, so impotent? Isn't it about time we take a hard look at our devotional practices and ask the question—are we slack in God's service?

Until we are ready to pay the price by much time alone and in small groups for prayer and serious Bible study, we are only kidding ourselves. We say our hearts are devoted to Jesus but our actions prove otherwise. Until we are willing to give ourselves to God in practical and measurable ways (hours per day in the word and prayer), then we have about as much reason to expect revival as a young man would of making the PGA tour by practicing a few minutes a day, a few days per week.

It's time to get serious about seeking God. It's time to repent of slackness, laziness, worldliness, and loving pleasure. It's time to pursue God with all our hearts and minds, to desire Him more than silver or gold, to yearn for Him like a man dying of thirst craves water. Do you need more time alone with God? Are you in a small group for prayer? Are you zealous and fervent in prayer? Are you seeking the face of God continually? Do you sense His smile upon your life?

October 13, 2011

“You shall die in your sins” - John 8:21

YOU WILL DIE IN YOUR SINS

Could it be that so few of us are concerned about our souls because the visage of death is veiled from us? We rarely see it, unless, of course, we have been on the battlefield or serve in the medical profession or as police officers, firemen, or EMT's. We know it is there, but we don't see it often, and because it is such an unpleasant experience we choose to avoid it at all costs. But clearly we will all die. The most vital question for any of us is this—are you ready to meet God?

Jesus is having trouble with the scribes and Pharisees in John 8. They have brought a woman caught in the act of adultery before Him, reminding Him that the Law says such a one ought to be stoned to death. Jesus stoops and writes something in the dirt and without looking up says to them, “He who is without sin among you let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” They each slink away, being humbled and foiled again in their attempt to bring Jesus down. From there Jesus proclaims that He is the Light of the world, that those who follow Him will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life. The Pharisees, who prided themselves in knowing the Law of God, objected to Jesus' proclamation, telling Him straight up that His testimony is not true. Jesus responds by saying that yes, His testimony is true because He knows from where He has come and He knows where He is going. He has come from His Father in heaven and He will soon return there. Jesus then says to the Pharisees, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sins; where I am going, you cannot come.” John tells us that the Pharisees did not understand what He was saying for they responded, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” So Jesus emphatically and soberly said, “You are from below, I am from above, you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Jesus says three times, “You will die in your sins.” What does this mean?

Jesus knows He is going to die. In fact He came into the world for that very purpose. John said early in Jesus' earthly ministry, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Isaiah prophesied seven hundred and fifty years earlier that Jesus would be pierced

through for our transgressions, that the Father would cause the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Jesus said that no one could take His life from Him, that He willingly gave it up. He told His disciples many times that He would be betrayed, arrested, beaten, scourged, and murdered. So Jesus was in full control of His mental faculties when He made this statement. He would soon be going to His Father in heaven and the Pharisees believed they would be there too. But Jesus says to them, “You will die in your sins. Where I am going, you cannot come.” This must have stunned the Pharisees. How indignant they must have been!

But what does He mean, “You will die in your sins?” The answer clearly is tied to what He says after this, a kind of veiled statement to further explain His declaration. Jesus has earlier said that He is intimately connected with His Father, that He will soon return to Him, and where does the Father reside? Clearly the answer is heaven. So Jesus is saying that He will return to heaven from where He had come, but they would not be going there. So to die in one’s sins means to leave this world and to depart from the very presence of God, to go to the place Jesus calls Hades, the place of outer darkness, a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place of eternal fire, a horrid place where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies, a place, therefore of conscious, endless torment. To go further, Jesus means that they still are in their sins, that their outward religious conformity to their manufactured and artificial use of the Law of God will not stand them in good stead before the Holy One who sees all. To make matters worse, the Pharisees simply don’t get it. They are so confident they are on God’s side that when Jesus says they cannot go where He is going, they assume He must be preparing to commit suicide, which in their minds would surely render Him unfit for heaven. The Pharisees are completely blinded in their self-righteousness. So Jesus takes another tack, seeking to show them their perilous condition. He bluntly says to them, “You are from below.” What does He mean? At least two things! First, they are earthly, natural. They are of this world. And second, He means they are from below the earth. They are children of the devil. They want to do the deeds of their father who was a liar and murderer from the beginning. But then Jesus, in juxtaposition to this, says that He is from above, from His father who is eternal. Then Jesus concludes this portion of His exchange with the Pharisees by saying, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins.” Why does He say this? He continues, “For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

So the whole issue for the Pharisees hangs on this one point—unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. What does Jesus mean when He says, “I am He.” After forgiving the woman caught in adultery He says to them, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.” Jesus is referring here to a well known part of Jewish history. After God’s deliverance out of Egyptian bondage Yahweh guided His people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He was providing for them, meeting their every need. Just as Yahweh told Moses to tell Pharaoh “I Am Who I Am sent Me to you,” Jesus is now declaring that He is the great I Am. He says the same thing repeatedly in John’s gospel—“I am the bread that has come down from heaven . . . I am the Good Shepherd . . . I am the Open Door . . . I am the Resurrection and Life . . . I am the Way, the Truth, and Life . . . I am the Vine . . .” He is declaring Himself to be God incarnate.

Here’s the bottom line—*like the Pharisees of old, no matter what your moral or religious condition, unless you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God you will die in your sins.* So what does this mean practically? First it means you will die. I am speaking the obvious, but we simply don’t want to face the obvious. The writer to the Hebrews says we will die once and then comes the judgment. As we are want to say, only two things are certain—death and taxes. I add the notion— after death come the judgment. How will you die? When will you die? Only God knows for sure. It may be today or tomorrow. It may be this year. It may be within the next five or ten years. Some of you will be dead by this time next year. Death is an absolute certainty. There are no exceptions. You will die. How might that happen? Perhaps you will die suddenly in an automobile on your way to work as you hit a patch of black ice and veer into on-coming traffic. You may die in a plane accident on take off when a small single engine plane mistakenly wanders into your air space and collides with the jet on which you are traveling. Maybe you will be murdered in a late night holdup at a convenience store as you innocently wait in line to pay for your milk. It may be that you die at work from a massive heart attack. Maybe you will be diagnosed with liver cancer and be told you have three months to live. Or maybe you will live to a ripe old age and die in your bed with your family around you. But however it happens, in whatever circumstances, at whatever age, you know the truth of what Jesus and the Apostles are saying—you will die! Second, you will die in your sins. To die in your sin means you die in an unreconciled state. It means you are still at enmity with God. It means

the wrath of God is still on you, even if you are outwardly righteous like the scribes and Pharisees. Furthermore, to die in your sins means you are still accountable to God for your sins. Sin is living, acting, thinking, valuing, or speaking anything at anytime not in obedience to God's law. God says that you are to love Him every day of your life, with every ounce of your being, in thought, word, and deed. It means you are likewise to love your neighbor as you love yourself, every moment of every day, in every circumstance, no matter how difficult the other person may be. Jesus said that we are to be perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect; and to fail even once means you are undone, without hope and mercy in this world. It means you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked and know it not. It means you are like the young child separated from his father on a trip, totally exposed to the evil doers and perversion of the world. It means you have not the capacity to arrest the guilt and shame of your sin, that you are spiritually bankrupt, having no options, standing before the One who searches the hearts and minds of all people, who judges you according to His perfect standard, and who sees you as lacking. Like Belshazzar at the feast in the prophecy of Daniel—you are weighed in a balance and found lacking!

Finally, to die in your sins means you face the righteous judgment of God who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. At death your soul will be separated from your body which will be put into the ground or cremated. But your soul lives on forever. To die in your sins means you will go to the place of death, what the Bible calls Hades or hell. You will be conscious in hell, fully aware of how you have rejected the many overtures of grace God sent your way. You will see them with great remorse, like a man who looks back and realizes he has made a mess of his life, marriage, and family but who finds it impossible at such a late hour to rectify any of it. You will be cast into a place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth—weeping due to remorse, and gnashing of teeth in anger and futility at missing the marvelous and reconciling opportunities God sent your way. You will remember the wonderful Sunday School teacher who told you about Jesus. You will think on the college roommate who tried to show you the way to Jesus. You will think on this essay or on how other preachers warned you to flee from the wrath which is to come and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You will mourn and weep but it will be too late. Your situation cannot be remedied. It cannot be redeemed. You must go to hell and suffer for eternity. But that is not the worst of it. There is something far more

dreadful that hell. Upon Christ's second coming all will stand before Him at His white throne judgment. Each will be judged according to their deeds. Jesus says that every careless word unbelievers spoke, will be judged by God on that great day. So you will stand before the tribunal of the Holy One as all your sins are brought before you. You will see them all in the light of His perfect, unmitigated holiness, and you will be utterly terrified. You will wail for your folly and perversion, and then you will hear the most awful words imaginable—depart from Me you accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. John calls this the second death, the lake of fire and brimstone. In that lake of fire, with the same eyes used to look at internet perversion you will look on unparalleled horror and see others in the unbearable pain of damnation. The ears with which you listened to lies and bad reports, the very ears used to listen to profane and blasphemous speech will hear the cries of the damned. The hands and feet used to do evil and to carry you to evil will seek to ward off the fire of God's wrath, will seek to run you far from the danger, but you can never escape it. It will become clear to you that this is not for a season, not for a few minutes, a few hours, or a few days, but this is for eternity.

This is why Jesus weeps over you, my dear friend. This is why He loves you so, why He soberly warns you. He knows you are to die in your sins and nothing, absolutely nothing can be more horrific. I wish this were not true. I wish it was only a figment of my imagination. But this is true, and you know it is true. You know deep down in your heart of hearts that there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned.

What then must you do? You must do what Jesus was calling the scribes and Pharisees to do. You must believe that Jesus is Messiah, the only begotten Son of God. And what does this mean? You must believe that He is God in the flesh, that He was born of the Virgin Mary, that He is 100% God and 100% man, that He is therefore the only Savior of sinners. There has to be a perfect sacrifice for sin. Allah cannot provide it. Neither can any other false god. You cannot supply it for yourself. Your good deeds for your neighbors, though certainly noble and worthwhile gestures of goodwill, can never atone for your sins. Your estranged condition before God is far too severe to find relief in anything you can do for yourself. You have sinned willfully and knowingly against the Creator of all things, the One who has sustained your life from the very beginning, the One who has given you everything. I often hear people say they have what they have

because of their hard work. Perhaps it is true that you have worked hard, but I have been in plenty of developing nations where the people work far harder than you and still have next to nothing in earthly remuneration. And you must do it now. You will have no second chance after you die. You must come to Jesus in this life or you will not come at all. And can you be so sure you will live past today? Don't you know people who one day seemed to be in perfect health, but the next day were dead! The devil's great ploy is to tell you that you have plenty of time to get religion. "Don't worry about that now. Live it up, then maybe when you are old and tired and have nothing better to do, you can become a Christian." But if you continue as you are then surely you will die in your sins, and then what will become of you! Paul the Apostle said, "Today is the day of salvation." Jesus said, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." He also said, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes on Me has eternal life." He said to the thief on the cross who had believed on Him, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near." If you believe on the Lord Jesus He promises to forgive all your sins, to give you His righteousness and holiness, to hear your prayers, and to take you to heaven when you die. Where else can you go for such relief from sin and death! Why die in your sins! There is no need. Run to Jesus! He is ready and willing to save you right now.

October 20, 2011

*“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”
- Hebrews 2:3*

NEGLECTING YOUR SOUL

Are you straying from the strong, church-going lifestyle instilled in you by your parents? Perhaps you slowly drifted away from Christianity as you married, had children, and got into the fast paced life of work, rearing children, and being part of your community. This happens to many of us, but maybe it is time for a change. Maybe you have been drifting long enough.

The author of Hebrews is writing to professing, second generation believers who are not showing the same zeal as their parents. So the writer seeks to stir up their commitment to Christ. Sometimes he shows the superiority of Jesus to angels, Moses, and Old Testament priests and sacrifices. At other times he pronounces severe warnings on them. He is doing the latter in Hebrews 2:1-3. After making a case in chapter one for the superiority of Jesus over angels, saying that all the angels of God worship Jesus, becoming His ministers, he then writes, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

What does the writer mean by these words? He begins by saying, “For this reason.” In chapter one the writer lays down the glorious truth that God had previously spoken through the Old Testament prophets in many ways, but in these last days—meaning at the coming of Jesus and His death and resurrection—God has now spoken to us in His Son, the One whom He has appointed as heir of all things, through whom He has made the world. In other words, Jesus is God’s appointed Messiah, the heir of all that the Father has, and the Creator of everything. This is the context of these important words in Hebrews 2:1-3. Because of the superiority of Jesus to all the angels, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard. Why must we pay close attention to these words? Because men tend to drift away from these things!

Here's the bottom line for—*how can you possibly escape the certain, terrifying judgment of God if you continue to neglect this great salvation?*

So what must you do? *You must once and for all put away the false notion that some other god can save you.* The writers of the Bible cannot be any clearer. Luke says that there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). David said, "I shall call upon God and the Lord will save me," (Psalm 55:16). Paul said, "I deliver to you of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins, that He was raised again from the dead according to the Scriptures," (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Isaiah said, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. And He will have compassion on him," (Isaiah 55:6-7). And Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me," (John 14:6). Those who say many roads lead up the mountain to God are terribly mistaken. Those who say that sincerity is all that matters in religious issues do not understand the magnitude of our problem. The animistic gods of Irian Jaya will not do. The neo-pagan gods of Sophia or Isis will not do. Allah will not deliver. Nor will the myriads of Hindu gods. We need radical grace, something profound, something powerful to overcome the sentence of original sin that enslaves, blinds, kills, and destroys, something that will assuage the shame and guilt of actual sin, millions of them that continue to pile up against us, rendering us unfit to stand before the gaze of pure holiness.

If religion is man's effort to reach up to God, then Christianity is God's great act of condescension, ripping open heaven, coming into the world as a baby born in a manger, born in obscurity and poverty, living perfectly, proclaiming the kingdom of God by His life, words, actions, and death, proving that He has purchased the redemption of His people by being raised from the dead and ascending to His Father's right hand.

Second, you must stop neglecting this great salvation. Enough is enough. It is sheer madness to not consider the sure and certain ending of your life. You will die, and then comes the judgment. You will stand before God and give an account of all you have said, thought, and done. Do you feel good about your chances to pass the perfected gaze of unmitigated holiness? Where will you go when you die? Contrary to what so many believe—you will not simply die and cease to exist.

You have a soul that will never die. You will not merely return to the dust from which you came. You will not get a second chance in purgatory. There is no such place. God has given you time to repent during your lifetime and thus far it may be that you have refused to heed His cry. You will not come back from the dead as some other person. There is no such thing as reincarnation. These are all lies of the devil to blind you to eternal verities, to drug you, as it were, so that you will live and die in your spiritual stupor.

Don't neglect this glorious, marvelous, and majestic salvation any longer. Stop your drifting. Come to Jesus right now. What does it mean to come to Jesus? By this I don't mean a mere religious life of church going, though this is important. I don't mean an emotional decision wrought by sheer terror at the thought of dying. But by this I do mean coming to grips with your mortality, your lack of true spirituality, the just condemnation for your sins under which you are now living. I mean seeing that you have offended a holy God, that Jesus is your only hope of eternal salvation, that you are willing to acknowledge your sinful rebellion against Him, that you are willing to hate and forsake your sin, that you ask God to save you by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this I mean you trust only in who Jesus is and what He did on the cross. You must see that you have nothing to offer Him, that your righteousness is like a menstrual cloth before Him. You must believe that Jesus' death and resurrection is the full payment and satisfaction of God for your sins. It means you say to God, "Be merciful to me, the sinner." It means that you are able to say about yourself with Paul the Apostle, "I am the foremost of sinners."

Are you willing to do so my friend? It matters not how long you have been away from God. It matters not how sinfully you have lived over these many years. It matters not how dreadfully you have hurt others, though surely you will want to make restitution to those whom you have hurt by confessing your sins to them and asking for their forgiveness. It matters not that the consequences of your sin are so profound and far reaching that you can never unravel the deceit and hardship you have caused others. Jesus is ready, willing, and able to save you right this very moment. Turn from your sin, my friend, and believe on Jesus Christ to save you. You will find Him to be all that He promises. You will know His peace, love, guidance, and provision all your days. And when you close your eyes in death, you will see

grandeur and majesty beyond comprehension. Only Jesus can save you and He can do so right now!

November 3, 2011

“Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me?”

- 1 Samuel 2:29

CARELESS MEN

Hophni and Phinehas were worthless men who did not know Yahweh and who regularly abused the sacrificial system in Israel. They commissioned their workers to go to families as they prepared the post sacrifice meal, having them plunge their three-pronged fork into the boiling pot and take up whatever meat they could. The priests were already guaranteed the breast and right thigh of each sacrifice (Leviticus 7:28-36) but Hophni and Phinehas were greedy. They wanted more. Moreover they had their workers demand uncooked meat, a direct violation of God’s law. The fat was first to be burned as an offering to the Lord (Leviticus 7:3-4) but these two wicked men would not wait for God’s protocol. And their workers promised harm on any who resisted. Finally we are also told that Hophni and Phinehas, priests serving before the Lord in the tabernacle, had sexual intercourse with the women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle. In other words, these wicked men were careless in handling the holy things of God. Consequently Yahweh removed them by death in a later battle with the Philistines. Israel also lost thirty thousand men, including the prized Ark of the Covenant, symbolic of Yahweh’s presence with His people.

Men, do not be careless with the holy things of God. What are those holy things? Well, first is your walk with Christ. Don’t take it lightly. Second is the spiritual welfare of your wife and children. And third is your place in the world, your church, and your job. In looking at the lives of Hophni and Phinehas it becomes obvious that this carelessness has at least three characteristics. First is presumption. David asks that God would keep him from presumptuous sins (Psalm 19:13). Hophni and Phinehas were priests. They believed they had Yahweh on their side, that they could do as they wished. Men, don’t do it. Just because you have walked with Jesus for many years, just because God has smiled on you by giving you a beautiful wife and children, and a good job, don’t presume on his goodness by living carelessly. Second is denigration, devaluing the rebuke of a friend. When Eli rebuked his sons for their ungodly behavior it made no difference at all. We are told that they did not repent because God had decided to put them to death. When your wife challenges some aspect of your behavior, when

a close friend asks, “What are you doing in getting close to that woman at work?” and you blow it off, bad idea! And third, carelessness is evident in accommodation with the world. Lot separated from Abram and moved his tents as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12). When Chedorlaomer raided Sodom and took Lot away into captivity, we are told that Lot was living in Sodom (Genesis 14:12). And when the two angels came to warn Lot to flee from Sodom we find that he is sitting in the gate (Genesis 19:1), that he is a major player in town. He had accommodated to the culture. A prophet of God came to Eli and rebuked him for honoring his sons before God. How did he do it? Yes, it is true that Eli rebuked his sons but he should have removed them from their priestly office. He had accommodated his sons over the holiness and glory of Yahweh. Men are you accommodating the culture? Are you watching things on television you would never have watched twenty years ago? Do you find filthy language coming out of your mouth, words you have not said for many years, since before you were converted? Are you looking at so called soft porn, convincing yourself that you can handle it?

Why have you become careless? Three reasons. First, you may take the grace of God for granted, sort of like what Samson did with the woman from Timnah, the prostitute, and Deliah (Judges 14:1ff, 16:1, 4ff). Samson knew God had raised him for a special purpose but he was careless in carrying out his mission. Yes, God’s grace is greater than our sin, but we are called not to participate in the unfruitful needs of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Second, you may forget the fear of God. To fear God is to know you can be displeasing to Him, that you are to dread more than anything His frown, and to desire more than anything His smile. Those who say that God is never displeased or angry with His children are not presenting a balanced explanation of living for Christ Jesus. Teaching and living in this way is the height of carelessness and folly. And third, you may mitigate the glory of God. You are to do all things for the glory of God, to make God look good in all you think, do, and say. You are exceedingly careless when you think you are to do all you can to make yourself look good.

It goes like this, men—you and your wife have been steadily growing apart over the last several years, not necessarily heated arguments, but surely poor communication and a decline in simply having fun together. Added to this is the frenetic pace of life where she does her own thing and you do yours. Then you are on a business trip, sitting next to a beautiful woman, and you strike up a conversation. As your

plane lands and you take the shuttle bus to the hotel you realize she is on the same bus. You continue your conversation. You are in a city far from home. You are feeling lonely. One thing leads to another and you find yourself in unspeakable sin that will ruin your life. You will lose your wife, your children, your Christian witness, and most importantly Christ's great name will be besmirched. Men, are you handling the holy things of God carelessly?

What happens to the careless man? He can surely expect the chastisement of a loving, holy Father (Revelation 3:19, Hebrews 12:9-11). Indeed the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). And you will experience death. God has taken people out very quickly after grievous sin (Numbers 16:31-33, Acts 5:1ff, 1 Corinthians 11:30), but I mean more than that. You will experience the death of your family and witness. Can you be forgiven? Of course you can, but the consequences are likely to remain for generations. Check out King David's family after his adultery and the murder of Uriah. The admiration of your children will die. Young believers who considered you a role model will be crushed, some perhaps leaving the faith due to your carelessness. And then you may indeed experience the judgment of God in hell. I am not saying that the true believer can lose his salvation. Scripture is clear on that one (John 10:28-29). But I am saying that adulterers will not enter heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" will enter heaven (Matthew 7:21-23), that those who go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth no longer have a sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:26-31).

Men, are you being careless with the holy things of God? What must you do? First, realize your grave danger. You face the chastisement of a holy God who loves you and who is jealous for His own glory. You face death. You face judgment. May you tremble before God at your carelessness, at what it may cost you! Let's face it, you battle the flesh daily. You may secretly delight in the attention of another woman. You may allow your mind to run rampant with sensual thoughts that can destroy you. You must tremble before God! And second, consider how you have been careless and repent, not with a mere moral repentance, of promising better things. Instead it must be a true, evangelical repentance where you hate your sin, see the untold danger of it, and cry out to Jesus for mercy and grace which alters your behavior. And third, do what I always tell people to do. You must run to Jesus for His holiness. He is your sanctification (1 Corinthians

1:30). As you repent you are promised the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Go to Jesus daily. Go to Him on Sunday as you hear the word preached, as you go to the Lord's Supper, as you lead your family in worship, as you walk throughout the day. Be vigilant. Your adversary, the devil, is a roaring lion, roaming about, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). You are no match for him but Jesus by the Spirit is (1 John 4:5).

November 17, 2011

“When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets” - 1 Samuel 28:6

REJECTING GOD’S WORD

The spiritual declension of King Saul is an ominous warning for all whom claim to love the Lord Jesus. He began so well. He was chosen king over Israel when they cried for one (1 Samuel 9:15ff). He routed the Ammonites in an early battle (1 Samuel 11). And he prophesied with the prophets of Yahweh (1 Samuel 10:9ff). But he also usurped Samuel’s authority by offering sacrifices (1 Samuel 13:8ff), and he failed to carry out Yahweh’s directive completely to annihilate the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:3ff). So after many years of continual and persistent rebellion, including the relentless pursuit of David in order to kill him, Saul now faces a serious battle with his perennial enemy, the Philistines. He is fearful and asks Yahweh for guidance. What shall he do? We are told that in every way possible Yahweh refused to answer him. The Lord sometimes communicated in dreams (Genesis 28:10ff, Numbers 12:6). Not this time. He at times gave guidance through prophets and Urim and Thummim⁸⁴ (Exodus 28:30, Numbers 27:21). Not now. Saul had rejected Yahweh’s word, so Yahweh took it from him.

In his despair, when left to his own devices Saul went *incognito* to a medium (he had earlier banned all mediums from Israel, but one now, in his desperation, suited his purpose) and asked her to bring up Samuel from the dead. And you thought mediums, witches, and their channeling was a myth! So the spirit of Samuel asked Saul why he sought him since Yahweh had departed from him and had become his adversary. Samuel reminds Saul of his rebellion against Yahweh, how he refused to carry out the directive against the Amalekites. He then gave him the bad news, “Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

Indeed, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. If you reject God’s word then He will take it from you. Is this not a principle clearly taught throughout all of Scripture? Do we not see this

⁸⁴ Literally these two Hebrew words can be translated *lights* and *perfections*, and apparently refer to a means by which God revealed Himself through the priests in the Old Testament.

with the northern kingdom of Israel, constantly refusing the prophets whom God sent them (Daniel 9:6)? They never repented, eventually being led away to Assyrian exile, never to return to the land. Do we not see this with Judah, the southern kingdom? Yes, they did return to the land but afterwards they continued in their folly (Psalm 85:8). And though the Scriptures clearly revealed Jesus as Messiah the scribes and Pharisees utterly rejected the word (John 5:39-40) and God finally rejected them in 70 A.D. in the terrible judgment by Titus of the Roman Empire.

Think for a moment of the mighty movements of God throughout history. Once the Enlightenment philosophy which rejects the Bible as God's word takes control of a culture, no revival has followed. The only places in the world today where there are mighty movements of God are Asia, Africa, and South America; and the Enlightenment did not dominate any of these cultures. It is true that England, Wales, and America had revivals in the mid nineteenth century but these were simultaneous with the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Since Darwinism took hold in the western world the only large revivals have been the 1904 Welsh revival (amongst coal miners) and the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles (primarily among the uneducated).

You must pray, labor, and believe God for revival, both personally and in your communities, churches, and country; but you must never forget this ominous principle—if you reject God's word, then He will take it from you. Are you taking God's word lightly? You may be if you hear but do not hear. Clearly that was Saul's serial problem. Jesus challenged the seven churches of Asia Minor in like manner, saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." You may be if you, like the Pharisees, outwardly conform but inwardly rebel. And the digression into apostasy is complete when you, like Jezebel, outwardly rebel and publicly flaunt it. And this happens to you when you listen to the Devil's age old question, "Indeed has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1). If you question the sufficiency, inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Scriptures by asking, "Indeed has God said that homosexuals will not enter heaven? Has He said that Jesus is the only way to God, that all without Christ go to an eternal hell?" Unwittingly those who go down this road begin with the culture instead of God's word, saying, for example, "Science says the earth is billions of years old so I guess we cannot take Genesis 1-2 as a literal, straightforward explanation of the origin

of everything.” And before long such people reject the word of God altogether and embrace the world, failing to watch over their hearts with all diligence, eventually plunging themselves, like Saul, into ruin and perdition. And like with Saul, a gradual hardening takes place. That is, the hunger for God’s word, both in personal reading and reflection, as well as ambivalence toward true gospel preaching begins to take hold. Dreadfully it is not long before one’s personal integrity is compromised with private inward sin, and eventually outward, more dominating sin enslaves, causing the person both to experience the consequences of sin with a growing doubt of one’s acceptance by God. Finally, since God is no longer guiding the person, since He has long left him, since he has grieved and quenched the Spirit, he is left to his own devices. No wonder our western world is experiencing a renaissance of witchcraft and neo-paganism.

Are you compromising the word of God in your life, in your family? Are you less regular in personal and familial times of worship and the word? Are you less frequent at church on the Lord’s Day? Are you listening to drivel that does not satisfy your soul? What, then, must you do? First, assess your situation. Ask God to search your heart, to show you any sinful way, and to lead you in His way (Psalm 139:23-24). Second, be honest with yourself, have you left your first love (Revelation 2:4). Are you white hot for Jesus? If not, then repent and do this third thing—do the deeds which you did at first (Revelation 2:5). What are those? Do you remember how you could not get enough of reading, studying, mediating on God’s word, how you loved true gospel preaching? Go back to it, even if you don’t feel like it. Make yourself spend time in the word, to listen to solid preaching, and ask God to meet you powerfully and existentially when you pursue Him. Finally—obey, obey, obey! Do what God says. Obey the word of God in everything. No short cuts. Will you do it perfectly? Of course not, but by the Spirit’s indwelling, the One who gives you everything you need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4), you have the capacity, the ability to obey God. As you draw near to God He promises to draw near to you (James 4:8, 2 Chronicles 15:2). I challenge you very specifically to this—commit yourself to at least fifteen minutes each day of reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on God’s word. If you begin with this, then it won’t be long before you must extend the time. Your hunger for God will increase and He will continue to meet you powerfully, sanctifying you, preparing you to meet Him face to face on that great day.

November 24, 2011

“A letter to the editor of the *Hartford Courant*” - November 9, 2011

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO US?

First it was Hurricane Irene and then it was our October snow storm, both causing millions of dollars of damage in Connecticut. In the first six months of 2011 (obviously not counting Hurricane Irene or the October snow storm) the United States has experienced sixty-three weather related catastrophes with losses in excess of \$25 million each.⁸⁵ For the third year in a row we are on track to have at least two hundred natural disasters. Perhaps this may sound prosaic and simplistic but is anyone seriously asking the question, “Why is this happening to us?” Of course some will immediately say, “These disasters are nothing more than manifestations of unusual weather patterns. These happen from time to time.” Of course that is true, but could there be something else in play? Yahweh, Israel’s covenant God, as He prepared to bring His people into the Promised Land, told them to obey Him, to keep His covenant. As they did so He promised to bestow blessing after blessing upon them. If they refused to obey, then they would experience His curse, which would include natural disasters (Deuteronomy 28:15ff). Later in Israel’s history the prophet Joel warned God’s people of His chastisement, threatening them with locusts and famine (Joel 1:4ff, 2:16ff), if they refused to repent. I could go on and on with this line. The Bible is replete with chastisements flowing from spiritual infidelity.

So I simply raise the question—could these natural disasters ultimately be the result of God’s displeasure with us? If so, with whom, then, is He displeased? At times Yahweh promises judgment on wicked pagan nations (the nation of Nineveh in Jonah 1:2ff, see also Romans 1:18ff), but He also brings His chastisement on His covenant people. Since the time of Jesus of Nazareth, God’s covenant people are His church, the one’s who profess faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of the nations. So my beef is not with the world. It is not with those who in no way claim allegiance to Jesus. Peter the Apostle said that judgment must begin with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). Within two generations of John Winthrop and his small band of church members landing at Massachusetts Bay in 1630, the church was already losing her saltiness. First there were the Salem Witch trials. Then pastors in Boston began to question the sovereignty of God

⁸⁵ Joe Romm’s blog, *Climate Progress*

in all of life, denying the Biblical doctrine of original sin, and man's total inability to please God in his own efforts. Connecticut's own Jonathan Edwards tried to correct them by writing his famous treatise at Stockbridge in 1751, entitled "Freedom of the Will." Few listened to him. Then by the late 18th century Deism was firmly entrenched in the American psyche which eventually led to the Unitarianism of William Ellery Channing, finally culminating in the Chair of Theology at Harvard being given to a Unitarian in 1804. We cannot over estimate the profound impact this had on our country. Indeed, it seems as though a dark cloud of Unitarianism still hangs over New England, affecting the rest of the country. At its root, this aberration of orthodox Christianity denies the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, the imputation of Adam's sin, and the penal vicarious atonement of Christ. It led to the public school movement of Horace Mann, a Unitarian, who believed in the perfectability of man through education. By the mid 19th century modern day theological liberalism was taking hold. Two of the major purveyors were Horace Bushnell of Hartford and Henry Ward Beecher of Litchfield. And when those who believed in the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Bible felt threatened by Harry Emerson Fosdick's famous sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy was on, culminating in the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. Ever since that time the conservative, evangelical branch of Christianity has sought a place at the table of the intelligentsia. They want respectability from the academic world. I could site innumerable examples, but I must hurry.

Jettisoning Biblical orthodoxy in the American church is seen repeatedly in every avenue of the church. I put the blame for our country's woes on the church, and even more specifically, on the priests and preachers of our nation. To be sure, not all are bad. Many have served faithfully and nobly. But others have been largely silent on the sexual sins of fornication, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, gay marriage, sex trafficking, and pedophilia. They have acquiesced concerning greed and avarice in the corporate world. Some have been too quick to defend the rich who have put their stock options ahead of long term growth of their companies, and have failed to consider the legitimate needs of their employees. Preachers have been mute on addressing, in a Biblical fashion, the issues of slavery, abortion, and all manner of social injustice. Some have ignored the poor. Some have aided and abetted poverty by looking to the government as savior. Some have failed to hold accountable fathers in

our inner cities to their responsibilities to their children, while others in our affluent communities have looked the other way while men give themselves to their corporate careers, abandoning their families for the sake of prestige, power, and position. They have failed to urge husbands to love their wives and children sacrificially, to put their family's needs above their own desires and interests. They have failed to expose the fallacious belief that a woman can have it all—a satisfying career and rearing children. Maybe they can have it all, but not at the same time! The politically liberal pastor seems always to denounce any war whatsoever, while the politically conservative one blindly supports any U.S. troop deployment anywhere in the world. Some blindly support Israel, while others do the same with the Palestinians. Both conservative and liberal preachers are guilty of preaching politics. This rarely is their area of expertise. It is certainly not their calling. Their parishioners can get that elsewhere. What their people want and need is a word from God.

What is the remedy? I suggest that preachers, priests, and their churches take a long, discriminating look at their lives, ministries, theology, and preaching. If they are found lacking, as Belshazzar was (Daniel 5:25ff), then they must change their ways. And what is the message they ought to proclaim? To borrow from the Apostle Paul, they must determine to know nothing among their people and communities but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5). They must get back to the Biblical gospel which proclaims a message of profound condescension, God ripping open heaven and coming to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, stressing His death and resurrection, as the great hope for all the nations. They must preach the law of God, showing how we all have failed to keep it, showing in turn that Jesus kept it perfectly, and that by repenting of sin and clinging to Jesus we can have both forgiveness and supernatural power to live as faithful, humble servants of God and our communities. In short, we must return to the preaching of native son Jonathan Edwards—that Jesus is an altogether beautiful Savior, the only hope for the world. Only then, as we seek God, as we acknowledge our own worldliness, greed, avarice, and lasciviousness, repenting of it, will God then hear from heaven, forgive our sins, and heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

Al Baker, West Hartford

December 1, 2011

*“ . . . if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”
- Romans 10:9*

WHAT’S THE LEAST YOU CAN BELIEVE AND STILL BE A CHRISTIAN?

Mainline Methodist minister Martin Thielen recently made this the title of a book he wrote in hopes of winning to the Christian faith skeptics, atheists, agnostics, and people who hate Christian fundamentalists.⁸⁶ Thielen recounts an on-going conversation with an atheist who was coming around to the Christian position who finally asked, “What’s the least I can believe and still be a Christian?” So Thielen writes his book, first of all listing ten things one does not need to believe. Here they are:

- God causes cancer, car wrecks, and other catastrophes
- Good Christians don’t doubt
- True Christians can’t believe in evolution
- Women can’t be preachers and must submit to men
- God cares about saving souls but not saving trees
- Bad people will be “left behind” and they fry in hell
- Jews won’t make it to heaven
- Everything in the Bible should be taken literally
- God loves straight people but not gay people
- It’s okay for Christians to be judgmental and obnoxious.

Then Thielen tells us what we must believe to be a Christian. He says that Christians need to believe in Jesus—His life, teachings, example, death, and resurrection, and this belief, in turn, provides “promising answers” to life’s most profound questions including:

- Who is Jesus?
- What matters most?
- Am I accepted?
- Where is God?
- What brings fulfillment?
- What about suffering?
- Is there hope?

⁸⁶ www.huffingtonpost.com/martin-tyhielen/whats-the-least-you-can-believe

- Is the church still relevant?
- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- What is God’s dream for the world?

Thielen says that people in the 21st century hunger for an open-minded expression of Christian faith.

What shall we say about these things? In the context of taking up the issue of why the Jews had largely rejected the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, Paul the Apostle says that the righteousness based on faith is what saves (Romans 10:5-8). From there Paul defines what he means by faith that saves (Romans 10:9-10). He says saving faith involves confession and belief. One must confess with his mouth (a public, willful, intentional proclamation) that Jesus Christ is Lord, that He is the One to whom we owe our supreme allegiance. One must also believe in his heart.⁸⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones shows how the heresy of Sandemanianism brought great difficulty in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in early 19th century. The view was largely that one could believe on Christ by mere intellectual assent, that one need not necessarily be moved in heart, one need not experience conviction and grief over sin.

So Thielen says that to be a Christian means one must believe in Jesus—His life, teachings, example, death, and resurrection. However, does this not necessarily beg the question, “What does it mean to say that one believes in Jesus?” Paul answers that question in Romans 10:10, “for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness (holiness of life, spiritual transformation brought on by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, John 3:5-7), and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (reconciliation, pardon from sin, the wrath of God taken away, Colossians 1:13-23). So true, saving faith always brings change, and that change begins by acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord, that what He says is true, that we are to obey Him. So this begs another question—what do Jesus, His apostles, and prophets say about the issues Thielen raises?

On cancer, car wrecks, and other catastrophes Isaiah says that God is the author of calamity (Isaiah 45:6-7). So does Amos (Amos 3:6). Jesus does not deny this but affirms the purpose of it (Luke 13:2-5).

⁸⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Exposition of Romans 10: Saving Faith*, Chapter 14, published by Banner of Truth.

On good Christians doubting, Jesus rebukes them for lack of faith (Mark 9:19). On true Christians believing in evolution, Moses believed in a literal, historical Adam and Eve, the father and mother of the human race (Genesis 2:20ff). Paul affirmed their historicity (Romans 5:12-14, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 11:3). On women being preachers Paul said, “No way,” (1 Timothy 2:12-14, 3:1). On women being commanded to submit to their husbands, Paul could not be clearer. (Ephesians 5:2-22). On saving souls and trees, God’s overarching purpose is the salvation of sinners to the praise of the glory of His grace (Genesis 3:15, 12:1ff, Isaiah 53, Mark 1:15, Luke 19:10, Romans 1:16). On bad people being “left behind”, Jesus said that unbelievers end up in hell (Mark 9:42ff, Revelation 21:8). Paul said the same thing (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). On Jews not making it to heaven, Jesus wept over Jerusalem because the Jews were rejecting Him (Luke 19:41). Paul was willing to go to hell for the sake of his kinsmen, the Jews (Romans 9:3). Any Jew, Gentile, pagan, Muslim, Hindu, animist, or secularist must come the same way—humbling themselves before God, seeing their sin, turning from it, and asking God for mercy through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 26:17-18). On taking everything in the Bible literally—the writers did not always mean for everything to be taken literally. That depends on the genre of Biblical literature. Some is poetic in nature (the Psalms and Proverbs), some is apocalyptic in nature (like Ezekiel 1-10 and much of Revelation), some is parabolic in nature (Matthew 13), but some is clearly to be taken literally (the straight forward Old Testament narratives like Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel; and the didactic Pauline and Petrine epistles). On God loving straight people and not gay people, the Bible makes clear that regardless of one’s sexual orientation, God is angry with the sinner everyday (Deuteronomy 32:35, Nahum 1:2), that He is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), that He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7). And on it’s okay for Christians to be judgmental and obnoxious—clearly being obnoxious is reprehensible and surely we are to heed Jesus words to not judge others (Matthew 7:1-3), but Jesus also allows for “judging” when we first get the log out of our own eye (Matthew 7:4-5), and He furthermore explicitly commands us to judge others (false prophets, Matthew 7:15-20).

Bottom line—true faith, saving faith results in the transformation of one’s mind, emotions, and will. He becomes more and more like Jesus. He takes God’s word seriously. He glories in the cross. He longs to obey, thus proving his sincere love for Jesus (John 14:15). While one

does not need to have all these doctrines nailed down in order to be saved, it is clear that as he grows in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, his views will most definitely change on these issues.

December 15, 2011

“All authority has been given to Me . . . Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” - Matthew 28:18-19

MUST YOU EARN THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD?

In the context of evangelistic work, when people are asked if they are speaking to their friends, neighbors, family members, and work associates about Christ; we often hear them say, “Well, not yet. I am trying to earn the right to be heard. I don’t want them to view me as a religious fanatic. Hopefully very soon I will gain the credibility I need to speak to them. When that happens, I most assuredly will share with them the gospel.”

What shall we say about such things? Is it Biblical to say, “I must earn the right to be heard”? Jesus commissioned His disciples to go with the gospel of the kingdom from city to city and if people failed to listen they were to shake the dust from their feet and go to the next one (Matthew 10:7ff). After His resurrection He told His disciples that by virtue of the state of His exaltation, all authority had been given to Him by His heavenly Father. He promised to be with them as they went forth to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20). He told them to wait in the city until they were clothed with power from on high, and then they were to go to the nations (Luke 24:44-49). He told them they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and consequently they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the utter most parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Peter, who had been afraid of a teen-aged girl on the night of Jesus’ arrest, fifty days later is a powerful, bold, and courageous preacher (Acts 2-4). In fact Peter and John utterly confounded the Sanhedrin who knew them to be mere fisherman, but who had power in their preaching, having noted that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

There is no Biblical evidence, whatsoever, that we must earn the right to be heard. We have authority. We have power. We have a divine commission. Now this does not mean that we are to be foolish, caustic, brash, arrogant, or unwise in evangelistic work. Paul allowed himself

to be lowered in a basket to escape arrest early in his ministry (Acts 9:23-25). Jesus told His disciples to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). Jesus did not want His identity widely publicized early in His ministry (Mark 1:34), no doubt because early on there was not the ground swell of interest in Him. To die too early would, from an earthly perspective, have marred His work because so few would have believed that He was the Messiah.

But none of this suggests we must earn the right to be heard. Let's be honest about this issue of evangelism—most of us are very uncomfortable bringing up the subject of people's sin and their need for Christ; and your friends to whom you ought to be speaking are often as uncomfortable about it as you are. And besides, do you really think you live such an exemplary life that people will eventually say to you, "I have noticed how patient, kind, and loving you are. What makes you tick?" I am not saying that ungodly behavior does not matter, for certainly it does. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) and we always are to conduct ourselves in a manner that honors our great Savior and King. On the other hand, however, you are flawed and others no doubt see those flaws.

Bottom line—if you are in Christ Jesus, then you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and you are therefore commissioned to take the gospel to your spheres of influence! You are to evangelize daily. From all I have read about great Christians from the past, they all have this same characteristic—they are filled up with Jesus and cannot stop speaking to others about what they have seen and heard. It never comes across in a judgmental fashion. It is winsome, sincere, loving, direct, bold, and kind. You cannot miss this in men like Charles Spurgeon, George Whitefield, Archibald Brown, Eric Liddell, or even in Tim Tebow.

How, then, do we get to the place where we are filled up with Jesus, where we cannot hold in our love for Him? Well, consider your own dating or courting relationship with the one to whom you are now married. You spent so much time together, you were so drawn in love to each other, you so enjoyed each other's company, that you found yourself thinking of that special one every spare moment of the day,

and when given the slightest opportunity, you found a way to bring your loved one into your conversations with others.

My dear friend, when you spend time with Jesus every day in His word and in prayer; when you contemplate deeply the beauty of His holiness; when you think on His glorious, kind, and tender-hearted mercies; when you meditate on His suffering and death on your behalf; then you simply cannot keep your mouth shut. You will talk about Him. You will tell others what he means to you, how He is sustaining you, how He gives you joy and peace, even in the midst of sorrow and tragedy. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then you will do what the Spirit does—testify about Jesus (John 14:16-17, 16:14). You will notice that I am not saying you must always directly engage the person by asking, “Are you saved?” Clearly we want to get there at some point, but I mean we are to tell others of the mighty deeds of God in our lives (Psalm 2:7ff, 96:1ff). Tell them of answered prayer, of how He has forgiven you all your sins, of how He gives you peace and joy, of your great comfort as you face the prospect of death. Always ground your remarks on the authority of Scripture.

So it all comes down to walking with Christ, spending time in His presence, going deeply with Him, contemplating His marvelous grace. As you daily bask in His glorious presence you cannot help but be filled to overflowing with His love, and this will find an outlet in your speech.

January 12, 2012

CONFUSION IN THE CONGREGATION

I have listened to enough sermons in the modern evangelical church to believe that the congregation is often confused by the message being preached. To whom is the preacher preaching? In a sincere, well-intentioned, and noble desire to appeal to the lost in their communities, preachers seem increasingly to use Sunday mornings to preach sermons geared to the postmodern, skeptical people around us. The problem, however, is that most of those present on Sunday mornings in solid, evangelical churches are not postmodern skeptics. I suggest that preaching to the believer is very different from preaching to the unbeliever. While an appeal to any unbelievers present to repent and believe the gospel is proper and necessary in any sermon; the thrust of a sermon to believers is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience and instruction (2 Timothy 4:2) because the Bible is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped thoroughly for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17), that the goal of any preacher’s instruction ought to be love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5), that the preacher should never shrink back from declaring to the brethren the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:27).

But when a preacher seeks to preach to both the believer and unbeliever in the same sermon he puts forth a confusing message. Here’s what I mean—the good news of free grace, telling the unbeliever that all he must do to be saved is to repent and believe the gospel, that he can do nothing to merit God’s favor, that God’s anger and wrath are removed by Christ’s death and resurrection, is a glorious message that in no way should be abrogated or mitigated. We must joyfully herald the good news of free grace to all people everywhere who need to be saved. But when believers hear this message, week after week, they can become confused. They hear the indicatives of God’s marvelous plan of redemption but they seldom hear the imperatives of what is expected of them after they come to faith in

Christ. Because the believer constantly hears the free grace of justification he seldom hears the duties of sanctification—be imitators of God, walk in love, let no immorality be named among you, put away filthy talk, know that no immoral man will inherit the kingdom of Christ, do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, be careful how you walk, do not be foolish (Ephesians 5:1ff). The glorious fact is that in regeneration Christ plus nothing equals everything, in justification and adoption Christ plus nothing equals everything; but in sanctification Christ plus nothing equals damnation. “Without sanctification no one will see the Lord,” (Hebrews 12:14). “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God,” (1 Corinthians 6:9). “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven,” (Matthew 7:21).

This kind of preaching cuts the other way too. When the preacher tells believers that the Father loves them with an everlasting love, that He will never leave them nor forsake them, that He will meet their every need in Christ Jesus, that He will be with them as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death; the unbeliever present often does not hear the preacher discriminate between unbeliever and the true follower of Christ. So he naturally assumes all these glorious promises are also his. So, on the one hand the believers present do not grow in gospel holiness under such preaching, and the unbelievers present too often assume the precious and magnificent promises of the gospel already apply to them.

What is the remedy? First and foremost, pastors must feed their sheep. They must unpack the word of God accurately, humbly, faithfully, practically, and Christo-centrally. By their own life, and more importantly by the word of God in the power of the Spirit, they must move their people to greater likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Sunday is the Lord’s Day it seems only fitting that Sunday morning worship be devoted to the edification of the saints. Second, believers present must be exhorted to evangelize daily in their families, communities, and work places. The pastor must lead the way by his lifestyle. If he is not regularly evangelizing then it is highly unlikely

his congregation will become evangelistic. And third, I wish to make a case for true, Spirit anointed evangelistic preaching every week within the context of the local church. I am aware that most churches no longer have Sunday night services. There are various reasons for this omission, and this is not the place to evaluate the loss of this practice. I know of many churches that have Saturday night “seeker services.” I wish, however, to put forth an appeal for weekly evangelistic preaching within the context of the local church. It is well known that Martyn Lloyd-Jones practiced this during his lengthy ministry at Westminster Chapel, London and before that at Aberavon in Wales.⁸⁸ At Westminster Chapel he preached on Friday nights for fourteen years through Paul’s epistle to the Romans (many of you know of these marvelous sermons in numerous volumes). This is exegetical and doctrinal preaching at its best. His Sunday morning pulpit ministry was also to the believer and was more pastoral than his Friday night ministry (he preached for eight years through Ephesians, for example). But his Sunday night preaching was strictly evangelistic and it was very different from his other sermons. Over two-thousand people heard him every Sunday evening. Most of his more recent publications are his Sunday night, evangelistic sermons. As you read them or as you listen to them on line⁸⁹ the difference is unmistakable. Lloyd-Jones quotes modern thinkers, recent newspaper articles, contemporary news stories of the day; and he enters into a kind of running dialogue with his audience in these sermons. He always calls the people to Christ and he was always available in his study after the service to speak with people under conviction of sin who were calling on Christ to be saved.

You might object by saying, “My preacher is not Lloyd-Jones and we live in a different day. People will not come out for evangelistic preaching. Why then should we do it?” First, as this confusion in the congregation continues we will find more and more people in our evangelical churches who are not truly converted. Second, when solid,

⁸⁸ See the masterful two volume biography of Lloyd-Jones by Iain Murray, published by Banner of Truth.

⁸⁹www.mlj-usa.com

Spirit anointed evangelistic preaching is done, God will draw people to it, and Christians will bring their friends to it. Third, it builds an evangelistic passion in the church member. And fourth, it breeds confidence and boldness in the believer who increasingly comes to believe and glory in the gospel, who finds that it captures his heart afresh and anew, and who consequently speaks the good news to anyone who will listen.

January 26, 2012

*“Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin
against Thee” - Psalm 119:11*

SCRIPTURE SATURATION

If we wish to be blameless (Psalm 119:1), if we hope to be blessed (Psalm 119:2), if we desire to live righteously (Psalm 119:3), if we want a shame free life (Psalm 119:6), if we long for lives marked by a spirit of thanksgiving (Psalm 119:7), if we want to be marked by purity (Psalm 119:9), and if we long to prevent apostasy or wandering from the true faith (Psalm 119:10), then we must treasure God’s word in our hearts. This is the remedy to overcome sin in thought, word, and deed. The first core value⁹⁰ is Scripture saturation. To treasure something is to hold it in high regard. I treasure my wife, children, daughter-in-laws, and grandchildren. I treasure my health. I treasure my close friends. I treasure my books. That is, I go to great lengths to preserve and improve those things dear to me. You, no doubt, do the same.

So to treasure God’s word in our hearts, in the very essence of our being, is to be very careful to take it into our lives and to act upon it (Matthew 7:24-27). In light of the multitudinous ways our minds, eyes, ears, and consequently our hearts are bombarded with error, it is vital that we become soaked, saturated, satiated with Scripture. You cannot get enough Bible. Jeremiah says that he found and ate the words of God, that they became the joy and delight of his heart (Jeremiah 15:16). Jesus said that we live by the word of God (Matthew 4:4). The writer to the Hebrews calls it a sharp and two-edged sword that pierces the division between soul and spirit and is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12). David said that it was his meditation all day long (Psalm 119:97).

⁹⁰ I see at least eight core values for any true servant of Christ—Scripture saturation, meditation, adoration, supplication, sanctification, propagation, proclamation, and consecration. I hope to take these up one by one in succeeding chapters.

What, then, do I mean by Scripture saturation and how do we do it? Every Christian ought to set aside some time every day, preferably in the morning (Psalm 5:3), to read God's word in a systematic fashion. There are many tools available to help you with this.⁹¹ However the manner in which you read it is vital. Reading the Bible merely to get through the reading of the day, to check it off your "to do" list is no good. To read it merely for its literary value will not feed your soul either. And, reading it only with your mind short circuits its sanctifying power in your life. Instead you are to read the Bible in "Three D", with your mind, heart, and will. You are to read your daily allotment of Scripture as though you are reading it for the first time. You are to read it existentially. Put yourself into the life situation of the text. When you read 1 Samuel 17, David's battle with Goliath, vividly see the story in your mind. Ask God to cause you to come alive to the text by the Spirit. And after you have read the passages for the day, ask yourself this question, "So what?" What does this mean practically for me this day? With the acrostic SPECK, you can ask more specifically—is there any sin to avoid, is there any promise to claim, is there any example to follow, is there any command to obey, and is there any new knowledge of God, myself, or the world that I learned today and what difference can this make in my life?

And since the word of God treasured in our hearts keeps us from sin and promotes righteous living, does it not stand to reason that we ought to be in the word several times per day. William Wilberforce, the great emancipator of the slaves, spent an hour in the morning, an hour at noon, and an hour at night soaking his mind, heart, and will in the word of God. He often recited all one hundred and seventy-six verses of Psalm 119 on his nightly walk home from the British Parliament. Perhaps you should find the time to read two chapters of the Bible in the morning, one at lunch time, and one in the evening.

⁹¹ I have long used the M'Cheyne reading diary published by Banner of Truth which lists every day in the year with generally four chapters to read daily, taking you through the Old Testament once, and the Psalms and New Testament twice in one year.

But I suggest true Scripture saturation is also aided by Scripture memorization. Early in my Christian life, while Bill Gothard was speaking to fifteen thousand people at a time, for a full week⁹², I remember being amazed at the amount of Scripture he had committed to memory. I have sought to follow his example for the last thirty-six years. It is much harder today than it was in the beginning, but setting aside time each morning for daily memorization work and systematically reviewing chapters I have learned in the past has been a wonderful encouragement to me.

While you are driving to work, while you are exercising, or while you are working around the house download sermons from great preachers and listen to them. Pray for your pastor that he may be gripped by God's word so that he may preach it to you in the power of the Spirit. Go to church each Lord's Day expecting to hear a word from God. And finally, spend a few minutes a day reading great Christian literature. There is so much wonderful material available to us today—from the Reformers of the sixteenth century, to the Puritans of the seventeenth century, to the great revival preachers and theologians of the eighteenth century, to the godly men and women of the last two centuries. But read and listen with a distinct purpose—to have the word grip your mind, heart, and will so that you may become more and more like Jesus. Because the Bible is the infallible, inerrant, and inspired word of God, it is your lifeline. Soak your soul in it.

February 2, 2012

⁹² *The Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts* was a remarkable movement of God. While none of us would agree wholeheartedly with all that was taught there, nonetheless many wonderful principles were taught that have helped thousands.

“This book of the law . . . you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it . . . then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” - Joshua 1:8

MEDITATION⁹³

Do you drink in the word of God, allowing it to feed and strengthen your heart and soul; or do you gargle it like mouthwash and spit it out of your mouth? The Bible on many occasions puts forth the virtue of meditation. As Joshua prepared to lead the sons of Israel into the Promised Land he was told several times to be strong and courageous. Yahweh said that wherever Joshua put his feet, He would give him the land, that no man would be able to stand before him, that he would have success (conquering his enemies) wherever he went as long as he did not turn from God’s path for him, as long as he meditated on the book of the law (Joshua 1:3-9). The *book of the law* obviously refers to the Bible they had at the time, the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. In a similar fashion David says that the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who does not stand in the path of sinners, who does not sit in the seat of scoffers (in other words, one who does not allow himself to be adversely affected by heresy or worldly wisdom) but who meditates on God’s law both day and night (drinking it as a way of life, not gargling it) will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season. He will be like a leaf of a tree that does not wither, that whatever this man does he will prosper (Psalm 1:1-3). At one of the low points of his life, while in a state of utter desperation in the wilderness, King David says, “When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches.” It is because of this meditation that he then says, “For Thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy,” (Psalm 63:6-7). In another time of great upheaval David also says, “Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the

⁹³ The second of eight core values for effective Christian living. I dealt with the first in the last chapter—Scripture saturation.

Lord,” (Psalm 4:4-5). He closes this Psalm with great expectation of comfort and deliverance, saying, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety,” (Psalm 4:7-8). Asaph says something similar, “I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart, and my spirit ponders (or searches),” (Psalm 77:6). He ends by affirming his confidence in Yahweh’s protection and provision, that He will lead them like a flock (Psalm 77:20). And finally David in his masterful Psalm on the power, profundity, and purity of God’s word says, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day,” (Psalm 119:97). From his delight in meditating on God’s law, David goes on to say that His commandments make him wiser than all his enemies, give him more insight than all his teachers, more wisdom than the aged, restrains him from sin, and keeps him on the narrow way of holiness (Psalm 119:98-104).

What do I mean by meditation? I do not mean Transcendental Meditation⁹⁴ which merely vacates the mind. In fact Biblical meditation is just the opposite. It is a filling of the mind and heart with God’s word. It is like a cow chewing its cud—the cow chews the grass, digests it, and then vomits it, and chews on it again. In Biblical meditation one can bring up any portion of Scripture he has memorized or recently read, and chew on it some more. We are thus to ruminate on God’s holy, inerrant, inspired, and infallible word.

If we have more solid evangelical books than ever, if we have such great preachers and ready access to their sermons through the internet, if we have such fine theological institutions and such wonderfully trained pastors, why then, do we lack power? We have the electrical wiring, as it were, the structure for power, but we lack the juice! If our people say they believe in the lostness of mankind without Christ, that

⁹⁴TM gained notoriety through the Beatles in the late 1960’s and Maharishi Yogi who taught peace and serenity through mindless and repetitive mantras.

these will go to hell for eternity unless they repent and believe the gospel, then why do so few of us make a practice of sharing our faith! If we have our books on Christian marriage and our weekend seminars on how to fulfill our Biblical roles better, why then does the evangelical church have as many divorces as the secular world? If Jesus is more powerful than Islam, if He is more powerful than secularism, if He is more powerful than materialism, then why has Islam conquered the Middle East and North Africa? Why has secularism won the day in Europe? Why is materialism the god of America, even within the church? The answer, my friend, is that we approach the Bible as a mere book, we embrace the Bible as mere doctrine, but we do not experience its life-changing power. We gargle it but we don't drink it.

This life-changing power, this transforming work of Christ comes as you take in God's word, as you saturate your mind and heart with it; but it also comes to fruition as you take time every day—as you drive to work, as you walk or run for exercise, as you lay down at night before you sleep and think on the word of God. You are to be mighty in the word of God and this comes through belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to energize you. Most of the great preachers in history have been masterful meditators on God's word. This was the secret of their power in the pulpit. Charles Spurgeon saturated his mind with God's word, thought deeply about it all week, and then prepared his Sunday morning sermon late Saturday night or even Sunday morning. George Whitefield spent hours meditating on God's word as his horse took him to his next preaching appointment. Whitefield then stood and preached extemporaneously for an hour or two at a time. Archibald Alexander, the great Princeton theologian, spent hours each week meditating on a passage and without concern for crafting phrases, would simply stand, open his mouth, and divine eloquence of unusual saving and sanctifying power came forth.

We must regain the heart of Jesus in life and ministry. Enough of sterile sermons, lifeless small group meetings, passionless preaching and public worship, and preoccupation with personal peace and affluence while the world languishes in darkness! Fill up your mind

and heart daily with the life changing power of God’s holy word, and then see what He does in you and through you.

February 9, 2012

“Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory, honor, and power, for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created” - Revelation 4:11

ADORATION⁹⁵

We are to rejoice in the Lord always. We are to consider everything joy when we encounter various trials. We are to have a song of praise in our mouths for God has lifted us from the miry clay and has put us on a solid rock. From Genesis to Revelation we find the people of God giving praise and adoration to their great King and Savior. Abraham offered sacrifices to God (Genesis 12:7, 13:4, 18, 22:9). So did Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:25, 28:18). Moses, when seeing the bush burn but not consumed, heard the voice of God say, “Take off your shoes for the place you are standing is holy ground,” (Exodus 3:5). God later gave explicit directions on how He was to be worshipped in the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31). After witnessing the awesome destruction of the Egyptian army by drowning in the Red Sea the people of God sang a song of praise to their mighty deliverer (Exodus 15). The glory of God in the form of a cloud hovered over the tabernacle and the people bowed down to worship Him (Exodus 40). Joshua met the captain of the Lord’s host and was told the same thing as Moses—“Take off your shoes. The place where you are standing is holy ground,” (Joshua 5:13-15). When Sisera fled from Barak and hid in the tent of Jael, and she drove the tent peg through his head, the people sang praises to the God who had delivered them from oppression (Judges 5). And of course much of David’s praise and adoration is found in his Psalms. Solomon praised the Lord (1 Kings 8:22ff). And we see praise and humble, joyful adoration given to Yahweh by the prophets. In one of the more remarkable examples of

⁹⁵ The third of eight core values for life and ministry. The first two are Scripture saturation and meditation.

the Lord Jesus giving adoration to His Father, when seeing the hardness of heart of the religious leaders and the willingness of the poor to receive Him, He says, “I praise Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and hast revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well pleasing in Thy sight,” (Matthew 11:25-26). And the Apostle Paul, in the midst of instruction, often bursts forth into praising God, seemingly unable to control himself, becoming lost in praise and wonder at the great mercy and grace of God (Romans 11:33-36, 1 Timothy 1:17). And we repeatedly find the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and myriads of angels giving praise and adoration to the Lord Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the bright and morning star, the Faithful Witness, the first born from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, the One who has loved us, who has released us from our sin by His blood (Revelation 1, 4, 5).

And why is it that these great saints of Biblical antiquity find the praise of God constantly on their lips? They seem to understand powerfully what we too often take for granted—all they have, all they are, every aspect of their eternal salvation is by God’s mercy and grace. They understood they had a cobra heart (Psalm 58:1-5), that they loved sin and hated God, that consequently they lived a godless life and had a filthy past (Romans 3:10ff). They came to know they were under the very wrath of God, that they had no hope, that they were without God in this world (Ephesians 2:12). They came to understand they lived a poisonous life, that just as a herbicide sprayed on crops in a field kills everything on which it lands, their relationships were destroyed (James 3:2-12), that all their religious or moral efforts to conquer their sin problem were to no avail. But God came to them in the person and work of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). He brought someone to them who preached Jesus and Him crucified. The Spirit caused them to be born again, to have the heart of Jesus that loves God and hates sin, that applied the pure, precious, and undefiled blood of Jesus to their souls, that washed away all their sins, that gave them the very righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1-8, Colossians 1:13-14), that gave them the holiness of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30), that enabled them to walk in holiness, to obey the law of God (Ezekiel 36:27).

They, along with Isaiah, after seeing the three-fold holiness of God, came to understand the depth of their sin and cried out to God, “Woe is me, I am undone,” (Isaiah 6:1ff). In the light of God’s holiness Isaiah came to see that it was as though he was a decomposing body in a tomb. He was utterly and completely annihilated. But God had mercy on him, on the others, and they consequently could not help but give continuous praise to God.

Why then, my friend, do we tend to go through our days grumbling, cold-hearted, complaining about how our spouses, children, parents, or employers treat us? I am not unaware that sorrow often comes our way. Jesus wept and so do we at the loss of loved ones. James tells us to consider everything as joy (James 1:2-4) but later he tells us to be miserable, and mourn, and weep, to let our laughter be turned to sorrow and our joy to gloom (James 4:9). Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 3:1, 4:4) but earlier in the same epistle he tells us that he wept over those in the church who actually were enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18). The glory, the mystery of the Christ-centered life, is the complementarity of truth. Jesus is 100% God, and He is 100% man. The Bible is the word of God but it is recorded, written down by man. God chooses people to be saved before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5), but everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). And so it with us in joy and sorrow! We are to rejoice always and we are to weep and mourn over our sin and the sin and suffering we find in the world. Only the true Christian can do both.

So you are to live a life of constant adoration and praise to God. I am presently in Uganda (January 24-February 5) and I am seeing this first hand. This past week in Ft. Portal, in the west, at our School of Evangelism, the two hundred people there, the poorest of the poor, broke forth continually into praise at our preaching. On two occasions, while I was preaching, people came forward and put a few thousand Ugandan shillings (a dollar or two) on the pulpit in appreciation for what they were hearing. When we took them out to share the gospel in the streets I saw men and women run to the front of the church, to stand in line behind the ones who would be leading them out. I saw

one man jump in the air for joy, like he had scored a game winning goal in a soccer game, at the prospect and privilege of sharing Jesus that day. It seems to me that the more material goods we have, the harder it is to see truly what God has done for us. When people have nothing, they come to see that when they have Jesus, they have everything. Most of us live in untold wealth yet we too often seem to lack the joy of the Lord. Step back, my friend, and see what great things God has wrought for you in your eternal salvation! Indeed, you were without hope, you were without God in this world, but you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. Yes, rejoice in the Lord. Again I say rejoice in the Lord!

February 16, 2012

“So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes” - Daniel 9:3

SUPPLICATION 96

After reading the prophet Jeremiah and having known of the promised return from the exile, Daniel seeks Yahweh with diligence and zeal—fasting, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and making supplication. Paul tells us to pray with supplication (Philippians 4:6). Zechariah records God promising that He will pour forth a Spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look on Jesus, whom they had pierced (Zechariah 12:10). We likewise are to make supplications to God. But what does this word mean? It has the idea of urgent, fervent, persistent prayer grounded upon an intolerable burden. We see this in the life of our Lord Jesus who, in the days of His flesh, offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety (Hebrews 5:7). We see it in Isaiah who with great emotion cries out to the Lord, “O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains may quake at Thy presence,” (Isaiah 64:1ff). We see it in David who prayed in like manner in a time of great darkness, “Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to Thee do I pray,” (Psalm 5:1-2). We see this intolerable burden in Nehemiah who, when hearing that the people were in distress and reproach, that the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still broken down after all those years of dwelling again in the land of Judah, sat down, wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:3-4). We see it further displayed in Nehemiah when he heard that after all Yahweh had done for them; the people repaid His beneficence by continuing to give their children to be married to pagans. He contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear to God, “You shall not give

⁹⁶ The fourth core value of life and ministry, the first three are Scripture saturation, meditation, and adoration.

your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves,” (Nehemiah 13:23-24).

My friends—all our ministry activity, all our planning, all our strategizing, all our money, all our buildings will be powerless until we gain an intolerable burden, until we learn to pray prayers of supplication. Business as usual will not work. The church in the west is losing the war. Okay, we have a few oases in the desert of the western church. We have a few bright spots, but we are losing ground. I noted several weeks ago that if things continue as they are we will continue to have a net loss of 3500 churches per year in America and that by 2050 only 11% of Americans will attend church at least twice per month. Your church may be growing financially, numerically, and even spiritually. That is, you may be seeing your people truly growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, but unless you are seeing many, many conversions, unless men, women, and children are joining your church by profession of faith in great numbers, then your church is already dying. A married couple which does not produce children will see their legacy die with them. If your church is merely growing through transfer of membership then you are kidding yourself. You are prolonging the inevitable, like many in places of power in our country who think we can continue to spend more than we take in. It is mindless! We are destined to failure. So it is within the church. We have lost the day on the homosexual agenda. Little or no progress has been made in the abolition of abortion. Corruption in government abounds. More and more laws are needed to hold our debauchery in check. Mosques are being built every year in America. Supposedly well-educated and informed people speak of the virtues of Islam, asking us to co-exist, simply to get along; while these same people blindly ignore the degradation of women in the Muslim family. Islam has never been willing to co-exist with any other religion. It is within the DNA of Islam to conquer. Do you want to see your children and grand-children living under Shariah law? Do you think I am writing in hyperbole? Augustine could never have dreamed that his beloved North Africa would be Muslim within four hundred years of his death, and yet it was.

My dear friends, until you gain an intolerable burden over how depraved and godless we are, until you see how powerless and hopeless we are to avert the coming judgment of God on our nation, then you will foolishly continue on with business as usual. You will be like Nero who fiddled while Rome burned.

How do you gain this intolerable burden to supplicate with passion, zeal, and persistence before the King of Glory? You must get a fresh glimpse of Christ's power and authority. You must get something of the zeal you find in Jesus when He cleansed the temple (John 2:13-19), driving out the money changers because they had made the court of the Gentiles, the place where the Jews were to pray for the nations (Isaiah 56:7), into a robbers den (Jeremiah 7:11). Jesus' actions were premeditated. He had been coming to the temple for years. The action of these greedy men was nothing new. Jesus made a whip and drove them out, turning the tables over as He made His way through the temple, coins flying in every direction, men fleeing from His presence, animals running for refuge. His disciples later remembered what David had said, "For zeal for Thy house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me," (Psalm 69:9). Will you gain a fresh vision of the glory, authority, and zeal of Christ for His kingdom? Will you supplicate with passion and loud crying like the Lord Jesus? Will you learn to pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18), praying until you pray, experiencing the felt presence of God, finding unusual felicity in the speech of prayer, praying with divine eloquence, like a preacher under the anointing of the Spirit as he preaches the gospel with convicting, converting power! Enough of business as usual! Enough of our passionless, Reformed orthodoxy! True Christian faith is lived in the heart, not merely in the mind; and when this occurs it will manifest itself in life. We will pray and live with Spirit power that will tear down the strongholds of the devil; that will see countless thousands in our communities suddenly arrested, convicted, and crying out, "What must we do to be saved?" Do you believe God can do this in our nation again? Do you believe He will? Are you willing to pay the price to see it happen? It shall not come without supplication, without the intolerable burden of Daniel, Nehemiah, and Jesus.

February 23, 2012

“. . . trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” - Ephesians 5:10

SANCTIFICATION⁹⁷

Every Christian is called to heed and obey the myriad of commands for holiness, for keeping God’s law.⁹⁸ And we all acknowledge that we fall short of that standard. In a desire to address legalism in the evangelical church the contemporary grace movement has reminded us that our salvation, from beginning to end, is all by God’s grace. This is certainly most true, and one of the more thoughtful and eloquent communicators of grace based sanctification is Bryan Chappell. I have heard some proponents of this movement say, “It really does not matter whether we go to church regularly, whether or not we tithe, or whether or not we read our Bibles. After all, God loves us anyway.” Others have said, “You will never hear me say, ‘You must be dedicated to Christ,’ because none of us can ever be dedicated to Him.” I recently read Bryan Chappell’s book⁹⁹ and I saw none of that in it. I saw nothing with which I significantly disagree. If I may assume, for a moment, that those who espouse this contemporary grace movement “buy in” to Chappell’s teaching, where then has it gone askew? Why have some lost the Biblical balance?

May I venture a hypothesis as to where some in the movement have gone awry? They embrace the glorious truth of God’s eternal justifying and sanctifying love while at the same time seemingly ignoring the necessity of pleasing Him. Paul tells the Ephesians, in the context of a series of admonitions (be imitators of God, walk in love, immorality must not be named among you, there must be no filthiness or coarse jesting, do not be partakers with the sons of disobedience, do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, Ephesians 5:1-

⁹⁷ The fifth core value of life and ministry, the first four being Scripture saturation, meditation, adoration, and supplication.

⁹⁸ See Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26, 1 Peter 1:16, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Romans 12-13, Ephesians 3-6 as only a few examples.

⁹⁹*Holiness by Grace: Delighting in the Joy that Is Our Strength*, published by Crossway Books.

11) that they are to try to be *pleasing* to the Lord (NASB). He tells the Corinthians something similar, that his ambition, whether at home in the body or absent from the body and present with the Lord is to be pleasing to Him (2 Corinthians 5:9). In acknowledging the glorious truth that nothing we do in our human efforts can gain or maintain God's love for us in Christ, that it in fact is an eternal, unchangeable love; I wonder if they are missing the necessity of pleasing God in all our actions. After all, Paul, who has laid out the glorious indicatives of Ephesians 1-3 tells those slaves at Ephesus, who are now in Christ Jesus, that they are to, "be obedient to their masters . . . with fear and trembling . . . not by way of eye service . . . doing the will of God from the heart . . . knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord," (Ephesians 6:5-8). He tells the Colossians that whatever they do, they are to do it heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:23). I wonder if by focusing on the grace of God in justification and sanctification they are neglecting the need to please God precisely because He has been so gracious to us.

Perhaps this analogy will help. I heard recently of an African child who fell into a latrine pit in his village. He was drowning in the disease filled pit of excrement and urine. People by the pit threw the boy a rope and tried to pull him out, but the filth made his hands slippery, and besides he was too weak to pull himself from the pit. When it appeared all was lost a man jumped into the pit with the boy and pulled him out alive. The man showed the boy mercy and grace, and is this not a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus, finding us in the miry latrine pit of our own guilt and shame, jumping into the latrine pit of our world, taking our filth upon Himself, and washing us clean of our filth by His precious blood. So far so good, but it seems to me that some in the contemporary grace movement may be careless with God's grace. I have heard some say, "You don't really need to worry about your job performance at work. Even if you fail, even if you go bankrupt and lose everything, God still loves you." Yes, that is true, but what if, in our own fleshly, sinful propensities, we surmise, "Putting forth the maximum effort here at work, coming in on time, giving my employer my best, cutting corners in my quality of work, is really not important.

I mean, even if I lose my job God still loves me.” Can you imagine the boy, after being saved from the filth and potential death of the latrine pit, then carelessly playing around the latrine pit, knowing that even if he falls in it again, that loving man who saved him the first time will surely be there to do it again? Perhaps he would be there again, but now the boy risks, not only death, but also the consequences of his carelessness, namely all manner of disease like typhus, HIV, and tetanus. While the young boy would be grateful to the man who saved him, he would also not presume upon his grace in the future. He also would do all he could to please the man, not because he was gaining or maintaining his favor, but because he genuinely delights in pleasing the man who had shown such sacrificial love.

Should we not, therefore, as the blood bought people of our great King—the One who loves us eternally, the One who shed His precious blood for us, the One who always lives to make intercession for us—do all we can to please Him? Should we not fear and tremble at violating His commands? Should we not discipline ourselves—in food, drink, physical exercise, and thoroughness and diligence in or employment—for the purpose of godliness? Should we not daily seek Him and His strength? Should we not do everything for His glory? And when we fail, and we surely will fail, we ought not to view our sin in a frivolous or cavalier manner. Instead it ought to grieve us, showing us afresh and anew that the latrine pit of our present sin can only be cleansed by the Lord Jesus, our elder brother, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

March 1, 2012

“And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number” - Acts 5:14

PROPAGATION¹⁰⁰

Roland Allen, in his book, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* 101, puts forth a clear distinction between the way the Apostolic Church grew and how ours in the west grow. The church of the apostles grew exponentially. Is this not clear in Luke’s recording of what was happening after Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead (Acts 5:1-11)? Do we not see this in Paul’s commendation of the church at Rome, where he was able to write that the faith of the Romans was known throughout the whole world (Romans 1:8), that due to the fervent witness of the Thessalonians and the believers in Achaia Paul need not say anything to anyone in that region (1 Thessalonians 1:8-9). And if you believe, as I do, that the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) largely prophesies a judgment that came in 70 A.D. then the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come,” lends even more credence to the marvelous propagation of the gospel to the whole world by the first generation church. How did they do it? What does this mean for us?

Every believer witnessed. They all knew they were to evangelize daily (Acts 8:4), to speak the truth in love daily (Ephesians 4:15, 25), and they were to serve one another daily (Galatians 5:13). Most of our churches, on the other hand, are woefully weak in propagating the gospel to our neighbors. Very, very few of our church members regularly, intentionally, and boldly share the good news of Jesus. Why

¹⁰⁰The sixth of eight core values for life and ministry. The first five are Scripture saturation, meditation, adoration, supplication, and sanctification.

¹⁰¹This book, written in 1925 and largely ignored by the western church, is a “game changer” and ought to be read by every pastor and world mission team member of every church. It applies today in the western context as much as any other place in the world, stressing the need for churches to be self-propagating, self-sustaining, and self-governing. It was recently republished by Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR.

not? I can think of three reasons for our unwillingness to speak the gospel to others. First, perhaps those in our churches who do not share Jesus are not truly born again. If one does not have the heart of Jesus in regeneration (John 3:3,5, Ezekiel 36:26) then he will not have the heart of Jesus for propagation (Matthew 6:10, 28:18-20). Second, perhaps he truly is a Christian, but due to the fact he heard a truncated gospel (justification only and not one that emphasizes regeneration, justification, and sanctification; or one that failed to emphasize the holiness of God and man's total inability to believe the gospel, meaning that all is truly from mercy and grace) he never has been truly gripped by its saving power. Or third, perhaps he is cold-hearted or hard-hearted at the present time, that due to worldly pursuits he has momentarily lost his zeal for Christ's kingdom. For whatever reason, we in the western church are woefully lacking in the clear cut command for every believer to take the whole gospel to the whole world.

What must we do? We must know experientially, from the heart, the remarkable saving work of the Triune God on our behalf. My friend, if you are in Christ Jesus, then you had a cobra heart that loved sin and hated God. Because of that you lived a sinful, disobedient, and wicked life. You had a filthy past of guilt and shame, even the best of you lived in the latrine pit of your sin and its slavery. Consequently you were on the road to destruction. You were on the road to hell with your eyes wide open and you did not fear it. If you had died at any point prior to your regeneration then you surely would have gone to hell. And you lived a poisonous life where bitter jealousy and selfish ambition abounded, bringing disorder and every evil thing to everyone around you. You were like cyanide sprayed indiscriminately on the country side, killing everything in its path—people, animals, crops, grass, trees, and weeds (James 3:1-16). But God the Father promised you eternal salvation (Ephesians 1:4-6), God the Son purchased it (Ephesians 1:7-12), and God the Holy Spirit sealed it by His regenerating, converting, and sanctifying power (Ephesians 1:13-14). Perhaps you are too familiar, taking for granted, the mighty work of God in your eternal salvation. You were an enemy of God, a rebel, and God would have been perfectly justified, when having you in the

sights of His judgment gun, to pull the trigger, killing you, and sending you to the eternal hell. But He had mercy, turning instead His judgment gun upon His only begotten Son, pulling the trigger on Him, killing Him, and sending Him to hell on your behalf. You were in the latrine pit of your sin, covered in the vile disease of indwelling and recurring sin, corrupted and infected by it, surely on your way to an eternal death, but the Lord Jesus jumped into the latrine pit of your world, delivering you from the filth and shame of your sin, washing you, not with soap, water, and shampoo; but with His precious, undefiled blood shed at Calvary for you and all His people.

Because of this great and glorious work of salvation, everything has changed about you. Instead of living cowardly for yourself, you are to understand that you are a co-laborer with God the Father, given His authority (1 Corinthians 3:9). Instead of living selfishly for yourself, you are to understand that you are an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, driven by His love to make His glories known to the un-reconciled (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). And instead of living shortsightedly for your favorite team or hobby, placing far too much emphasis on the temporal, you are to realize your privilege to be called an instrument of the Holy Spirit, driven by His power to live with a divine swagger (2 Corinthians 3:3, Acts 4:13). You have authority. You have love. You have power.

What would happen, my dear friends, if we took seriously who we are, if we applied the fullness of what has happened to us, to our daily living? Would we not be more like the apostolic church! Would we not see spontaneous growth in our churches! I am not suggesting that everyone give up their jobs and become evangelists. No, indeed you are to be hard at your work, all week long, and then come to the church for worship and instruction on the Lord's Day. Nor am I suggesting that you steal from your employer and witness on the job while he expects you to serve your company, clients, and customers. But if you are filled up with Jesus, if you understand that you are a co-laborer with God the Father, an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, and an instrument of the Holy Spirit; then the Triune God will engineer

opportunities for you to speak of the excellencies of the Savior who died and gave Himself up for you.

March 8, 2012

“The cleverness of the clever I will set aside” - 1 Corinthians 1:19

PROCLAMATION¹⁰²

In a church world enamored with technology, strategy, personality, and hyper-contextualization we would do well to take seriously Paul’s marvelous declaration in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16. Paul, without question, was a massive intellect, one of the brightest men to ever live, yet he tells us that he intentionally, purposefully, and deliberately refused to use the wisdom of the world in gospel proclamation. Keep in mind that the Greeks of his day prided themselves on their intellect, on learning new things (Acts 17:21). The Jews were also quite proud of their religious heritage. Paul clearly knew both the Jewish world (Philippians 3:3-6) and the fine points of the Greek philosophers (he makes direct and indirect reference to a number of their poets and philosophers, Acts 17:27-28), yet he tells the Corinthians that when he came to them he determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. To put this in a modern context, that would be like Paul today saying, “Americans search for science, Asians search for technology, Europeans search for art and culture, but I preach none of these to them. I committed myself to preach only the mystery of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He goes on to say that he does in fact preach wisdom, but it is not a wisdom of this world, rather it is God’s wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory (1 Corinthians 2:7).

We have a long history, especially in the last five hundred years, of wanting, perhaps even aching for the approval of the world. We saw it in the sixteenth century with Erasmus who battled Martin Luther for the minds and hearts of the Europeans. Erasmus argued for the freedom of the will, knowing that Luther’s emphasis on man’s total inability to believe the gospel was insulting to the intelligentsia of their

¹⁰²The seventh of eight core values for life and ministry. The first six are Scripture saturation, meditation, adoration, supplication, sanctification, and propagation.

day. Many of the Presbyterians in Scotland in the 18th century, in a desire to gain a hearing among those with whom David Hume was winning the day, began to put science before Scripture, resulting in the general wasteland that is now Scottish Presbyterianism.¹⁰³ In a desire to reach the cultured despisers of the gospel in his day, Friedrich Schleiermacher taught that one need not necessarily believe in the miracles of Scripture in order sincerely to follow Christ. The departure of Fuller Seminary from Biblical inerrancy in the 1960's can be traced to the desire of some of her professors to "gain a place at the academic table" of the day.¹⁰⁴ And today the exegetical gymnastics of men like Peter Enns¹⁰⁵ and Francis Collins of Bio Logos¹⁰⁶ in order to soften the straightforward account of six day creationism in Genesis 1-2 in hopes of winning a hearing in the secular cosmological and biological world is another example of denying the straight forward preaching of the mystery of the cross. Simply put—anytime we try to explain our Christian faith apart from the mystery of regenerating grace through preaching the supernatural work of the Spirit in imparting new life to the sinner, then we are setting ourselves up for failure and accommodation to the world. When we try to use any scientific, philosophical, moral, or historical argument to prove the validity of the Christian faith, then we must realize others may refute our arguments. After all, there is no real power in philosophy or science to prove or disprove Christianity. At the end of the day we can no more prove six day creationism than the evolutionist can prove the earth is

¹⁰³ This is clearly put forth in *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* by Arthur Herman who shows how the Scottish Enlightenment adversely affected the church.

¹⁰⁴ See George Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*.

¹⁰⁵ *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins*. For example, Enns writes, "Attempts to reconcile Genesis and evolution are understandable, but they invariably lead to making some adjustments in the biblical story, and these adjustments always move us away from a strictly literal/historical reading of Genesis toward something else—call it symbolic or metaphorical or some other term," page xv.

¹⁰⁶ See *Socrates in the City*, edited by Eric Metaxas and Collins' article entitled "The Language of God" in which he says that Darwin was right, that common ancestry is correct, page 314.

billions of years old. None of us were there and the “experiment” cannot be repeated and therefore cannot be observed. But those who champion science in place of Holy Scripture, a totally unwarranted position, have repeatedly damaged the faith of many on the college campus when they encounter Biology 101!

What, therefore, does this have to do with proclamation of the gospel? We make gospel proclamation to the lost far more complicated than it really is. Bottom line—every unbeliever, regardless of his philosophical or biological training, is a blind rebel who cannot see the kingdom of God unless he is born from above (John 3:3). She is a hell bound adulteress (John 3:36, 4:15-18) and a child of the devil (John 8:44). He suppresses, or purposely puts down, the truth of God in unrighteousness, the ample knowledge of the existence of God (Romans 1:18). He has a cobra heart that loves sin and hates God, and he has no intention of being convinced by logic of the validity of the Christian faith. He cannot and will not believe the gospel, no matter how sharp your arguments may be (Romans 3:10ff)

What, then, does this mean for gospel proclamation? You have the Holy Spirit indwelling you. You are a co-laborer with God (1 Corinthians 3:9). You are an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). You are an instrument of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:3). You also are a fool (the Greek word is *moron*) for Christ’s sake and the world considers your gospel as utter and complete foolishness (1 Corinthians 2:14, 3:18-19, 4:10). By virtue of your union with Christ you also have authority, power, and love. You therefore ought simply to challenge people to listen to the gospel. Now, you must, of course, be gentle and respectful; but you should not give an inch. You have the truth. They do not. You have the mystery of the cross, working through the application of the Holy Spirit to the preaching of the gospel. You have everything going for you. All they have is their philosophical speculations, founded on nothing but thin air. You have the historical Christian faith, made known by the work of the Holy Spirit. So go forth with the gospel, acknowledging your dependence upon the Spirit, accepting the fact that the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing but is the power of God to those who are being

saved. Expect God to save people as you present the simple, straightforward gospel which exalts Christ, debases man, and brings salvation to all who humbly bow before Him.

March 15, 2012

“ . . . but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you, whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing” - Romans 15:23-24

CONSECRATION¹⁰⁷

We know that Saul of Tarsus was a “can do” man—a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to the righteousness through the Law, found blameless (Philippians 3:5-6). While Saul was in the very act of persecution the Lord Jesus arrested him on the road to Damascus, striking him blind, asking him why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9:1ff). Ananias was told by Jesus to go to Saul and to give him a precursor of what was to come, that Saul was to bear Jesus’ name to the Gentiles and to the rulers and those in authority, that he would suffer much for the privilege of doing so (Acts 9:11-16). Immediately following his conversion Paul began preaching Jesus to the people in Damascus. When the Jewish leadership severely opposed him, seeking to kill him, his friends lowered him in a basket to expedite his deliverance (Acts 9:23-25). He then traveled to Arabia to make sure he had the gospel down, not consulting immediately with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16-17). Three years later he was in Jerusalem to consult with the fathers of the church, again to confirm that his gospel was the true gospel (Acts 9:26ff). After several years, waiting on God for direction for his ministry, Paul was fetched by Barnabas, having brought Paul to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). And from there we know the elders set apart Paul and Barnabas for the work of missionary service (Acts 13:1ff). Following Paul’s itinerary for his three missionary journeys, plus his trip to Rome, evokes wonder and amazement. He was relentless. It is not as though he hopped on a jet and was in his next destination in a few hours. The trips by sea and land, not to mention the continual opposition, persecution, imprisonments, and physical hardships (2 Corinthians 11:22ff) no doubt took their toll on the man,

¹⁰⁷ The eighth of eight core values for life and ministry, the others being Scripture saturation, meditation, adoration, supplication, sanctification, propagation, and proclamation.

but he still was able near the end of his life, as he faced execution at the hands of Nero, to say, “The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me, and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearing,” (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul was always looking to push the gospel further. He told the Romans at the end of his third missionary journey, while at Corinth, around 57 AD that he hoped to see them on his way to Spain, the end of the world, as far as people in his day were concerned. In spite of all his hardships he still was able to tell the Corinthians, “Though we are afflicted, we are not crushed. Though we are perplexed, we are not in despair. Though we are persecuted, we are not forsaken. Though we are thrown down, we are not destroyed,” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). Indeed we can emphatically say that Paul went far, fast, and furious with the gospel. To be sure he was strategic. He was not haphazard. He had a plan and he worked it (he went first to the Jews, and by his second journey he was going to the big cities in Europe and Asia Minor) but he was able to tell the Corinthians that he would gladly spend and be expended for their souls (2 Corinthians 12:15).

What was it that drove Paul? Why did he do what he did? Why did he go far, fast, and furious? Simply put—he had been arrested by the gospel. He knew it was true. It had been given to him by divine revelation (Ephesians 3:1-3), and he had received a clear, divine call from the Lord Jesus to preach this glorious message of eternal salvation and reconciliation. Like Peter and John, he could not stop speaking what he had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). After giving the Romans eleven chapters of divine indicatives, he transitions into the kingdom imperatives of all out consecration by saying, “I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God,” (Romans 12:1). This command is in the aorist tense, meaning that it is once and for all, never to be repeated, like a couple who gets married once. They continually look back to that day of commitment to each other. It defines their relationship going forward. And so it is with Jesus—total surrender of everything to Him, once and for all, at the time of conversion. This is the norm for the

believer. This is not merely something for the super spiritual. Our lives ought to be marked by consecration of the highest order. We are to follow Paul's lead (Philippians 3:17).

What, practically, does it look like to go far, fast, and furious with the gospel of grace, especially if you are at home with children, work a sixty hour work week, or have many other demands on your time? I could give you suggestions on the use of your time—how to budget it, how to cut things out of your schedule, how to prioritize, etc. However I will not do it. That's because this approach would be far too mechanical. Besides, you have read books and attended your seminars on how to manage your time. However I will tell you this—gain the heart of Jesus for the nations, His vision of having all the tribes of the world represented before His throne, giving adoration to Him (Revelation 7:9-12). Get a new vision of why you are in the world—to make disciples of all the nations, regardless of how you pay your bills. Paul told the Corinthians that the love of Jesus consumed him, dominated him, motivated him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). He went far, fast, and furious because he was in love with Jesus. He adjusted his schedule accordingly. Granted, Paul was not married, and he could devote all his time to gospel work. You likely do not have that situation. There are times that you must slow down for your spouse. However, having said that, keep in mind that you were dead in your sins, that you were children of wrath, that you were without hope and without God in this world, but God has drawn you near by the precious blood of Jesus. So begin every day, giving yourself afresh and anew to Jesus, saying, “Here I am. Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee.” Expect the Holy Spirit to redirect your schedule, the events of your day, bringing people into your life with whom you can share the gospel of grace.

March 22, 2012

“So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present” - Acts 17:17

GOING TO THE STREETS

My wife and I were in Athens, Greece a year or so ago while I was teaching at the Greek Bible Institute and preaching at the First Evangelical Church of Athens. We took a sight-seeing trip one day and of course enjoyed wandering amongst the ruins of the ancient Acropolis. Afterward we walked down to Mars Hill, which is next to the Acropolis, where the Apostle Paul preached his famous Areopagus address (Acts 17:19ff). We sat on this rather unimpressive rock while I quoted to her the words Paul had preached on that very spot. Very moving! However, after being there for a while we walked down the hill between Mars Hill and the Acropolis to find a place to eat (we love Greek food) and on our left were the ruins of the ancient agora, the market place, where Paul went “door to door” preaching Jesus to the people of that great city. For some reason this moved me far more than seeing Mars Hill. Perhaps that’s because we know how relentless Paul was in gospel work. He preached to large crowds. He evangelized one on one. He went first to the Jews, seeking to reason with them in their synagogues, but when they rejected him and drove him out, something they always did, he then went to the Gentiles to proclaim Jesus. In other words, Paul was a street preacher. He did not wait for people to come to him. He preached wherever he could. He did not wait for the “right to be heard.” He did not make friends first and then hope to slip the gospel into conversation. In loving zeal he went straight at people with the gospel.

The prophets did the same thing. There is no indication they limited themselves to the synagogues. After seeing his utter depravity and decomposing spiritual life in the light of God’s perfect holiness, Isaiah said, “Woe is me. I am ruined,” (Isaiah 6:5). After his cleansing and the Lord asking, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?” Isaiah responds, “Here I am, send me.” And he went and preached to the

people (Isaiah 6:8-9). Jeremiah was terrified at the prospect of preaching, but God promised to give him the words to say, sending him to preach in the city of Jerusalem, urging the people to turn from their sin and return to the Lord (Jeremiah 2:1ff). God later told Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the Lord's house (street preaching) and there proclaim His word (Jeremiah 7:2). Ezekiel received a similar call, to go to the rebellious, obstinate people of the city. He was not to fear them. He was to speak the word of the Lord (Ezekiel 2:2ff. See also Ezekiel 11-14 for other graphic examples). Jonah finally went to the streets of wicked Nineveh and preached coming judgment and repentance (Jonah 3:4). We could say the same about Amos and Hosea (Amos 1-4, Hosea 4:1, 5:1). Jesus told the apostles that after they had received power they were to be His witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8) and we know their preaching largely was done in the streets of the cities to which He sent them (Acts 2:5 8:5,40, Acts 13-14, 18-19). And prior to this, Jesus sent out His disciples, telling them to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 10:7). They were to go to cities and villages (Matthew 10:11). And Jesus sent the seventy out to the cities and places where He had gone, telling them that He was sending them as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:1-3). John the Baptist did open air preaching (Matthew 3:1ff), and so did Jesus (Matthew 5-7, Luke 6:17ff). And church history is replete with a host of open air, street preachers—men like Savonarola, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland.

But street preachers and intentional, bold, one-on-one evangelistic workers are largely rejected and ostracized by the church. Always have been, probably always will be! The religious establishment does not seem to know what to do with fervent evangelists. My friends—street preaching and one-on-one evangelism, handing out gospel tracts, conducting religious questionnaires in hopes of engaging people in gospel conversation is Biblical. We all should be doing this, but very few of us do. Why not? I know some street preachers give the work a bad name, using “shock and awe” tactics, focusing on preaching against sin in a harsh way, saying that God hates homosexuals, using loud P.A. systems and invading people's privacy, etc. Clearly this does not honor God. My experience, however, is that

this is not generally the case. The street preachers I know, and with whom I have worked, are grace filled, courageous men, who stand on University campuses in free speech zones, or in public venues at major sporting events, and proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, warning people to flee from the wrath of God, urging them to repent and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. What, my friend, is so wrong and objectionable with that? I know what people say, “That doesn’t work anymore . . . I prefer to do friendship evangelism . . . that does more harm than good . . . our postmodern world does not respond to such approaches . . .” When, my friends, has the world ever liked preaching! If we live in a post-Christian world, always remember that Paul lived in a pre-Christian one. The gospel came in power then, and it can do so again today. It is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18ff). When I hear those objections I then know several things are in play. First is the denial that God uses many different means of evangelism. By no means is street preaching and direct, one-on-one work the only thing we should do. There clearly is a place for longer term relationships with unbelievers, patiently answering their questions, taking them through an evangelistic Bible Study. Street work is a broad cast of the gospel, trusting the Holy Spirit to bring those nearby whom He has prepared for a moment such as that. Second is a failure to remember that salvation is always a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, that only He can open the hearts and minds of people to believe the gospel. We should, however, expect Him to do such a great work, and we must go to the streets with that expectancy. And third, our objection to street work is probably an admission that we are deep down ashamed of the gospel. Be very honest with yourself—when you come upon street preachers, are you embarrassed, repulsed by them? Why? Are they not proclaiming the beauty of Christ? Are you embarrassed to hand out gospel tracts? Do you say, “This cheapens the gospel. I prefer to win the right to be heard.” Could it be, my dear friend, that you are, deep down in your flesh, filled with pride and a desire for comfort and acceptance by people? Has this caused you to be ashamed of Christ and His gospel!

In a series of graphic descriptions, Paul says that we are slaves, chained to the oars, deep in the bowels of a ship (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). He says that we are as men condemned to death, a spectacle (literally a *theater*) to the world (1 Corinthians 4:9). He says that we are fools (literally *morons*) for Christ (1 Corinthians 4:10). Indeed the words of Paul concerning himself ring true of many street preachers I know, “We are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and roughly treated . . . reviled, persecuted, and slandered, the scum of the world and the dregs of all things” (1 Corinthians 4:11-13).

The simple truth, my dear friends, is that street preaching and street evangelism are Biblical and necessary. Jesus told us that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24). We must die to ourselves and one of the best ways to do so is to face the rejection our Lord Jesus and His apostles and prophets faced, as well as that of saints now and throughout the history of the church. Jack Miller said that the greatest tool in evangelism is the willingness to be a fool for Jesus’ sake. Finally, if you know street preachers or if you have street evangelists in your church, thank God for them. They are a great gift to your church. Turn them loose. Pray for them, support them financially, and go with them to the streets. This is front line evangelistic work and it is a beautiful thing to behold.

March 29, 2012

“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”

- Acts 14:22

REVIVAL COMBAT

After Barnabas fetched Paul in Tarsus, bringing him to Antioch to help him shepherd the flock of God there, the elders eventually laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, their very best servants, and sent them out to the Gentile world to evangelize and plant churches. As they made their way through modern day central and eastern Turkey, preaching in such places as Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, they constantly faced opposition. The Jews falsely accused them, inciting angry mobs to beat them; but they kept going with the gospel. Near the end of this, Paul’s first missionary journey, Luke tells us that Paul had been encouraging the brethren, reminding them that it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God. Why such terrible opposition? Jesus told His disciples, just prior to His death, resurrection, and ascension that because they were not of the world, even as He was not of the world, the world would hate them; that they were not greater than their master, that if Jesus Himself was persecuted they should expect the same treatment (John 15:18-20). All that Jesus prophesied about persecution, all the persecution Paul experienced was within the context of the revival culture the believers in Acts were experiencing. A mighty movement of God was in progress and the devil and the world despised it and would do all they could to stop it. Paul experienced persecution because he was a revival preacher. He spoke the truth. He preached God honoring, Christ exalting, and man debasing sermons with conviction and power that moved people to repent and believe the gospel. Some loved it. Others hated it. Perhaps the reason we suffer so little for Jesus is because we are not revival people. Take Tim Tebow for example—he is a revival man. It is all about Jesus with him. He is humble and gentle but at the same time bold as a lion. He is fearless. He speaks of Jesus all the time. He has many, many admirers, but he also has many people who despise him. I recently watched a five minute exchange on ESPN where Stephen A. Smith was spewing vitriol about Tebow while Skip Bayless was

defending him. Why is Tim Tebow such a polarizing figure? For the same reason the Apostle Paul was—he is a Jesus man, and many unbelievers who hate Christ hate those who so readily live for their Savior. May God so work in you and me that we become so bold, so sold out for Jesus, that we are polarizing figures, that some love us while others hate us! Jesus said, “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you,” (Matthew 5:11-12). Those who persecute Jesus people are doing them a huge, eternal favor.

But even if you are not a revival man or woman, isn't it true that you still face some measure of tribulation from time to time? What kind? I can think of five. First is the world (1 John 2:15). The world is that frame of thought contrary to God. I could say many things, but here's one, due to lack of space—those in the world live as though they will never stand before God and give account of their actions, speech, or values (Matthew 24:37-39). You see it all the time—people living for themselves, never giving their sin or the coming judgment a second thought. When you stand against the world you face opposition from it. Just try telling some people that Jesus is the only way to God; or give the Biblical perspective at work on same sex marriage or abortion and see how people respond. Second is the flesh (Galatians 5:16). I don't merely mean your battle with lust (Romans 6:12-13), indwelling sin (Romans 7:18-20), or the old man (Ephesians 4:22-24), but I also have in mind the frailty of your human condition—panic attacks, sleepless nights due to worry or hormonal upheaval, and physical and mental wasting away due to the aging process (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Third is the devil (1 Peter 5:8). He hates Christ and those who love and serve Him (Revelation 12:1-4). He brings temptation; and while indwelling sin usually manifests itself by continual, recurrent sinful propensities; the devil comes at you suddenly, in shocking, in-your-face “golden” opportunities to satisfy yourself (see Jesus in Matthew 4:1ff)—the beautiful young woman on the plane, with whom you strike up a conversation, and who “just happens” to be on the same hotel shuttle bus with you late at night, going to the same hotel as you.

Fourth is the church. This seems odd doesn't it, but the status quo church has never known what to do with Jesus men and women. Such zeal seems out of place, making many uncomfortable. It is unnerving. Zeal for the kingdom does not sit well with the lukewarm, Laodicean church. Never has, and never will! Jonathan Edwards was run out of his church in Northampton. Some at Westminster Chapel were quietly not sorry to see Martyn Lloyd-Jones retire and continue his itinerant preaching ministry elsewhere. Your church may not know what to do with your evangelistic passion or your challenge to church members to take seriously the call to kingdom living. And fifth, and perhaps surprising to you is God Himself. If you are lukewarm, if you are proud and unwilling to listen to godly counsel, then God may be against you. He may chastise you. A.W. Pink suggested that when in the midst of trials, we ought to ask, "God, are you contending with me, and if so, why?" Jesus said, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. Be zealous therefore and repent," (Revelation 3:19). Both Peter and James said that God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6, 10, 1 Peter 5:6).

What, then, is the remedy for tribulation? By the grace of God, as the indwelling Spirit works in you, renew your mind through Scripture (Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:23). Love and trust God, not the world's ways. Abide in Christ by faith (John 15:1-5). With the Psalmist say, "My soul clings to Thee, and Thy right hand upholds me," (Psalm 63:8). Go to Jesus daily, many times per day, asking Him for His Spirit and His holiness (Ephesians 5:18, 1 Corinthians 1:30). Put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10ff) and rebuke the devil by the blood of the lamb (Revelation 12:11). If your children are having bad dreams, especially if you are engaged in difficult ministry, then pray over them, rebuking the devil, telling him that he has no power over you or your family (Matthew 12:29). And when the church opposes you, make sure you respond in humility and grace, praying for your enemies, loving them, moving toward them in deeds of kindness (Matthew 5:43-48, Romans 12:14-21). And when God is opposing you, taking you to "the woodshed", then repent, humble yourself before His mighty hand, and thank Him for His loving chastisement (Hebrews 12:9-13). And above all, remember that if God is for you,

who can be against you? He who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things (Romans 8:31-32).

April 19, 2012

*“I am under obligation . . . I am eager to preach the gospel to you”
- Romans 1:14-15*

EVANGELIZE OR PERISH

We know the old adage in the academic world—a professor must publish or perish. The same principle holds true for the church of Jesus in our day, in any day. We must evangelize or we will surely perish. If we fail to obey Christ’s command to disciple the nations then He will take the lampstand out of its place (Revelation 2:5). If we fail to repent of lukewarmness then He will vomit us out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16). We are fishers of men (Luke 4:19). We are ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are fools for Jesus’ sake (1 Corinthians 4:10). We must evangelize or we will perish.

I am a Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church in America and I love my denomination. I would not want to be anywhere else, but I am deeply troubled by the paltry number of adults joining our churches through profession of faith, especially in light of how much money we spend on our ministries. Take, for example, the following look at total giving (tithes and offerings, special causes, building funds, and other) divided by the annual adult professions of faith (POF) in 2010 in four of our Presbyteries, right in the middle of the Bible belt.¹⁰⁸

Presbytery	Total Income	Adult POF	Cost/Adult POF
Evangel, Birmingham	\$31,860,440	48	\$663,759/POF
Metro Atlanta	\$44,857,816	173	\$259,293/POF
Mississippi Valley	\$21,088,540	28	\$753,162/POF
Nashville	\$20,474,146	48	\$426,544/POF

¹⁰⁸2011 Yearbook, *Presbyterian Church in America, volume one*, pages 424-427, 516-519, 532-535, 544-547.

No doubt churches see others make credible professions of faith who, for one reason or another, never join a PCA congregation; and perhaps some joining by reaffirmation of faith, or even by transfer were actually converted only recently before joining our churches. But surely these statistics are still troubling. I looked at the 1973 numbers (the first year of the PCA) for these same Presbyteries (the Nashville Presbytery was non-existent then and Metro Atlanta was by another name, North Georgia, all these Presbyteries were far smaller in church membership). There IS a distinct downward trend in conversion growth.¹⁰⁹ It is true that inflation distorts these giving numbers but it is also true we were seeing far more conversions proportionately then than now.

Presbytery	Total Income	POF	Cost/POF
Evangel	\$1,478,153	155	\$9536/POF
North Georgia	\$225,380	9	\$25,042/POF
Mississippi Valley	\$1,796,022	90	\$19,955/POF

It is very clear to our church planters in places like Utah, New England, and the Pacific Northwest that they must evangelize or perish. If they are not intentional and aggressive in finding ways to win people to Christ, then they will not make it.¹¹⁰ There simply are not enough Christians from other churches or those who move into their communities to sustain their ministries long term. Supporting churches and individuals want to see something for the money they are investing. Sooner or later they will pull the plug on financial support if there is not movement in the right direction.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Second General Assembly of the PCA*, September 17-20, 1974, Macon, GA, pages 192-193, 201-202, 204-205.

¹¹⁰ Obviously I know that salvation is completely from the Lord (Ephesians 1:3-14), but it is also true that God always works through people (Romans 10:9-17).

May I suggest, however, that the same principle holds true for all of us, no matter where our churches may be, no matter how “successful” they presently seem. Immigration and secularization¹¹¹ continue to erode the Christian consensus in America. We have been pretty effective in the last fifty years at reaching politically conservative, religiously inclined people, especially in the south and Midwest, those who watch Fox News and love Sarah Palin. The American demographic, however, is changing. The 1960’s radical leftists who rioted in Chicago at the 1968 Democratic Convention are now professors and administrators in universities and colleges around the country. The anti-Christian sentiment by many of these college and university professors has taken hold of the twenty and thirty *some things* in our nation. We must evangelize or perish, and we must evangelize those who are very different than most of you reading this.

Mountains can be very deceiving. When recently in Park City, Utah I was watching people ski down the slopes and I remarked to someone, “The slopes don’t look that steep to me,” but I was told that they are in fact very steep. The brush I saw growing on the side of the mountains did not look that tall either, but a closer look revealed that it was well over six feet high and very thick. A similar deception can be at play in our churches. You may look at your church on any given Sunday and see a large crowd, worshipping in a big, expensive, and beautiful building with numerous paid staff people serving the congregation, partaking of outstanding programs for your children, listening to well trained and very effective communicators of Biblical truth; but unless your church is seeing new blood, people coming to faith in Christ, it is all a mirage. You are being deceived. We all are. We are kidding ourselves. We are like those on the *Titanic* who refused to believe the ship was sinking, who preferred to continue their delicious meal while the band played in the background.

What must we do? Well, for starters, consider what a few of my friends are doing in Salt Lake City, Utah. Doug McNutt, Robby Plemmons,

¹¹¹David F. Wells, in his, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, takes up this issue in detail.

and Brian Lee are church planters there for the PCA. They have tapped out the meager prospects of a core group for their church plants. There are few Christians in their towns and those who are there are happy in their own churches. These men do not have the luxury so many other pastors have—Christians looking for a new church. They must evangelize or they will die. So, they are presently spending thirty hours per week, for four weeks, going door to door in predominantly Mormon or secular communities. They are old school—knocking on doors and asking if they can in four minutes tell the people what their new churches believe. Mostly the people are willing to listen. This has been bathed in many months of serious prayer. On the first day of their effort they found ten different people who were willing to have them come back and share in more detail. They are averaging two hundred face to face meetings per week. They have been invited into numerous homes and had lengthy gospel conversations with many people, especially Mormons.

Should we not learn from these men—if we don't evangelize we will die! Perhaps not right away, maybe not in your lifetime, but sooner or later. If your church does not evangelize and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8) then Jesus will close up shop and go somewhere else (Revelation 2:5). Just check out all the church buildings turned museums or restaurants. I challenge you, all of you, pastors and lay people alike, get serious about evangelism! I have lots of friends with Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship, Evangelism Explosion, Search Ministries, and Globeworks International who will help you.¹¹² In fact, I know several who will come to your church for a week or so at a time and take your people out door to door in your community and share the gospel with as many people as they can. At the very least you will find your people outwardly focused and you may even find people join your church by profession of faith. New life will be infused into your church, and more importantly, Jesus will see the anguish of His soul and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:11).

¹¹² www.pefministry.org www.globeworks.org
www.evangelismexplosion.org www.searchnational.org

April 26, 2012

“So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroath. The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies” - Judges 2:13-14

THE CATALYST FOR REVIVAL

Recently on vacation at St. Simons Island/Sea Island, Georgia, as I drove around those beautiful places, taking in the scene of magnificent homes with immaculately groomed landscapes, I asked myself the question, “Do I really believe that one day, these very comfortable, wealthy, and accomplished people will wake up under profound conviction of sin, crying out to God, ‘What must I do to be saved?’” In other words, can God all of a sudden, without secondary means, bring deep conviction of sin leading to repentance and conversion for thousands or millions of people? God, of course, can do that, but the question is, will He? What is God’s revealed means of awakening people from their deathly slumber?

After years of Egyptian bondage, after a mighty deliverance by Yahweh, after wandering in the wilderness for forty years, after the conquest of the land of Canaan, after covenant renewal led by Joshua, Israel has settled into a pattern of unbelief, a lifestyle of idolatry, going after the false gods of Baal and Ashtaroath. Yahweh had commanded His covenant people to worship Him only (Exodus 20:3) and He told them repeatedly what would happen if they failed to do so (Deuteronomy 28:15-68, Leviticus 26:14ff, Joshua 23:15-16). So the author of Judges tells us Yahweh’s response to their spiritual infidelity—the Lord’s anger burned against His people. And how did He manifest His anger? He gave them into the hands of their enemies who took their wealth, freedom, and dignity. Is this an isolated instance? Not at all! Yahweh brings one wicked ruler after another on His people throughout the book of Judges; and we see the same practice of judgment through natural disaster and wicked rulers played out constantly in Israel’s history (Joel 1:4ff, Nahum 1:2ff, 2

Chronicles 36:1ff) repeated throughout the rest of their history. Yahweh's intention is always to bring His covenant people to repentance (2 Chronicles 6:36-39, James 5:1-6).

Most believers know well and cling to the promise of revival in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land." I have noticed that most people misquote this verse. It does not begin with the word *if*, but *and*. *There is a vital precursor to this repentance and healing.* Actually what the chronicler says is this, "Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and heal their land," (2 Chronicles 7:1-14).

In other words, the means by which God most often brings revival is hardship on His people. He brings wake-up calls, often in the form of foreign invasion, economic downturn, pestilence, famine, earthquake, and other forms of so-called natural disasters. Often these hardships come and His people don't get the message. Haggai told post-exilic Israel that though they were living large by building nice homes for themselves the Lord's house remained desolate. He told them to consider their ways, to wake up, to see what was happening. They were sowing much but harvesting little. They were drinking but they did not have enough wine to get drunk. They had clothing but not enough to keep warm. They were earning money but their purses had holes in them. Their money was running through their fingers (Haggai 1:3-6). Does this not describe us at the present time? God sends us one natural disaster after another, a prolonged economic recession, the real threat of hyper-inflation which could level us all, and yet we persist in ignoring the obvious—God is calling us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand, that we might pray, that we might seek Him,

that we might turn from our evil ways. Instead we continue to trust in our storehouses of grain, our investment portfolios and real estate holdings, our science and technology, ever failing to realize that none of these can keep us in good stead if the Holy One visits us with a mighty display of His awesome power. Indeed, as Malachi asks, “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap,” (Malachi 3:2).

We are so far gone as a nation and church, so wicked, so perverse—having the blood of millions of innocent children on our hands through abortion; fathers abandoning their children; corruption in Washington, on Wall Street, and Main Street; sexual immorality that rivals that of ancient Rome; calling evil good and good evil, embracing prophets who prophesy falsely and rulers who rule unjustly, finding pulpits where men merely pay lip service to preaching Christ crucified—that if God does not visit us with true revival, resulting in millions of conversions, then we are doomed.

So, if God is to bring revival then He more than likely will turn up the heat, tighten the screws, bring much greater hardship. I wonder what would happen if a terrorist set off a dirty bomb in Grand Central Station at rush hour, killing ten thousand people! Would this serve as the catalyst for revival? The Tsunami and earthquake in Japan over a year ago has awakened many previously hard-hearted Japanese to seek the true and living God. The wicked Islamic regime in Iran has driven countless Iranians into the burgeoning underground church there. The untouchables in India, the Dalits, are turning to Christ by the millions. God’s generally prescribed way toward revival and awakening is hardship. Even the great revival of 1857 in New York City where thousands of businessmen gathered daily to pray was brought on by the stock market fall of that year where the market lost sixty percent of its value overnight.

The question, my friends, is this—are you willing to pay the price for revival? Are you willing to pray earnestly? Are you willing to suffer with the rest of our nation? Can you endure the catalyst for revival?

May 3, 2012

“For the waters of Dimon are full of blood. Surely I will bring added woes upon Dimon, a lion upon the fugitives of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land” - Isaiah 15:9

WHO CAN ENDURE THE DAY OF HIS COMING?

CNN reporter Don Lemon, on his *CNN Newsroom* segment “No Talking Points” recently ran an old clip of Alabama Governor George Wallace saying, “Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever,” and the crowd cheered. Lemon then said, “Honestly, can you imagine having uttered these words in front of television cameras and being one of the people in the crowd cheering . . . That was not so long ago . . . Now think about how far we have come and think about what this might sound like a few decades from now.” Lemon then played the film clip of Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney speaking at the Liberty University commencement saying, “Marriage is between one man and one woman.” The crowd cheered.

Lemon’s obvious point is that Mitt Romney’s statement concerning traditional marriage is the same kind of hateful discrimination as that of George Wallace’s segregationist stance and those who cheered him in it. For the record—after the assassination attempt on George Wallace in the 1972 Presidential race, Wallace became a Christian, repented of his racist views, and apologized to the black people of Alabama, asking for their forgiveness. Lemon is using the same flawed argument which proponents of “Gay marriage” have used for some time—that it is a civil right that ought to provide the same tax benefits, health insurance coverage, etc. of heterosexual, married couples. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s own granddaughter recently and correctly pointed out that gay marriage is not a civil right. Our President, whom *Time* magazine is calling our first Gay President, as you know, has recently gone on record supporting Gay marriage.

Knowingly or unknowingly, Mr. Lemon, in his “No Talking Points” segment is insinuating that anyone opposed to Gay marriage is a racist

or homophobic. He fails to acknowledge that Christians have Biblical reasons for rejecting homosexuality in general and Gay marriage in particular. Some will argue that homosexuality is by “nature, not by nurture.” That is, homosexuals are born that way and thus cannot be held responsible for their behavior. First of all, there is no proof of a “gay gene” that causes people to desire people of the same sex. But even if scientists do find one this still does not alter the Bible’s strong prohibition of homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27). It does not necessarily follow that because someone is inclined toward a particular behavior he is free to act upon that impulse. A young boy sexually abused by a man does not have the liberty later to act on his just anger and murder the perpetrator, no matter how heinous the man’s actions were, “. . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance for one another in love,” (Ephesians 4:2). A man who finds himself drawn sexually to women still does not have the right to act on that impulse outside the bounds of his own heterosexual marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

So our President is now on record. He supports homosexual marriage. So do some forty-two percent of Americans. Don Lemon may be right about one thing—there may come a time when the vast majority in the U.S. look back at Romney’s Liberty University speech with contempt. This, however, will not alter God’s view of the matter.

The prophet Isaiah, probably prophesying during the reign of Hezekiah as the Assyrians were bearing down on Israel; pronounces judgment on Israel’s wicked neighbor to the east, Moab, a nation of polytheists whose major god was Chemosh, a deity which seduced Israel into spiritual and literal harlotry (Numbers 25:1ff, Judges 10:6). Adherents to Chemosh were given over to cult homosexual prostitution (1 Kings 14:24) and they offered human sacrifices to appease him (2 Kings 3:27). Knowing what God says about idolatry, sexual sin (prostitution, fornication, adultery, and homosexuality), and murder we should not be surprised to find Isaiah prophesying their coming doom (Isaiah 15-16). He says that the waters of their major city, Dimon, were filled with blood, probably meaning that dead

bodies had been thrown into the river. And there was to be no rest from the avenger, for lions would attack them as they fled for their lives.

May I suggest that our nation's increasing support of homosexual marriage, our unmitigated culture of death (abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, and homosexuality—HIV, high death rate due to suicide, violence)—place us under the same wrath God promised and carried out upon Moab.

Where are the preachers, the prophets, who will proclaim boldly and confidently, “Do not return to folly,” (Psalm 85:8)? How much longer will God put up with us? He is pouring out His wrath on the world (Romans 1:18). We are storing up wrath from God by our continued sinful disobedience (Romans 2:4ff). Will the populace listen? Will such forebodings make any difference? We do not know. We can hope they will, but regardless of how the message is received, the prophet must continue to warn people to flee from the wrath which is to come and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Preacher, will you preach the whole counsel of God? Don't shrink from it.

At the same time, however, do not allow the strong position against homosexual marriage and the homosexual lifestyle harden your hearts against homosexuals. You are to love them, to offer them Jesus, to point them to the cross where there is true freedom from the slavery of sin (Romans 6:20-23). You can befriend gay couples without compromising your Christian position. How? Do unto them as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12). Love them as neighbors (Matthew 22:39). Pray for them. Let them know you are a Christian and believe the Bible and wish to see them converted but you will remain their friend, no matter what happens.

Will we become like Sodom, like Gomorrah, like Dimon?

May 31, 2012

“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy” - Proverbs 29:1

GOD STILL KILLS PEOPLE

On the evening of May 22, 2011 in Orlando, Florida Robert Lee Gibson, age 42, and a street preacher carrying his Bible, was stopped by Jason Carr and Frank Whack, both 18 years old. Carr and Whack both had lengthy police records. They tried to rob Gibson of what little money he had. An argument ensued and one of these men shot Gibson three times in the chest. He died there on the street in his own blood. Two nights later the Orlando Police Department came upon Carr and Whack to serve them warrants for their arrests. The men sped away in their car with three others on board. The driver lost control of the car as it went against traffic and careened into a canal. Carr and Whack died on the spot. Another of the passengers died the next morning.

God still kills people. What kind of people and why? God kills people who have repeatedly hardened their hearts against His reproof. It will come suddenly and there will be no escape, no remedy, no way out. When a young child repeatedly refuses to obey his father’s instruction, and later in school refuses to listen to teachers, coaches, and school administrators; when as a young man he breaks the law through petty crime, spends a brief time in jail, and upon release graduates to greater, more violent crime; when as a married man his loving wife challenges him about his drinking, gambling, and drug addiction and he continues to reject her overtures, even after she leaves him; when a preacher or friend continually warns him to turn away from atheism, agnosticism, or some false religion and he scoffs; this man is the kind of person God still kills. I say, “Still kills”, because the Bible is replete with examples of such. Even after ten examples of God’s majestic power Pharaoh hardened his heart and he and his army were drowned in the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1ff). When Israel grumbled against Moses in the wilderness, and refused to enter the Promised Land at Joshua and Caleb’s insistence, God promised they would die in the wilderness, that they would not enter His rest (Numbers 14:32ff). When Korah,

Dathan, and Abiram, along with two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, rebelled against Moses' God ordained leadership, the ground opened underneath Dathan, Korah, and Abiram and they, along with their wives and children, were swept into perdition (Numbers 16:31-33). Fire came down upon the other two hundred and fifty men and consumed them as well (Numbers 16:35). And when Israel continued to murmur against God He killed another 14,700 in a plague (Numbers 16:49). And after these mighty manifestations of His holiness, Israel murmured still. God raised up fiery serpents to bite and kill many of them (Numbers 21:5-6). God also killed the wicked, recalcitrant sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas (1 Samuel 2:34, 4:11). After Judah was repeatedly warned by God sending them many messengers and prophets, they continually mocked Him, despising the word they preached. God sent His wrath upon them through Nebuchadnezzar's army which slew their young men with the sword, showing no compassion on young man or virgin, on old men or the infirm (2 Chronicles 36:15ff). And God killed Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1ff).

Rolfe Barnard, the old Carolina, Calvinistic preacher¹¹³ tells the story of preaching in Detroit one Sunday morning, urging people to repent and believe the gospel. After the service a little girl came crying to Barnard saying, "Preacher, I want my daddy to be saved." Barnard told the little girl's mother to have her husband listen to his radio sermon that afternoon. Surprisingly the man was listening and half-way through the sermon Barnard directly addressed the man, saying that his little girl longed to see her daddy saved. The man furiously got up from his seat, left the house, went to the local bar, and was shot five times in the chest, thirty minutes later. God still kills people.

Can we prove that Carr and Whack and this other man were whacked directly by God? No, but surely you will agree that the evidence seems strongly to suggest it. People die suddenly all the time. It is appointed for men to die once, then comes the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

¹¹³ For a treasure trove of Barnard's marvelous gospel preaching you may wish to visit www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=928102056519

Automobile accidents, commercial jets on take-offs and landings, heart attacks, drive by shootings. You name it. Am I saying that everyone who dies suddenly was in rebellion against God? No, of course not! Our lives are in God's hands. He will do as He pleases. In His sovereign plan He takes His own to be with Him when our work here on earth is finished.

What shall we do with this truth—God still kills people? You must warn anyone, everyone who is not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of how moral or kind they may be, they still are under the wrath of God and if they die in that state, they will spend eternity in hell (Romans 1:18, 2:5-6, Mark 9:48). And even believers who persist in unrepentant sin, who bring shame to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, may be taken prematurely from this world. I have in mind the believers at Corinth who died because they were abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30). Indeed, our God is filled with loving kindness and compassion (Psalm 103:8-13). He is quick and ready to forgive (Psalm 32). He is patient and long suffering with us (Exodus 34:6-7). He, however, is one who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7, Nahum 1:2-3). He is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Consequently it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). We ought to fear this God, my friends, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). I mean, really fear Him. Fear what He might do, not unlike but far greater than the fear you had of your father's belt or paddle when he came home from work that night. He sees all you do, all you think, all you say, all you feel. Who can stand before such a consuming fire? Our only hope is to run daily, repeatedly and humbly to the great lover of our souls, the One who died for us, the One who intercedes for us, the One who will come again to receive us to Himself, the One who will wipe away every tear from our eyes, who will take away our sinful flesh and give us perfect, glorified bodies on that day. You have no holiness in yourself. You must flee daily to Jesus, asking Him by the Holy Spirit to give you His holiness. Indeed, fear the Lord and live.

June 21, 2012

“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown . . . When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” - Jonah 3:4, 10

THE KIND OF PREACHING WE NEED

Business as usual in the church will not work. Preaching as usual in the church will not work either. Surely you will agree that we have never had more Bible teaching in America. Never have we had the immediate access to so much good and orthodox teaching through the internet, DVD’s, and books. Yet we seem to be powerless to slow down or stop our slide into Sodom. We are running headlong into perdition. We have well known and popular preachers espousing various forms of theistic evolution, calling themselves *progressive creationists*, whatever that means. We have sound, faithful, and orthodox men in our pulpits who see little happen in their preaching—few conversions, little gospel transformation of their people, little conviction of sin, little gospel interest by unbelievers in the community, little to no societal impact by their churches in their communities. Most preachers I know are terribly perplexed and discouraged by these things.

What must we do? Consider Nineveh in Jonah’s day. It was on the banks of the Tigris River, across from modern day Mosul, Iraq. The walls around the city were as high as eighteen feet. The temple there was at least one hundred and fifty feet wide and over three hundred feet long, made with millions of bricks, a spectacular accomplishment for the time. The people were proud, tempestuous warriors, boasting that they showed no mercy to those whom they conquered. They were mortal enemies of Israel and would, within fifty years or so, conquer them. Jonah, as any good Jew of his day, hated them; and they hated the Jews. So you can understand his reticence at taking God’s message of repentance and mercy to them. You probably know the story. Instead of going in a northeasterly direction to Nineveh, he went the opposite way, northwesterly to Tarshish, fleeing from the presence of

the Lord. God got his attention through the storm, having him thrown overboard, being swallowed by the big fish, and then miraculously delivering him. So he went preaching to his hated enemies and God showed mercy by moving the people of Nineveh, including the king, to repent. God relented concerning the calamity He was planning to send upon them.

What kind of preaching did Jonah do? What was it that brought repentance from these wicked, idolatrous people? Admittedly, we have little to go on in the text, only one verse, but we can still glean important principles from it. First, you will note that Jonah went to Nineveh. He went throughout the city. He took the message to the people. He did not wait for them to come to him. Second, he cried out to them. Can we agree that he showed passion? There was nothing casual in his approach. Third, he overcame his natural bigotry and hatred of these people. Fourth, he was specific. He did not hide the clear cut word—judgment was coming. Fifth, he was earnest. They only had forty days to repent. Failure would mean perdition. Sixth, he preached with certainty. This was a word from the Lord, “Nineveh will be overthrown.” Seventh, we know he preached the necessity of repentance from sin and faith in the true and living God. That’s because of the strong response of the Ninevites (Jonah 3:5-9). They knew exactly what they must do. Eighth, he preached a clear and vivid view of the true and living God. They were idolaters, but verse five tells us they believed in God. The king told the people in verse 8 to call on this God (His name in the text is *Elohim*, the creator God, a direct challenge to their false gods of nature and superstition). The king believed that *Elohim* was merciful, filled with loving kindness and compassion. Why else would he have hoped that He would turn from His just and burning anger and save them (verse 9)? So Jonah proclaimed *Elohim* as creator, sustainer, holy, just, and merciful. And ninth, Jonah had the anointing of the Spirit upon his preaching. How else can you explain the amazing conversion of an entire city?

What does this mean for us in our day? Four things may happen when a man stands in a pulpit to preach. First, he may truly preach. He will herald the truth of God’s word by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is

the best that can happen. This is what we need. Such a preacher reaches the heart by challenging the mind, affecting the will. True, Biblical, Spirit anointed preaching brings conviction of sin, conversion, and action by the Spirit's power (1 Thessalonians 1:5). He expects and works for a verdict. God has already given His verdict concerning His Son. He says, "This is My Son, My chosen One. Listen to Him," (Luke 9:35). A true preacher demands such a verdict from his auditors, "What will you do with this Jesus and His demands upon your life?" Second, he may teach God's word. This is okay, much better than the two possibilities that follow. But teaching is not preaching. The teacher reaches the mind, perhaps inspiring the heart, but affecting not the will. He informs his congregation. Perhaps he says intriguing things, putting Biblical truth in provocative and encouraging ways. His content is good. His delivery is polished, but it does not transform. Third, he may engage in Bible talking. He speaks of the Bible, from the Bible. He informs the mind, affecting not the heart or will. A Bible talker lacks passion, unction, zeal. He comes across as though he were lecturing on the latest innovations of office technology. His talking does not inspire change. It deadens, can harden people to pride, promoting lukewarmness. And fourth, he may be a Bible wanderer. He stands to speak God's word but seems not to know where he is going with the text. He wanders from the text, rarely getting to the point, failing to drive it home to the consciences of his auditors. He confuses the mind and kills the heart and will. He is unwilling to tackle prophetic and cultural issues. He is reluctant to take up the hard sayings of the prophets, apostles, or the Lord Jesus.

Teaching, talking, and wandering will not work in our day if we are to see mighty conversions, mighty assemblies, mighty holiness, and mighty societal impact. We must have preaching. It must be nothing but the word of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, calling people to decide for Christ right on the spot. It must preach Christ crucified. Will you, preacher, purpose to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:1-4)? Will you, congregant, purpose to pray for your preacher, that the anointing of the Spirit will rest upon his pulpit ministry? Business as usual in the church is not working. We must have more. We must have true, Biblical preaching.

June 28, 2012

“And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground” - Nehemiah 8:6

PREACHING THAT BRINGS REVIVAL

God had promised through Jeremiah a return from the exile after seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10) and indeed God fulfilled His promise in 536 B.C., raising up Darius of the Medo-Persian empire to rout Babylon (Daniel 5:30). As the people of Israel returned to Judah, due to opposition but also their own worldliness, they were very slow in rebuilding the temple and wall around the city. God raised up the prophet Haggai who challenged the people to rebuild the temple (Haggai 1:2). By God’s grace they answered the call. Later, when hearing that the wall was still in disrepair after many years, Nehemiah was burdened while in Medo-Persia as King Artaxerxes’ right hand man. He wept, fasted, and prayed for days, gaining the King’s favor to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. He did so in fifty-two days. It is within this historical context that Ezra stands, reads the word of God, and expounds it to God’s covenant people. The response was immediate and powerful. They affirmed it as God’s word, saying “Amen, Amen!” Beyond this they acted upon what they heard. It wrought humility and a profound desire to worship God. It also brought sorrow because they realized their folly in turning away from the Lord so many times in the past. Ezra told them that was not the time for weeping. Instead they were to rejoice at God’s goodness.

Have you noticed how many times the reading and preaching of God’s word brings revival? It happened after the exile under Ezra and Nehemiah. It happened earlier under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29-31) who brought back temple worship and the Passover. It happened under Josiah when he heard the rediscovered words of the Law, tearing his clothes because he knew he and his people had failed to obey God. Josiah then renewed the covenant with the Lord and brought back the Passover another time (2 Chronicles 34-35). It is within this context, however, that the words of Psalm 85 are particularly pregnant with

meaning, “Restore us, O God of our salvation. And cause Thine indignation toward us to cease. Wilt Thou be angry with us forever? Wilt Thou prolong Thine anger to all generations? Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Show us Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation,” (Psalm 85:4-7). These post-exilic Jews are asking God once again to revive them, to remove His anger toward them, to show them His lovingkindness, to bring salvation to them. And what does this revival look like? In verse 9 we read, “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in the land.” Revival brings salvation to many. Revival brings glory to the land—a palpable, troubling, disturbing, converting, sanctifying, felt presence of God. Revival is the people of God being saturated with the presence and power of God. In revival people cannot get enough Bible and preaching. One sermon a week is not enough. Hence, the Sunday night service and mid-week service. One reason I know we are not in revival is because people are generally content with one sermon each week, as long as it is not too lengthy or too convicting. In revival, people cannot get enough prayer and fellowship. They cannot get enough of telling people about Christ. Revival brings tears—tears of sorrow over sin leading to repentance, tears of joy due to the mercy and grace of God received, tears for *Ichabod* (the Lord’s glory departing the church and culture), and tears for the multitudes of lost souls who are running head long into perdition with their eyes wide open.

In a day when many seem to be mitigating the preached word of God, calling us to a neo-sacerdotalism (emphasizing the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and baptism over against the efficacy of the preached word of God)¹¹⁴, we all the more need preachers who will preach for revival. How are we to do it? The church and her preacher have only two weapons—prayer and preaching. Nothing else will work. So, how do we preach for revival? First, the preacher and congregant alike must

¹¹⁴ By all means we ought regularly to observe the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Every believer and his covenant children ought to be baptized and we ought regularly to partake of the Lord’s Supper as a means of grace, of growing in Christ, of partaking of His holiness. These, however, are to supplement the preaching of God’s word, not to eclipse it.

believe that revival is necessary and possible. Surprisingly, this is not even on the radar screen of many western believers. I will go further and say that the revival culture of Acts is normative, that this is always the benchmark of the church and anything short of it is dishonoring the One who gave Himself for us. Second, we must pray with the intolerable burden of which I have so often spoken and written in the past. We can have revival in our day if we are willing to pay the price for it—if we are willing to pray, fast, and weep like Ezra (Ezra 10:1) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:1-4); if we are in such anguish over the state of Christ’s church that we will pull the hair out of our heads and sit down appalled like Ezra (Ezra 9:1-3), that we will pull the hair from the heads of our brethren, like Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:25); if we are willing to pray with deep humility, confessing and repenting of sin like Daniel (Daniel 9:1ff). Without this kind of sustained burden we have no reason to believe our prayers are effectual. We must pray prayers of supplication, intense passion (Daniel 9:3. Zechariah 12:10). Third, as the preacher proclaims God’s word he comes to his great calling hot with Christ, after hours of prayer, study, and meditation on the word to be preached; after filling up his heart and mind with the glory of Christ, after feeling deeply and passionately the truths he will proclaim; after believing in the total sufficiency and efficacy of the preached word through the Spirit’s anointing. He knows he must have the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit fall on his preaching. He knows his gifts, charisma, training, or experience will not bring revival fire. He labors in his preaching and every aspect of his pastoral ministry with the expectation of revival. This kind of preaching brings action. It demands a verdict. Preaching for revival affects the conscience, heart, and will. No one could listen to the Lord Jesus, the Apostle Paul, or Isaiah the prophet without being moved in heart, mind, and will. Some loved the message and embraced it fully. Others despised it and wanted to kill the purveyors of it. When the Holy Spirit falls upon such preachers and their preaching, then the devil and his minions are awakened from hell. They come after the preacher in many forms—discouragement, financial or health crises, sexual temptation, severe opposition from within the church leadership, hatred and disdain from the world. But with the Apostle Paul, the preacher and the congregation are able finally to say together, “We

have fought the good fight. We have finished the course. We have kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for us the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to us on that day, and not only to us, but also to all who have loved His appearing,” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

July 5, 2012

“. . . but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified”
- 1 Corinthians 9:27

COFFEE WITH JESUS?

I recently read a four panel comic of a woman drinking coffee with Jesus. It goes like this:

Ann: “There are some Sundays I just don’t want to go to church. I want to wake up late, stay in my pajamas, drink more coffee and enjoy a very quiet day.”

Jesus: “That sounds like a fine, restful morning, Ann. I’m not keeping attendance at your church and you won’t need a note from your doctor.”

Ann: “So I don’t have to go to church? Wow. That’s kind of liberating, Jesus. It, it almost makes me want to go to church.”

Jesus: “There ya go. But since you’re not a sports fan, you might wanna stay home this Sunday. Your pastor is phoning it in with some football analogy sermon.”¹¹⁵

From where does this kind of theology come? It is rampant in today’s evangelical church. It comes from those who make a false dichotomy between law and grace, between gospel and law. They want to say the law is all about threats and punishments, that the law only works to drive the unbeliever to Christ, that it has no part in the believer’s life. They want to say the gospel is all about promise, comfort, and hope. But clearly the law of God is a delight and joy (Psalm 119). King David says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul . . . The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart . . . They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey

¹¹⁵ <www.targuman.org> Some of these comics, by the way, are very, very good. Not this one though.

and the drippings of the honeycomb . . . In keeping them there is great reward,” (Psalm 19:7-11). And the gospel has threats and punishments, “dealing out retribution to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). It is not either-or, but both-and.

God does put demands on His people. He expects a lot from us. Paul understood this. He disciplined his body, keeping it under subjection, making it a slave, so that he would not be disqualified. He is using a sports analogy, saying that we run to win, we show self-control, and we beat our bodies into submission. Well, what about it? Is Jesus keeping attendance at church? Of course He is. He commands us to worship Him (Hebrews 10:24-25, John 4:23, 7:37, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 95, 96, 100, 145, 150). Failure to do so is disobedience. It is sin. We are to be pleasing to God, knowing that we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). You betcha! Jesus is keeping score. But why are we required to worship God? Do we gain our salvation by doing so? No, of course not, but obeying God proves that we belong to Him, that we love Him (John 14:15). Do we obey Him perfectly? By no means, but Jesus delights in our faltering obedience (Mark 5:25-34). Jesus said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you,” (John 15:12-14). Paul said that the love of Christ consumed him (2 Corinthians 5:14-21), made him preach the gospel as a tent-maker, foregoing his right to earn a living by his preaching (1 Corinthians 9:1ff). Jesus summarized the law by saying that we are to love God with all our being and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39).

No doubt about it—the law of God makes demands on believers. It demands that we see our sin and repent. But the law also promises blessing for those who diligently obey the Lord, being careful to do all His commandments (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). But what about those

things God does not directly command us to do?¹¹⁶ Were David's three mighty men commanded to bring him water from the well in Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23:13-17)? Was the poor widow required to give all her money to Jesus (Mark 12:41-44)? Was Barnabas required to give his property to the church (Acts 4:36-37)? The answer clearly is "No," in all three examples. Are you required to spend an hour or two in prayer and God's word each day? Are you required to give above the tithe to world missions? Are you required to refrain from watching so many sports programs on television? No. But what if the mighty men had not gone to the well? What if the widow had not given all her money? What if Barnabas had not handed over his property? Would they not have missed out on a great blessing? Would not failure to follow the promptings of the Spirit have brought leanness to their souls? What if you spend lots of time with God, if you give to world missions, if you spend more time with your family and less time in front of the television? Do you think there is a payoff? Though Paul was not required to earn his living apart from the gospel he chose to do so. He said that he was under compulsion. He said, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel?" What does that mean? Was he going to lose his salvation? No, but disobedience to God's command to preach surely would have brought the chastisement of the Lord. He goes on to say that by preaching voluntarily, he will gain a reward. If however he preaches against his will (if he just doesn't feel like preaching anymore) he has a stewardship entrusted to him (1 Corinthians 9:15-18). Clearly Paul saw a payoff from obeying the Lord. He saw a benefit from going beyond anything God directly commands in Scripture. All these men and women went the extra mile because they loved Jesus; and their obedience brought great blessing to them.

Here's the bottom line—by all means you must go to church. You must read your Bible. You must tithe. You must obey all God's holy will. You must love your wife. You must submit to your husband. You must honor your father and mother. You must not commit adultery.

¹¹⁶ John Frame calls this moral heroism. Frame has a very good "take" on this issue of law and grace, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pages 176-199.

You must not steal. You do all these things because God commands you. You do them because you love Jesus. And you go beyond what Scripture commands, not because you have to do so, but because you love Jesus from the heart and you delight to please Him. And you do them because obedience yields a big payoff, here but also when you appear before God's awesome judgment seat. Yes, Jesus is keeping score and it is your duty to stay in the game, always keeping in mind that you have no holiness in yourself. You have no ability to do any of these things in your own strength. Your help, alone, is in the name of the Lord. When you fail, and you certainly do fail, you must run daily in repentance to Jesus for His holiness.

July 26, 2012

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard” - Isaiah 5:3

ME AND MY VINEYARD

The Marquis de Sade, the eighteenth century French philosopher and politician, was best known for his many writings encouraging and championing every kind of sexual perversion.¹¹⁷ Due to his hatred of religion in general and the French Roman Catholic Church in particular, he was an atheist who took that belief system to its logical conclusion. If there is no God, then there is no fall into sin; and if there is no fall into sin, then there is no sin; if there is no sin, then there is no judgment; and if there is no judgment, then there is no Savior. Therefore anything goes in every area of life. So the Marquis de Sade said that any feeling of guilt in one’s sexual life was a vestige of religious nonsense that one ought quickly to jettison. He said that pedophilia, sexual masochism, bestiality, necrophilia, and any other kind of sexual act one wished to engage in was perfectly fine. We now find our culture increasingly (the only thing at which our culture still recoils in horror is pedophilia) living on the Marquis de Sade’s world view.

What I find most troubling about the Marquis de Sade’s writing and the willingness of people in his day to take it seriously is that he was a contemporary of the great revival and evangelistic preachers of the Eighteenth century—George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley. He was born in 1740 and by the time he entered the public eye Whitefield (1770) and Edwards (1758) had died and the Great Awakening was waning. Surely these men knew of the Marquis de Sade’s writings and opposed them, but why did his writings gain traction in that day? Why hasn’t the plethora of churches, preachers, seminaries, church growth seminars, and Christian music and

¹¹⁷For a detailed explanation of this see Rousas John Rushdoony’s book entitled *Noble Savages: Exposing the Worldview of Pornographers and Their War against Christian Civilization*.

publishing houses been able to slow down the hegemony of perversion so prevalent in our own culture?

Isaiah the prophet, preaching between 740 and 701 B.C. to the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, is taking God's covenant people (in today's parlance, the church) to task for rejecting His beneficence. He refers to them as a vineyard, planted by Isaiah's beloved (Yahweh) who set them up to succeed and be prosperous (He planted them on a fertile hill, He removed the stones from the field, He planted the field with the choicest vine, He built a tower in the vineyard for their protection, He made a wine vat there so that they could imbibe joyfully from the fruit of the vine, and He thus expected good grapes). Instead, however, the vineyard produced worthless grapes (literally in the Hebrew text, "stinking ones"). So Yahweh asks the question of His people, "Judge between Me and My vineyard? Who is right? Who is just? What more could I have done than I have already done? Am I not justified in destroying them? Now here's what I will do, 'I will remove My restraining hand and the hedge of protection and the stone wall around the vineyard to keep out wild animals. Now the vineyard will be exposed to wild beasts that will utterly destroy it. Why?' I looked for justice and all I found was bloodshed. I looked for righteousness but all I heard was a cry of distress from those treated unjustly (kind of like the young boys crying for help in Jerry Sandusky's basement and no one came to their rescue, kind of like those who saw what Sandusky was doing in the Penn State locker room and only rattled a few lockers to let him know they were there).

So, why, after all Yahweh had done for Israel and Judah; after all God had done through the preaching of Whitefield, Edwards, and Wesley; why after all the evangelical ministries of our day, is sexual perversion rampant and inundating our culture? There is only one reason—the church has accommodated the world. My friends, stop looking at how wicked and perverse the world is. It has always been that way. Instead, start looking at the church. While Yahweh does pronounce judgment on the world (this is repeatedly done in Isaiah 12-24, as only one example), judgment must always begin with the household of God (1

Peter 4:17). How has the church accommodated the world? In a desire to reach the lost in the world we have allowed the world to invade the church. How so? We have neglected our role as gatekeepers, allowing ministers to preach who deny the authority of Scripture, who merely pay lip-service to our creeds and confessions; allowing people to join our churches and take the Lord's Supper without evidence of true conversion. We have neglected the true, full-orbed preaching of the gospel—on the one hand preaching cheap grace with seemingly little concern for holiness; and on the other hand demanding far more of those making professions of faith than the Bible demands—things like a lengthy conviction of sin, deep remorse over one's sin, and cult-like accountability structures.

And where has this negligence and accommodation to the world taken us? Underneath it all is a market driven ethos of the church, and once we succumb to that it is only a matter of time before wild and crazy things go on in churches, even evangelical ones. How so? We have today the prosperity, self-help gospel of Kenneth Hagin and Joel Osteen (we have had this for years, going back to Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher in the 19th century and Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller in the 20th century). But we also have a pseudo gospel by those espousing the gnostic gospels (Elaine Pagels, Bart Ehrman, and Dan Brown¹⁸ come to mind). They are giving us a new kind of Jesus—one who is ethereal, non-judgmental, and spiritual. And we also have a pantheistic gospel—that all are one with god, that one can worship any god, that all roads lead to Nirvana. Elizabeth Gilbert, an accomplished author, who had an apartment in Manhattan, a large home in the Hudson River Valley, and a devoted husband, nonetheless was beside herself with anxiety. In what she calls prayer, Gilbert knelt down one evening in her home, saying, “I don't want to be married anymore and I don't want to have a child.”

¹⁸Pagels has written extensively on these false gospels, trying her best to debunk the original and authoritative ones by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Bart Ehrman, a former evangelical, has written *Misquoting Jesus*, and Dan Brown has made millions of dollars by popularizing Pagels in his blockbuster *The Da Vinci Code*.

She says god (she always had a problem “with that one fixed rule of Christianity insisting that Christ is the only path to God”) spoke to her in a calm, wise, and compassionate voice, saying, “Liz, go back to bed.”¹¹⁹ So Gilbert divorced her husband and went on a year-long tour of Italy, India, and Indonesia (Bali) and wrote a book about it, *Eat, Pray, and Love*, which spent 187 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and was made into a movie starring Julia Roberts. A subjective, ethereal, non-threatening, “I’m okay, You’re okay” religion now pervades the western church and culture. There is no fear of God. There is no fear of hell.

The church has sown the seed of folly in accommodating the world and we are reaping a world wind of debauchery and devastation. We are in danger of God removing His restraints on evil, of allowing the floodgates of governmental tyranny to overwhelm us, to strip away our religious and economic freedom. What, then, must we do? Preachers and church leaders must repent of accommodating the world. We must preach the prophetic gospel, the hard sayings of Jesus, His prophets, and His apostles; calling people to repent, to be done with lesser things, to flee from the wrath of God which is surely to come, and to believe in the only refuge for sinners—the Lord Jesus Christ. We must proclaim this in the churches, in the streets, in the universities, and everywhere else in between. We are to eschew a desire to be hip and cool with the world. Who cares what the world thinks of us! Ask God for sincere and true conviction of your sin of accommodation and trust Him to work these powerful and life-changing principles into you and your loved ones.

August 2, 2012

¹¹⁹See Russ Douthat’s best seller, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*, for an outstanding historical survey of what has gone wrong with religion in America.

“This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you . . . he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards . . . he will take a tenth of your seed and your vineyard and give to his officers and to his servants . . .” - 1 Samuel 8:11-18

WHAT GOD RULES AMERICA?

The Puritans who came to Massachusetts Bay in 1630 knew exactly what they were doing. John Winthrop, in his *City on a Hill* 120sermon, set the Puritan vision for the new world. Their’s would be a God-centered nation in covenant with the Lord of Glory, who promised to bestow blessing upon blessing on those who obeyed Him, but curses upon curses on those who turned from Him (Deuteronomy 28-29, 2 Chronicles 7:12-18). And because these early Americans feared God and kept His word, they were rewarded with untold material blessing. However, by 1690, only sixty years after their arrival, Cotton Mather was concerned at their drift from obedience and fidelity to God. He warned them to repent and turn back to God. All cultures seem to battle the same temptation—in desperation we seek God but when prosperity comes we abandon Him (Moses warned Israel about the same thing, Deuteronomy 8:11-20).

And after God had shown Himself faithful to His people—by delivering them from Egyptian bondage, by taking them through the wilderness of their unbelief, by conquering the Canaanites and other wicked people, and by giving them the Promised Land—Israel cried out for a king, like all the other nations around them. God relented and gave them what they wanted, but in doing so He warned them of the consequences. It comes down to this—either we make the Lord our King, the One whom we will trust with our welfare, or we look to a king, the state, to our government. It has always been this way. There are only two options—either our trust is in the Lord or our trust is in the government. Now, if we choose the later, here’s what we can expect (I am paraphrasing 1 Samuel 8:11-18). The government will:

¹²⁰See my book *Seeking a Revival Culture*, page 1.

- Take your sons into involuntary conscription into the military
- Make you their serfs
- Confiscate your property (think eminent domain)
- Unjustly tax your income, giving the proceeds to fellow government workers (their cronies)
- Confiscate your workers and make them their serfs
- Unjustly tax you again and again and again, finally reducing you to serfdom

You will finally cry out to the Lord in distress but it will be too late.

God demands a tithe of His people and anything less than this is robbing Him (Malachi 3:10). Actually Israel was expected to pay three tithes.¹²¹ They were to tithe one-tenth of their income (in their agrarian society, a tenth of their crops and animals) to the house of the Lord and the priests and Levites were to use these proceeds to provide for tabernacle and temple worship and to administrate the education of the covenant children of Israel. The second tithe of ten percent was to be set aside for the worshippers as they made their three annual trips to Jerusalem for worship (the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths). This was “holiday worship money” to enable them to seek God earnestly. The third tithe was for the poor in Israel and this tithe was paid every three years, thus amounting to 3.3% per year. In other words, Israel was to tithe 13.3% of their income to the Lord. There were no property taxes since the earth belongs to the Lord, not the state (Psalm 24:1). The only other tax required of Israel was a half-shekel of silver temple tax paid annually by all men, age twenty and older. This was used for the infrastructure of the nation and for defense by the military. Therefore the government would by definition be very small and unobtrusive. God’s covenant people were to have freedom to live under God and not under the state. So when Israel decided they

¹²¹I am indebted to R.J. Rushdoony for this insight in *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 50-58. Most people today reject Rushdoony out of hand, and this is terribly unwise. He has much to teach us, as John Frame so ably reminds us in his *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pages 957-976

wanted a king like every other nation, they set themselves on a path to serfdom, heavy taxation, and government control.

It goes without saying that we are not a theocracy as Israel was under Yahweh, nor are we an agrarian society. Nonetheless the general equity of these principles ought to apply to any nation that wishes to seek and honor God. God's ways, not man's ways, work to the benefit of all people. Our pathway to serfdom did not begin with President Obama or President Bush. Nor did it begin with Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson, as some have suggested. Four years before George Washington was sworn in as President in 1789 he wrote a letter to James Madison, lamenting the fact that Virginia no longer required her citizens to pay the tithe to the church. John Adams was for "big government" and Thomas Jefferson was for "small government." Small government is "godly" and big government is "ungodly". I am not saying that everyone who is for big government is not a Christian, nor am I saying everyone for limited government is a Christian. I am saying, however, that the god of America is not the God of the covenant, the One to whom our Puritan forefathers pledged themselves as they came to this country. Our god today is the state and he has a voracious appetite.

Have you ever wondered why many who want an ever increasing encroachment of the government into our lives (the state has no God-given right to care for the poor, to educate our children, or to build up an unnecessarily large military industrial complex) typically give so little to charity, why they are content with paying higher taxes? In their minds, they are being very generous. Just as you give your tithe or more to the Lord's work and thus worship your God; so they are worshipping their god by giving more and more to him. They look to the state for salvation. They look to the state to feed them, to clothe them, to educate them, to provide their health care. The beast (see Revelation 14:9-12, 19:19ff, the Roman Empire and subsequent nations which demand our worship) is never satiated. He will take more and more, consequently keeping the poor in servitude, killing their incentive to work and pull themselves up out of their poverty, robbing them of their dignity along the way. In unrelenting greed the

beast will confiscate your personal property. His appetite is never satisfied. The continual worship of the beast will destroy us. God is not mocked. He will have no other gods before Him. If we refuse to repent, if we refuse to pursue Him in covenant, then sooner or later we will cease to exist. He will surely wipe us out as He did Israel and Judah.

What, then, must we do? My dear friends, we must gain an intolerable burden, not merely for holding onto our freedom which is rapidly evaporating; but for the glory of God to come once again upon our nation; that we would repent of idolatry. Without a return to covenant with God, of making the Lord our God in this nation, we are doomed to serfdom and annihilation.

August 9, 2012

“Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there is no more room . . . In my ears the Lord of hosts has sworn, “Surely, many houses shall become desolate, even great and fine ones, without occupants” - Isaiah 5:8-9

GREED AND AVARICE

By now we all know what happened with the housing bubble when it finally burst in the fall of 2008. Can there be a more graphic illustration of greed and avarice! The mortgage broker showed greed by convincing unqualified house buyers that they could own a house, taking his commission by folding it into the loan package. The lender showed greed by facilitating a bad loan even though there was government pressure to do so on the mortgage loan business. The government showed greed because they were looking for votes. Big banks like Citigroup and Lehman Brothers through their investment banking arms showed greed by purchasing the subprime loans and rolling them into packaged securities along with good, solid mortgage loans. The loans were guaranteed by quasi-governmental backed agencies like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and when not covered by them they often were insured by the likes of AIG. The investment banks made huge fees for creating and underwriting these asset backed securities. Everyone was fat, dumb and happy.

Isaiah the prophet, in this context preaching to the fat, dumb, happy, and wealthy people of Israel and Judah pronounces a woe, a strong word of judgment, upon them. In an agrarian society land was a status symbol and the rich in Israel were buying up all the land they could. Don't think this is an indictment on you buying a vacation home at the beach or the mountains. Land in Israel had been divided among the twelve tribes when they drove out God's enemies (Joshua 13ff) and the land was handed down from generation to generation. The problem in Isaiah's day was that the wealthy were committing usury, loaning money at exorbitant interest rates, and confiscating property when the people could not service the debt (Micah 2:1-2, Habakkuk 2:9-10). They also wished to live alone in the land! They were all about

isolation. They wanted to separate themselves from the “little people.” They did not want to be bothered by the ordinary problems of ordinary people. They loved their comfort and security. Yahweh, however, has different plans for them. Their homes will become desolate, even great and fine homes. Sound familiar? And part of His judgment on them is that their land will yield a pittance—ten acres of a vineyard will yield only six gallons of wine, six bushels of seed sown in the field only yields one-half bushel of food. Hyper-inflation, or perhaps deflation, would strip them bare. Isaiah pronounces another woe on them in verse 11, “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may pursue strong drink, who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them.” He goes on to say that they are living large in their parties but pay no attention to the Lord. Therefore Sheol, or death, will come upon them suddenly. All, rich and poor, those with or without status, will be abased, brought low. But Yahweh will be exalted in judgment.

Isaiah is not against wealth per se. The people of God are often blessed materially, especially as they seek Him, as they keep covenant with Him (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). However, He is concerned about the same thing as Jesus who said that we ought to be on guard, never thinking our lives consist of our possessions (Luke 12:15). Paul said something similar, warning of the danger of seeking wealth (1 Timothy 6:9-10), also of trusting in wealth (1 Timothy 6:17). Solomon, who certainly was rich himself, warned of the same thing (Proverbs 23:4). In fact, Paul said that because life is short, because this world is passing away quickly, we ought to buy as though we do not possess anything, we ought to use the world as though we do not make full use of it (1 Corinthians 7:30-31).

Why is this warning of judgment so vital for us? Will you not agree that our wealth, the affliction of our affluence, the distress of our distractions, can bring pride and presumption! It is so easy to focus our attention on what we see, the temporal and material; while failing to consider the unseen, the eternal and spiritual. I always think of Tom Brady, the Quarterback for the New England Patriots, in this regard. Talk about having it made from a worldly perspective! He is a famous

football player, making millions of dollars annually. He has a model for a wife, a couple of children, fame, good looks. So Tom Brady could easily say, “I suppose I should acknowledge all this is from God. He has greatly blessed me. And because He has done so, then surely I have His favor. I must be in right relationship with Him.” Actually the goodness of God is meant to draw Brady to repentance and faith but he avoids God (as far as I know); and because of his own stubbornness and unrepentant heart, he is storing up wrath for himself in the day of the wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:4-6).

So God is serious about greed and avarice, which begs a few questions, doesn't it? Are these two sins dominating your life? How can you know one way or the other? Consider this—you are consumed with greed and avarice when you acquire more and more stuff (fill in the blank, it can be anything) while neglecting your own soul (Luke 12:15ff). Are you allowing work and money to encroach on your personal time with God each day? If you are too busy for God then you are too busy! You are greedy if you pursue wealth or fame while neglecting your spouse, children, church, or ministry responsibilities. You are greedy if you are jealous of those who have more than you, if you speak against them (James 4:11-12), if you complain against them (James 5:9). Do you speak negatively of other people? Why? Are you jealous of them?

What, then, should you do? Taking a vow of poverty is not necessary. Nowhere in the Bible is this commanded of us. Nor does this mean we are to embrace socialism and cave into the federal government's unabated tyranny of exacting more and more of our wealth through taxation. It does mean that we are to work honestly, sincerely, giving our very best in our work, seeking to make our employer profitable (Ephesians 6:5-8). It also means we are to show compassion to the poor and needy in our world. While we rightfully resent the government taking our hard-earned money through exorbitant taxation; at the same time we are to hold our possessions loosely and give to worthy causes. The financial and time commitment of hundreds of people in Birmingham, Alabama to fund an annual budget

of \$1.3 million at *Restoration Academy*, an inner city school in Fairfield, Alabama which is giving poor children an outstanding Christian education, is a fine case in point. It also means we ought to show restraint. Just because you can, does not mean you should. When making any relatively significant purchase, learn to ask yourself, “Why am I buying this? Do I really need it? Is this the best use of the money God has given me?” And finally, it means we are to preach the folly of greed and avarice, not only to ourselves but to other Christians and to those in the world. Many people have ship-wrecked their faith on the rocks of greed and avarice. Such a temptation! Such a snare! But only Jesus can satisfy the longing of your heart. A new house, car, or suit of clothes will not do it.

August 16, 2012

“ . . . wrath and indignation on the contentious, on those who disobey the truth, who obey unrighteousness. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek” - Romans 2:8-9

THE WRATH OF ALMIGHTY GOD

In August, 79 A.D., the people of Pompeii awoke to nearby Mt. Vesuvius spitting toxic gas, ash, and pumice stone. Pliny, the Roman historian, a teen-ager at the time, was there with his uncle, the officer in charge of the Roman navy in that vicinity. Pliny gives us a vivid and detailed account of what happened, informing us how his uncle, in typical Stoic fashion, sailed right into the bay below Vesuvius to rescue Roman citizens. He took his time, napping and eating a sumptuous meal. Unfortunately, Pliny the Greater, as he was called, died of asphyxiation. At least 15,000 died in the eruption of Vesuvius, many frozen solid in the lava that flowed at over sixty miles per hour down the slopes into the city. But the eruption lasted for twenty-four hours. Why did the majority of the people remain in the city? After all, an earthquake seventeen years earlier destroyed the city which they were still rebuilding when the eruption occurred. The judgment was upon them and they did nothing to flee from it.

People have an uncanny ability to think positively in the presence of impending, terrifying, and certain judgment. They don't think it will happen to them. They seem to think they will live forever, that they have plenty of time to get right with God. Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). He said that God deals out retribution to all who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will suffer the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and His glory (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Jesus referred to hell as a place of weeping (they weep over what they have lost and they have lost heaven) and gnashing of teeth (people gnash their teeth in anger and pain—anger at God for His perceived unjust sentence, anger at the

devil for deceiving them, anger at themselves for their failure to repent, Mathew 13:42). He also said it is a place where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies (Mark 9:46). In other words, it is eternal. There is no indication in Scripture that souls in hell are eventually annihilated.

And Paul makes clear that God's just wrath and indignation is upon all who are contentious, on all who mock God, who reject the overtures of grace in Christ Jesus. It comes upon all who refuse to obey the truth of God's word. It rests upon all who obey unrighteousness, who willfully, continually, and consciously break God's law. He goes further to say that tribulation and distress will follow these contentious and rebellious people who do evil. In other words, all who reject the gospel of Christ, even the most moral of people, even the most religious Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or Presbyterian are under the just sentence of condemnation by Almighty God. Any and all not covered by the justifying, redeeming, reconciling, propitiating, and expiating blood of Jesus have the sentence of eternal perdition upon them.

What does it mean to be under the wrath and indignation of God?¹²² It means two things. First, while still in this world, prior to their deaths, the contentious and rebellious face three potential scenarios. First, in judgment God may simply leave them alone, not strive with them, not pursue them, refuse to bring conviction of sin upon them. Paul states this in Romans 1, saying, "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity . . . God gave them over to degrading passions . . . God gave them over to a depraved mind," (Romans 1:24-32). God says, "Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone," (Hosea 4:17). But God may also curse the unbeliever. He told Israel that failure to obey His law, going after idols, would bring His curse upon them (Deuteronomy 28:15ff). This curse can be in at least two ways. Could it be that God's curse is upon the Joseph Kennedy family? Kennedy

¹²²For a detailed, graphic, and sobering look at the doctrine of hell, read Jonathan Edwards' sermon "The Portion of the Wicked," <www.gracegems.org/Sermons/The Portion of the Wicked>

was a serial adulterer who made his money in illegal alcohol during Prohibition. His oldest son was killed in World War II and while reduced to a wheelchair and unable to speak due to a stroke, Joe, Senior saw his beloved son JFK assassinated. A few years later RFK was assassinated, JFK, Jr. died in a plane crash. The way of a transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). But then sometimes God curses the contentious by allowing them material and temporal prosperity. Paul says that the goodness of God is meant to lead people to repentance, to faith in the Lord Jesus, but because of their stubbornness and unrepentant heart, they are storing up wrath for themselves in the day of the wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:5). Could this be the case for Muhammad Ali and Donald Trump? Both have prospered by the hand of God but both remain recalcitrant sinners. The longer people live without repentance, then the more their sins mount up against them, until God's patience boils over in unmitigated wrath. And finally, prior to death, sometimes the contentious are overwhelmed with fear (Hezekiah certainly was terrified, Isaiah 38:1ff). They know something horrible is about to happen and they have no answer. Their smooth talk, sophistication, and ability to make deals in this life mean nothing on that horrible day.

As bad as this is, it gets worse, much worse upon death. If angels escort Lazarus to Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22), is it too much to suggest that wicked, vile demons escort the damned to hell! And when there, the eyes they used in this world to look upon evil will look on untold horror in hell. The mouths that spoke vile, blasphemous words on earth will cry out in incomprehensible agony in hell. The ears that listened with pleasure to bawdy jokes and wicked speech will hear the wails of the damned, begging for the slightest, momentary relief; but there will be none. But this is not the end. The worst is yet to come. The demons and the damned would gladly spend another ten million years in hell if they could only postpone the day of the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15); for on that day, upon Christ's return to this earth, books will be opened and every damned sinner will be judged according to his deeds. His thoughts, his speech, and his actions will all be brought before the holy tribunal of the

glorified Son of God who has eyes as a flame of fire. Each will see his own guilt and hear the most awful words ever uttered, “Depart from Me into the everlasting fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels,” (Matthew 25:41). With soul and body (1 Corinthians 15:22, Daniel 12:2) the damned will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death (Revelation 20:14-15).

My friends, this is the truth, whether you wish to believe it or not. If you are not yet covered with the blood of Jesus, having come to acknowledge your own guilt and condemnation, having run to the only Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ, who took hell upon Himself for you; then you must flee now from the wrath of God which is surely coming. Don't be like the people of Pompei who simply figured nothing too bad was going to happen to them. Flee from the wrath of God which is to come and believe now on the Lord Jesus Christ! He will save you now, no matter how wicked and perverse you are. You have no hope except to flee to Jesus.

And if you are in Christ, if you are a Christian, should you not humble yourself in awe and adoration that God has been merciful to you! He did not leave you alone in your sin. He came to you, opened your eyes, and gave you the grace of regeneration to repent and believe the gospel. And can you see the necessity of preaching this message to the world! One hundred and forty-six thousand people die daily—100 per minute, 6000 per hour, perhaps the majority of them going to hell and a judgment beyond our comprehension. What are you going to do with what you now know?

August 23, 2012

“If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger, and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” - Revelation 14:9-

10

WORSHIPING THE BEAST

The interpretation of the Book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John, has long been problematic. Many have believed that Revelation ought to be interpreted literally¹²³, so in Revelation it has been suggested that the beast is, among many possibilities—a revived Roman Empire¹²⁴, or a wicked ruler of a one world government (in the highly popular *Left Behind* novels his name is Nicolae Carpathia who dies, is resurrected by Satan, and who becomes the head of the United Nations). This teaching, called premillennial dispensationalism, has ignited speculation as to the identity of the antichrist (it has been suggested that he is—take your pick, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, or Henry Kissinger, to name a few). Gary Demar has shown the folly of such speculation in his book *Last Days Madness: The Folly of Trying to Predict When Christ Will Return*. Our dispensational brethren also believe the mark of the beast on the forehead and hand are to be taken literally as well, that during the seven year Tribulation period, those who worship the beast will have the number 666 implanted on their hands and foreheads.

Other exegetes, including those of the amillennial or postmillennial persuasion¹²⁵, believe that the apocalyptic genre of Revelation

¹²³ Premillennial Dispensationalists like C.I. Scofield, Dwight Pentecost, John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie, to name a few. O.T. Allis in *Prophecy in the Church* succinctly shows the error in such literalism.

¹²⁴ *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, John Walvoord, Moody Publishers, 1966, pages 197-198.

¹²⁵ *A* means no, *millennial* means one thousand. Thus, an amillennialist does not believe in a literal one thousand year reign of Christ. Instead it is a

demands we take these images in a spiritual or figurative manner. In other words, Jesus does not literally have seven eyes and seven horns (Revelation 5:6). I am a postmillennialist¹²⁶ and therefore believe we should interpret Revelation figuratively. So, who is the beast of Revelation? Kenneth Gentry makes a strong case for the beast being the Roman Empire at the time John received his revelation from the risen, exalted Christ.¹²⁷ To be more specific, Gentry points out that sometimes the Beast is described in a generic fashion (the Roman Empire) and sometimes he is specifically identified. Gentry believes the beast was Nero, the wicked Emperor of Rome, who committed suicide in June, 68 A.D. If Jesus gave His revelation to John around 66 A.D. (as I and all these postmillennial scholars affirm), then He clearly is referring to cataclysmic events soon to take place (Revelation 1:1,3, 3:11, 22:7,12). The churches of Asia-Minor, to whom Jesus was writing (Revelation 2,3), were being severely persecuted by the Roman Empire on the one hand; and by the Jewish, religious establishment on the other. These believers needed encouragement to hold fast until Jesus came (this refers not to His second coming in final judgment, but to His coming in judgment on Jerusalem in just three or four years) to overcome the beast, the false prophet, and the dragon; and that encouragement came from Jesus who promised to destroy all their enemies in the lake of fire that burns with brimstone (Revelation 19:20, 20:10). Jesus gives His revelation to John so that he can write it to the seven churches in Asia Minor, that they would stand firm, that they would not deny their Lord who was exalted to the right hand of the Father, who rules once and for all over all nations, kings, and despots (Psalm 2:8, 47:8, 110:1-2,

spiritual reign which began at Christ's first coming and continues until His second coming. *Post* means after. Thus, a postmillennialist believes the spiritual one thousand year reign of Christ begins after His second coming.

¹²⁶ I am not alone in this interpretation of Biblical prophecy. Many of the seventeenth century Puritans were postmillennialists. See Iain Murray's *The Puritan Hope*. So was Jonathan Edwards. Modern day proponents of this view include R.C. Sproul, R.J. Rushdoony, Gary Demar, John Jefferson Davis, Greg Bahnsen, and Keith Mathison.

¹²⁷He writes brilliantly and lucidly on the issue. See his *The Beast of Revelation* and *He Shall Have Dominion*, Both are published by The Institute of Christian Economics.

Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 11:15). The Jewish nation was destroyed some four years later, as Jesus had earlier prophesied (Matthew 24, 25) when Titus of the Roman Empire laid siege to Jerusalem, killing 1.1 million people (has there ever been a more horrific massacre in such a short time period!) and destroying the Temple.

The Roman Empire, the beast of Revelation, was severely persecuting the people of God, demanding that they pay homage to Caesar, something they refused to do. Consequently they were often thrown to the lions and killed by gladiators in the Coliseum in Rome. The temptation for any Christian at the time was to denounce Christ and to proclaim allegiance to Caesar. Jesus is God, not Caesar. We are to have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3). Hence Jesus' strong words of judgment on any who worship the beast, who put their trust and confidence in the Roman Empire! So it was vital that they knew what it meant to worship the beast, to give homage to Nero. Worshipping Nero was evident if one had his mark on the forehead or hand. What does that mean? We best not take this literally, as I have suggested earlier. To receive the mark on the head is to be controlled in one's thinking by the state, to believe that the state is one's savior. To have the mark of the beast on the hand is to have one's work (we work with our hands) committed to Nero, to work for him and to work against the Christ.

So Jesus is directly speaking to people in that day in a specific situation of persecution. Does this then mean that Revelation has no practical benefit for us in our day? Of course it has meaning for today! All of Scripture does. We have no trouble believing that Paul's direct words to the Corinthian believers about eating food sacrificed to idols applies to us in a principled way. The message of Revelation is no different. Even as Jesus warned the churches in Asia Minor to not worship the Roman Empire, to not put their trust in Nero; we likewise are to refrain from putting our hope and trust in the state. If one worships the state, instead of the true and living God, then he is under God's judgment. He will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of God's righteous anger. Those

who worship the beast will be tormented forever in fire and brimstone (the lake of fire). This torment will be executed in full view of God's holy angels and the Lord Jesus Himself.

So it is vital that we make sure we are not worshipping the beast or his image. You may be doing so if you think Big Brother is to care for you from cradle to grave, if you think the state is to provide education for people, if you believe caring for the poor is the government's business, if you believe health care is an entitlement Big Brother owes you. All that you have is from God and you are to be faithful stewards of it (1 Timothy 6:18-19). I am not saying all who are for limited government intrusion and lower taxes are Christians; nor am I saying all for increased government intrusion and higher taxes are infidels. Perhaps, however, you fall into the latter category. Have you really thought through your view of the world, church, and government? Step back for a moment and reconsider your position. Our problems today come down to the clash between two world views. On the one hand, there is the belief that God is our King, that our supreme allegiance is to Him and His word; and His word tells us that His covenant people are to provide for the education and welfare of the church and nation. On the other hand, there is the belief, perhaps unknowingly or unconsciously, that our hope is in man, or more specifically, the government. As long as a majority of people in the U.S. worship the beast then we can expect an ever increasing servitude to him which eventually will bring our demise.

August 30, 2012

“Let no one look down on your youthfulness” - 1 Timothy 4:12a

WHY DOES GOD USE YOUNG MEN IN REVIVAL?

Jesus was thirty when He began His public ministry (Luke 3:23), and Peter must have been close to Jesus' age when he began to follow Him. Some say Saul of Tarsus was in his twenties when he was converted on the road to Damascus. Augustine was forty at his conversion. Savonarola, the fiery Italian preacher who took on the corrupt political and church leaders of 15th century Florence, was in his twenties when he was calling the city to repent. Martin Luther was thirty-four when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg. John Calvin was twenty-six at the first publication of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Charles Spurgeon was sixteen when he began preaching and was preaching to 6000 people at the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle when he was twenty-five. John Girardeau, the mighty Presbyterian preacher to the slaves of Charleston, SC, was thirty-four when revival broke out in his church in 1859. Evan Roberts, the leader of the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905, was twenty-six. The powerful Scottish Presbyterian preacher Robert Murray M'Cheyne was twenty-nine when he died; as was David Brainerd, whom God used powerfully with the American Indians in the 1740's; as was Brainerd's cousin, James Brainerd Taylor, who was used mightily in the Second Great Awakening in the 1820's in Connecticut. When revival broke out the first time in Northampton, MA, Jonathan Edwards was thirty-two. George Whitefield was twenty-one when he was preaching to forty thousand people in Moorfields outside of London and in Philadelphia. Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, both from Wales and contemporaries of Whitefield, whom God also used mightily as evangelistic preachers, were twenty-one and twenty-four respectively when they began their public ministries. Billy Graham was thirty in 1949 when God did mighty things through his preaching in Los Angeles. Jim Eliot, whom God used powerfully as a voice for the gospel, was martyred by the Auca Indians at the age of twenty-eight. Don Richardson, the missionary writer who wrote the popular

book *Peace Child*, was twenty-seven when he began his ministry among the Sawi people of Papua New Guinea which resulted in mass conversions of these formerly stone aged people. And Erlo Stegen from South Africa, the instrument of mighty revival among the Zulu people at Kwasizabantu, was thirty-two in 1966 when God poured out His Spirit in remarkable ways, bringing conversions to thousands of Zulu's. David Wilkerson was twenty-eight when he left his comfortable pastoral ministry for his street evangelistic work in New York City; and God did mighty things through him there.

Clearly there is a pattern here. God uses young men in revival. Why? Obviously anything I say here is mere speculation but surely this is worth our consideration. Why does God use young men in revival? I can think of several possible reasons. First, isn't it true that young people often have an idealistic mindset, whether for good or ill! No doubt these young preachers mentioned above had a holy zeal for Christ and His kingdom. They believed wholeheartedly what they were preaching. They had not yet been brought to cynicism by the affairs of the church and world. To go further, perhaps they had not yet been corrupted by the world, the flesh, and the devil; and because of this they tended to be purer, cleaner vessels through whom the Holy Spirit could work powerfully. And it could be they had child-like faith. Jesus told us that unless we are converted and become as little children, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:3). Part of our problem, the older we get, the more theology we read, the more we see the devastation of the lives of professing Christians who have wandered from the faith, is we begin to mitigate the clear teaching of Scripture. We simply explain away the straightforward promises and commands in the Bible. Jesus says, "Ask and you shall receive," (Matthew 7:7) and we don't take that command and promise very seriously. He also says, "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name. Ask and you shall receive that your joy may be made full," (John 16:24).

But I wonder if the greatest reason for God using young men in revival is this—they have nothing to lose. Think back to your early twenties when you were not yet married, just beginning your career. You

probably had very little money, and even fewer possessions. You could probably load up everything in your car and move to a new city at the drop of a hat. You had no investments, no big career to hold you back. You had no wife or children so your responsibilities were limited. You were not running a company. No one was dependent on you keeping the company going so that they could get a pay check. You could take risks. Maybe you had lots of wins and lots of losses, but that was okay. None of these men mentioned above, as far as I know, had much money. They were not worried about keeping a congregation happy. They were fearless to preach the truth of the gospel in all its practical applications. They were not bound by needing to be home at night to help their wives put the children to bed. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain. They have much in common with eighteen year old soldiers, who fearlessly go into battle, risking their lives for their country.

What does this mean for us today? Well, if you are young and not yet married, then treasure the freedom you now possess. I am not saying marriage is a bad thing. Of course a good wife is a wonderful gift from the Lord (Proverbs 31:10), as are children (Psalm 127:3-5); but realize you have this window of time where you can give yourself totally, 24/7, to the work of prayer, evangelism, and making disciples. Your time will be limited when you are married and have children. I challenge you “to go for it”, “pull out all the stops,” and “leave it all on the field.”

But what if you are like me, getting older with all these familial and financial responsibilities? I challenge you to heed the words of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians, “Therefore if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above; where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God,” (Colossians 3:1-3). If you are in Christ then you have been raised with Him. You are in Christ Jesus now. Thus you are commanded daily to seek the things that are above, not the things of the world (see also Matthew 6:19-20). In other words, hold your possessions of time and money very loosely. Ask God daily to give

you opportunities to give yourself away in sacrificial service. By all means begin with a tithe of your income and increase it from there each year. Obey the promptings of the Spirit to give to particular ministries when a need is made known to you. Consider supporting missionaries and Christian workers who are laboring diligently for the sake of Christ's kingdom. And finally really believe that if you have Jesus you have everything; and even if you lose everything in an economic downturn or some other act of "frowning providence", you still have everything.

September 6, 2012

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