

**Tenth Annual
West Virginia Christian
Lectureship**

September 13-16, 2009

**Theme:
“Just A Closer Walk With Thee”**

**Pennsboro Church of Christ
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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The 2009 edition of the West Virginia Christian Lectureship marks the completion of a decade of this wonderful event. It is impossible to know the extent of the good that has been achieved by this work.

This lectureship is an outgrowth of the *West Virginia Christian* publication, which is an outstanding work that continues to be a blessing to the brotherhood. Brother Albert Farley, editor of the paper, and his devoted wife, Nancy, are to be commended for their great work.

The Pennsboro church of Christ is honored by the privilege of hosting this event for the fourth time. It is no small task and will only be accomplished by a firm commitment to its success, and diligently work toward that end. It will not be achieved by the effort of one. It requires the involvement of many. I would like to express appreciation to the entire Pennsboro congregation for their willingness to follow the leadership of the elders and work tirelessly to make this a special event. Never have I heard a negative word, nor have I witnessed a refusal on the part of anyone to put their shoulder to the wheel and give nothing but their best effort.

Our elders, Steve Hayhurst, Francis Sellers, Phelps Taylor, and Lynn Wells, have led by example in working for and promoting the lectureship. I am deeply indebted to them for their wisdom and generous support. They are to be commended for budgeting the money to pay for the printing of the book you hold in your possession. This lectureship will continue to contribute to spiritual edification for generations to come as long as this book exists.

We are immensely grateful to our speakers who have provided the material that makes up this volume. Every one of them are faithful servants of God and gifted laborers in His kingdom. Each one has gone the extra mile to prepare manuscripts that are simply magnificent.

In a time when we have witnessed an unbelievable movement away from God, what better lecture theme could have been chosen than *Just A Closer Walk With Thee?* The prophet Jeremiah said, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (10:23). Folks today need to hear that message, learn that lesson, and be convinced of their need to walk with God. It is our prayer that this Tenth Annual West Virginia Christian Lectureship will make a contribution toward that end, and that our great God will receive all the glory.

Terry G. Jones
Lectureship Director

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Phil Sanders

For many people the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Some people think of the Holy Spirit as an “it.” They think he is some kind of force or influence but not a person. The Bible, however, always speaks of the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person like the Father and Jesus Christ. Jesus, you’ll remember, taught in the Great Commission that we should baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:20). When Paul gave his final greetings at the close of the book of 2 Corinthians, he said, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14). Surely the Bible would not put the Holy Spirit in such a place if he were not part of the Godhead.

As a person, the Holy Spirit performed many functions. For instance, the Holy Spirit was present at creation. Genesis 1:1-2 says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The Holy Spirit was directly involved in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:11 says, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” The Holy Spirit thinks, feels, speaks, teaches, and has a will. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke “as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The Spirit was involved in the miraculous gifts of the first century. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Bible mentions nine different miraculous, spiritual gifts. It says, “All these are

empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (verse 11).

One of the most vital functions of the Holy Spirit was to be involved in the inspiration of the Bible. The Bible is God’s Word given to the apostles and prophets through the Holy Spirit. The Bible says in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.”—that is, no prophet ever thought up Scripture on his own—“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Paul also believed everything he wrote in the Bible came through the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 says, “For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.” This is from the New American Standard Bible.

Many people today think that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them or impresses some feeling on their hearts to motivate them to say something or act in a certain way. Through the years I have heard people say, “The Holy Spirit told me to tell everyone Jesus is coming again very soon.” But the Lord Jesus said about his second coming in Matthew 24:35-36, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” No one today knows when Jesus will come again. What Jesus spoke in the first century is just as relevant and true today as when He spoke them.

In the first century the Spirit taught directly to the apostles and prophets. The Spirit teaches us today by the written words of those apostles and prophets found in the New Testament. Some claim to believe the Bible but say there is another authority in addition to the word of God. They say this is the Spirit moving inside them. But one cannot accept an additional authority without rejecting Biblical authority. Some people today will reject the plain teaching of God's Word to follow their feelings.

While I believe the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets, I see no reason to believe the Holy Spirit is speaking directly to people today. I often hear of some individual or some group claim the Holy Spirit has led them into some belief that goes against the Scripture. Let me illustrate what I mean. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:34, "The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says." Now this is not a suggestion; it is what the Spirit revealed to the early church as the truth. In verses 37 and 38 the apostle Paul further says, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized."

The Bible speaks again. 1 Timothy 2:10-11 says, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." In spite of these passages some women excuse their public teaching and preaching to men in the church by saying the Holy Spirit told them they should. Of course, this makes the Holy Spirit say one thing in the first century and quite another today. Did the Holy Spirit really tell them they should preach? The Holy Spirit is not in the business of contradicting himself. Will the Holy Spirit, who inspired

the Bible, instruct people to disobey what the Bible teaches?

Neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit would lead people to disobey. In fact neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit would speak new teachings or act on their own authority. Listen to what Jesus says about what he teaches in John 12:49-50: “For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” Jesus only taught what the Father taught. Now listen to what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” If Jesus would not go beyond the instructions of the Father, and if the Holy Spirit would not go beyond the instructions of the Father, and if we know women are to keep silent in the churches, how can anyone believe that the Holy Spirit is now telling women to go beyond the instructions He gave in the first century and start preaching?

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all the truth in the first century; He did this in fulfillment of the promise of Jesus found in John 16:13. If the Holy Spirit guided them into all the truth, why do we need any more revelations today? The Bible must be complete, because God commanded that its authoritative message be preached to all people in all lands and in all times. Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:18-20, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all

that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The message of the first century given by the Holy Spirit is the message for every century!

Some people don't like the suggestion that anyone has “all the truth.” We are saying Jesus Christ revealed all the truth through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. It is arrogant for humans to think they know everything—that's true, but it is not arrogant to say that the Son of God and the Divine Holy Spirit know all things and gave us all truth. It is not arrogant to claim that Jesus Christ fulfilled his promise of giving the apostles the Spirit of truth, who would guide them into all the truth. The Bible is complete for all time because it fulfills the promise of Christ. Instead of seeking something new; we should look to what God has already revealed to us. The Bible doesn't lack even one spiritual or moral truth.

The Bible does not deal with changing things which are now out of date, but with truths which do not change, and which are needed to change men. The apostle Paul, when he spoke to the Ephesian elders said in Acts 20:27, “for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” He did not tell them to trust their feelings or some inner light. He said in verse 32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” The Bible, God's Holy Word, is the source of the whole truth for us today. It can build us up and give us an inheritance. We can rejoice in God's Word!

Those who claim the Holy Spirit told them something often ignore the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. They forget the Scriptures claim they are inspired and complete. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If Christianity had all truth and was equipped for every good work in the first century, we do not need any new truth or need any further equipping in the 21st century. “All” and “every” means “all” and “every”; not “all,” except when I feel moved.

People use phrases such as “the Spirit led me to...,” “the Holy Spirit impressed on my heart to...,” or “the Spirit prompted me to...” to justify their own choices and directions. Such subjective assertions are often more a statement of what they desire rather than what the Spirit has revealed. Instead of looking at our feelings, we are now to contend for the faith, which was once for all time delivered to the saints according to Jude 3. We are not to innovate or reinvent Christianity. We are to go back to the Bible and practice what the Bible teaches.

In the days of Jeremiah, some false prophets were always claiming to speak “the word of the Lord.” Jeremiah said: Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’” For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? (Jeremiah 23:16-18).

God said clearly, “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have

proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds” (Jeremiah 23:21-22). Jeremiah spoke of prophets who were convinced God had spoken to them, but the vision came from their own hearts and minds. God did not speak to them. They weren’t listening to God. They spoke out of their own imagination. When someone today claims God told them to do something the Bible says not to do, they are deceiving themselves. God didn’t tell them; they dreamed it up on their own. We must be very careful today not to say God said something when he did not do it. Our task is to listen to God and be obedient to his Word. I hope you will do just that.

Biographical Sketch

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AMERICA IS WALKING AWAY FROM GOD

Dave Miller

Since we are all finite creatures subject to time, we are constantly in danger of thinking that we are the only ones who have lived. We can easily fail to grasp the bigger picture of history and the mistakes of the past. The Bible provides just such perspective and context. God intends for us to see the larger scope of human history so that we might guard ourselves from traveling down the wrong pathway. Notice that for the last half-century, the most recent three generations of Americans have been less concerned than perhaps any other generation in America with maintaining a sense of connection to the past beliefs and values—those “traditional American values” that dominated our culture for the first 175 years. Consequently, we are literally witnessing the decline and ultimate demise of the nation.

To grasp the extent to which America has moved far afield from its origins, all one need do is go back and see what the architects of American civilization, the Founders of the Republic, said and did with respect to religion, morals, and what constitutes proper behavior. Doing so is a real shocker! Generally speaking, those who founded this nation were significantly superior to us today in their knowledge of the Bible and their professed commitment to the God of the Bible and the religion of Christianity. Quite frankly, they would be horrified and heartsick at the way America is walking away from God. And most of the previous population of America would feel the same way. Allow me to provide proofs for these claims.

The *Declaration of Independence* is the premiere document that launched America as a new nation—our

national birth certificate. Here is a quintessentially **political** document—a public expression of national concerns intended to articulate justification for declaring a separation from England. If the Founders intended to keep God out of national life, here was the perfect opportunity to manifest that intention. However, in this relatively brief document, they used the following phrases: “Nature’s God” (i.e., an 18th-century way to refer to the God Who created nature), “all men are **created** equal” and “endowed by their **Creator**,” “appealing to the **Supreme Judge** of the world,” and “with a firm reliance on the protection of **divine Providence**.”¹ Astounding! The 56 signers of the *Declaration of Independence*, in risking their very lives, put their signatures to a **political** document that **acknowledged and appealed to the God of the Bible four times!** So much for their alleged insistence on “separation of church and state.”

Every President in this country has delivered an inaugural address after taking the oath of office. Not only have the Presidents felt compelled to refer to the God of the Bible on those occasions, the farther back you go, the more Presidents have emphasized the importance of acknowledgement of God. For example, on Thursday, April 30, 1789, the first President of our country, George Washington, made the following remarks:

Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station, it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to **that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect**, that **His** benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of

the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to **the Great Author of every public and private good**, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own, nor those of my fellow-citizens at large less than either. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore **the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men** more than those of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of **providential agency**; since we ought to be no less persuaded that **the propitious smiles of Heaven** can never be expected on a nation that disregards **the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained....** Having thus imparted to you my sentiments as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to **the benign Parent of the Human Race** in humble supplication that, since **He** has been pleased to favor the American people with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility,...so **His divine blessing** may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.²

Such remarks not only reflect a deep sense of dependency on and intimacy with the God of the Bible, they demonstrate the extent to which **the entire nation** integrated this conviction into national, public life.

The second President of the United States, John Adams, made the following remarks in his inaugural speech on Saturday, March 4, 1797:

Relying, however, on the purity of their intentions, the justice of their cause, and the integrity and intelligence of the people, **under an overruling Providence which had so signally protected this country from the first**, the representatives of this nation, then consisting of little more than half its present number, not only broke to pieces the chains which were forging and the rod of iron that was lifted up, but frankly cut asunder the ties which had bound them, and launched into an ocean of uncertainty.... And **may that Being who is supreme over all, the Patron of Order, the Fountain of Justice, and the Protector in all ages of the world of virtuous liberty**, continue **His blessing** upon this nation and its Government and give it all possible success and duration consistent with the ends of **His providence**.²

Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural on March 4, 1801 included the following words:

...acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter—with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people?.... And may **that Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe** lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for your peace and prosperity.³

In his second inaugural address on March 4, 1805, Jefferson announced:

...I shall need, too, the favor of **that Being in whose hands we are**, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old, from their native land, and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with **his providence**, and our riper years with **his wisdom and power**; and to whose goodness I ask you to **join with me in supplications, that he will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures**, that whatsoever they do, shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations.⁴

Such remarks by one of the least religious of the Founders hardly sounds like the anti-Christian “deist” that he has been represented to be. He believed in the God of the Bible—the same One Who had guided the Israelites as reported in the Old Testament—and believed that He had guided the founding of America and was **actively influencing** America and her leaders.

Moving along in American history, on March 4, 1841, William Henry Harrison’s inaugural address included these astounding remarks:

I deem the present occasion sufficiently important and solemn to justify me in expressing to my fellow-citizens **a profound reverence for the Christian religion** and a thorough conviction that **sound morals, religious liberty, and a just sense of religious responsibility** are essentially connected with all true and lasting happiness; and to **that good Being who has blessed us** by the gifts of civil and religious freedom, **who watched over and prospered** the labors of our fathers and **has hitherto preserved to us** institutions far exceeding in excellence those of any other people,

let us unite in fervently commending every interest of our beloved country in all future time.⁶

Like his presidential predecessors, not to mention the Founders themselves, here was a President who would be deemed by today's standards to be wholly and unequivocally politically incorrect. Observe carefully his forthright contentions: (1) being inaugurated as President of the United States is sufficiently significant to express to the entire nation and the world profound respect for **Christianity**—not Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, or atheism; (2) all true and lasting happiness **depend** on Christian morality, freedom to practice Christianity, and a proper/just sense of **religious** (not social or political) responsibility; (3) the civil and religious freedom enjoyed by Americans **came from God**; (4) America's political institutions are **superior** to all other countries; and (5) America's future is dependent on God. Illegal endorsement of religion by government? Ridiculous!

On Monday, March 4, 1861, when Abraham Lincoln became President, the nation was standing on the brink of imminent civil war. If you had been in that crucial position on that momentous occasion, what would you have said? In his inaugural address, it is evident that the God of the Bible and the Christian religion weighed heavily on his mind:

My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to hurry any of you in hot haste to a step which you would never take deliberately, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it.... If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for

precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, **Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land** are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty.⁷

Imagine that! Abraham Lincoln used as the central rationale to avert the War Between the States the fact that they all shared the same God and the same religion!

Moving into the 20th century, on March 4, 1921, fresh out of World War I, Warren G. Harding delivered his inaugural speech:

One cannot stand in this presence and be unmindful of the tremendous responsibility. The world upheaval has added heavily to our tasks. But with the realization comes the surge of high resolve, and there is reassurance in belief in **the God-given destiny of our Republic**. If I felt that there is to be sole responsibility in the Executive for the America of tomorrow I should shrink from the burden. But here are a hundred millions, with common concern and shared responsibility, **answerable to God** and country. The Republic summons them to their duty, and I invite cooperation. I accept my part with single-mindedness of purpose and humility of spirit, and implore **the favor and guidance of God in His Heaven**. With these I am unafraid, and confidently face the future. I have taken the solemn oath of office on that **passage of Holy Writ** wherein it is asked: “**What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?**” [Micah 6:8—DM]. This I plight **to God** and country.⁸

Who was viewed as directing the destiny of America? God!

To whom was the president answerable? To God! To Whom did he appeal for guidance? To God! On what object did he take the oath of office? The Word of God! To Whom did he “plight” (i.e., solemnly pledge) himself? To God! Such words certainly conflict with the current alleged restriction between church and state.

Four years later, on Wednesday, March 4, 1925, Calvin Coolidge commenced his presidency with the following words:

Here stands our country, an example of tranquility at home, a patron of tranquility abroad. Here stands its Government, **aware of its might but obedient to its conscience**. Here it will continue to stand, seeking peace and prosperity,...attentive to the intuitive counsel of womanhood, encouraging education, desiring **the advancement of religion**, supporting the cause of justice and honor among the nations. America seeks no earthly empire built on blood and force. No ambition, no temptation, lures her to thought of foreign dominions. The legions which she sends forth are armed, not with the sword, but with **the cross**. The higher state to which she seeks the allegiance of all mankind is not of human, but of **divine origin**. **She cherishes no purpose save to merit the favor of Almighty God.**⁹

This President claimed that America may not be justly styled an aggressor nation—since the nation embraces Christianity. Indeed, he insisted that America’s **only purpose** is to please God and to urge all nations to do the same by giving their allegiance to Him.

This examination of presidential inaugural addresses could be greatly expanded. Do not miss the point: In direct contradiction to the attempt to expel God from the

government and public life, these remarks demonstrate that the people of America and their leaders were far more attached to the God of the Bible prior to the last 50 years. **America is walking away from God.**

After independence was achieved, the Founders met for the purpose of hammering out the political principles that would guide the new nation. On June 28, 1787, in the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, one of the least religious of the Founders, Benjamin Franklin, now in his 80s, rose to his feet and made the following majestic remarks [NOTE: Allusions to God and the Bible are noted in bold and direct biblical citations are italicized and bracketed]:

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to **the Father of lights** [*James 1:17*], to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, **we had daily prayer in this room for divine protection**. Our prayers, Sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. And have we now forgotten **that powerful friend**? Or, do we imagine we no longer need **his assistance**? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more **convincing proofs** [*Acts 1:3*] I see of this truth—that **God governs in the affairs of men** [*Daniel 4:17*]. And if **a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice** [*Matthew 10:29*], is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the **Sacred Writings**, that “**except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it**” [*Psalms*

127:1]. I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without **his concurring aid** we shall succeed in this political building no better than the **Builders of Babel** [*Genesis 11*]: We shall be divided by our partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a **reproach and by word down to future ages** [*Psalms 44:13-14; Jeremiah 24:9*]. I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth **prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessing** on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.¹⁰

The constant appeal to God and the heavy reliance on the Bible in such speeches is in stark contrast to the status of our current political leaders.

Francis Scott Key, 35-year-old poet-lawyer, was aboard ship on September 13, 1814 eight miles away when he witnessed the valiant defense of Fort McHenry by American forces during the British bombardment in the war of 1812. The incident inspired him to write the words to “The Star-Spangled Banner.” He later stated: “Then, in that hour of deliverance, my heart spoke. Does not such a country, and such defenders of their country, deserve a song?”¹¹ Though written in 1814, it was not until 1931 that the song was adopted by Congress as the official national anthem. Few Americans are aware that the fourth verse reaffirms the historic national attitude toward God:

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war’s
desolation!

Blest with victory and peace, **may the heaven-
rescued land**

**Praise the Power that hath made and preserved
us a nation.**

Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: **“In God is our trust.”**

And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall
wave

O'er the land of the free and the home of the
brave!

While studying at Andover Theological Seminary in 1831, Samuel Francis Smith wrote the song “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” also known simply as “America.”¹² Observe the fourth verse:

**Our fathers’ God, to thee, Author of liberty, to
thee we sing;**

Long may our land be bright with freedom’s holy
light.

Protect us by thy might, Great God our King.

How many Americans are aware that we have a National Seal? On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress assigned Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson the task of creating a seal for the United States of America. The seal was to embody the beliefs and values that the Founding Fathers wished to pass on to their descendants. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson (again, two of the **least** religious of the Founders) proposed a thoroughly **biblical** design: Moses crossing the Red Sea, with Pharaoh in hot pursuit. It included the motto: “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.”¹³ These two men were so familiar with the Bible, and so believed in the God of the Bible, that they were able to draw the parallel between the relationship of the Israelites to Pharaoh and the relationship of Americans to the King of England. Observe further that both men viewed the separation from England

to be **in accordance with the will of God**. As it turned out, their proposal did not make the cut.

The Great Seal was finalized and approved six years later on June 20, 1782. It has two sides. One side is sometimes referred to as the spiritual side. It contains a 13-step, incomplete pyramid with the year 1776 in Roman numerals at the base. At the top of the pyramid is a triangle (as if finishing out the pyramid) containing the Eye of Providence. Above the Eye is the motto *Annuit Coeptis*, which is Latin for “He (i.e., God) favors our undertakings.”¹⁴ Both sides of the Great Seal can be seen on the back of a one-dollar bill.¹⁵ That means that every dollar bill in America contains **three allusions to the God of the Bible**: “In God We Trust,” the Eye of God, and “He favors our undertakings.” ACLU attorneys must be pulling their hair out—though they continue to use the currency.

Many indications of our national attachment to the God of the Bible are in evidence in our nation’s capitol. Consider just one: The apex of the Washington Memorial is topped by a 100 ounce aluminum capstone that has on its east face two lone Latin words: *Laus Deo*, i.e., praise be to God.¹⁶

The Continental Congress considered God and the Bible so important to national life that they actually passed resolutions to make certain that Bibles were in abundance in the country. The Continental Congress directed a committee to investigate ways by which Bibles could be secured. The committee made its report on September 11, 1777, stating “that **the use of the Bible is so universal, and its importance so great**...your Committee recommend [sic] that Congress will order the Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different ports of the states

in the Union.” Congress promptly ordered the importation.¹⁷ Four years later, as the colonies suffered from the effects of the British embargo, and as the shortage of Bibles continued, importation became sufficiently impractical that Congress was again petitioned for approval, this time to print Bibles in America, rather than to import them from outside the country. The request was approved and upon completion of the printing, on Thursday, September 12, 1782, the full Congress not only approved the edition, but gave permission for their endorsement to be placed in the front of the Bible! It read: “Whereupon, Resolved, That the United States in Congress assembled...recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States.”¹⁸ Who today would believe that the original Congress of the United States considered the Bible so important to national existence that they would expend effort—even in wartime—to make certain that Bibles were available to the American population? The present widespread loss of respect for and interest in the Bible, is disgraceful, and if continued, will spell our national doom. It is yet another indication that **America is walking away from God.**

To grasp the depth of commitment and reliance on the God of the Bible that the Founders and Framers of American civilization possessed, and thus to see the extent to which America is now walking away from God, consider several proclamations that ushered forth from the Continental Congress during the tumultuous years of the American Revolution (1776-1783). These expressions, though perhaps tedious to today’s reader, are filled with spiritually uplifting, life-sustaining principles. For example, on November 1, 1777, the Congress issued the following proclamation to the country:

FORASMUCH as it is the indispensable Duty of all Men to adore the superintending Providence of

Almighty God; to acknowledge with Gratitude their Obligation to him for Benefits received, and to implore such farther Blessings as they stand in Need of: And it having pleased him in his abundant Mercy, not only to continue to us the innumerable Bounties of his common Providence; but also to smile upon us in the Prosecution of a just and necessary War, for the Defense and Establishment of our unalienable Rights and Liberties; particularly in that he hath been pleased, in so great a Measure, to prosper the Means used for the Support of our Troops, and to crown our Arms with most signal success:

It is therefore recommended to the legislative or executive Powers of these UNITED STATES to set apart THURSDAY, the eighteenth Day of December next, for SOLEMN THANKSGIVING and PRAISE: That at one Time and with one Voice, the good People may express the grateful Feelings of their Hearts, and consecrate themselves to the Service of their Divine Benefactor; and that, together with their sincere Acknowledgments and Offerings, they may join the penitent Confession of their manifold Sins, whereby they had forfeited every Favor; and their humble and earnest Supplication that it may please GOD through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of Remembrance; That it may please him graciously to afford his Blessing on the Governments of these States respectively, and prosper the public Council of the whole: To inspire our Commanders, both by Land and Sea, and all under them, with that Wisdom and Fortitude which may render them fit Instruments, under the Providence of Almighty

GOD, to secure for these United States, the greatest of all human Blessings, INDEPENDENCE and PEACE: That it may please him, to prosper the Trade and Manufactures of the People, and the Labor of the Husbandman, that our Land may yield its Increase: To take Schools and Seminaries of Education, so necessary for cultivating the Principles of true Liberty, Virtue and Piety, under his nurturing Hand; and to prosper the Means of Religion, for the promotion and enlargement of that Kingdom, which consisteth “in Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost.”

And it is further recommended, that servile Labor, and such Recreation, as, though at other times innocent, may be unbecoming the Purpose of this Appointment, be omitted on so solemn an Occasion.

Attest, Cha. Thompson, Secretary

God save the United-States of America.¹⁹

On March 20, 1779, the Continental Congress issued a Fast Day Proclamation to the entire nation:

Whereas, in just punishment of our manifold transgressions, it hath pleased the Supreme Disposer of all events to visit these United States with a destructive calamitous war, through which His divine Providence hath, hitherto, in a wonderful manner, conducted us, so that we might acknowledge that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong: and whereas, there is but too much Reason to fear that notwithstanding the chastisements received and benefits bestowed, too few have been sufficiently awakened to a sense of

their guilt, or warmed our Bosoms with gratitude, or taught to amend their lives and turn from their sins, that so He might turn from His wrath. And whereas, from a consciousness of what we have merited at His hands, and an apprehension that the malevolence of our disappointed enemies, like the incredulity of Pharaoh, may be used as the scourge of Omnipotence to vindicate his slighted Majesty, there is reason to fear that he may permit much of our land to become the prey of the spoiler, and the Blood of the innocent be poured out that our borders to be ravaged, and our habitations destroyed:

Resolved, That it be recommended to the several states to appoint the first Thursday in May next, to be a day of fasting, Thanksgiving humiliation and prayer to Almighty God, that he will be pleased to avert those impending calamities which we have but too well deserved: that he will grant us his grace to repent of our sins, and amend our lives, according to his holy word: that he will continue that wonderful protection which hath led us through the paths of danger and distress: that he will be a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless children, who weep over the barbarities of a savage enemy: that he will grant us patience in suffering, and fortitude in adversity: that he will inspire us with humility and moderation, and gratitude in prosperous circumstances: that he will give wisdom to our councils, firmness to our resolutions, and victory to our arms That he will have Mercy on our Foes, and graciously forgive them, and turn their Hearts from Enmity to Love.

That he will bless the labours of the husbandman, and pour forth abundance, so that we may enjoy the fruits of the earth in due season. That he will cause union, harmony, and mutual confidence to prevail throughout these states: that he will bestow on our great ally all those blessings which may enable him to be gloriously instrumental in protecting the rights of mankind, and promoting the happiness of his subjects and advancing the Peace and Liberty of Nations. That he will give to both Parties to this Alliance, Grace to perform with Honor and Fidelity their National Engagements. That he will bountifully continue his paternal care to the commander in chief, and the officers and soldiers of the United States: that he will grant the blessings of peace to all contending nations, freedom to those who are in bondage, and comfort to the afflicted: that he will diffuse useful knowledge, extend the influence of true religion, and give us that peace of mind, which the world cannot give: that he will be our shield in the day of battle, our comforter in the hour of death, and our kind parent and merciful judge through time and through eternity.

Done in Congress, this 20th day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-nine, and in the third year of our independence.

John Jay, President.

Attest, Charles Thomson, Secretary.²⁰

The Founders had no hesitation to acknowledge the God of the Bible and His true religion as the keys to national survival and success. A year later, now into the fourth year

of war with Britain, Congress issued another proclamation in October 1780:

Whereas it hath pleased Almighty God, the Father of all mercies, amidst the vicissitudes and calamities of war, to bestow blessings on the people of these states, which call for their devout and thankful acknowledgments, more especially in the late remarkable interposition of his watchful providence, in rescuing the person of our Commander in Chief and the army from imminent dangers, at the moment when treason was ripened for execution; in prospering the labors of the husbandmen, and causing the earth to yield its increase in plentiful harvests; and, above all, in continuing to us the enjoyment of the gospel of peace;

It is therefore recommended to the several states to set apart Thursday, the seventh day of December next, to be observed as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer; that all the people may assemble on that day to celebrate the praises of our Divine Benefactor; to confess our unworthiness of the least of his favors, and to offer our fervent supplications to the God of all grace; that it may please him to pardon our heinous transgressions and incline our hearts for the future to keep all his laws that it may please him still to afford us the blessing of health; to comfort and relieve our brethren who are any wise afflicted or distressed; to smile upon our husbandry and trade and establish the work of our hands; to direct our public councils, and lead our forces, by land and sea, to victory; to take our illustrious ally under his special protection, and favor our joint councils and exertions for the establishment of speedy and

permanent peace; to cherish all schools and seminaries of education, build up his churches in their most holy faith and to cause the knowledge of Christianity to spread over all the earth.

Done in Congress, the last day of October, 1780, and in the fifth year of the independence of the United States of America.²¹

Astounding! The Continental Congress felt compelled to include in its proclamation to the entire nation its earnest desire that God would be pleased to cause Christianity to spread over all the Earth! That's not the Congress of **our** day! Our political leaders—just like the nation as a whole—**are walking away from God.**

Ironically, as Commander-in-Chief of all U.S. military forces, George Washington frequently issued orders to the officers and soldiers of the Continental Army, stressing the critical importance of rendering obedience to the one true God. For example, in General Orders issued on February 26, 1776, Washington admonished:

All officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers are positively forbid [sic] playing at cards, and other games of chance. At this time of public distress, **men may find enough to do in the service of their God, and their Country**, without abandoning themselves to **vice and immorality.**²²

Patrick Henry, known for his “Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death” speech, illustrates again to what extent the Founders were tied to God. On April 18, 1775, Paul Revere and two others made their famous ride, followed the next morning by the British marching on Lexington and Concord and firing “the shot heard ‘round the world.” The next day, British troops went into action in Virginia, seizing colonist supplies in Williamsburg. Patrick Henry

felt their action should not go unchallenged. Hence, he gathered the local militia on May 2 and

inflamed their patriotism by calling up before them the fields of Lexington and Concord still warm with the blood of their brethren; he showed them that the object of the ministry was to render the colonies powerless by seizing their military stores.... He reminded them of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which guided the children of Israel; of the water gushing from the rock at Horeb; of the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, and then, with eye uplifted, his arms aloft, and his whole soul burning with inspiration, declared that the same God still ruled in the heavens; that he was watching from his throne the oppressions of His people in America and that He was still strong to deliver and mighty to save.²³

Who among our present national leaders have such faith, zeal, and attachment to God?

Allow me to provide one more indication of our country's previous reliance on God. During the American Revolution, as Commander-in-Chief of our military forces, George Washington issued the following General Orders from Headquarters at Valley Forge on Saturday, May 2, 1778:

The Commander in Chief directs that divine Service be performed every Sunday at 11 O'Clock in those Brigades to which there are Chaplains; those which have none to attend the places of worship nearest to them. It is expected that Officers of all Ranks will by their attendance set an Example to their men.

While we are zealously performing the duties of good Citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to **the higher duties of Religion**. To the distinguished Character of Patriot, **it should be our highest Glory to add the more distinguished Character of Christian**. The signal Instances of providential Goodness which we have experienced and which have now almost crowned our labors with complete Success, demand from us in a peculiar manner the warmest returns of Gratitude and Piety to the Supreme Author of all Good.²⁴

When the leaders of a nation manifest such attentiveness to gaining the favor of the God of heaven, he undoubtedly hears and responds. In contrast, when a nation and her leaders move away from God, deliberately attempt to eliminate His Word and His influence from the government, the schools, and society in general, their days are numbered. Indeed, as America walks, nay, seemingly **stampedes** away from God, she is running headlong toward destruction. Hear the word of the Lord: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34); “For the kingdom is the LORD’s, and He rules over the nations” (Ps. 22:28); “Let the nations be judged in Your sight. Put them in fear, O LORD, that the nations may know themselves to be but men” (Ps. 9:19-20); “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Ps. 9:17); “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 33:12). [NOTE: Much of this lecture is taken from the author’s book *The Silencing of God*.]

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Biographical Sketch

A native of Arizona, Dave is the Executive Director of Apologetics Press—a 30-year-old organization dedicated to the defense of the Christian Faith. His formal education includes three Masters Degrees, and a Ph.D. in rhetoric and public address from Southern Illinois University. Author of numerous articles and books, including *Piloting the Strait*, *The Quran Unveiled*, *Sexual Anarchy*, *The Silencing of God*, and a series of books that teach children how to read. He frequently speaks on matters pertaining to Christianity and the culture wars, appearing on lectureships and conducting seminars 40-50 weekends a year.

JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE

Phil Sanders

I want to walk closer to God. I want to walk closer to Him more than I want anything. I want to belong to God body, soul, and spirit. I want Him to be on my heart when I arise and when I go to sleep. I want to eat, sleep, and breathe the will of God in my life.

There are two earthly men who walked with God and one Divine man who walk with God and whose lives are an example for us to learn how to live close to God.

Enoch

Genesis 5:22, 24 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters...Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. (The LXX says that Enoch was “not found,” for God took him.)

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

Enoch was the father of the long lived Methuselah and the great grandfather of Noah. It is said of him that he walked with God after the birth of Methuselah, three hundred years. It was a long time for a man to support a holy life and communion with God without any relapse worthy of notice. It is difficult for Christians to do this: how remarkable then that he should have done it for the long space of three hundred years. Such approval did his extraordinary piety gain him, that when the time came for him to leave the world, God translated him, as he

afterwards did Elijah, and suffered him not to taste the bitterness of death; perhaps to show mankind what he would have done for them had they never sinned.

Ezra

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra, the priest, was a direct descendant of Aaron (7:1-5). He was a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven (7:12). Ezra was skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel had given (7:6). He was learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel (7:11). The hand of the Lord his God was on him (7:6), and the Lord put it into the heart of Artaxerxes king of Persia to beautify the house of the Lord in Jerusalem (7:27).

The Lord extended to Ezra his steadfast love before King Artaxerxes and his counselors and before all king's mighty officers. Because of this, Ezra took courage, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him (7:28).

When one considers the heart of Ezra (7:10), it is easy to see why God's hand was on him. Ezra set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, to do it, and to teach it. His heart belonged to the God of heaven, and the God of heaven remembered him (2 Chronicles 16:9). The Lord seeks people like Ezra to bless and to support strongly in doing His will.

Jesus

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

John 8:28-29 So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”

Mark 14:33-36 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.” And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

For Jesus walking with God and doing His will was his very heart and soul; it was His food and purpose in life. Nothing would keep Him from doing the will of His Father. He and His Father were one (John 10:30).

It was the custom of Jesus to begin every day with time spent with His Father. No matter what else was happening in his life, he prayed to the Father. “But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray” (Luke 5:16).

Before difficult decisions, Jesus spent extra time in prayer. “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles” (Luke 6:12-13).

Jesus began and ended his time on the cross with prayer. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they

do” (Luke 23:34). “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

How to Be Closer to God

James gives us some inspired instruction in how to walk closer to God. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (James 4:7-10).

This passage is addressed to Christians. That should tell us something. Christians have to be conscious of the need to stay close to God. They must intend to stay close. The Christians James addresses had been professing faith for a while. They needed to do more than talk their faith; they needed to live it.

James 1:22-25 says: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Submit to God!

Submit: *be subject, submit to, obey, be under the authority of.* Submitting is a choice to put ourselves in subjection to a higher authority. Your life will never be what it ought to be until you come to that point where you

are willing to submit to the Father in everything. Some people wonder why they are not happy as Christians. One cannot have one hand reaching out to God and the other reaching out for the world. Many Christians are very unhappy in their faith, because they have never committed their lives fully to God. When they are at church, they are not happy, since their minds long for the world. When they are in the world, they are not happy, because they feel guilt for the sins they commit. Consequently, they are unhappy wherever they are.

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (14:23). The Lord does more than merely express His love for us when we obey Him; He comes to live with us.

Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:9-11). We must make it our aim to abide in His love every day of our lives.

To do this we must watch our tongues. James warned Christians to be careful how they used their tongues. “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:9-10).

To follow in the footsteps of Jesus and abide in His love, we must also watch our hearts. Attitudes make a great

difference in how we live. James warned the brethren not to become selfish and lustful. They had likely become careless about their commitment and had succumbed to the desires of the world. “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us” (James 4:4-5)?

Resist the Devil

You can't make little deals with the devil and remain close to God. You will never be rid of the devil as long as you flirt with him. You cannot defeat him as long as you entertain him. You must resist him at every point to be rid of him. Paul reminded the Ephesians, “give no opportunity to the devil” (Eph. 4:27). The apostle Peter by inspiration advised, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Every denial is a great discouragement to the devil. With Christ you have the upper hand. Satan may repeat his assault a thousand times, but each denial makes you stronger and weakens his grip on your life! Notice that when you resist the devil, “he will flee from you.”

Animal trainers say that the secret of handling lions, tigers, and leopards is to keep them constantly afraid of you. The instant they get over their fear, they will attack. They are treacherous beasts and often gather courage for an attack when the trainer's eyes are turned away from them.

Satan is always seeking to attack us from the rear or in ambush. He goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, but he is a great coward when faced with courage. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” is as true today as it was when the Apostle James first made the declaration.

Draw Near To God

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

I was blessed to visit the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in June, 2006. There were 18 mizvehs outside the temple in Jerusalem—these are ritual baths that worshipers used to cleanse themselves before they entered the temple to worship. To come near God one must be clean. This was not an empty ritual; it reminded people of the holiness of God. We should prepare our hearts and cleanse our lives to approach our holy God.

There are times in all our lives we must look deeply into our lives and see just what is there. We may not like what we see. We may need to mourn our sins and repent of them. We can never find joy in a sinful life. Like David we sometimes must cry,

Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:9-12)

There are times in all our lives that we must put to death our sins (Rom. 8:12-13; Col. 3:5-11) and embrace the Lord afresh in holiness. Do we too not have books to burn (Act 19:19-20)?

To live with the Lord we must not touch the unclean thing. The apostle Paul taught the Corinthians:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Conclusion

Let us be done talking and act as we should. When William Henry Harrison, our ninth president, was inaugurated in 1840, he had prepared a 9,000 word inaugural address. The weather was dismal, cold and wet, but Harrison stubbornly spent almost two hours giving every word of that address. In the effort he caught pneumonia, and within a month, was dead. He holds the record for both the longest speech and the shortest term of any president. He talked more and did less than anyone.

True repentance hates the sin, and not merely the penalty; and it hates the sin most of all because it has

discovered and felt God's love. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

AMERICA IS WALKING TOWARD ITS DEMISE

Dave Miller

America is swiftly stampeding further and further from God's framework, and faster and faster toward destruction. Just in the last 50 years, America has shifted from a church-going population with a vast majority of its citizens openly professing the general doctrines of Christianity, to an essentially "unchurched," religiously-neutral society. The generic manifestations of Christianity in the form of Protestant denominationalism have been so diluted and altered that they in many ways stand for nothing except touchy-feely, "better felt than told," entertainment-oriented religion. Crime statistics have skyrocketed beyond any previous level. The prisons are full to overflowing and more are being built as swiftly as possible. Foreigners, who do not share our values and culture, are pouring over our borders, and on a daily basis the specter of terrorism hangs over the nation. Satan is having a "hey-day" and American civilization is imploding.

This has happened before. Do you remember what God said to the Israelites prior to their entrance into the Promised Land? "[A]ccording to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances" (Lev. 18:3). "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you" (Lev. 18:24). "Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you" (Lev. 18:30).

But what happened once the people were settled in the land? They walked "according to the abominations of

the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel” (II Kgs. 16:3). They “did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel” (II Kgs. 21:2). What were these “abominations of the nations” that they, themselves, commenced to commit? The sins of the nations included **idolatry** (II Kgs. 21:3), **adultery** and the breakdown of marriage (Lev. 18:20; 20:10), the use of **mediums** (II Kgs. 21:6; 17:17), **bestiality** (Lev. 18:23; 20:13), **bad judges** (II Chron. 19:5-7), **homosexuality** (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), and **killing their children** (II Kgs. 16:3; 17:17; 21:6). Question: Do these behaviors sound like America? As a matter of fact, in the last 50 years, each of these sins has become commonplace.

Idolatry

Two forms of idolatry are rampant in America. Since the 1960s, the literal form has escalated beyond what any of the Founders could have ever imagined. Hindu and Buddhist temples have sprung up all over the nation. In the decade of the 1990s, adherents to Buddhism increased in America by 170%, while Hindus increased a whopping 237%. Who could have imagined that the day would come when a Hindu would be invited to open a session of the United States Senate with a Hindu prayer?¹ Other religions that incorporate pagan idolatry have also increased dramatically. America is literally following the same pathway that Israel followed in departing from the living God.

The other form of idolatry that is widespread in our day is the one mentioned by Paul in Colossians 3:5—covetousness and greed. Think of it. More than ever before in our nation, people seem money crazed and are willing to place everyone and everything behind their lust to acquire

wealth. Television shows flaunt the lust for money before the viewer, from *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* and *The Apprentice*, to the so-called survivor and reality TV shows (*Fear Factor*, *Survivor*, *The Great Race*) in which people are willing to be humiliated and subject themselves to senseless indignities in order to get rich quick. One by one, states continue to succumb to the lure of wealth alleged to be available through the lottery. And now, rather than being confined to Las Vegas, casinos have sprung up all over the country—many times owned and operated by native Americans who are given special privileges. Horse and dog racing are widespread as well. Our national government has been following unbiblical economic principles for about 50 years now, spending us into catastrophic debt, leaving the nation standing on the brink of financial disaster. Greed reigns supreme. Yes, America is an idolatrous nation!

Adultery

What is the condition of our country with regard to sexual promiscuity and the breakdown of the home? One in four New Yorkers are infected with Herpes Simplex Virus-2—a lifelong, sexually-transmitted infection that doubles the risk of contracting HIV, and that compares with one in five Americans (19%).² Think of it: one-fifth of all Americans have contracted one type of venereal disease (not counting all the other STDs!). Marital unfaithfulness is at an all time high. Sexual promiscuity and the consequent venereal diseases are epidemic. Referring to this state of affairs as “the deinstitutionalization of marriage,” researchers at the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University concluded:

Taken together, the marriage indicators do not argue for optimism about a quick or widespread comeback of marriage. Persistent long-term trends

suggest a steady weakening of marriage as a lasting union, a major stage in the adult life course, and as the primary institution governing childbearing and parenthood.³

Yes, America is an adulterous nation.

Mediums

Americans continue to give increasing attention to the mystical and the superstitious. Think of the programs in the last few years that give credence to psychics, astrology, mediums, and spiritualism—from the *Psychic Friends Network* and the *Psychic Hotline*, to Miss Cleo and Sister Julia, to John Edward’s *Crossing Over* and *Cross Country*. Millions of Americans actually believe that man can communicate with the dead.⁴ Yet, the Bible is very clear in its forthright condemnation of those who dabble in such matters (Rev. 21:8). Yes, America is a superstitious nation.

Bestiality

I am sickened to have to report to you that as sexual anarchy spreads across our land like a deadly scourge, the extent of sexual depravity deepens. New terminology has been forthcoming to legitimate the change. Zoophilia is defined as sexual attraction by a human to an animal. The one who would oppose bestiality is labeled an “antispeciesist.” Books and articles have come off the press promoting this behavior, including *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality* (by Midas Dekkers), *The Horseman: Obsessions of a Zoophile* (by Mark Matthews), “Rethinking Bestiality” (by Piers Beirne), *Love, Violence, and Sexuality in Relationships between Humans and Animals* (by Andrea Beetz), *Dog Love* (by Marjorie B. Garber), *Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia* (by Hani Miletski), and “Zoophilia

in Men: A Study of Sexual Interest in Animals” (by Colin J. Williams and Martin S. Weinberg). Keep in mind that those who define their identity in terms of their sexual appetites generally endorse and support all forms of sexual depravity—those who are “gay, lesbian, bestial, necrophile, sadomasochist, bisexual and transgender people.”⁵

America is glibly walking down the same road that the corrupt, degraded European nations went down. Homosexuality and bestiality were legalized in Sweden in 1944. Princeton University professor, Peter Singer, who authored *Animal Liberation* in 1975, recently wrote an essay titled “Heavy Petting” in which he suggests that sexual relations with animals need not be “an offence to our status and dignity as human beings.”⁶ PETA President, Ingrid Newkirk, agrees: “If it isn’t exploitation and abuse, it may not be wrong.”⁷ No wonder Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, writing the dissenting opinion for the Court in the *Lawrence v. Texas* case that struck down all sodomy laws for all states, declared: “State laws against bigamy, same-sex marriage, adult incest, prostitution, . . . adultery, fornication, bestiality, and obscenity are likewise sustainable only in light of Bowers’ validation of laws based on moral choices. **Every single one of these laws is called into question by today’s decision.**”⁸ In other words, all laws against sexual deviance stand or fall together. It looks like sexual deviance is going to stand—and we as a nation are going to fall. Yes, America is a sexually deviant nation.

Bad Judges

How does the average American feel about the criminal justice system? With no disrespect intended toward the many fine law enforcement officials that we continue to have, nevertheless, I suspect that many Americans feel that a mockery has been made of the system

and that, since the 1960s, many things have gone awry. Indeed, “criminal rights” take precedence over the innocent. In the 1960s, it was bad judges that took God out of our public schools. It was bad judges who legalized abortion in *Roe v. Wade*. It was bad judges who legalized homosexuality in *Lawrence v. Texas*. And it is bad judges who continue to wreak havoc on our moral foundation when they give credence to lawsuits by the ACLU to omit “under God” from the pledge of allegiance, to remove Christian symbols from government buildings, and to ban prayers before school board meetings, city councils, and school sports. The unmitigated gall and defiant audacity of activist judges are seen when they brush aside the will of the people by striking down voter-approved marriage amendments in both Nebraska and Georgia.⁹ Yes, America is plagued by bad judges.

Homosexuality

The war waged by homosexual activists since the 1960s has resulted in significant erosion of the Christian values that characterized the nation. In 1973, when the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago first asked people about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex, 80% described them as “always wrong” or “almost always wrong.” By 2006, the number had dwindled to 61%.¹⁰ As noted above, the historic Supreme Court case of *Lawrence v. Texas* resulted in all sodomy laws being struck down as unconstitutional. Hollywood has succeeded in mainstreaming homosexuality by introducing homosexual characters on a host of programs and sitcoms. Homosexual activists succeeded in convincing many large corporations to make “sensitivity and diversity training” mandatory for their employees, and they are busily infiltrating our public schools with books and other materials that are calculated to gain approval for

the homosexual lifestyle by the next generation. Yes, America is succumbing to the homosexual agenda.

Killing Children

It is virtually impossible for the human mind to grasp the fact that since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1973, some **50 million** unborn children have been butchered.¹¹ That figure exceeds the number of Americans who have died in all wars in American history. That figure is roughly one-sixth of the current U.S. population. The God we read about in the Bible will not let this holocaust pass. Listen to what God said to those in Jeremiah's day who had committed a comparable atrocity: "they have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, **which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind**" (Jer. 19:5). "And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, **nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination**, to cause Judah to sin" (Jer. 32:35). Yes, America is killing her children, too.

So What is Going to Happen?

What lies ahead for America when a sizable percentage of the citizenry no longer acknowledges or submits to the God of the Bible? **The Founders anticipated and answered this very question.** On March 11, 1792, the Father of our country made the following statement—one that is particularly chilling in view of the specter of terrorism that hangs over the nation:

I am sure there never was a people who had more reason **to acknowledge a Divine interposition in their affairs** than those of the United States; and I

should be pained to believe that **they have forgotten that Agency** which was so often manifested during our revolution, or that they failed to consider the omnipotence of that God **who is alone able to protect them.**¹²

Undoubtedly, America has the greatest, most technologically sophisticated military in human history. Yet, according to the first Commander-in-Chief of America's armed forces, God **alone** is able to protect the country. He was merely echoing Scripture. Read carefully the words of the psalmist:

No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on **those who fear Him**, on **those who hope in His mercy**, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine (Psalm 33:16-19, emp. added).

In the final analysis, all of the Apache attack helicopters, Tomahawk subsonic cruise missiles, nuclear warheads, and sophisticated military weaponry that American ingenuity has created, will not save America. Rather, only God can preserve us—and His protective care is extended only to **those who fear Him**. But should we make preparations for defense? Certainly. The Bible declares: “The horse is **prepared** for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the Lord” (Proverbs 21:31, emp. added). Sure, we should make preparations for the defense of the nation against outside forces; but we must keep ever before us the fact that deliverance from enemies comes ultimately from God—not man. And God extends His assistance to the virtuous and righteous—as noted by Patrick Henry:

Whether this will prove a blessing or a curse, will depend upon the use our people make of the blessings which a gracious God hath bestowed on us. If they are wise, they will be great and happy. If they are of a contrary character, they will be miserable. Righteousness **alone** can exalt them as a nation. Reader! Whoever thou art, remember this; and in thy sphere practice virtue thyself, and encourage it in others.”¹³ “The great pillars of all government and of social life: I mean virtue, morality, and religion. **This is the armor, my friend, and this alone, that renders us invincible.**”¹⁴

John Witherspoon echoed precisely the same sentiment: “He who makes a people virtuous makes them invincible.”¹⁵

Another uncanny, prophetic warning was issued by Jedidiah Morse, the “Father of American Geography” and father of Samuel Morse, the inventor of the Morse Code.¹⁶ In an election sermon given at Charlestown, Massachusetts on April 25, 1799, this American patriot offered the following frightening warning—an observation not unlike those of many of the Founders:

The foundations which support the interest of Christianity, are also necessary to support a free and equal government like our own. In all those countries where there is little or no religion, or a very gross and corrupt one, as in Mahometan and Pagan countries, there you will find, with scarcely a single exception, arbitrary and tyrannical governments, gross ignorance and wickedness, and deplorable wretchedness among the people. **To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoy.** In

proportion as the genuine effects of Christianity are diminished in any nation, either through unbelief, or the corruption of its doctrines, or the neglect of its institutions; **in the same proportion will the people of that nation recede from the blessings of genuine freedom, and approximate the miseries of complete despotism.** I hold this to be a truth confirmed by experience. If so, it follows, that all efforts made to destroy the foundations of our holy religion, ultimately tend to the subversion also of our political freedom and happiness. **Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.**¹⁷

Declaration signer Charles Carroll of Carrollton issued a somber warning in a letter written to fellow Founder and signer of the federal *Constitution*, James McHenry, on November 4, 1800:

Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure...are undermining the solid foundation of morals, **the best security for the duration of free governments.**¹⁸

Noah Webster sounded the same warning:

[T]he Christian religion, in its purity, is the basis, or rather the source of all genuine freedom in government.... [A]nd I am persuaded that no civil government of a republican form **can exist and be durable** in which the principles of that religion have not a controlling influence.¹⁹

Elias Boudinot, president of the Continental Congress (1782-1783), articulated the same precise point, when he expressed his “anxious desire” that:

our country should be preserved from the dreadful evil of becoming enemies to the religion of the Gospel, which I have no doubt, but would be introductive of **the dissolution of government and the bonds of civil society.**²⁰

Declaration signer and Connecticut governor, Samuel Huntington, agreed, as indicated by his remarks on January 9, 1788 at the state convention debating ratification of the federal *Constitution*:

While the great body of freeholders are acquainted with the duties which they owe to their God, to themselves, and to men, they will remain free. **But if ignorance and depravity should prevail, they will inevitably lead to slavery and ruin.**²¹

Signer of the *Constitution*, Gouverneur Morris, insisted in a speech delivered September 4, 1816:

There must be religion. When that ligament is torn, **society is disjointed and its members perish.** The nation is exposed to **foreign violence and domestic convulsion.** Vicious rulers, chosen by vicious people, turn back the current of corruption to its source. Placed in a situation where they can exercise authority for their own emolument, they betray their trust. They take bribes. They sell statutes and decrees. They sell honor and office. They sell their conscience. They sell their country. By this vile traffic they become odious and contemptible.... But the most important of all lessons is the denunciation of **ruin to every State that rejects the precepts of religion.**”²²

Declaration signer and “The Father of the American Revolution,” Samuel Adams, likewise issued a solemn warning in a letter to James Warren on February 12, 1779:

A general dissolution of the principles and manners will more surely overthrow the liberties of America than the whole force of the common enemy. While the people are virtuous, they cannot be subdued; but when once they lose their virtue, **they will be ready to surrender their liberties to the first external or internal invader.**²³

In his inaugural address as the Governor of Massachusetts in 1780, Founder John Hancock insisted that both our freedom and our very existence as a Republic will be determined by public attachment to Christianity morality:

Sensible of **the importance of Christian piety and virtue** to the order and happiness of a state, I cannot but earnestly commend to you every measure for their support and encouragement.... Manners, by which not only the freedom, but **the very existence of the republics**, are greatly affected, depend much upon the public institutions of religion and the good education of youth.²⁴

Revolutionary War soldier and U.S. Federal judge appointed by President John Adams, Jeremiah Smith, declared in an oration on February 22, 1800:

[C]herish and promote the interest of knowledge, virtue and religion. They are **indispensable to the support of any free government**.... Let it never be forgotten that **there can be no genuine freedom** where there is no morality, and no sound morality where there is no religion.”²⁵

The words of *Declaration* signer John Witherspoon are frightening: “Nothing is more certain than that a general

profligacy and corruption of manners make a people **ripe for destruction.**²⁶

Observe: according to the Framers and Founders, the American republic cannot last any length of time without Christian morals characterizing the people; no civil government of a republic can exist and last without the controlling influence of Christian principles; the government and civility in society will dissolve if the citizens become enemies of Christianity; ignorance of one's duty to God and depravity will lead to slavery and ruin; without religion, foreign violence, domestic convulsion, and ruin result; abandoning Christian virtue will result in submission to invaders; there can be no genuine freedom where religion and morality are lost; and we will then be ripe for destruction. There is no doubt that the Founders were single-minded in their recognition of the same fact: if Christianity, Christian morality, and devotion to the God of the Bible dissipate in America, **we cannot perpetuate our national existence—and the nation is doomed.** My friends, America is walking toward its demise!

In a speech delivered on February 23, 1852, second generation American, Daniel Webster, likewise warned what would happen to America if she ever displaced God from His rightful position over the nation. His words are eerily prophetic in that they now describe America to a T:

[I]f we and our posterity reject religious instruction and authority, violate the rules of eternal justice, trifle with the injunctions of morality, and recklessly destroy the political constitution which holds us together, **no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us that shall bury all our glory in profound obscurity.**²⁷

Ask yourself four questions—**#1: Are Americans—** on a widespread scale—**rejecting Christian instruction and authority?** *The polls show that fewer and fewer attend church service or follow the Bible.* **#2: Are Americans violating the rules of eternal justice?** *Look at the unprecedented numbers of lawbreakers occupying overcrowded prisons, and the shift in the justice system that commenced in the 1960s favoring the “rights” of the criminal.* **#3: Are Americans trifling with the injunctions of morality?** *Unbelievably, we are actually having a national discussion (battle) on how to define marriage!* **#4: Are Americans recklessly destroying the Constitution?** *Liberal Supreme Court justices reject strict constructionist interpretation and insist on are looking to the courts of the world for their opinions, while federal judges are legislating from the bench—even overriding majority votes of the people.* The haunting answer to these four questions is a resounding “Yes!” **How, then, can we as a nation possibly escape catastrophe?** We cannot. We will not.

In view of how God has dealt with nations in world history, and in view of the fact that “God still rules in the kingdoms of men” (Daniel 4:17), we ought to expect God to react to America’s degradation in two ways: (1) unleash upon, or at least refrain from protecting, the country (or specific localities within the country) natural disasters (read the Old Testament book of Joel); or (2) allow hostile enemies to inflict casualties and suffering upon us (read Habakkuk). It is interesting that the Founding Fathers recognized this eternal principle as having been posited in the fabric of the Universe by the Creator. They understood that while God will judge each individual human being at the Judgment when Christ returns (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:10), He judges nations **in history, in time**, by bringing destruction upon them when their iniquity is “full” (Genesis 15:16).²⁸ That is why Luther Martin, a delegate to the

federal Constitutional Convention, stated in 1788: “It was said, it ought to be considered, that national crimes can only be, and frequently are, **punished in this world by national punishments.**”²⁹ As the Father of the Bill of Rights, George Mason, affirmed to his fellow delegates to the Constitutional Convention on August 22, 1787: “As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, so they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, **Providence punishes national sins by national calamities.**”³⁰ The “Father of the American Revolution” and signer of the *Declaration of Independence*, Samuel Adams, explained: “Revelation assures us that ‘Righteousness exalteth a nation.’ Communities are dealt with **in this world** by the wise and just Ruler of the Universe. **He rewards or punishes them** according to their general character.”³¹ Thomas Jefferson likewise warned: “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that **His justice cannot sleep forever.**”³²

Observe carefully how the words of Judges 2:10 so aptly describe the cataclysmic shift that has taken place in America between the World War II generation—considered by some “the greatest generation any society has ever produced”³³—and those that have come after: “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.” Since World War II, succeeding generations of Americans no longer acknowledge God and Christ, and they are woefully ignorant of what God has done for America. The Founders would have had a hard time imagining that such could ever happen here, as George Washington expressed on June 29, 1788:

No country upon earth ever had it more in its power to attain these blessings than United America. Wondrously strange, then, and much to

be regretted indeed would it be, were we to neglect the means and to depart from the road which Providence has pointed us to so plainly; **I cannot believe it will ever come to pass.**³⁴

A similar, striking resemblance may be seen in the warning God issued to Solomon and the nation over which he served as king:

[I]f My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place.... But **if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them,** then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.... [E]veryone who passes by it will be astonished and say, “Why has the Lord done thus to this land and this house?” Then they will answer, “Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers...and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; **therefore He has brought all this calamity on them** (2 Chronicles 7:14-22, emp. added; cf. Deuteronomy 29:19-28).

As the population of America continues its progressive entrenchment against God, the outcome is inevitable: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and **all nations that forget God**” (Psalm 9:17, emp. added). Indeed, as Americans turn their back on the God of their

fathers, so God will cease to bestow His protection and blessings. “Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’” (Jeremiah 5:9,29; 9:9). The only hope for America is to experience a nationwide spiritual awakening by returning to God and begging His forgiveness. “Return to Me, and I will return to you,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:7). Our only hope is for a sizeable percentage of Americans to rise up and act upon the factuality of the psalmist’s words: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him... **Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord**” (Psalm 33:8,12). God help us. If it be His will, may God save the United States of America.

Summary

Is there any doubt that America has lost her moral compass? Indeed, spiritual wickedness is rampant! Listen to the inspired descriptions of the Israelites and their politicians in the long ago, observing the uncanny parallel to what is happening in America:

But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them **to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed** before the children of Israel. And the Lord spoke by His servants the prophets, saying,...**he has acted more wickedly** than all the Amorites who were before him...’ (II Kgs. 21:8-11).

For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had **encouraged moral decline** in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord (II Chron. 28:19).

He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and **did not humble himself** before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord....

[H]e stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel.

Moreover **all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more**, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, **because He had compassion on His people** and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the **wrath** of the Lord arose against His people, **till there was no remedy**. Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and **had no compassion** on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand (II Chron. 36:12-17).

America is moving swiftly toward the same ultimate calamity.

Signer of the *Declaration of Independence*, first Vice-President of the United States (under George Washington), and second President, John Adams, in a speech to the Officers of the Massachusetts Militia on October 11, 1798, issued a sober warning for Americans that ought to haunt this nation: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion.... Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."³⁵

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, we have our work cut out for us. We must be about the business of restoring the fight against spiritual wickedness. We must avail ourselves of every means that God has made available to us. We must rise above both the liberalism as well as the petty, trivial distractions and in-fighting that plagues the church within. We must be faithful ourselves—in the home, at school, and on the job. We must model Christianity to the world around us. As the church of our Lord, we must represent Christ accurately to our contemporaries. And above all, we must evangelize! We must use the pulpit, television, mail, magazines, books, tracts, radio, Internet, word-of-mouth, and every other legitimate means to sound the alarm and alert all who will listen! God loves us; we **can** do it; let's do it!

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, **against spiritual wickedness in high places.**

Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:10-13).

Endnotes:

¹Miller, Dave (2007), “Hindu Prayer in Congress,” *Reason & Revelation*, 27[8]:57-63, August, [On-line], URL: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3399>.

²Miller, Dave (2008), “Sexual Anarchy in the City,” [On-line], URL: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3735>.

- ³Popenoe, David and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead (1999), "What's Happening to Marriage?" [On-line], URL: <http://marriage.Rutgers.edu/Publications/pubwhatshappening.htm>.
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WALKING CONTRARY TO GOD

Dan Kessinger

When it comes to Bible study and students, it is difficult to stir up enthusiasm for the book of Leviticus. With the exception of the Nadab and Abihu account, and (especially in today's climate) the condemnations of sexual perversion found in Leviticus, the book is thought to have little bearing on modern Christian life. After all, what real value is there in knowing about the particular clothing, diet, and even hairstyles that were part of Jewish law? Is there any immediate interest in discussions of farming techniques and Old Testament cleansing rituals? The book begins with several chapters of details of the various offerings, and how they differed according to the sin, and even the social status of the offender. Two offerings are labeled "sin" and "trespass" offerings respectively. To most of us, the words are synonymous, and yet these are two distinct offerings!

To many, the Old Testament remains a book of mysteries. To some it is only known by the stories that provide fodder for children's classes, or for its most general principles. To some, an intense study of the Old Testament is almost a waste of time, since we Christians live under the authority of the New Testament. Ironically, both those who reject the Old Testament and those who claim that we are living under parts of its law today suffer from the same ignorance of the laws found there. It is important to remember that these are the books that Jesus and the New Testament writers called "Scripture," or that which was written. There must be a good reason that God ensured the preservation of these books through the millennia.

It must be readily admitted that the details of Leviticus do not often immediately arrest the attention of

the typical student. But Leviticus teaches one simple, unmistakable and invaluable lesson. Le 20:26 'And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine. In Leviticus we learn the ultimate reasons for the detailed items of obedience that God commanded for his people: it was holiness. God is a holy God, and he demands that his people also practice the holiness that he himself defined. In Lev. 11, the kosher diet is punctuated with a virtually identical statement of God's holiness in vv 44-45. Why were these laws important? Was it because of health? Certainly God knew what was best physically, but holiness is the ultimate justification. This verse is a virtual repetition of 1:2, in the context of a number of various Levitical laws. "Be holy for I am holy" (or variants thereof) are found also in 20:7 with regard to worshipping false gods, in the previously mentioned v 26, pertaining to sexual ethics, and in 1 Peter 1:16 which reads, "because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"

Clearly Leviticus served an invaluable function in guiding one through the maze of hundreds of Old Testament laws. Those who either chose to disregard it or were ignorant of it reaped destruction because they indulged in unholiness. But just as clearly, 1 Peter 1:16 indicates that there is a great principle for Christians today. No, one is not blessed by serving God through the Old Testament laws, but those very laws demonstrated who God is, and that he is not to be trifled with. Voices from without and within the church dismiss God's laws because there is no immediately identifiable reason for obeying them. "I don't understand why I have to be baptized." "I don't see what the harm in instrumental music is." "A qualified woman ought to preach for the glory of the Lord." "A successful businessman is just as qualified to be an elder as a successful father." "I don't see what harm

there is in communing on other days than Sunday.” The Bible frequently provides a rationale for these laws, but the objections originate with a disrespect for the holiness of God. Even if we had no idea why we ought to comply with God’s desires, the fact that he has legislated is sufficient reason to obey without question. My Dad used to say that ignorance of the Old Testament was one major reason that liberalism was increasing in the church. He believed that a greater knowledge of the Old Testament was helpful to understanding just who God is, and to emphasize that one ought not to trifle with him.

While it should not be argued that the detailed commands of Leviticus are without merit, admittedly they can be tedious. However, chapter 26 is not one of those sections detailing the particular laws. Instead, it is a rather stern warning for the reader to be obedient to the covenant. Like human contracts, God’s covenants invariably include consequences for those who disregard them, along with the blessings of compliance. This format (blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience) is common throughout the Bible, frequently utilized by Jesus himself. With particular regard to the national fate of Israel, the consequences were dramatically illustrated. This emphasis accounts for an interesting but unusual ritual that was performed on the two mountains on either side of Shechem. One half of the tribes of Israel were to assemble on Mt. Gerizim to bless those who obeyed God’s law; the other tribes were to curse those who disobeyed from the nearby Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27; Joshua 8). It is difficult to imagine just how powerful and memorable such an experience would have been for those who heard hundreds of thousands of voices emphatically preaching the importance of honoring God’s covenants. It should have left a lasting impression on God’s nation throughout the centuries. It did not.

It is this writer's opinion that Leviticus 26 owes its format to a profane contract form that is found more fully developed in the book of Deuteronomy, called the Suzerainty or Hittite Kings' Treaty. The Exodus era Hittites had developed a very specific "legalese" for making a covenant with conquered foreign nations. To the discerning reader, this form shows up in great detail in our Bibles, demonstrating that the Pentateuch was neither a later fraud nor an evolution of an oral tradition. Watts claimed that Deuteronomy 29-30 displays the features of those treaties as follows:

1. Pre-History (29:2-9)
2. Recording the agreement (29:10-15)
3. Warnings against disobedience (29:16-21)
4. Curse for breaking the covenant (29:22-29)
5. Statement of blessing (30:1-10)
6. Exhortation to keep the covenant (30:11-14)
7. Bless and curse conclusion. (30:15-20)(Coffman, Deuteronomy 322)¹

The pattern seems complete with regard to Deuteronomy. In a more general way, the thus attuned reader begins to see these features sprinkled throughout the Pentateuch and Joshua. Exodus 20, for instance, begins the Decalogue with the subtle but purposeful placement of the 1st two commands and the beginning identification, i. e., "I am the Lord."

Why bring up this pattern? This writer is convinced that it accounts for the format of Leviticus 26 in which five of the six features are prominently displayed, though it is unknown if any scholars agree with this analysis.

1. Identification of the King - 25:55
2. Gracious acts of the King (26:13)

3. Covenant Obligations (26:1)
4. Instructions for reading the Document (not present)
5. Deity as a witness (26:46)
6. Blessings and curses (the bulk of the chapter)²

If indeed this pattern is an adaptation of the Hittite Kings' Treaties, its immediate impact on the reader would have been dramatic. These were not suggestions for right living in Leviticus; they were matters of life and death. The Suzerainty treaty was offered as a peace treaty to those who had been conquered, and the severe consequences for violation were always in evidence. They were not treaties made by equal nations, but from a conqueror to the conquered. In the same way, God wanted men to understand that his covenant was absolute. It was neither negotiation nor compromise. Hebrews 12:29 reads, "For our God is a consuming fire."

Rebellion and Forbearance

Leviticus 26:21-28 is part of the section that threatens curses against those who fail to comply with God's demands. The text pre-supposes examples of walking against God, and indicates that there would be consequences for this. Two immediate facts become evident from the text: the conflicting phenomena of foolish rebellion and God's mercy. After the initial warning against walking contrary to God in v 21, and a listing of consequences additional warnings are found in v 23 and v 27, each accompanied by escalating consequences,

It would be reasonable to assume that of all peoples on Earth, Israel would be submissive to God. As a nation of ex-slaves, they had been elevated to not only the status of a nation, but had been granted extraordinary prominence in the region. However, rebellion turned out to be the rule

rather than the exception. At Sinai, the newly free family of Israelites was presented with an awesome display of the power of God. In Exodus 19:8, the people claimed readiness to receive the terms of God's covenant. In ch. 24:3 we read "So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the Lord has said we will do.'" But the terms of this covenant had been broken before Moses returned with the tables of stone (Exodus. 32). The 10 centuries following Sinai were marked by unheeded warnings. These included specifics concerning being removed from the land (Leviticus 18:24-30). At the cusp of Canaan, God clarified the terms of the Promised Land only to see these warnings ignored.

"Therefore know that the Lord your God, He {is} God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (Deuteronomy 7:9) Before Moses died, he preached a lengthy warning (the book of Deuteronomy) on honoring the commands of God. Before Joshua died, he too delivered a stern warning. He scoffed at Israel's impetuous promise to serve the Lord saying "you cannot serve the Lord..." (Joshua 24:19). His skepticism proved well founded, for the book of Judges stands as a monument to rebellion as a response to God's mercy.

Israel's lack of loyalty, combined with a sense of entitlement and a complete refusal to heed God's warnings defy rational analysis. Israel was repeatedly delivered from the brink of destruction only to again defy the terms of God's covenant. They were, to put it mildly, rebellious and stubborn as described in 2 Kings 17:14 "Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God." In spite of the example of Assyrian destruction of Israel in 722 BC, the southern tribes learned little,

destroyed themselves in 586 BC. Stephen described the tradition of stubbornness and rebellion in Acts 7:51: "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you."

Of course it is not just Old Testament Jews who are guilty of rebellion and stubbornness against a merciful God. Whether faced with severe temporal consequences or not, it is evidently human nature to be rebellious. "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6)

Considering the foolish and constant rebellion predicted by the curse of Leviticus 26, the forbearance of God is just as noteworthy. Had God chosen to bring immediate destruction on Israel at their first sign of rebellion, it would have been just. But he is not that kind of God. One of the reasons that Israel had so many examples of rebellion was that they continued to exist and even thrive as a rebellious people. Perhaps many decided that they were prospering because either God was pleased with them, or that he was absent or unable to fulfill his threats of utter destruction. Whatever Israel's misguided reasoning, their very existence was proof of God's mercy, though they utilized that opportunity to indulge in further rebellion. Of course, the same may be said of all of those who walk contrary to God today. Perhaps they believe him to be dead, sleeping, ineffectual, or inattentive. Perhaps our own prosperity leads us into the delusion that God is pleased when in fact he is patient. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

It is important to recognize that God's patience in Leviticus 26:21-28 is not infinite: it has an ending point. There is an escalation from the curses of vv 21-22, to God's walking contrary to the people, followed by more consequences in vv 24-26. The consequences reach a zenith in v 28 where we read: "then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins." It is a foolish thing to thus explore the patience of God. Israel did exactly that, finding that God's grace was eventually exhausted. He had blessed and cursed Israel, and had found that they would not do as they ought no matter what. 2 Kings 14:26 reads: "For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel."

The prophet Amos pictures the patience of God as a cart that had been over laden with sheaves (Amos 2:13). While God is of infinite mercy with regard to what he is willing to forgive, his mercy is not eternal. The cart could only hold the sin of so many generations before it reached a breaking point. Israel faced God's cart full to overflowing with their sin, perhaps with the sides bulging outward and the axles bent low, and simply proceeded to simply pile on more offenses. Did they assume that God would never destroy them? If so, both they and Judah were mistaken. It is a dangerous thing to explore the limits of God's mercy.

Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. (2 Chronicles 36:17)

Having previously cited 2 Peter 3:9 as proof that God is a patient God, even with those of us today who have thus far stubbornly refused his gentle call, it is important to understand that the next verse reminds one that this gentle

call will end. 2 Peter 3:10 reads, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” Though we serve a gentle God, the day of the Lord is inevitable, thus ending the era of mercy. On that day, the Lord will indeed walk contrary to the rebellious in wrath.

The Walk is Significant

The use of walking is significant in Leviticus 26, describing both Israel’s actions and those of the Lord. Walking is a frequent Bible metaphor for the way one lives, and God’s people are said to walk with him when they comply with his commands. Enoch was famed for having walked with God (Genesis 5:24), paraphrased in Hebrews 11:5 as “pleased God.” With life full of a myriad of directions, the only walk (lifestyle) that can be pleasing to God is the one that he particularly identified. Fellowship with God depends on our walking with him in his paths, not depending on him to vary his direction to suit our whims. “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

Whether in modern or ancient times, it cannot be argued that God has been less than clear in revealing directions for our steps. Psalm 119:105 states “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.” We notice from Leviticus 26 that the predictive accusation is not one of wandering aimlessly throughout life, perhaps lacking any direction or purpose at all. Rather, it has been a rebellious walk, a lifestyle that God’s people were determined to follow in spite of instruction. These were not just sheep without a shepherd, such as those over whom Jesus lamented in compassion (Matthew 9:36). These were

people who stubbornly pursued their own interests and preferences, even after being warned and punished.

Of the many choices in life, the one that really matters is to follow God or not, but many choose paths that they feel are equal to those identified by God. Some of these unauthorized life choices seem relatively innocuous, failing to an immediate ungodliness. The world seems full of those who would not dream of actively opposing God in their life's direction; some speak fondly of God; others claim to follow the Bible while walking contrary to his word. It matters little which method we choose of not following God, the destination is all one and the same; God is concerned direction because of destination. For those who resist following the Lord and his law, the implications are alarming. Despite its immediate appearance, no unauthorized path is parallel to God's and the repercussions are eternal.

Since the text contains repeated warnings from God to change, perhaps it could be argued that this text does not apply to those who walk contrary to God out of ignorance. But one must recall that those predicted warnings would come not from the voice of God directly, but from the voices of the prophets.

And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. (2 Chronicles 36:15-16)

In a like manner, God's New Testament prophets continue to warn the disobedient today. Because of the existence of the Bible, it cannot be argued that we have no responsibility to correct the steps that are condemned by his revealed word. Whether by stubborn refusal to obey or whether out of ignorance, all wrong paths have the same eventual consequence.

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14)

As we consider the concept of the walk with God, we are also reminded that there is inequity in this walk. As Amos had already suggested, there is a need to walk together in order to find fellowship or agreement. But how can one reasonably be expected to keep pace with his maker? Isn't this demanding too much? In fact the walk with God is all about inequity. It is noteworthy that God did not threaten "unless you keep up with me..." What about those who fail to keep pace, who are making an effort to walk the way they ought but experience frequent failure?

The answer to this inequity is the grace of God. Nothing that we read in this text should lead us to the conclusion that God is threatening those who fail. This text is about direction of life, not stumblings and missteps. The depths of God's grace are plumbed in Micah 7:18, "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy." This text sounds little like a maker who is determined to destroy the weak. This is great news for those today who are trying to "walk in the light as He is in the light..." (1

John 1:7) since they too are guilty of indiscretion of pace and direction. The warning of Leviticus 26 does not address weakness and failure; it applies to those who are determined to follow their own course.

Walking and Punishment

The consequences of one's walk must also be considered inequitable. That is, the responsibilities and blessings are disproportionate. While Israel was obligated to walk with God, the blessings outweighed the cost of obedience. The blessings of Canaan were unearned (Deuteronomy 6:10-12); the commandments were "for our good always (Deuteronomy 6:24). To suggest walking with God was too great a burden ignores how little God required by comparison to what he promised. This inequitable weight of responsibility and blessing is entirely due to the attitude of God toward his people.

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; "but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

Likewise, it must be stated that obedience and blessings are inequitable in the Christian walk. To hear some tell it, Christianity is too heavy a burden. But Jesus came to relieve mankind of a heavy load (Matthew 11:28-30). Admittedly, walking with the Lord can have its challenges, but the reward far outweighs the investment. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

On the other hand, the consequences stated in Leviticus 26, though severe, are absolutely equitable. God's warning deliberately uses the same language to describe Israel's disobedience and his reaction to those violations, i.e., "walk contrary to Me" (v 21; 23; 27) precedes "I also will walk contrary to you" (vv 24; 28). God will not arbitrarily walk against his people; they have first repeatedly walked against him. Some Bible students question the Bible's punishments, seemingly considering them too harsh. Various denominations soften the Bible's threats of hell, attempting to cool its fire in various ways. Sometimes it is a metaphor, sometimes it is only for an instant, sometimes, it does not exist at all. Alarming, questioning the validity of hell has become more prevalent in churches of Christ, with increasing numbers of mainstream authors following the lead of Edward Fudge in mitigating God's curse.³

Perhaps this is due to a too common human trait: to more clearly see curses against us than those we perpetrate. Several years ago, Chicago columnist Bob Greene wrote of a man who had been convicted of repeatedly tying up his own child, and urinating on him. After being convicted of child neglect, endangerment, and probably a host of other charges, the man was imprisoned. His lawyer later filed a complaint with a judge, seeking protection for his client. The man's complaint was that other prisoners were urinating on him.⁴ This criminal argued that he himself should not suffer such a fate, but evidently had difficulty seeing that a child should not suffer it from him! The history of Israel demonstrated that they understood their punishment much better than their sins. When they cried out to God, it was for deliverance rather than in true remorse for their offensive actions. When delivered, they quickly forgot about God.

It would seem more productive to influence people to avoid hell than to attempt to adjust its thermostat. The curse of God is appropriate because of our opportunities, the inequitable grace of God in teaching us to serve him, and his mercy when we fail.

“For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, (Hebrews 2:2-3)

The consequences of walking contrary to God are evident in the use of the number seven in describing them. These punishments include seven times the plagues (v 21), punishments (v 24), and chastisements (v 28). These disasters may well utilize the number seven to indicate that their source is Divine, rather than in the sense of ultimate destruction. After all, if they had suffered complete destruction by plague (v 21), there would be little left to destroy by pestilence (v 25). But the entire chapter consists of escalating punishment.⁵ God’s reaction to those who walk against him is to first punish, then to walk against them in punishment (v 24), then to walk against them in fury (v 28). The previously mentioned pestilence and plague also help to illustrate this principle. Though used synonymously, the two words indicate different levels of punishment. Verse 21’s makkeh (plague) is literally a “blow” or a “wound,”⁶ contrasted to verse 25’s deber (pestilence), used in the sense of destroying.⁷

In the process of punishing Israel, God intends to utilize his providential mastery over the natural world. These include destruction by beasts (v 22), pestilence (v 25), and famine (v 26). This famine is illustrated by the pathetic prediction of ten women who are baking bread in one oven. This likely does not illustrate the scarcity of

ovens, but to that of food. The resources of ten families must be combined to make what ought to be one family's meal, but which must be shared among ten.⁸

Among the curses from God to those who insist on walking contrary to him, the loss of Divine fellowship must surely be paramount. So long as they remained faithful to the covenant, God's blessings, both miraculous and providential were enjoyed. They would be successful in warfare, agriculture, livestock, and health. These were blessings promised by God. But here God promises to not only withhold assistance from his disobedient people, but also to aid in their destruction. The enemy's sword of destruction is said to "execute the vengeance of the covenant (v 25). To no longer be able to count on God's help is a moral, physical, and spiritual calamity. Not only would God's people lose their lives at the hands of wicked people, but it would also indicate the complete breakdown of fellowship with God. Perhaps it this, and more than selfishness that caused David to plead "O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me." (Psalm 25:2)

It continues to be tragic for God's people to walk contrary to him. Servants of the Almighty have every reason to comply with the will of a maker who has their best interests at heart. By walking contrary to God, we not only place ourselves in jeopardy of eternal punishment, but we also consign ourselves to a lonely walk through a harsh world. Why walk against such a God? Why risk enmity with a God who is at once powerful, just, and loving?

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Hebrews 13:6)

Endnotes

¹ Coffman, James Burton Commentary on Deuteronomy (ACU Press, Abilene TX, 1988) p 322

² Coffman, James Burton Commentary on Joshua (ACU Press, Abilene TX, 1988) p 261

It must be stressed that Coffman is applying this template to Joshua 24, and to this writer's knowledge did not apply it to Leviticus 26

³ Fudge, Edward The Fire That Consumes (Verdict Publications, Fallbrook CA, 1982)

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⁴ Bob Greene, Chicago Tribune, date unknown

⁵ Coffman, James Burton Commentary on Leviticus and Numbers (ACU Press, Abilene TX, 1987) p 246

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⁷ Ibid p 29

Biographical Sketch

Riverview Michigan is a place about which Dan Kessinger knows nothing except that he supposedly was born there, though his parents Bob (deceased) and Doris Kessinger may have been pulling his leg about that. After being run out of Michigan, Georgia, and Kentucky, the family returned to West Virginia to stay in 1973. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West (who is decidedly not amused by these silly biographies) have two boys, D.J. and Thomas.

Dan either graduated or was kicked out of Walton High School, then attended Ohio Valley College over the objections of faculty, students, and administration. They eventually granted him a diploma just to be rid of him. His degree reads "Bachelor of Science in Bible." He has thus far accidentally set 47 Bibles ablaze with Bunsen burners.

Dan preached his first sermon in the Spring of 1982 at the Mt. Zion church of Christ in Walker WV. Congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, Proctor have also endured him. In 1994, the Dewey Ave. church of Christ in St. Marys found themselves in need of a preacher. They hired Dan and 15 years later they are still in need of a preacher.

Dan speaks "weakly" on a local radio program. Dan conducts gospel meetings and appears on lecture programs each year. He is never invited, but he keeps showing up anyway. He is a frequent contributor to

religious journals, but those articles are just as frequently mocked and rejected. He is the author of "A Cloak of Malice" and much confusion. He has worked with WV Christian Youth Camp since 1984, and West Virginia School of Preaching since 1995.

WALK IN WISDOM

Beth Cook

Each year at my annual physical check-up, my doctor asks, “Are you exercising?” Specifically, he asks, “Are you walking?” He then emphasizes that the right kind of walk (one which increases the heart rate) is good for the physical heart. Likewise, for the Christian, the right kind of walk is good for our spiritual heart. The Bible uses the term “walk” many times to describe our manner of life, lifestyle, daily conduct or behavior. The Christian life is a walk. Among other ways, Christians are admonished to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4), walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1), walk in love (Ephesians 5:2), walk in the light (1 John 1:7), walk worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10), and walk in wisdom (Ephesians 5:15; Colossians 4:5). In this lesson, we want to examine the subject, “Walk in Wisdom.”

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6).

What does it mean to “walk in wisdom?” Simply, to walk in wisdom is to walk with God. The Bible has much to say about wisdom. In fact, the key word in the book of Proverbs is “wisdom.” One example of wisdom that often comes to mind is Solomon. God asked him in a dream, “What shall I give you?” (1 Kings 3:5) Solomon asked God for wisdom to be able to discern between good and evil to rule the people well. “The speech pleased the

Lord...” (I Kings 3:10), and He gave Solomon a wise and understanding heart, as well as riches and honor.

Wisdom is defined as “the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action based on knowledge and understanding” (Nelson 1316). *Eerdmans’ Handbook To The Bible* defines wisdom as “the expression of an attitude to life which is centered on God” (659). If we walk in godly wisdom, we will study the Word of God, obey His commandments, and apply and implement His Word and godly principles in all areas our lives. Our lives will be “centered” on God. Unfortunately, most folks in the world seek after worldly or man’s wisdom. Worldly wisdom is man trying to find his own way in the world without God. Man’s wisdom says, “I am smart enough to do this on my own. I don’t need God.” In 1 Corinthians, Paul contrasts worldly wisdom and true wisdom. “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness” (1 Corinthians 3:18-19). Proverbs 28:26 reads, “Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.” (ESV) A man may have a Ph.D, have the ability to quote the entire Bible, and still be unwise. One may attain great wealth, fame, achievements, and yes, even knowledge, and in man’s eyes be considered very wise. But, if he has no regard for God, he is unwise. Often we consider one who acts or speaks irresponsibly as unwise. But one is unwise if he simply lives his life apart from God. Spurgeon says, “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom” (as qtd. in Patterson 10).

There is a vast difference in having knowledge and using knowledge!

How does one start a walk in wisdom? Scripture teaches, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy one is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of the Lord is at the root of wise living. Wisdom starts with a fear and awe of God that will lead to a deep longing to please Him with our conduct. As we strive to walk in wisdom, we will realize we need to seek the wisdom from God--true wisdom. “If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally...” (James 1:5). “For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6). Realizing our dependency on God is wise. “It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). God has given us freedom to make choices and decisions. But, oh, how we need His guidance to properly discern and apply knowledge in our daily lives. He tells us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The Christian life is a walk, and if we are going to walk right, we need wisdom from above. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). Wisdom is shown by our good conduct. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). If we would walk in wisdom, we must walk the walk, watch the clock, and talk the talk!

Walk The Walk

Ephesians 5:15 says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.” If we are going to walk in wisdom, we need to know where we are going and how to get there. The Word of God provides that direction. Our lives need to be lived purposefully—with direction. What is our goal as Christians? Our goal on this earth is to glorify God and then inherit heaven after life on this earth. To have any other goal would be foolish. Inheriting heaven will not happen by accident—it is a deliberate plan. Oh, how I love the words of Daniel 1:8 when Daniel refused to eat the king’s delicacies. “But Daniel purposed in his heart...” He had a plan! Listen to Joshua’s resolve and plan for his life. “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). David also made a choice for his life. He said in Psalm 119:30, “I have chosen the way of truth; your judgments I have laid before me.” An athlete does not earn a place in the Olympics through luck or chance. He has a thoughtful, deliberate plan that includes strict preparation and discipline, because he wants to finish with victory. Let’s walk purposefully to finish with victory! “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it” (I Corinthians 9:24).

To walk purposefully, we need to walk circumspectly (Ephesians 5:15). Circumspectly literally means exactly, diligently, carefully, accurately, or consistently. The English Standard Version translates Ephesians 5:15, “Look carefully then how you walk...” The New English Bible translates this verse, “Be most careful then how you conduct yourselves.” *The Brethren New Testament Commentary* says to walk circumspectly is “an all around inspecting walk.” Circumspect comes from two words—“circum” meaning “around” and “spect” meaning “to look.” Walking circumspectly means to walk with your eyes open, alert, looking all around as you walk,

and watching your step! A wise person will live life carefully and accurately according to God's principles. Satan wants to distract us from godly walking with worldly pleasures and concerns. He fills our path with obstacles to cause us to stumble and fall as we walk. Truly, the devil is seeking to devour us. How quickly we can be distracted and led off the path of righteous living. Daily we must be careful where we go, what we do, what we watch, read, and listen to, what we wear and how we talk. We must not just profess our faith-- we must live it in our daily walk. Wisdom is exhibited in our conduct. "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..." (Philippians 1:27). Are we to conduct our lives differently from the world? Absolutely! "Therefore come out from among them and be separated says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17). For example, Christian women must use discretion in their use of the Internet. We must also be careful in our viewing of what Hollywood calls entertainment. And, certainly, we must not allow fashion designers to dictate the Christian woman's apparel. Sadly, some Christian women are falling into Satan's trap. The Lord requires apparel that professes godliness (1 Timothy 2:9-10). Can we honestly go out in public in clothing that exposes parts of the woman's body that incites lust, and still say we are professing godliness? Ephesians 5:15 teaches we are to walk, not as fools but as wise. The opposite of walking carefully is walking foolishly with no regard for right living. "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15). "A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident" (Proverbs 14:16).

Just as Ephesians 5:15 teaches "wisdom walking," a similar scripture in Colossians 4:5 states, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside." Scripture is very specific about how Christians should conduct themselves toward

unbelievers. “That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). The world watches and judges Christianity and the church by our behavior outside the church building. Are we conducting ourselves with wisdom by demonstrating kindness, compassion, patience, purity, and honesty? Our behavior must be above reproach so the name of Christ is not maligned. Give the unbeliever no basis to mock or ridicule Christ, His church, or His children. After Nathan had rebuked David for his sin with Bathsheba, Nathan said to David, “However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die” (2 Samuel 12:14). How careful we must walk so as not to give those who are not Christians reason to “blaspheme.” The words in the hymn, “The World’s Bible,” still hold true.

We are the only Bible The careless world will read,
We are the sinners’ gospel, We are the scoffers’ creed;
We are the Lord’s last message Given in deed and
word,
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is
blurred?

Few people read the Bible, but many read the Christian.

Our mission as Christians is to win outsiders to Jesus Christ. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). Guthrie stated in his commentary, “Careless walk can only hamper the spread of the gospel. There is a constant need for Christians to recognize their responsibility” (84). What a tremendous responsibility and opportunity we have to influence others for Christ by our conduct. Paul told the Corinthians, “You are our epistle written in our hearts,

known and read by all men” (2 Corinthians 3:2). This poem by Edgar A. Guest sums it up.

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely show
the way,
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear;
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live
their creeds,
For to see the good in action is what everybody needs.
I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it
done,
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too
fast may run.
And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and
true;
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you
give,
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how
you live.

(as qtd. in McCollum 112)

To walk in wisdom is to walk the walk.

Watch The Clock

Just a tiny little minute only sixty seconds in it.
Forced upon me. Can't refuse it. Didn't seek it,
didn't choose it,
I must suffer if I lose it, Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it.
(Author Unknown)

We are time conscious people. Most people have watches, clocks, calendars, schedules, appointments and deadlines. Just when we get it all arranged, inevitably, something happens to rearrange our whole day! With so

many responsibilities and demands on our time, we sometimes scream, “Something has to give!” Unfortunately, for some Christian women, what gives is their relationship to God.

Paul tells us to walk in wisdom, “redeeming the time.” Use our time wisely! The English Standard Version translates these verses, “making the best use of time.” The word “redeem” here means to ‘buy back,’ to “ransom,” “to rescue.” Redeeming the time is making the most of every opportunity. Lightfoot says concerning redeeming the time, “Letting no opportunity slip by you, of saying and doing what may further the cause of God” (as qtd. in Knight 247-248). Certainly, we cannot reclaim lost time or hoard time, but we are to seize and make the best use of opportunities we have right now—today. The opportunities today brings will never return.

We all have equal time in each day, and how we choose to use that time is a personal decision for which we will be held accountable. How we spend our time is important to God, and He entrusts us to use it wisely. Psalm 90:12 says, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Life is short and eternity is long. “Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. Indeed, you have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor” (Psalm 39:4-6). We cannot reclaim yesterday, and we have no guarantee of tomorrow. “Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

While we have time, how are we using it? Satan wants to steal our time. He wants us to be caught up in things of little significance so that we will fail to spend

time on things that are of supreme importance. Satan wants us to live for the here and now and doing what pleases us, instead of living in view of eternity and pleasing God.

Most folks today are concerned about the economy. Many have watched investments decrease and dwindle away. We look for sound investments that promise good, profitable returns. The same is true with our time. If we invest our time in the wrong areas, we can expect a poor return. However, if we invest our time wisely, redeem the time, then we can expect wonderful blessings and benefits from God. Take our children, for example. If we invest time only in their secular activities, and not in their spiritual growth, we will reap what we sow. They will be good at the secular things, but not know how to find the book of Isaiah in their Bibles (if they can even find their Bibles). What about us? What if we “invest” or “spend” our time filling our minds with this world’s garbage? Think of all that wasted time that could have been used filling our minds with God’s Word or serving others. How careful we must be with the amount of time we spend on the computer, watching television, or secular reading while neglecting spiritual food and good works. A woman who “redeems the time” will arrange her priorities properly and put first things first. God wants us to spend time developing godly character, loving our husbands and children, being keepers of our homes and helping others. Certainly, we all need time in rest and relaxation. Jesus needed it, and He knows we do, too.

Life passes swiftly. Death and judgment are certain (Hebrews 9:27). Procrastination is a favorite tool of the devil, and it is the thief of time. Tomorrow I will study. Tomorrow I will pray. Tomorrow I will teach a Bible class. Tomorrow I will share Christ with my neighbor. Tomorrow may never be. Time is indeed precious. Let’s

be making good choices in the proper use of time, “redeeming the time,” using the opportunities to live for God. When we spend time wisely, we invest it in eternity.

No Time For God
(Author Unknown)

You’ve time to build houses, and in them dwell,
And time to do business – to buy and to sell;
And none for repentance, or deep earnest prayer;
To seek your salvation you’ve no time to spare.
You’ve time for earth’s pleasures, for frolic and fun,
For her glittering treasures how quickly you run;
But care not to seek the fair mansion above,
The favor of God or the gift of His love.
You’ve time to take voyages over the sea,
And time to take in the world’s jubilee;
But soon your bright hopes will be lost in the bloom
Of the cold, dark river of death and the tomb.
You’ve time to resort to the mountain and glen;
And time to gain knowledge from books and from men;
Yet no time to search for the wisdom of God,
But what of your soul when you’re under the sod?
For time will not linger when helpless you lie,
Staring death in the face; you will take time to die.

Then, what of the judgment –pause, think, I implore!
For time will be lost on eternity’s shore.

(as qtd. in Riley)

Talk The Talk

Walk in wisdom, redeem the time, and speak graciously. Our speech is a vital part of walking in wisdom. “The Christian’s ‘talk’ compliments his ‘walk’” (Knight 248). The Bible has much to say about the tongue and offers much wisdom on controlling our speech.

Following Paul's admonition to walk in wisdom, redeeming the time, he says, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). This verse can be broken down as such: speak gracefully and tastefully. To "let your speech always be with grace" means that when we speak, words of kindness and encouragement will flow from our lips.

Gracious words come from a joyful heart. When the heart is right, the words will follow suit. Our words can be inviting and attracting others to Christ, or they can turn people away. We have a responsibility as Christian women to be kind and gracious when we speak. Defending truth and teaching New Testament Christianity must not be done with harshness or with a "know it all" attitude. Humility and loving concern for another's soul will help keep our speech in check. Gracious words are "courteous and agreeable" (as qtd. in Barnes 283). When we are governed by walking in wisdom, a mild calmness will be evident in our speech. The people who heard Jesus marveled at His gracious words (Luke 4:22).

Not only are our words to be with grace, they are also to be seasoned with salt. A little salt can add just the right taste to our favorite foods. Our words, then, need to be spoken tastefully. Sometimes we may hear something that leaves "a bad taste in our mouths." Those words were not spoken tastefully. Those distasteful words are condemned in Ephesians 4:29. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." Our Lord, in describing our example and influence, said we are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Salt not only adds flavor, but it also is a preservative. Our words can have a preserving effect on others as we try to lead them to Christ.

What are specific areas where these gracious and tasteful words need to be spoken? In the home, do we speak to our husbands and children in ways befitting Christianity? Do we sometimes show more courtesy and kindness to complete strangers than we do to the love of our lives? Do we speak more kindly to our children's friends than we do to our own children? In the community, do we seek to avoid the rumors and gossip? In the church, do we seek to encourage fellow Christians by the words we speak? Are we willing to teach and share the good news? Can we be counted on to be positive and joyful, supporting the elders in good works? Are we an encouragement to the elders and preacher?

The reason stated for our words to be gracious and tasteful is that we may know how we ought to answer every man. Speech, in general, is to be wholesome and beneficial, whether we are answering questions concerning our faith (1 Peter 3:15), or discussing any other topic. Volumes have been written concerning proper speech but none as wise and powerful as the Word of God. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

Conclusion

An old hymn says, "Men strive for the wealth of this wide, wicked world, They seek after honor and fame..." Am I following man's wisdom, or am I seeking to "walk in wisdom" by following the footsteps of Jesus, our perfect example? (1 Peter 2:21) "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). Someday when my walk here is finished, I will walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4). Is my walk in life preparing me for that walk? We must walk in wisdom here if we want to walk with Him there. "He

who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever” (Tillotson).

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Biographical Sketch

Beth Cook was born and raised in Elyria, Ohio, where she attended the East Broad Street Church of Christ with her parents, Hazel Driver and the late James Driver, and two sisters. She is a graduate of Ohio Valley College and Freed-Hardeman University. Beth has been married to Randy Cook for 31 years and they have two sons and a daughter-in-law. Their older son, Matthew and his wife, Charla, are presently living in Henderson, TN, preparing to do long-term mission work. Lord willing, they will move to Cusco, Peru in October of this year. Their younger son, James, is a 2009 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University, living in Henderson, TN. Randy and Beth have worked with the Oakhurst Church of Christ in Farmington, WV for 16 years where Randy serves as the minister and one of the elders. Prior to this work, the Cooks served the church in Oakland, Maryland, for ten years.

Beth teaches various Bible classes for children and ladies. Beth is actively involved with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp, where she has taught for the past 21 years. She has spoken on various ladies days in West Virginia, Ohio, Maryland, Connecticut, and Tennessee. Beth works at home supplying video tributes to local funeral homes.

WALK BY FAITH

Steve Stevens

The great theme of this lectureship is indeed a personal challenge to every Christian living in the early years of the 21st Century. The present culture has little to no concern for a closer walk with the Heavenly Father, the Lord of Lords, His Son, and the Guide to all truth, the Holy Spirit.

Christianity is mistakenly blamed for the social ills of our culture. The Church is portrayed as a tax-exempt organization which determines its own by-laws and mission based solely upon the opinions and feelings of its membership. The Bible is considered an ancient relic that has no relevance to the enlightened and educated people of today. The motto of the average person on main street in America could well be: Just a Closer Walk With Me. We need to be reminded of why we need a closer walk with God and how we can be sure that we are doing it.

Persecution, opposition, and challenges are not new to the people of God. However, to deny that we are affected, possibly in varying degrees, by the constant pressure to be conformed to the world and to satisfy the lusts of the flesh would be self-deceptive. Deception, delusion, and disbelief are the devises of Satan and most certainly will not bring anyone into a closer walk with God.

To have a closer walk requires that we “draw near” to God (James 4:8 “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”). God certainly wants us to draw near to Jesus (John 6:44 “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day”). God has provided the means

to draw all men to Christ (John 12:32 “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”). Hebrews 10:22 says, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” A closer walk with God requires a “Walk By Faith.”

The assigned text for this study is a parenthetical statement of 8 words in the KJV and 7 words in the *Textus Receptus* found in 2 Corinthians 5:7—“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

Let us begin our study with the **CONTEXT** of this verse, particularly, 2 Corinthians 4:1 through 5:10:

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11 For we which live are always

delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you. 13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; 14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. **5:1** For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: 3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. 4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. 5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. 6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: **7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)** 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. 9 Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that

he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (Underlining and emphasis mine—SS)

The apostle Paul begins chapter four by declaring “we faint not” (4:1c). We do not faint with regard to those who reject the message of the gospel (4:2-6). We do not faint when faced with troubles and persecutions which must be endured in order to preach the gospel (4:7-12). Again, he declares in 4:16a “we faint not” with a view to the past resurrection of Jesus and the hope of our own future resurrection by the same power of God (4:14). What sustained Paul in his service to Christ? The answer is: what **he looked at!** We have two options given in 4:18: 1) “the things which are seen”—the temporal, or 2) “the things which are not seen”—the eternal.

Paul knows that the worst any enemy of Christ could do to any disciple was kill the physical body. Paul also knows (5:1) that when our physical body dies it will one day be resurrected and given a new spiritual, glorious, immortal body by God (see 1 Corinthians 15). He further understood that we would appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of what we have done in this physical body, whether it be good or bad (5:10). His conclusion in 5:9 is: “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” The word “labor” used here is a noble word which means “to seek after honor” and Lenski writes that it carries the idea of “to act from love of honor”¹ The term “accepted” means “well pleasing.”² Whether in this life or the next, whether we live or die, it must be our honorable purpose to act in a manner that is well pleasing to the Lord. How can we live this manner of life that seeks to be acceptable to the Lord? “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

Having examined the context of our text let us now turn our attention to its **CONTENT**. “For” is a primary

postpositive particle serving as a conjunction to the thought expressed in verse 6 about being at home in our physical body and absent from the Lord. “Walk” is a present active indicative verb suggesting a continuous aspect to its action. It is derived from a compound word consisting of a preposition that means “around” and a verb which means to “walk.” It occurs 96 times in the KJV New Testament and is translated ‘walk’ 93 times, and ‘go,’ ‘walk about,’ and ‘be occupied’ one time each. The word is used “physically” to refer to the literal act of moving about on foot, and “figuratively signifying the whole round of activities of the individual life.”³ Hence, the verb refers to the regulation and conduct of one’s life.

“By” is a proper primary preposition which denotes the channel of an act. It refers to the ground or reason by which something is or is not done. According to Lenski “‘By’ expresses the medium and his translation of this preposition is ‘by way of’.”⁴

“Faith” is “primarily, “firm conviction,” a conviction based upon hearing..., is used in NT always of “faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual. The main elements in “faith” in its relation to the invisible God...are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgment of God’s revelation or truth...; (2) a personal surrender to Him...; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender....”⁵

“Not” in this verse comes from an absolute negative adverb. Its principle function is to negate the act of walking by sight.

“Sight” refers to looking on the external or outward form and therefore seeing what is visible. It is used five times in the New Testament of the KJV and is translated

“shape” two times, and “fashion,” “sight,” and “appearance” one time each.

A rather rough expansion of the translation of this text adhering to its order in the Greek for emphasis might go like this: *For by way of a firm conviction based upon hearing the truth of God we keep on regulating and conducting our lives, not by way of what is visible.*

Our text for this study sets forth a **CONTRAST** between walking by faith and walking by sight. Let's begin with “not by sight.” To walk by sight means to walk according to what we see and what we feel. What we see is temporal or temporary in nature. Look around us. What we see does not last forever. This world labors under a regulation of decay, corruption, rust, and what does not wear out or get used up can get taken away from us. Look in the mirror. That does not last forever either. Compare what you see there now with what you saw 10, 20, or 50 years ago. Notice a difference in the way you feel and move? 1 John 2:15-17 records, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” The world “passes away” and the lust thereof does also. The ‘lust of the flesh’ and the ‘lust of the eyes’ are not from God. Romans 13:14 teaches us to “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. Galatians 5: 16, 17 states, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Paul

describes what the Ephesians' lives were like prior to surrendering their will to the will of God:

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein **in time past ye walked** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also **we all had our conversation in times past** in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: (Ephesians 2:1-3). (Emphasis added—SS).

This world is not our home, we're just passing through. It is hard not to get attached to the world and its things. Peter beseeches us “as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). A stranger in this verse is an alien or foreigner, and a pilgrim is a sojourner with no permanent dwelling where he lives. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20,21 NKJV). “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). It is time **to look at that which is not seen** and set our affections on things above and not on the things of this earth. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your

affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: 7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them" (Colossians 3:1-7).

"WE WALK BY FAITH!" Faith is not wishful thinking. Biblical faith is not a leap in the dark as it is so often described. Faith in general is a basic component of life. We operate daily on the principle of faith. We drive our cars by faith. We eat in a restaurant by faith. We take our medications by faith. We drill for oil by faith. However, Biblical faith is not a worldly action. The foundation of biblical faith is God himself. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Romans 10:17 instructs us that "...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." 2 Timothy 3:15 records, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The holy scriptures, the Word of God are necessary to reveal to us the knowledge of truth. However, faith is more than listening to the Word of God. "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Hebrews 4:2). Biblical faith "is by no means, however, the mere acceptance of certain facts," but a subordination to Jesus as Lord.⁶ Our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. "That your faith should not stand

in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5). The **power of God** involves “the preaching of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”), and the “gospel of Christ” (Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”).

The New Testament manifests quite a continuum for faith. It speaks of ‘dead faith’ (James 2:17,20); ‘little faith’ (Matthew 6:30); ‘weak faith’ (Romans 4:19); ‘failing faith’ (Luke 22:32); ‘increasing faith’ (2 Corinthians 10:15); ‘exceedingly growing faith’ (2 Thessalonians 1:3); ‘strong faith’ (Romans 4:20); ‘rich in faith’ (James 2:5); ‘full of faith’ (Acts 6:5); ‘unfeigned faith’ (2 Timothy 1:5); and ‘great faith’ (Matthew 15:28). May we search our souls that we might readily answer our Lord’s question to his disciples, “Where is your faith?” (Luke 8:25). May we echo the attitude of the apostles when they said unto the Lord, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).

There are three things we must realize about walking by faith. One, **faith is showable**. “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). A faith without works is dead. Two, **faith is knowable**. “For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain” (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Paul was deeply concerned about leaving the young church in Thessalonica so abruptly. He had been forced by a series of persecutions to flee several places and finally ended up in Athens. He could no longer stand not knowing about the newborn

babes in Thessalonica. He sent Timothy back to check on them so that he might know their faith. Three, **faith is testable**. A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. Rest assured our faith will be tested and tried. “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4). “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1 :7-9). Notice how this verse harmonizes with 2 Corinthians 4:18 concerning the “having not seen” and the “ye see him not” yet believing we will receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. God tests our faith for two reasons. First, to make sure we know it is real or counterfeit. Secondly, to build our faith up for the tasks He knows we must do. We never know by what trial God determines to test us next. He will not tempt us to do evil. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). With Gideon of old He simply told everyone who was afraid to go home on the first test and the army of Israel went from 32,000 to 10,000. The second test was the manner in which these 10,000 soldiers drank water and the forces were reduced from 10,000 to 300. Sometimes walking by faith is as unglamorous as doing the next task that awaits us in life’s journey. Someone has said, “make every occasion a great occasion, for you can never tell when somebody may be taking your measure for a larger place.

What does it mean to “walk by faith?” Graciously, God has given us an inspired **COMMENTARY** on these brief words in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. It begins with a description of faith itself. Faith is “the substance of things hoped for.” The “things hoped for” involve all the blessings and fulfillments of the promises of God a Christian receives in this life and the world to come. Romans 8:24,25 records: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? 25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” We hope for that we see not—the eternal things. Therefore, we with patience (steadfastness; endurance) wait (“expect eagerly;” “look for”⁷) the eternal rewards. Faith is the “substance” for these things we hope for. Wuest writes concerning the term “substance” that it had a technical meaning in the business world of the first century. It referred to one’s property or effects. It refers to “the whole body of documents bearing on the ownership of a person’s property, deposited in the archives, and forming the evidence of ownership. Referencing Moulton and Milligan he goes on to say, “...they translate it as “faith is the title deed of things hoped for.”⁸ We can hold the title deed to a piece of property we have never seen with full confidence that it is ours to possess. Faith is the title deed to the eternal inheritance we have in heaven. Faith is further described as “the evidence of things not seen.” This chapter repeats this refrain of “things not seen” or the “invisible.” 2 Corinthians 4:18 equates them with the eternal realm. The creation, the second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, heaven, hell, and the Godhead would all belong in this realm. “[Evidence] is defined by logicians [as] a demonstration of the certainty of a thing by sure arguments and indubitable reasons.”⁹ Faith is surely described in terms of strength and certainty. It is

substance and evidence. It is the basis of man's relationship with God, and when employed by men and women just like us look at what it is capable of accomplishing.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7). Noah heeded the warning of God about “things not seen as yet” (references the coming flood and destruction of the world; cf. 2 Cor. 4:18) and motivated by godly fear (Ecclesiastes 12:13) prepared an ark. To “walk by faith” we must be willing to do the work God directs us to do, when He needs it done, and in accordance with His instructions for us to do it.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11: 8-10). Abraham was called by God **to go** and he **went out**. Now that is obedient faith. He sojourned (just like we do) in tabernacles (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1). How did he keep going when he did not know where he was going? **He looked** (see 2 Cor. 4:18) for a city whose builder and maker is God. They lived as pilgrims and strangers (11:13), seeking a country (11:14) not in this world, but a heavenly city prepared for them by God (11:16). They all died in faith, but without receiving the promises. God is not ashamed to be called their God. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 4:5) was part of God's answer to Moses when he asked who he would tell Israel had sent him into

Egypt. To “walk by faith” requires that we live in such a manner so as not to make God ashamed to be called our God. Take this test and see how it fits in your life. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and the God of _____ (fill in your name).

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Hebrews 11:17-19). The “father of the faithful” and the “Friend of God” has his faith put to the test by the God who gave him the” promised son.” Abraham never flinched. He deliberated that God is able to deliver on His promises and demand obedience to His Word. The God who could provide a son to Abraham and Sarah could raise up one from the dead. To “walk by faith” we must factor in the power of God as we reckon on how we should obey God. From what we are able to know and see the situation may look impossible, but when we look to Him who is invisible, with Him all things are possible (Luke 18:27).

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; 25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:24-27). Moses refused the privileges and the riches of the position as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. How could he do such a thing? He had

“respect” unto the recompense of the reward. The word “respect” means “to look away from all else at one object...; hence, to look steadfastly.”¹⁰ **He looked** (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18) at the unseen. He forsook Egypt, not fearing the king’s wrath, and he endured (remained steadfast) as seeing him who is invisible (2 Cor.4:18). To “walk by faith” we must not fear him who is able to kill the body and not the soul (Matthew 10:28), we must refuse to be ruled by the cares, riches, and pleasures of this world, we must suffer with the people of God when such occurs, we must keep our “eye of faith” on him who is invisible (eternal).

Through faith they did what was right, won victories, escaped death, endured torture, were tested, were imprisoned, were killed, lived destitute lives, wandered in dens and caves, and why would they do all this? “that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35c).

Hear the **CONCLUSION** of how we long to have a closer walk with Him as we “walk by faith, not by sight.”

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, **ye endured a great fight of afflictions**; 33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. 34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, **knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.** 35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. 36 For **ye have need of patience**, that, **after ye have done the will of God**, ye might receive the promise. 37 For yet a little while, and **he that shall come will come**, and will not tarry. 38 **Now the just shall live by faith**: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition;

but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.
(Emphasis mine—SS)

Biographical Sketch

Steve Stevens is a native of West Virginia and the son of Earl P. and Vonda J. Stevens. He was baptized on January 22, 1967 at St. Marys, WV by his father. His father and brother, David Stevens are both Gospel preachers as well. Steve preached his first sermon at the age of nine on June 25, 1964 at Daybrook, WV on the subject of “The temptations of Jesus.” He held his first Gospel Meeting and directed his first Vacation Bible School at the Norway Church of Christ near Fairmont, WV in June of 1970. From June of 1970 to December of 1975 he preached on regular Sunday appointments with the congregations at Long Valley, Sancho, New Freeport, PA, and Pine Grove at Hebron in Pleasants County. During this same time he preached in Gospel Meetings, taught Bible Classes, directed VBS, and conducted Singing Workshops with over 35 congregations in Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. He married the former Karen Barnhart of New Freeport, PA in July of 1976 and they are the parents of eight children. He located as the fulltime preacher for the Norway Church of Christ, near Fairmont, WV on December 1, 1975. He moved to fulltime work with the Church of Christ in Hundred, WV on April 1, 1981 where he continues to labor. He was one of the charter faculty members for the West Virginia School of Preaching beginning in 1994 and taught classes in the Life of Christ, Marriage and Family, and New Testament Greek. He took a respite from teaching at WVSOP from 2000 to 2005, but returned in August of 2005 and continues to teach New Testament Greek. He continues to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Gospel Meetings, Bible Classes,

and on lectureships when and where God grants him an opportunity to do so.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 1963), p.1013.
- ² Unger, Merrill F. and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), p.7.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 664
- ⁴ Lenski, p. 1009.
- ⁵ Vine, p. 222.
- ⁶ Balz, Horst and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 93.
- ⁷ Vine, p. 378.
- ⁸ Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest's Word Studies From The Greek New Testament, Vol. 3 "Bypaths"* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 18,19.
- ⁹ Clarke, Adam *Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 6 "Romans to Revelation"* (New York: Abingdon, n.d.), p. 762.
- ¹⁰ Vine, p. 529

NOAH WALKED WITH GOD

Frank Higginbotham

Most of us have heard about the faith of Noah from the time of our youth. He is a great example of serving God in complete trust. The writer of the Hebrew letter uses him as an example to introduce us to the chapter of faith. The purpose of recording the events of the Old Testament in the Bible is to use the lives of those who lived before us to encourage us to live for the Lord. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). As Paul warned of the falling of many people in time past, he explains that the things that had happened to them serve as lessons from which we can learn. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews records some events from the life of Noah and describes Noah's walk with God. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7). The complete account of this man's walk with God is recorded in the sixth chapter of Genesis. It is noted that Noah walked with God.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and

the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. (Gen. 6:5-9)

The contrast between Noah and most of the people of his day is made clear in these verses. It is hard to realize the extent that man had gone in sin. Every thought was turned in an evil way. God was sorry that He made man. The only ray of hope dwelt in a man named Noah. This man lived up to what God expected of him. In a world overtaken in sin, this man was able to be a shining example of righteousness. He found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God could not overlook this example of faith. It is clear that Noah's ability to overcome the pressure of sin was due to the fact that he walked with God. In this study we hope to take a look at what is involved in walking with God. Noah set a great example for us.

Noah's walk with God resulted in a complete submission to the will of God. It is stated that Noah did exactly as God instructed him. "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen. 6:22). He did not waste his time in arguing with God nor did he put his wisdom up against God. The prophet Isaiah made it clear that man is not able to stand when his wisdom is compared with God. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9). This fact should go without saying but man never seems to realize the truth of this statement. Since the beginning of time man has challenged God's ways. We see this in our present day. Men have thought that they have the right and the wisdom to remake the church. God gave a pattern in the Bible for the church.

Some are arguing that there is no pattern. They have referred to any appeal to the pattern as 'pattern theology' and ridiculed this as contrary to God's way. God ordered Moses to follow the pattern that He gave for the tabernacle. "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8:5). Does it make sense to argue that Moses was given specific instruction to be sure to follow the pattern for the building of the tabernacle but you and I are given liberty to do as we please with reference to the church? Clearly, God wants us to follow His pattern. God's pattern for becoming a Christian has always been challenged by men and women in the world but more recently is being challenged by some in the church. Who ever thought that a time would come when we would hear people condemning those of us who stand up for the Lord's statement about the necessity of believing and being baptized? "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). God's pattern is very easily understood. We become children of God when we show our faith by obeying God's Word and being baptized for the remission of sins. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). God's wisdom is supreme. Many are also challenging God's pattern of New Testament worship. Men are striving for unity with the denominational world by compromising with the use of instrumental music. We thought that this battle was won years ago by faithful, courageous brethren who stood firmly for the truth but Satan has raised this issue again. It should have been settled by applying the

principle of truth found in a statement made by the Apostle Paul. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:16-17). Instrumental music is wrong because it is not authorized. When will we ever learn that man cannot formulate his own way of salvation? Jeremiah said, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). God's Word is settled in Heaven and does not need man's help. (Psalms 119:89). We will account to God for our attitude toward the Word of God. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:48-49). Noah respected God and His Word and did exactly as he was instructed.

In walking with God Noah faced some unknown situations. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb.11:7). How would you react if you were told that there was to be a long period of rain? There is no record that Noah ever saw rain before. What would be your reaction to the news that there was to be a flood? Noah must have wondered about what a flood was. God then told Noah to build an ark. Would Noah have known what an ark was? In spite of all the things that were unknown, Noah faithfully obeyed. Consider the trust that he had in God. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto

thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). From a human viewpoint he might have had many reasons to question his instructions, however this is not present with this man who walked with God. There are many situations in life that we have trouble understanding. The man who walks with God places his trust in God and believes that even though he does not understand all the details, his God is in control. What a great example Noah gives us. When times of sickness come to us or even when we face our death or the death of a loved one, some begin to waver in their faith. Financial reverses are hard to deal with but we are not required to know how everything will work out. Our part is to place complete trust in God.

As Noah walked with God he had a faith that was obedient to the instructions of God. It would be impossible to separate Noah's faith from obedience. It is common to hear men teaching that faith does not require obedience on the part of man. We are told that God is the only one who plays a part in man's salvation. We are told that Christ has done it all. If followed to its logical conclusion this would mean that universalism is true. All men would be saved without any act of obedience. Appeal is made to the second chapter of Ephesians. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)" (Eph. 2:4-5). The conclusion many arrive at is that grace and obedience are mutually exclusive. To include an act of obedience as being necessary for salvation would make our salvation of works and we are told that all works are excluded. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in

them" (Eph. 2:8-10). Are all works excluded by these verses? If so, even faith is excluded. Faith is called a work. "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29). There is a difference in works of God and works of boasting. Works of boasting are excluded by these verses but works of God are not. Thus the attempt to remove baptism as a necessary part of our salvation falls short. Faith without obedience is a dead faith. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works" (James 2:17-18). James is a book inspired of God and it is clear that it is in harmony with all of the other statements in the New Testament that show the importance of obedience. After preaching the great sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained the difference in being wise or being foolish. It is foolish to hear God's Word and not obey God.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:24-27). As Noah walked with God he showed his faith in God by obeying the instructions of God. "And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him. (Gen. 7:5)

Walking with God means that we have the companionship of God all during life. Noah was not walking alone as he preached righteousness. He carried God's message with God at his side. "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Pet. 3:20). One of the great promises of the Bible is that God will not leave us. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6). Nothing brings us through the very worse times in life in a greater way than to know that God is with us each step of the way. As we read of great men and women of the Old Testament we are impressed with the fact that they did not act on their own but were aware of the presence of God each step of the way. When David faced the challenge of Goliath he reminded others that God had been with him and helped him to defeat a lion and a bear and that He would be with him in defeating this bold and frightening Philistine.

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee. (1 Sam. 17:34-37)

Probably no passage of the Bible has been of more help to struggling people than the twenty third Psalms. Most funeral sermons include a quotation from this great passage. David stated that he could face any situation of life including death because the Lord was with him. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalms 23:4). Each of us will face some hard times in our lives. Job made this observation. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). Some face greater challenges in life than others but none are exempted from facing hard times. Paul, the apostle stated this same fact in his letter to the church at Corinth.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (2 Cor. 5:1-4)

Though the problems we face are large, we can handle them with the help of God. Paul stated, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). The task of building an ark of such great size in the midst of a disapproving world did not stop Noah from being successful because God was with him. The fact that God is ever with us becomes more real when we become aware that we can talk with God at any time and at any situation. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). This verse does not express the idea that God is watching us to detect any false move we make but rather show His interest in helping us

with the situations of life. Of course God sees everything that we do. We cannot hide anything from Him. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). The thought that Peter expressed is that God is always aware of our needs and is willing and ready to meet them. What a great comfort this is to the Christian.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

In walking with God Noah was assured that he was not alone. He had the companionship of his maker. He would surely be successful.

In Noah's walk with God, he was able to influence a few others to do the right thing. Though the total number that he convinced to believe God was only seven, it was certainly worth it for him to encourage some others to trust God. Does it surprise you that the total number of those who listened to God was so small in comparison to the world that rejected God?

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: (1 Pet. 3:20-21)

Jesus made it clear that few would follow His way.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate,

and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

The work of the Christian is to both save his own soul and to also show the way to others. Paul stated, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). Noah was a preacher of righteousness. "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:5). Christians have the God given responsibility to take the message of salvation to the world. This work was first entrusted to the Apostles and now is in the hands of the church. It is the pillar and ground of the truth. In explaining the possibility of being delayed in coming to them, Paul said this. "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). We must diligently go about fulfilling the task before us. The world is lost and the Gospel is the only remedy. The thirteenth chapter of Acts tells about how the church took this responsibility given to them as they sent forth Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Noah's work saved some others and therefore was profitable.

The walk of faith as demonstrated by Noah is a great example to be followed by those of us who are walking by faith today. We know more about walking by faith after taking a look at this great man of God. It does not surprise us to hear the writer of the Hebrew letter say this about Noah. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7).

Biographical Sketch

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV, February 21, 1933. He is the son of Mr. & Mrs. A. G. (Bus) Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville and from Florida Christian College in Tampa, FL. First located work was with the Columbia Street Church of Christ in Fairmont, WV. From there he worked with the church in Wellsburg and the West Street church in Weirton, WV. In 1964 he moved to the Virginia Avenue Church of Christ in Chester, WV and is currently in his 45 year with this congregation. Frank has done radio and TV preaching and has been preaching for 57 years. He is speaker at this time for 'Bible Meditations'. This 15 minute program is produced five days a week and has been on the air since 1949. He preaches on various lecture programs and conducts 8 to 10 meetings a year.

Frank is married to Rose Marie (King) Higginbotham and they are the parents of three children. Donna (passed away in 1965), Janie Gallagher who is married to Brent Gallagher (the preacher for the Oakwood Road Church of Christ in Fairmont) and Steve who is the preacher for the South Green Street Church of Christ in Glasgow, KY. The Higginbothams have seven grandchildren.

WALK IN TRUTH

Brent Gallagher

The small, one-chapter, letters of 2 Jn. and 3 Jn. are sometimes ignored in one's study of Scripture but they contain valuable information that can help one in his Christian walk. They were both probably written in the late first century. As one reads these two little letters he sees a correlation between their teaching and the teaching of 1 Jn. Much of the content of these two letters is the same as 1 Jn. except they are written in a more personal nature. Words such as "walk," "truth," "love," and "commandments" which are common in 1 Jn. can be found in 2 Jn. and 3 Jn. Second Jn. is addressed to the "elect lady" (probably an unnamed woman or a reference to a church) and 3 Jn. is addressed to Gaius. Second John refers to how false teachers (those who denied Jesus came in the flesh) should be treated while 3 Jn. discusses how traveling teachers (who were truly of God) should be treated.

"I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father" (2 Jn. 4)

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 Jn. 4). [All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

The Greek word which is translated "walk," is defined as "a term denoting way of life; the nature and the manner of the way of life make it clear as to what governs a man in his being and acting" (NIDNTT 3:944). The Apostle John uses this word to describe "existence governed by God and existence governed by the world" (NIDNTT 3:945). He writes in his letters of two categories of people – those who "walk in the light" and those who

“walk in darkness” (1 Jn. 1:5-7). One is either of God or of Satan (1 Jn. 3:4-9).

“Truth” can either refer to that which is true as opposed to a lie (truth as opposed to falsehood or deception) or it can refer to God’s revelation to man and is synonymous with the Gospel (NIDNTT 3:889-93). Almost half of the times the word “truth” is found in the New Testament it is found in the writings of the Apostle John. In John’s Gospel he quotes Jesus as saying, “I am the way, the truth, the life” (Jn. 14:6). Christ equates truth with the Gospel when He says in Jn. 17:17 “Sanctify them by Your truth; Your word is truth.” In 2 Jn. 4, in the Greek, the definite article “the” is not found before the word “truth” while in 3 Jn. 4 the definite article is found. Because of a minor textual variant the KJV and the NKJV choose to translate 3 Jn. 4 without the definite article while most other translations (ASV, RSV, NASV, NIV, ESV) include it. While the definite article is not found in 2 Jn. 4 the ESV still chooses to translate it as “the truth.” Dana and Mantey write:

Abstract nouns are ordinarily general in their character and application, and therefore indefinite. But in Greek, when it is desired to apply the sense of an abstract noun in some special and distinct way, the article accompanies it. Thus, aletheia, *truth*, means anything in general which presents a character of reality and genuineness, but he aletheia, as used in the New Testament means that which may be relied upon as really in accord with God’s revelation in Christ (141).

However, the absence of the definite article does not mean that it should not be included in the translation. Dana and Mantey state that at times “with a noun which the context proves to be definite the article is not used” (149). Stott makes this observation commenting on 2 Jn. 4:

The parallel verse in the Third Epistle (4), which has the definite article, suggests that here, too, John is referring to walking in the truth. To ‘walk in the truth’ (RSV ‘follow the truth’; NEB ‘living by the truth’) includes both believing it, especially the central truth of the incarnation, and obeying it, seeking to conform our lives to it. It dwells in us (2); we walk in it. The truth here seems to be likened to a path along which we walk, by which we keep course, and from which we should not deviate. Indeed, to go astray from revealed truth (whether in doctrine or in morals) is not just an unfortunate error, but an active disobedience, for *we have received a commandment from the Father* to walk in the truth. God has not revealed His truth in such a way as to leave us free at our pleasure to believe or disbelieve it, to obey or disobey it. Revelation carries with it responsibility, and the clearer the revelation, the greater the responsibility to believe and obey it (cf. Am. iii. 2) (205-206).

It would seem the presence or the absence of the article is immaterial. The one who is walking in truth is walking consistent with God’s revealed Word. He is one who accepts the Truth and then tries to live the Truth.

In 2 Jn. the Apostle specifically relates walking in truth to the “commandment from the Father” which in turn he relates to love.

I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it (2 Jn. 4-6)

This passage is reminiscent of some of John's first letter where he writes:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 Jn. 2:3-11).

And again, in chapter five John says:

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:1-3)

As one looks at these two passages he sees the need for obeying God's commandments and the need for loving God and other brothers. He also notices the inter-relationship between one's love for God and the keeping of God's commandments. One specific commandment God has

issued through Jesus is the need for Christians to love one another. Law has referred to this inter-relationship of obedience, love, and belief as a “spiral staircase” where these three topics become intertwined (5-6).

One aspect of walking in truth is the proper understanding of the nature of Jesus. In both 1 Jn. and 2 Jn. false teaching concerning Jesus’ nature is reflected. John writes in his first letter:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world (1 Jn. 4:1-3).

Concerning this heresy John writes in his second letter:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds (2 John 4-11).

The doctrinal error reflected in these passages (probably docetic Gnosticism which claimed Jesus simply “seemed” to have a fleshly body) was not to be supported. Not only was it wrong to believe such error but it was also wrong to encourage and support one who taught the error.

In both 2 Jn. and 3 Jn. the Apostle expresses joy over “*some* of your children “and “my children” who were walking in (the) truth. The word “children” probably refers to some of John’s converts in 3 Jn. while the “children” referred to in 2 Jn. could be the specific woman’s offspring or it could be a reference to Christians within a congregation. John experienced much joy hearing of the faithfulness of these Christians. In 2 Jn. 4 he uses the adverb lian (greatly) in reference to how much he rejoiced. Commenting on 3 Jn. 4 Woods states:

“Greater” here (*meizoteran*), is a double comparative, and thus a term of great emphasis. Compare the “more better” of Paul in Phil. 1:23. These forms are of frequent occurrence in both biblical and classical Greek. In Eph. 3:8, there is a comparative on a superlative: “Unto me whom am *less than the least* of all saints...” In this manner did the apostle indicate the tremendous satisfaction he derived from the knowledge that his children (those whom he converted to the truth, or with whom he had been closely associated in the work of the Lord), walked in truth. That which brought joy to the apostle’s heart is likewise a source of much satisfaction to all faithful gospel preachers today. To know that those we have been instrumental in leading to the truth are continuing steadfastly in the faith and good works warms the heart and stirs the emotion of all true teachers of the word (359-60).

Who is the person who walks in truth? In a general sense this phrase would describe one who understands the Bible is from God and then in turn would try to follow it in his life. More specifically, as the letters of John are studied, it is the person who loves God and His commandments and also loves his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is also the person who has a proper understanding of Jesus’ nature and would not encourage one who would teach false doctrine. May all strive to truly walk in (the) truth.

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Biographical Sketch

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JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH MUHAMMAD?

Dave Miller

In order to understand the religion of Islam, one must be introduced to its primary proponent.¹ The following extremely brief recounting of Muhammad's life will provide some sense of the central figure of Islam. Muhammad was born in A.D. 570, in Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. His father died before his birth; his mother died when he was six years old. His grandfather, and then uncles, served as guardians. His youth was spent as a typical Bedouin boy: tending sheep and goats, learning the weapons of war, and traveling with kinsmen on trading expeditions. At the age of 25, he married a 40-year-old, wealthy widow named Khadijah.

In A.D. 610, Muhammad claims to have been visited by the angel Gabriel in a cave on Mt. Hira and began to receive revelations from Allah for the next 23 years. The resulting 114 revelations, known as surahs, compose *Al Quran* ("The Reading/Recitation"). The primary subject matter of the Quran consists of stern denunciations of Arab polytheism and idolatry. As he began to make known these surahs, hostilities commenced with his hometown tribe (Quraysh) since they were the official keepers of the Ka'bah. Arabs believe the Ka'bah ("cube") in Mecca was built by Abraham and Ishmael at the direction of Allah (*Surah* 2:125-127), and that Allah told Abraham to institute pilgrimage to Mecca (*Surah* 22:26-27). But over time, the Arabs grew idolatrous and used the facility as a shrine dedicated to many pagan deities. As the guardians of the Ka'bah, the Quraysh were hosts to the annual pilgrimage made by Arabs from all over Arabia.

Muhammad's insistence on monotheism clashed with the foundation of the local economy which depended on the revenue generated by polytheism. Hostilities were directed against Muhammad and intensified as he began to make converts from among the Meccans.

In A.D. 619, Khadijah died. Later that year, Muhammad claims to have made a trip to heaven (*Al-Mir'raj*). The next year, he claims that Allah ordered him to marry A'ishah (the six-year-old daughter of his best friend, Abu Bakr). In A.D. 622, local persecutors forced him to flee for his life to Medina where a group had already embraced his ideas. This event marks the Hijrah ("Flight" to Medina)—the start of the Islamic Calendar. The Quran has Meccan surahs, i.e., those received while still in Mecca (A.D. 570-622), and those received in Medina (A.D. 622-632).

The years in Medina were characterized by (1) hostilities and armed conflicts with Jewish tribes, surrounding Arab tribes, and especially his hometown tribe of Quraysh; (2) Muslim conversions and military expansion; (3) reception of continuing revelations from Allah; and (4) additions to Muhammad's harem. By A.D. 630, Muhammad's military power was sufficient to enable him to march on his hometown of Mecca, bringing it under submission. Two years later, Muhammad participated in a farewell pilgrimage to Mecca. He died later that year on June 8 at the age of 63.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Islam may be summarized neatly in terms of its five major doctrines. First, the *shahadahs* are oral testifications that must be made to become and remain a Muslim. They are: "There is no god but Allah" and "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." Second, *salat* refers to the prayers

made five times per day, preceded by the call to prayer and ritual ablution. Friday is community mosque worship. Third, *sawm* refers to the month-long Ramadan Fast. Fourth, the *Hajj* is the annual pilgrimage to the Ka'bah in Mecca. Finally, *zakah* is the religious tax given by Muslims that amounts to about two to three percent of annual income. The word "Islam" means "submission" while a derivative of that term, "Muslim," refers to "one who submits."

The Central Conflict Between Islam and Christianity:

The Deity, Person, Role of Christ

In sorting out the extent to which Islam and Christianity are compatible, one need go no further than to compare the central doctrine of the Christian religion with the teaching of the Quran. The name "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16) is derived from the core concept of Christianity, i.e., the divine identity of Christ. First and foremost, the Christian religion mandates belief in and obedience to Christ *as the Son of God*. In sharp contrast, the Quran forthrightly denounces the deity of Christ.

[NOTE: All quotations from the Quran are taken from the celebrated translation by Islamic scholar Mohammed Pickthall.] Consider the following six passages from the Quran:

"Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah" (*Surah* 3:64).

"Praise be to Allah Who hath revealed the Scripture unto His slave...to give warning of stern punishment from Him...and to warn those who say: Allah hath chosen a son, (A thing) whereof they have no

knowledge, nor (had) their fathers. Dreadful is the word that cometh out of their mouths. They speak naught but a lie” (*Surah* 18:1-5).

“And they say: The Beneficent hath taken unto Himself a son. Assuredly ye utter a disastrous thing, whereby almost the heavens are torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall in ruins, that ye ascribe unto the Beneficent a son, when it is not meet for (the Majesty of) the Beneficent that He should choose a son. There is none in the heavens and the earth but cometh unto the Beneficent as a slave” (*Surah* 19:88-93).

“And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they! They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no God save Him” (*Surah* 9:30-31).

“He unto Whom belongeth the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, He hath chosen no son nor hath He any partner in the sovereignty. He hath created everything and hath meted out for it a measure” (*Surah* 25:2).

“The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort, when He created all things and is aware of all things? Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him” (*Surah* 6:102-103).

In bold contradiction to these verses from the Quran, the Bible repeatedly affirms the deity of Christ.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**.... And the Word

became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of **the only begotten of the Father**, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14).

“[Jesus] is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And **He is before all things**, and in Him all things consist.... For **in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily**” (Col. 1:15-17; 2:9).

“...lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, **who is the image of God**, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

“God...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...through whom also He made the worlds; **who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person**, and upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:1-3).

Further, the Quran forthrightly denies the crucifixion of Christ:

“And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger—**They slew him not nor crucified**, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; **they slew him not for certain**, but Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise” (*Surah* 4:157-158).

Again, in sharp contradistinction, the Bible attaches tremendous significance to the crucifixion of Christ (Luke 23:33; 24:20; Acts 2:23,36; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2,8; Gal. 3:1; et al.).

Closely related to the divinity of Christ and His death on the cross is the critical doctrine of His atonement for sin. But the Quran shows no awareness of the need for blood atonement for sin—

“And lo! unto each thy Lord will verily repay his works in full. Lo! He is informed of what they do. So tread thou the straight path as thou art commanded, and those who turn (unto Allah) with thee, and transgress not. Lo! He is Seer of what ye do.... Establish worship at the two ends of the day and in some watches of the night. Lo! **good deeds annul ill deeds**. This is a reminder for the mindful. And have patience, (O Muhammad), for lo! Allah loseth not the wages of the good” (*Surah* 11:111-112,114-115).

“Those are they from whom We accept the best of what they do, and **overlook their evil deeds**. (They are) among the owners of the Garden. This is the true promise which they were promised (in the world)” (*Surah* 46:16).

No wonder terrorists believe they earn a ticket straight to Paradise when they die fighting for Allah—even though they have deliberately engaged in immorality. On the other hand, the Bible adamantly affirms the need for blood atonement—not by animals (Heb. 10:4), but only by the Son of God—in order for sin to be forgiven (Heb. 9:11-10:4,19; 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:14,20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-21; Rev. 1:5).

As a further indication of the magnitude of the conflict between the Quran and the New Testament on the matter of the person, role, and deity of Christ, observe that the Quran flatly condemns the idea of the Trinity:

“O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was **only** a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed

unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, **and say not ‘Three’—Cease! (it is) better for you!—Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son.** His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be a slave unto Allah, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him” (*Surah 4:171-172*).

“They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! **whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah, for him Allah hath forbidden Paradise. His abode is the Fire.** For evil doers there will be no helpers. **They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three;** when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a **painful doom** will fall on those of them who disbelieve. Will they not rather turn unto Allah and seek forgiveness of Him? For Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (*Surah 5:72-74*).

The Bible, on the other hand, affirms the Trinitarian essence of deity in its use of the term “Godhead” (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9), as well as its descriptions that portray the distinct and respective actions of the Persons of the Godhead (e.g., Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; John 15:26; 2 Cor. 13:14).

The Quran and the New Testament Conflict on Ethics

For the person whose mind has been nourished, developed, and sensitized by New Testament teaching, it is shocking to encounter the teaching of the Quran on polygamy. The Quran openly advocates polygamy for men:

“And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, **two or three or four**; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess” (*Surah* 4:3).

“O Prophet! Lo! **We have made lawful unto thee thy wives** unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war..., and a believing woman if she give herself unto the Prophet and the Prophet desire to ask her in marriage—a **privilege for thee only, not for the (rest of) believers**—We are aware of that which We enjoined upon them concerning their wives and, those whom their right hands possess—that thou mayst be free from blame, for Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. **Thou canst defer whom thou wilt of them and receive unto thee whom thou wilt, and whomsoever thou desirest of those whom thou hast set aside (temporarily), it is no sin for thee (to receive her again)**; that is better; that they may be comforted and not grieve and may all be pleased with what thou givest them. Allah knoweth what is in your hearts (O men) and Allah is Forgiving, Clement. It is not allowed thee to take (other) women henceforth, nor that thou shouldst change them for other wives even though their beauty pleased thee save those whom thy right hand possesseth. And Allah is Watcher over all things. O ye who believe!.... **And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain.** That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the messenger of **Allah nor that ye should ever marry his wives after him.** Lo! that in Allah’s sight would be an enormity” (*Surah* 33:50-53).

While various individuals in the Old Testament practiced polygamy, the Bible clearly affirms monogamy as God’s ideal intention from the beginning (Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Matt.

19:3ff.; 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). In Muslim North Africa during World War 2, writing from Casablanca on June 9, 1943, General George S. Patton made an insightful observation about Islam and the degrading practice of polygamy:

“One cannot but ponder the question: What if the Arabs had been Christians? To me it seems certain that the fatalistic teachings of Mohammed and the utter degradation of women is the outstanding cause for the arrested development of the Arab. He is exactly as he was around the year 700, while we have kept on developing. Here, I think, is a text for some eloquent sermon on the virtues of Christianity.”²

Another ethical issue that prevents any agreement between Islam and Christianity pertains to the subject of violence. The Quran forthrightly advocates violence to advance Islam—

“Now when ye **meet in battle** those who disbelieve, then it is **smiting of the necks** until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the **war** lay down its burdens. That (is the ordinance). And if Allah willed He could have punished them (without you) but (thus it is ordained) that He may try some of you by means of others. And **those who are slain** in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain” (*Surah* 47:7).

“**Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you**, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors. And **slay them wherever ye find them**, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for **persecution is worse than slaughter**. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you (there) **then slay them**. Such is the

reward of disbelievers. But if they desist, then lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And **fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah**. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrongdoers. The forbidden month for the forbidden month, and forbidden things in retaliation. And one who attacketh you, **attack him in like manner as he attacked you**. Observe your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who ward off (evil)” (*Surah 2:190-194*).

“**Warfare is ordained for you**, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not. They question thee (O Muhammad) with regard to warfare in the sacred month. Say: Warfare therein is a great (transgression), but to turn (men) from the way of Allah, and to disbelieve in Him and in the Inviolable Place of Worship, and to expel his people thence, is a greater with Allah; for **persecution is worse than killing**. And they will not cease from fighting against you till they have made you renegades from your religion, if they can” (*Surah 216-217*).

“**Sanction is given unto those who fight** because they have been wronged; and Allah is indeed Able to give them victory” (*Surah 22:39*).

“Allah loveth those who **battle for His cause in ranks**, as if they were a solid structure” (*Surah 61:4*).

“Freedom from obligation (is proclaimed) from Allah and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom ye made a treaty: Travel freely in the land four months, and know that ye cannot escape Allah and that Allah will confound the disbelievers (in His guidance). And a proclamation from Allah and His messenger to all men on the day of the Greater Pilgrimage that Allah is free from obligation to the idolaters, and (so is) His messenger. So, if ye repent, it will be better for you;

but if ye are averse, then know that ye cannot escape Allah. Give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful doom to those who disbelieve. Excepting those of the idolaters with whom ye (Muslims) have a treaty, and who have since abated nothing of your right nor have supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill their treaty to them till their term. Lo! Allah loveth those who keep their duty (unto Him). Then, when the sacred months have passed, **slay the idolaters wherever ye find them**, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (*Surah 9:1-5*).

“**Fight against** such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low” (*Surah 9:29*).

“**And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is all for Allah....** If thou comest on them in the war, deal with them so as to **strike fear** in those who are behind them.... And let not those who disbelieve suppose that they can outstrip (Allah’s purpose). Lo! they cannot escape. Make ready for them all thou canst of **(armed) force and of horses tethered**, that thereby ye may dismay the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others beside them whom ye know not.... **O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight.** If there be of you twenty stedfast they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred stedfast they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are a folk without intelligence.... It is not for any Prophet to have captives **until he hath made slaughter in the land.** Ye desire the lure of this world and Allah desireth (for you) the Hereafter, and Allah is

Mighty, Wise. Had it not been for an ordinance of Allah which had gone before, an awful doom had come upon you on account of what ye took. Now enjoy what ye have won, as lawful and good, and keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (*Surah* 8:39,57,59-60,65,67-69).

One can easily see that the Quran frequently advocates violence and armed conquering of enemies. Indeed, the Quran promises Paradise to those Muslims who die killing infidels:

“Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks.... And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain. He will guide them and improve their state, and **bring them in unto the Garden [Paradise]** which He hath made known to them” (*Surah* 47:4-6).

“O ye who believe! Be not as those who disbelieved and said of their brethren who went abroad in the land or were fighting in the field: If they had been (here) with us they would not have died or been killed.... And what though ye be slain in Allah’s way or die therein? Surely pardon from Allah and mercy are better than all that they amass. What though ye be slain or die, when unto Allah ye are gathered?.... So those who...fought and were slain, **verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow**—a reward from Allah” (*Surah* 3:156-159).

The Quran even teaches that thieves should have their hands severed:

“As to the thief, male or female, **cut off his or her hands**: a punishment by way of example, from Allah, for their crime: and Allah is Exalted in Power. But if the thief repent after his crime, and amend his conduct, Allah turns to him in forgiveness; for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” (*Surah* 5:38-39).

Again, in stark contrast, the Bible insists that Christians are to be nonretaliatory, forgiving, and kind to enemies (e.g., Matt. 5:39,44-46; 26:52; Luke 6:27-36; John 18:36; Rom. 12:19-21).

Summary

Many other doctrinal issues could be examined in an effort to compare Islam and Christianity. These are sufficient to establish the undeniable, glaring fact that the two religions are in irreparable conflict. There is no way for a Christian to have a closer walk with Muhammad. The Quran and the Bible, in fact, **contradict** each other. The Quran clearly teaches that Jesus is not the Son of God and was not crucified. It insists that no blood atonement is necessary, and God is not triune. It openly advocates, even encourages, polygamy. And it makes no bones about its approval of violence and armed fighting to advance Islam.

The Founders of the American Republic were well aware of the presence of Islam in the world at the time of the founding of the nation. Several of the Founders, in fact, spoke out about the threat of Islam to the Republic and Christianity. For example, in the court case, *People v. Ruggles* in 1811, the defendant, who had been sentenced by a lower court to be imprisoned for three months and to pay a fine of \$500 for publicly badmouthing Christ and Christianity, appealed his case all the way to the New York State Supreme Court. Writing the opinion of the high court, Chief Justice James Kent (known in history as a Father of American Jurisprudence) made the following declaration:

The free, equal, and undisturbed enjoyment of religious opinion, whatever it may be, and free and decent discussions on any religious subject, is granted and secured; but to revile, with malicious and blasphemous contempt, the religion professed by almost the whole

community, is an abuse of that right. Nor are we bound, by any expressions in the constitution, as some have strangely supposed, either not to punish at all, or to punish indiscriminately the like attacks upon **the religion of Mahomet** [Islam—DM] or of the Grand Lama [Buddhism—DM]; and for this plain reason, that the case assumes that **we are a Christian people**, and the morality of the country is deeply ingrafted upon Christianity, and not upon the doctrines or worship of **those imposters**.³

Another prominent Founder, James Iredell, who was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by George Washington and served on the high court from 1790-1799, made the following remarks:

But it is objected that the people of America may perhaps choose representatives who have no religion at all, and that pagans and **Mahometans** may be admitted into offices.... But **it is never to be supposed that the people of America will trust their dearest rights to persons who have no religion at all, or a religion materially different from their own**.⁴

Samuel Johnston, early Governor of North Carolina and member of the *Constitution* Ratifying Convention, observed in 1788:

It is apprehended that Jews, Mahometans, pagans, &c., may be elected to high offices under the government of the United States. Those who are Mahometans, or any others who are not professors of the Christian religion, can never be elected to the office of President or other high office, but in one of two cases. First, if the people of America lay aside the Christian religion altogether, it may happen. Should this unfortunately take place, the people will choose such men as think as they do themselves.⁵

Joseph Story, another Father of American Jurisprudence, appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by James Madison

from 1811-1845, in his *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (3:728), wrote:

The real object of the [First] amendment was not to countenance, **much less to advance Mahometanism**, or Judaism, or infidelity by prostrating Christianity; but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment which should give to a hierarchy the exclusive patronage of the national government.⁶

Conclusion

May God help us to **love** Muslims (Matt. 5:44-45). May we show respect to all with whom we disagree. After all, true Christianity is not coercive or threatening. Most importantly, may we prepare ourselves to evangelize Muslims. May we strive to explain New Testament Christianity to them. The most powerful force for changing people is—the Gospel!

Endnotes:

¹This lecture is adapted from the author's book, *The Quran Unveiled*, and the PowerPoint seminar he conducts on the subject: *Islam, the Quran, and New Testament Christianity*, available on DVD from Apologetics Press (800-234-8558).

²Patton, George S. (1995), *War As I Knew It* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), p. 49.

³*People v. Ruggles* (1811), 8 Johns 290 (Sup. Ct. NY.), N.Y. Lexis 124.

⁴Elliot, Jonathan, ed. (1836), *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, ed. Jonathan Elliot (Washington, D.C.: Jonathan Elliot), 4:494, [On-line], URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwed.html>.

⁵Elliot, 1836, 4:198-199.

⁶Story, Joseph (1833), *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (Boston, MA: Hilliard, Gray, & Co.).

WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

Phil Sanders

Micah of Moresheth prophesied during the reigns of Judean kings Jotham (750-735 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (715-687 BC). Under Uzzah's prosperous and peaceful reign, Judah saw the emergence of a wealthy upper class that often mistreated others. Micah's task was to bring a lawsuit against Israel and Judah for their sins. These sins included idolatry (Mic. 1:7; 5:12-14); the unfair seizure of property (2:2, 9); the failure of civil leadership to execute justice (3:1-3, 9-10; 7:3); the failure of priests and prophets (3:5-7, 11); the belief that personal sacrifice satisfies divine justice (6:6-7); and corrupt business practices and violence (6:10-12).

Israel was taken out of the way because of its extreme and enduring faithfulness (2 Kings 17:7-23). Judah too had broken covenant with God (6:16). God summoned 'the heavens and earth' as a cosmic forum of witnesses to his covenant with Israel (Dt. 4:26). Now, about 700 years later, he summons the mountains (Mic. 6:1-2) and the everlasting foundations of the earth (2) as a forum of witnesses to the truthfulness of his case and charge against his people, Israel. So Micah prophesies what happens when God's people forsake the covenant:

Therefore I strike you with a grievous blow,
making you desolate because of your sins.
You shall eat, but not be satisfied,
and there shall be hunger within you;
you shall put away, but not preserve,
and what you preserve I will give to the sword.
You shall sow, but not reap;

you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil;

you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine (6:13-15).

How much better it would have been for Israel and Judah if they had learned to follow the Lord, to do what was right and good. Covenant faithfulness with God consists of more than rituals and sacrifices. Covenant relationship consists in loving commitment to the Lord and expresses itself in justice, kindness and humility. Micah explains in this marvelous passage:

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:6-8) ?

This is one of the great, pure statements, which in simple and beautiful terms sums up the heart of our walk with the Lord. This ethical injunction is not intended as a way of salvation, but as the way the saved are to walk. When we commit it to memory, and practice it daily, we will please both God and our fellowman.

God was not asking to be appeased through extravagant gifts. The most extravagant offering they could give him would be their obedience. God wants them to do what is good. “Good” here is practical and moral, not speculative or philosophical. To do “good” involves three things: (1) act justly or be fair in their dealings with others, (2) love mercy by carrying through on their commitments

to meet others needs, and (3) walk humbly with God in modesty and without arrogance.

Our task today is to focus on the phrase “to walk humbly with your God.” God has always highly prized the humble spirit. Nothing melts the heart of God more than the person who truly humbles himself. David said, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). David was humbled by his sin, but he was not alone. Isaiah, when he came into the presence of God by means of a vision, saw the awesome glory of God and his own unworthiness. He said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5)! Knowing God makes us humble; knowing ourselves keeps us humble.

When Josiah heard Shaphan read the book that Hilkiah the high priest found in the temple, he tore his clothes (2 Kings 22:11). He said, “great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (22:13). Josiah’s heart was tender, he tore his clothes, and he wept before the Lord (22:19; 2 Chron. 34:37). Josiah brought a great restoration of devotion to the Lord. “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2). The Bible records this of Josiah: “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him” (23:25).

God has always prized the humble of heart. Through Isaiah God said, “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa. 66:2). The humble person takes God and His Word seriously. God can speak to the humble and be heard; but the arrogant has no room for God in his heart. The history of Israel shows again and again how God blessed the humble but opposed the proud. The pathway to revival is the way of humility.

When Solomon dedicated the temple, he prayed to God that the people would be forgiven of sin when they humbled themselves before God.

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if 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 and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:12-14).

Humility reveals wisdom; arrogant people do not feel the need to change or repent. “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom” (Prov. 11:2). They see that God is God, and we are but mere humans. God will honor the humble, because the humble have learned to fear, to listen to, and to submit to Him. “The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor” (Prov. 15:33).

Jesus Christ’s life provides the best example of what it means to have humility. Jesus describes himself as “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). In a magnificent exhortation to humility, Paul used Jesus as an example:

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:3-8).

True humility means making yourself nothing. The self is no longer the important thing. Humility is focusing on doing the will of God and providing for others. The person who is humble does not look down on others and think himself better than others. Paul told the Roman Christians, “Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom. 12:11). Again, he says, “Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited” (12:16).

While God resists those who are proud, He gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:6). Jesus taught

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28).

Jesus did not look for greatness in those who lord it over others; He saw greatness in the one who would serve others. “The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and

whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:11-12).

The Greek world abhorred the quality of meekness or humility, but the Christian community believed these qualities were worthy. Not one monument of the ancient world ever ascribed honor to the humble man, but the Lord Jesus thought otherwise. The apostle Paul said, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends” (2 Cor. 10:17-18). As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, Christians are to put on a heart of humility and meekness (Col. 3:12). Paul said the Ephesians who were fussing with one another, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2).

Someone has well said: Moses spent forty years in the king's palace thinking he was somebody; then spent forty years in the wilderness as a shepherd finding out that without God he was a nobody; finally he spent forty more years discovering how God can use a nobody to do great things! God can use you if you are willing to humble yourself and put yourself in His hands.

WALK CAREFULLY THROUGH THE YEARS

Bob Eddy

I would like to express my appreciation to the elders of this good church, to Bro. Terry Jones and to the lectureship committee for the invitation to speak on your lectureship program. I am highly honored to do so. I am confident that there are others who are more qualified than I to speak on the subject assigned me, but, I will do my best to present this lecture in such a manner that your time being here will not be spent in vain.

I appreciate the theme of your lectureship: “Just a closer walk with Thee.” All of us need to be walking closer to God. No greater or better advice could be given to anyone than to walk closer to God through all years of their lives. No greater advice could be given to our young people than to start young in life to achieve the greatest blessings and happiness that come through walking closer to God.

My assigned subject is: “Walking Carefully through the Years.” My assigned text is taken from Isaiah 38. Here we read about king Hezekiah who was one of the best kings who ever sat upon the throne of Judah. He was a sincere and devout man, although, not perfect by any means.

Hezekiah was sick unto death. Isaiah, a prophet of God, who was Hezekiah’s friend and counselor, came to him with a message from God. “Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.”

Hezekiah was a praying man and when smitten with a fatal illness, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to God to spare his life.

Isaiah now delivers Hezekiah another message from God. “Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.”

After Hezekiah had won the battles set before him, with God’s help, he writes a song. Among some of the great things he said was: “I will walk humbly (carefully) all my years” (Isa. 38:15).

Before the great flood, there were only 120 left for sinners to repent. (Gen. 6:3). Later on we read: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psa. 90:10).

Today, the percentage of older people living longer is greater than it has ever been. Of course, this is due to improvement in health care, more doctors, more hospitals and more treatment centers. It is worthy to note that in many congregations of the Lord’s church today, there are more older people in attendance than younger people.

Therefore, it is imperative that young people submit themselves to the words of Solomon when he wrote: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say; I have no pleasure in them...” (Eccl. 12:1). It was Peter who gave us a recipe for how to live a careful (humble) life and live long upon the earth. In 1 Peter 3:10-12 we read: “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do

good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” I am also reminded of the words of Paul when he wrote: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:1-3).

Almost everyone desires to love life and see good days. It is a joyful feeling to awaken each morning living life in its fullness. In our younger years, we did not suffer the pain of aging illnesses, nor did we hesitate to embark on the weightier things of life. The world was ours and we planned to enjoy it. But, we should never forget, it was God’s desires that we, his children, enjoy life. Adam and Eve were given a paradise so they could enjoy life and see good days, but, that soon changed. What they thought was good, turned out to be bad. And to this day, we suffer the consequences of their sin. But God has a better way and Peter gives us a glimpse of how to achieve true happiness in this life.

Some of the most important years are the teen-age years. During this time, young people struggle with their identity. They are not sure who they are and what they want to be in life. Oft times, serious mistakes are made which will haunt them for many years to come. Many of the good days and years they were planning for are overshadowed with being homebound and their consciences riddled with guilt. Therefore, it is most important that while they are teenagers, they walk carefully through those most impressionable years.

Choosing a mate is without question one of the greatest decisions young people will ever make. If at all

possible, Christians should marry Christians, not in name only, but a mate that loves God with all his/her heart, soul and mind, and a mate that will help them and their children get to heaven.

At creation, God said: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:21-23).

The most beautiful wedding ever performed on earth was a garden wedding performed by God and no human being witnessed it. To that union sons and daughters were born and the population of the world flourished. “Adam called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

When God ordained marriage in Genesis 2, it was the intent of heaven that such an arrangement would bless mankind tremendously. Genuine love between husband and wife and parents and children should be rich and vibrant indeed. In the home we overlook failures and shortcomings as we labor together for a better day. When husbands and wives live in harmony with Jehovah’s blueprint for marriage they glorify our Creator together. Godly homes truly prepare us for a heavenly abode. “The house of the righteous shall stand, but the house of the wicked shall perish” (Prov. 12:7; 14:11).

Marriage as God would have it is facing many challenges in our world. Divorce is in every family and

God hates divorce. The living together arrangement (LTA) and same sex marriages are sanctioned by our government in many states and in some cases, accepted in churches today. Sad but true, gay churches of Christ exist today. There is no way we can have a closer walk with God when God's Word is being rejected and ridiculed.

Some of the greatest responsibilities that man will ever have are rearing children. If teenagers think it is hard growing up in this society, try being a parent.

If we want to enjoy life and see good days, we must establish a Christian home based upon God's blueprint for marriage. In a study as serious as the Christian home, and if we want to love life and see good days, we must know what God has said and done for the home. "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband" (Rom. 7:2). "I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matthew 19:9) That being true, everyone, both young and old alike, must choose well the one they plan to spend the rest of their lives with. That is the only way we can walk carefully through the years and truly enjoy life to its fullest.

When middle age arrives, and the children have "flown the coop", and if all goes well, mom and dad will be alone again, the nest will be empty. Now they can look forward to having grandchildren. What a blessing that will be! It has been said that it is sheer joy when you see the headlights on the car which is carrying your grandchildren pull into the driveway and it is a greater blessing when you see the tail lights leaving.

If we have grown old carefully, the sunset years of our lives will be filled with a deeper happiness than what we had in the beginning. Sad but true, husbands and wives find themselves so much involved in jobs, rearing children, buying a home and paying bills that they forget the one they chose to be their lifelong companion. Paul addressed that subject when he wrote: “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it...For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh... Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Eph. 5:21-25; 5:33).

Growing old is natural. And as John LeForge said: “I believe old age is a gift, a very precious gift, not a calamity. Since it is a gift, I thank God for it daily.” Although, growing old has its aches and pains, good times and bad times, it is worth living. It is estimated that there are over thirty million people living today that are over 65 years of age. The lifespan now is reaching heights never reached before. At the time of the Roman Empire, life expectancy was 22 years. During the middle ages it was 33 years. At the time of George Washington, it was 35.5 years. At the time of the civil War, it was 43 years. At the close of the nineteenth century, it was 50 years. At the close of World War I, it was 57 years. At the close of World War II, it was 65 years. At the present time it is 75 years. Many doctors predict now that a hundred-year life

span is already in sight. Yes, we are growing older and we need to plan to love life and see good days.

Many are fearful of growing old because death follows old age. A spiritual-mature person has no reason to fear death. Paul writes: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

Most of us are familiar with the internet. A few years ago an article appeared titled: “A Senior Citizen Prayer.” It reads: “Today, dear Lord, I’m 80, and there’s much I haven’t done. I hope dear Lord, you’ll let me live until I’m 81. But then, if I haven’t finished all I want to do, would you let me stay awhile, until I’m 82? So many places I want to go, so very much to see, do you suppose you could manage to make me 83? The world is changing fast, there is so much in store, I’d like very much to live until I’m 84. And if by then I’m still alive, I’d like to stay till 85! More plans are in the air, so I’d really like to stick and see what happens to the world when I turn 86. I know, dear Lord, it’s much to ask, (And it must be nice in Heaven), but I’d really like to stay, until I’m 87. I know by then I won’t be fast, and sometimes will be late, but it would be so pleasant to be around at 88. I will have seen so many things, and had a wonderful time. So, I’m sure that I’ll be willing to leave at the age of 89...maybe. Just one more thing I’d like to say dear Lord, I thank you kindly, but if it’s okay with you, I’d love to live past 90!

No matter who you are, or what age you have achieved in life, it is better to walk with God through the years than to harbor regrets. Reaching heaven is the ultimate goal in life for all of us and preparing for heaven should be a very pleasant venture.

When this life is over and we stand before the judge of the universe, the sweetest words this side of eternity will be: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34)

End Notes:

- Bible (KJV - NIV)
- Growing Old Gracefully (Bob Walton)
- Harding Lectureship (Oct. 81)
- Spiritual Sword Lectureship (Oct. 92)

Biographical Sketch

Robert D. (Bob) Eddy was born on Point Lookout Ridge (Near Bens Run, WV) on December 21, 1933 and has been preaching the gospel for 55 years. He is presently the pulpit minister for the Lorain, OH Church of Christ and in his eleventh year with the Lorain church. He has done located work in five states and served 14 congregations. He averages two gospel meetings each year. He is married to Patty L. (Wetzel) Eddy; they have been married 54 years and have two children and seven grandchildren. Bob is a graduate of St. Marys High School, St. Marys, WV (Class of 1951). He attended night classes at Ohio Valley College, Parkersburg, WV, Blackhawk College in Moline, IL and Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. He speaks on a weekly thirty minute radio program (The Radio Gospel Hour) each Sunday morning over station WOBL in

Oberlin, OH and is known throughout the area as “Preacher Bob.” He is the director of the North Central Ohio Bible Lectureship.

WALK IN GOOD WORKS

Beth Cook

Last summer while sitting in a hospital waiting room, a family member asked me, “Have you ever thought about the legacy you will leave behind after your death? Have you ever wondered about the purpose of your existence?” Why am I here? For the Christian, these questions are answered in God’s Word. The very purpose for our creation is to do good works and glorify God! We were created for a specific purpose in Jesus Christ to serve God by serving mankind. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). “We are his ‘workmanship’ (Gk. poiema), His work of art, His masterpiece. And we show that we are His workmanship by the works which we perform” (Bruce 52). We are God’s poetic masterpiece. When a poet creates a poem that is considered a masterpiece, it will touch the lives of people for many generations. Since a Christian is God’s masterpiece, we ought to, in turn, touch the lives of people by the good works we perform.

God never intended for Christians to be lazy or idle people. We are to be busy doing right things, providing for our own, as well as providing for those in need. Good works are not an option for the faithful Christian.

Performing “random acts of kindness” is a good practice, however, Paul tells us we should “walk” in good works. Walking denotes a “continuous” way of life. Walking in good works describes who we are! “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in

the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Instead of being busybodies, we need to keep our bodies busy!

Christianity is a “one another” religion. Numerous New Testament passages use the “one another” phrase. The mark of a disciple is the love we show one another. “By this, all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). If we love like Christ demands, we will get out of self and serve others (Galatians 5:13). Love is demonstrated by action. Janie Craun states, “Service is love in work clothes” (47). “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 was industrious, providing for her own, as well as the needs of others. “She seeks wool and flax, And willingly works with her hands” (Proverbs 31:13). “...And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants” (Proverbs 31:15). “She extends her hands to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20). Her life exemplified generosity, mercy, kindness and compassion. “She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26). She was a woman of service—walking in good works and glorifying God. “But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates” (Proverbs 31:31). As we grow and mature as Christians, the desire to walk in good works becomes somewhat automatic. The more we appreciate what God does for us, the greater our desire will be to do for others. A willingness to serve out of a joyful, thankful heart can make us, too, women of service.

Have you every heard someone sarcastically ask, “Am I your servant?” Seriously, the answer to that question is “Yes!” The supreme example of a perfect servant is Jesus Christ. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38b). Jesus had compassion and a genuine concern for people. The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates there are those who lack compassion and are not willing to serve others. “The ritualistic Jews were careful about obeying every letter of the law, but many felt no real concern for those around them. According to Jewish custom, if a wall fell on a man on the Sabbath day, they could remove enough of the wall to see if the man was a Jew or Gentile!” (McWhorter 49). When Jesus touched the lives of people with good works, he made a difference. We, too, can make a difference.

Good Works Defined

If we are commanded to walk in good works, it would be helpful to know what we mean by good works. The word “good” carries with it the meaning “morally excellent, virtuous, generous, or beneficial.” “Exactly what constitutes good works from a Biblical standpoint? How can we define our subject? A good work is one done by one of God’s people, for God’s sake, and in God’s will. A “good work” is a “God work” (Farstad). As Christians, we must be about our “Father’s business.” Are we busy in good works, which are glorifying God, pleasing to Him, and according to His will?

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make

you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Everything we need to know about what God wants us to do is found in the scriptures. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Good Works Described

Serving others (walking in good works) includes providing for their physical and spiritual needs. Jesus, in Matthew 25:34-36 (depicting the judgment scene), described some physical needs of men that include feeding the hungry, helping strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and caring about those in prison. Dorcas is described in Acts 9:36 as “full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.” If something is full, it contains an “abundant” supply. Dorcas was generous in her supply of clothing for widows. What an impact she made on lives, shown by the reaction of the widows at her death. The Samaritan man in Luke 10 cared for the physical needs of the wounded man. We read in Acts 6 of the widows being neglected and the provisions made for their care. James tell us, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Certainly, this involves visiting them and taking care of their physical needs.

Many times taking care of the physical needs of a person opens a door to provide spiritual needs. It’s been said, “Folks don’t care how much you know till they know

how much you care.” Someone suffering from hunger would listen to the gospel message much better if he had just been fed. Included in “good works is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to the lost. Jesus instructed, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Peter tells us we are “His own special people,” and we are to proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Peter also told Christians to display “honorable conduct” that when they were spoken of as evildoers, “they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12). Sometimes, without us saying a word, people observe our good works, and it creates in them an interest in spiritual matters. While the Lord has instructed women not to teach so as to usurp authority over a man, we still have the responsibility to teach. Mothers, we must be teaching our children in our homes the necessity of “seeking first the kingdom of God.” What a tragedy if we neglect this important good work! Many women have the ability to teach children’s classes, teenage girls, and classes for women. Personal evangelism is another area where women can be involved in the good work of teaching the gospel.

Teaching is not the only way to be involved in spiritual good works. When we encourage others, we are helping others spiritually. Are our names synonymous with the word “encourager?” Barnabas was not only generous (Acts 4:37), but he was an encourager to other Christians. The Bible says about Barnabas, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement)...” (Acts 4:36). Offering encouragement is a good work that every Christian in the pew can do. We can all be encouragers to our brothers and sisters through our presence, words, notes, letters, cards and visits. What

about the aged and lonely, who, due to decreased physical ability, often feel forgotten? Do we “refresh” or “depress” our brethren? Paul said to Philemon, “For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother” (Philemon 7). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 16:15-18, speaks of Stephanus and other men who “refreshed” his spirit. Christians are to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). This verse tells of our mutual obligation that we have to encourage (provoke, incite) one another to be more loving and to be busy doing good works. Our encouraging one another can be done on a daily basis, as well as when we assemble for worship (Hebrews 10:25). Words of encouragement can also restore a brother or sister who has fallen away. “Brethren if any is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2). “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). Will we be remembered as encouragers?

Good Works Detailed

As Christian women, we must be prepared for good works. “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1). Paul also said in 1 Timothy 6:18 to be “ready to give, willing to share.” We need to be prepared lest we be caught off guard when opportunities arise to do good. “Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Urgent needs must be met in a timely

manner. As we learned from Ephesians 5:16, “redeeming the time” includes making the most of an opportunity NOW.

As Christian women, we must be passionate about good works. Titus 2:14 tells us Jesus gave Himself for us “that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people zealous for good works.” Zealous means enthusiastic! We must develop a desire to do good works and put all our heart into them. Folks can tell when we really don’t want to help. How zealous are we about other activities? Our zeal for an activity demonstrates a great deal about our interest in that activity.

As Christian women, we must be plentiful in good works.

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

If we are walking worthy of the Lord, we will be “fruitful in every good work” (Colossians 1:10). When we plant gardens and fruit trees, we do whatever possible to cause our crops to bear much fruit. Is it not surprising that God expects us to bear much fruit?

As Christian women, we must be a pattern of good works. In Titus 2:6-7, Paul exhorts young men to be a “pattern of good works,” but certainly his exhortation applies to all of us. Mothers, we are given a splendid

opportunity to teach our children by our pattern of good works.

Show them there is no unimportant or menial job in our service to God, as our Lord demonstrated when He washed the feet of his disciples. If others followed our pattern of good works, how much work would get accomplished?

As Christian women, we must be permanent in good works. Don't ever become lax or quit! Instruction is given to "maintain" good works in Titus 3:8, 14. We must "carry on" or "continue" in good works because they are good and profitable to men. When we fail to maintain good works, we become unfruitful. If we still have the ability, then we have the responsibility. Service to the Lord is for a lifetime.

As Christian women, we must be personal in good works. God expects us to do what we can, where we are, with what we have...today. Each stage of life brings different opportunities for good works. For example, a mother with small children may not be able to serve in the same area as a woman whose children are raised can serve. Let's be careful that we are not critical of the avenues of service that others choose, especially if they are different from our choices.

Jesus praised the woman who anointed His head with oil in Mark 14:3-9. He said of her, "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). We do not all have the same goods, abilities, talents, or schedules. We do not all have the same function (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12). But how marvelous it is when we each develop and use our own unique capabilities. We have the opportunity to complement each other's abilities while accomplishing so

many more good works. Perhaps we each need to ask ourselves, “What is that in my hand?” (Exodus 4:2) Dorcas held a needle and thread in her hands. Do I have a car, telephone, kitchen, money, time or talent? The unprofitable servant in Matthew 25:14-30 did nothing with what was in his hands. “Remember, he was not praised for being humble; he was condemned for neglecting his opportunity” (Craun 45). We must take our opportunities and responsibilities to serve personally. Am I walking in good works?

Conclusion

When we walk in good works, God is glorified, others are blessed, and we are rewarded. Someday when this earthly life is over, we will rest from our labors and our works will follow us (Revelation 14:13). Sisters, “let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9). May this song be our prayer.

Make me a servant, Lord make me like You
For You are a servant, make me one, too
Make me a servant, do what You must do
To make me a servant, make me like You.

To Love my brother, to serve like You do
I humble my spirit, I bow before You.
And through my service, I'll be just like You
So make me a servant, make me like You.

Open my hands, Lord, teach me to share
And open my heart, Lord teach me to care.
Service to others is service to You
So make me a servant, make me like You.”

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WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Randy Cook

All of us, to one extent or the other, know the danger of walking in darkness. Whether a root sticking out of the ground, a hole in the sidewalk, or the furniture not being where it once was, we have experienced bruised knees and egos from walking in darkness. We all appreciate the wisdom of a well-placed light to show us the way. We regularly use lights in our houses, in our cars, and outdoors, so that we may see to move around safely.

Most of us also know the frustration and extra care that must be shown when there is a power outage. We have come to depend on lights, and when they go out, we can very easily get confused. We also know the danger of depending on someone else's light when it has a tendency to fade or stop altogether. In our technologically advanced society, the thought of being in the dark would be foreign to some.

But, tragically, multitudes walk in spiritual darkness. The Bible, which addresses our spiritual condition, demands that we walk in the light. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The previous verse speaks of the possibility of walking in darkness. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). Note, also, the words of the wise man, Solomon, "The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble" (Prov. 4:19). This same Solomon instructs us that wisdom will protect us "from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness" (Prov. 2:19).

What does it mean, then, for us to walk in the light? How can we apply this biblical instruction in the 21st Century? These and other questions will be considered in this study, as we take this verse, 1 John 1:7, and break it down. But first, a definition of light is in order. The word is *phos* in the Greek language, and it means to shine or make manifest, especially by rays (Strongs). The word is “expressing ‘light as seen by the eye,’ and, metaphorically, as ‘reaching the mind’” (Vine 369).

“If We Walk In The Light”

The concept of “walking” suggests at least four things: life, activity, progress, and destination (Deloach, 33-34). There was a movie a few years back called “Dead Men Walking”, which this writer never saw. I do not even know the premise of the movie, nor why such a title was given. But I do know that dead men do not walk! Walking is for the living, and if we are alive in Christ, then we have a spiritual walk in which to engage. We have surely been made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1) when we were baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). Those same verses from Romans state that we “arise to WALK in newness of LIFE”. Walking is a part of life, and when life ceases, walking does also.

Walking is an activity, not something done sitting down. For us to walk in the Christian life, activity must be involved. The Christian life is not to be a docile, lazy, inactive kind of life. The church is a living, working organism. It is not a place for Christians to just sit and do nothing. All must be involved in the common goal of helping others come to Christ.

As we walk in the light, we are to make progress along the way. We are to grow, increase in knowledge, improve our service, deepen our faith, and strengthen our

commitment. We cannot make progress until we are willing to put one foot in front of the other continually. To “go for a walk” does not mean to take one step, then stop or quit. In walking in the light, may we never be satisfied to take just a step or two and call it walking. We have often heard in public prayers, “Help us to do better tomorrow than we did today.” That means progress. That means improvement. That means desire and effort must go into the walk. May we daily seek to improve as we walk in the light.

A fourth element involved in walking is destination. Every path has a destination, a goal, an end. Every path leads somewhere. As we walk in the light, our destination is heaven. That is our goal and expected end when this walk has ended. Paul said, “I have finished my course” (2 Tim. 4:7b). He went on to talk about what was at the end of that path. “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). Great care must be given to the destination of the paths we are on. Sadly, many who think they are on the path to life are headed in the wrong direction. As we consider the light of God’s word, may we be mindful of the path we are taking. Make sure our path and our expected destination match. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). God’s word will safely guide us on the correct path.

“As He Is In The Light”

Walking in the light is the result of dedicating our lives to serving God. Our goal will be to please Him in every aspect of life. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). God is the exclusive light to lead us in the paths of righteousness (Psa. 23:3). He is that

light which allows us to bask in God's glorious light. "For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light" (Psa. 36:9). Though many have claimed to be "enlightened," only in God, through Jesus Christ, can we find our way. Jesus is the way (John 14:6), and He is the light that has come into the world (John 1:5-9).

Isaiah, speaking to a nation which had forsaken God's ways, pleaded with them to return to God. "O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD" (Isa. 2:5). When folks depart from following God's will, they leave the light and begin walking in darkness. In darkness, there is danger, despair, and the Devil. In the light, there is holiness, joy, peace, love, and hope. Walking in the light brings safety and forgiveness. In the light - that is where God exists. "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life'" (John 8:12). Jesus presented only two options - walking in light, or in darkness. If we do not walk in the light, there is no gray area, no dusk or dawn, no in-between. It is either light or dark - period!

Our so-called light is not to come from the empty philosophies of men. Nor are we to derive them from feelings, intuitions, opinions, or traditions. Our light is to come from God, the only source of true light. That true light is found when we read, study, obey, and apply the Bible, God's Word, to our lives. False pagan religion does not have the light. The popular denominations around us do not have it, either. Only in God and in His word do we find how to walk in that true light.

"We Have Fellowship With One Another"

The first of two joyous results of walking in the light is the fellowship with one another. “Fellowship (*koinonia*) is partnership, joint participation, communion” (Woods 217). Of primary importance is our fellowship with God, which, in turn, enables our fellowship with brethren. To be in fellowship with God is the safest, most desirable place to be. To consider the alternative is unthinkable. Consider the agony of being out of fellowship with God – no blessings, no forgiveness, no peace, no true joy, and no hope. But, when we walk in the light, that fellowship is ours. With that comes the blessing of answered prayer, the comfort of true forgiveness, the peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7), the joy unspeakable (1 Pet. 1:8), and the sweet anticipation of the hope of heaven. When we walk in the light, we are afforded all of these and so much more because of our fellowship with God.

That fellowship is not just vertical between God and us, but it also extends horizontally to others who are walking in the light. We have fellowship with other Christians because of our walking in the light. Because of that, many mutual responsibilities and privileges are explained in various scriptures. The “one another” passages are abundant. Following are several of those. We are to “love one another” (John 13:34), “be kindly affectionate to one another” (Rom. 12:10), “receive one another” (Rom. 15:7), “through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13), “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2), “bear with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2), “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (Eph. 4:32), “comfort one another” (1 Thess. 4:18), “exhort one another daily” (Heb. 3:13), “and love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22).

Amos asked the common-sense question, “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3) By

walking in the light, we are agreeing with God. That agreement places us in fellowship with Him, and with His people. It is said of Enoch that he walked with God (Gen. 5:24). Enoch walked in the light, and he walked in agreement with God. Because he pleased God (Heb. 11:5), he was afforded the unique opportunity of being taken from this life into eternity without experiencing death.

Can it be said of us that we are in fellowship with God? If we are, then we are in fellowship with everyone else who is in fellowship with God. May we continue to walk in the light so that fellowship can be maintained and never broken.

“And The Blood Of Jesus Christ His Son Cleanses Us From All Sin”

The second blessed result of walking in the light is the continual cleansing from sin. God has placed a condition upon this, in that cleansing is based upon our walking in the light. Our obedience to the gospel is that first step to walking in the light. That is the point when the blood of Jesus Christ washes all our past sins away (Rev. 1:5). We also find that in baptism our past sins are washed away. Ananias, in instructing Saul, told him to “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). There is no contradiction in these two verses. One states that it is Christ’s blood, but the other says it is baptism that washes sins away. Christ’s blood is the cleansing agent, and baptism is the event when the cleansing takes place. Jesus shed that atoning blood when He died on the cross. We contact the cleansing power of the blood when we are baptized into the death of Christ. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into

death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

But, that initial cleansing does not forgive future sins. A continual cleansing must take place. That happens when we walk in the light. This does not give us a license to sin, not does it provide grace to forgive unrepentant willful sin. But, when we try our best, and still fall short, we have the confidence that the cleansing continues. We must still have an awareness of sin, knowing the power of temptation and the danger of falling. When we know we have sinned, we must be willing to confess that sin to God, seeking His forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

There is a peaceful comfort knowing when we pillow our heads at night that all of our sins have been cleansed away. The prerequisite of walking in the light allows that kind of peace. If we choose to walk in darkness, we reject the saving power and the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

Satan’s Attempts To Stop Us

Satan know all the tricks of how to get us to stop walking in the light. He places “distractions” in the most prominent places. When we go “for a walk,” numerous distractions may appear. It could be a colorful bird, or a beautiful wildflower, or a wild animal. If we are not careful, when our attention is diverted from our path, we may stumble and fall. Sometimes, while driving, distractions such as deer, turkeys, or a billboard, attract our attention. When that occurs, we may find that we have drifted off the road or across the center line. When

distractions attract us, then we lose focus on the present path and the intended goal.

The same applies in the Christian life. As we try to daily walk in the light, Satan does his best to distract us. Tempting situations catch our attention. If we begin to pay attention to distractions, then we lose focus on the paths of righteousness, and on the goal of heaven. Note the description of these distractions: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17). We must be vigilant in our guarding our hearts from being distracted. Satan know our weaknesses, and he seems to know just when to put that temptation right in front of us. Let us keep our focus on the goal as we walk in the light of God.

The Hebrews writer describes the same idea for running instead of walking, but the same principle applies. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).

Conclusion

The wise Solomon offers instruction on walking in the light, then warns of following an evil path. “Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will

be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life” (Prov. 4:10-13). Note then the serious warning about following the evil path, or walking in darkness: “Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on” (Prov. 4:14-15).

When it comes to walking in the light, God placed a condition on it – “if.” A comparison is shown to God being in the light. The result is two-fold: companionship and cleansing. Our service to God is oft times in the Bible described as a walk. Walking in the light is wise, safe, beneficial, and pleasing to God. Walking in the light will ultimately lead to Heaven’s gate, where we will commence that eternal fellowship with God and the saints. May we all carefully consider the path on which we are traveling? Where does it lead? Do changes need to be made? May God bless us as we daily strive to walk in His marvelous light.

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Biographical Sketch

Randy Cook has been preaching in his home town in Farmington, WV for the past sixteen years. Prior to coming to Farmington, he preached in Oakland, MD for ten years. He is a 1983 graduate of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions in Knoxville, TN. Randy has worked with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp for over thirty years, and has made two mission trips to India. Randy is married to the former Beth Driver of Elyria, OH. They have two sons: Matthew, who is preparing to move to Cusco, Peru for long term mission work, and James, who is a graduate student at Freed-Hardeman University.

ABRAHAM WALKED WITH GOD

Frank Higginbotham

One of the most loved and respected characters of the Old Testament is a man named Abraham. He is held in the highest regard by both the Jewish people and by the Gentile as well. Abraham was first known as Abram until his name was changed by God and he became the Father of a great nation. His life encompassed many outstanding events that are recorded to help us to be able to appreciate what it means to live and walk with the Lord. Paul explained to the church at Rome the reason for the recording of the lives and events of those who have gone on before us. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). One of the great helps in learning anything is to see an example. It then follows that observing the life of this great man of God will be of help in understanding what is meant when we say that Abraham walked with God. This observation is made in the following statement. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). This instruction to walk before God was carefully followed during the life of this great man. His leadership reaches beyond the Jewish nation. He is the father of the faithful. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar" (James 2:21)? James includes the Gentile when he refers to Abraham as our father. When we take time to study the life of Abraham we are lead to a greater appreciation of what it means for a man to walk with God.

God gave to Abraham a promise that involves people even today. The promise was two-fold. There was a land promise. He was given the land of Canaan according to God's will. He was also given a spiritual promise that includes us. The promise is stated in Genesis twelve.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. (Gen. 12:1-5)

This promise is repeated to Abraham when he was ninety and nine years old.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant

between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Gen. 17:1-8)

God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants has been fulfilled. "And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh.23:14). The spiritual promise is fulfilled in Christ. All families of the earth can be partakers of this promise. In speaking of this promise to Abraham, Paul makes this observation. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3:7-8). Those who become children of God do so when they are born into God's spiritual family and thus are recipients of the blessing promised to Abraham.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:26-29)

Abraham walked with God as he believed that God would do what He had promised. The promise seemed beyond imagination but Abraham trusted God.

As he walked with God, he moved even when he did not know the end of his decision. This is one of the reasons that he is listed by the writer of the book of Hebrews as one of the great examples of faith. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). Think of the uncertainty that must have been in the mind of Abraham when God did not even give him the details concerning his journey. He was told to leave his people and God would later let him know just where he was going. Most people would have wanted to know the details of the journey before they would have gone about making ready to obey this instruction of the Lord. Abraham did not doubt his God. God also told Abraham of something that would have seemed to be an impossible thing. As he neared one hundred years old and his wife was nearing ninety he was promised by God that they would have a son. Because of age, this promise seemed impossible but Abraham trusted God. When Paul wrote the Roman letter he made this comment in regard to God's promise of Abraham and Sarah having a son.

(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. (Rom. 4:17-22)

Abraham did not stagger at the promise of God. He trusted that God would be able to keep His Word. Another major test of his faith was when God gave instructions for him to offer his son as a sacrifice to God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Heb 11:17-19)

Abraham was left to wonder how God could keep His word and bless all families through Isaac if he offered him in sacrifice. He took it for granted that God would raise him up from the dead if his life was taken. Imagine the stress as Abraham made preparation for this sacrifice. When he was asked about the lamb for the sacrifice, he told his son that God would provide. Abraham was about to take the life of his son when he was told not to do harm to him. "And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Gen. 22:12). As Abraham walked with God he displayed great trust in God.

Another result of walking with God is seen in the practice of Abraham to express his thanksgiving to God for His blessings. "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him" (Gen. 12:7). Chapter thirteen tells us in verse four that at that altar Abraham called on the Lord. Men should realize that all good gifts come from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). How ungrateful men are when they drink in the blessings of God daily and feel no

need to express thanks to Him for His gifts. This lack of gratitude was not characteristic of Abraham. Luke tells of ten lepers who sought healing from Christ. When Christ healed them and they were given instructions concerning what to do, nine of them went on their way and only one returned to thank Him. This gives a bad picture of the attitude many show to the Lord. Jesus asked, were there not ten who were healed? How could anyone be so forgetful? Were they not aware of the great miracle that had been done? The very least they could have done would be to return and express thanks but they were not touched this deeply. Do we duplicate the action of the nine? How much do we depend on the blessings that God gives us daily? We sometimes sing a song, 'Count Your Many Blessings'. How big would the paper have to be for us to write down all the good things God gives us each day? Paul reminded the people of Athens that we are totally dependant on God for our blessings. "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:24-25). It is God who gives us life and breath and all things. Does He deserve thanksgiving? In verse twenty eight Paul explains that in him we live, and move, and have our being. If God were to withhold His blessings for even one second, all would be over for mankind. With grateful hearts and bended knees we need to be approaching God many times each day. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). Abraham serves as an example of taking the time to let God know that we love Him enough that we will worship Him. Worship and thanksgiving should not be a chore but something we love to do. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into

the house of the LORD" (Psalms 122:1). Rather than being pleased at the opportunity to worship God, some folks express indifference or perhaps anger when they are invited to keep their appointments with the Lord. They act as though they are being imposed on when they are reminded of what they miss when they willingly absent themselves from the public periods of worship. No one had to remind Abraham that he needed to give thanks to God. He did it because he walked with God. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).

To even the casual reader of the Bible, it is apparent that the faith of Abraham included his obedience to God's Will. How could anyone so twist Scripture that he would come to the conclusion that obedience on the part of man is an unnecessary thing? Many today have accepted at least part of the doctrine of Calvin that seeks to minimize the necessity of doing the commands of God. Some see a conflict between the Bible doctrine of salvation by the grace of God and the equally clear demand for complete obedience to God's Will. However such a conflict does not exist. No one to my knowledge argues that salvation is totally without the grace or unmerited favor of God. We cannot save ourselves by any work or combination of works that we devise. After we have done all that is commanded we still should consider ourselves as unprofitable servants. Thus, we must have the grace of God. On the other hand does it follow that obedience is eliminated as a necessary part of our salvation? "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). The necessity of obedience is emphasized in this passage describing Christ and His attitude toward the Will of God.

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. (Heb. 5:7-9)

If God required obedience on the part of His Son, who am I to think that He does not require the same of me? Christ is the author of salvation but only to those who obey Him. This is why Jesus states that we must decide to enter the way to life (Matt. 7:13). Only those who do the will of the Father will enter into Heaven (Matt. 7:21). Think of how presumptuous it is for man to think that he can hear the word of the Lord and refuse to do it and still has a right to expect Heaven.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:22-25)

Even as we view the life of Abraham who walked with God, we do not see a perfectly sinless man. Abraham, knowing the beauty of his wife devised a plan that he hoped would keep another man from taking his life. If he told that Sarah was his sister, perhaps his life would be spared.

And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this

place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. (Gen. 20:10-13)

Even though Sarah was his half sister, he did not tell the truth about the situation and sinned in so doing. For us to think that we can walk with God and thus be totally free from mistakes is contrary to plain teachings of the Bible.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

In chapter one of the book of Romans Paul gives a description of the extent of the sin of the Gentile world. In chapter two he makes it clear that the Jew did not have anything to brag about because they also were guilty of sin. In chapter three it is concluded that both Jew and Gentile are guilty of sin. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). John then explains in 1 John that he has written these things to the people so that they might avoid sin in the future. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1

John 2:1-2). We should remember that we still have the sin problem to deal with but we have the answer in Christ.

Abraham walked with God and passed the test. God knew that he loved Him as he submitted to His Will. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). Our hope of Heaven should keep us each day in the walk with the Lord. Abraham serves as a great example of living by faith.

WALK IN UNITY

David P. Stevens

On September 7, 1809, the Christian Association of Washington, PA adopted the *Declaration and Address* written by Thomas Campbell. This document is one of the most important documents in the history of the Restoration Movement. This year (2009) is the 200th anniversary of the writing of this treatise on Christian unity. Many do not know much about what it says, but the principles set forth in this work launched the largest religious movement in American history.

At the heart of the *Declaration and Address* was a call for unity based upon the Scriptures alone. Thomas Campbell decried the religious division present in his day, not only in the religious world, but in his own Presbyterian Church. In this document, he sets forth the principles that he believed would bring unity to a divided religious world.

The essence of the *Declaration and Address* was distilled into thirteen propositions. Two of these propositions eloquently condemned religious division. The first one stated, "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians." Another declared, "That division among the Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is antichristian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is antiscritural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express

command. It is antinatural, as it excites Christians to contemn, to hate, and oppose one another.”¹

Thomas Campbell strongly promoted unity and opposed division within the body of Christ. He enlisted the help of his son, Alexander, to promote the principles set forth in the *Declaration and Address*. Together, father and son made history.

How is Christian unity attained? How is it maintained? Both of these questions will be answered in this lecture.

I. UNITY ATTAINED: REMISSION OF SINS, REGENERATION AND RECONCILIATION.

The subject of unity is an important one. Jesus prayed for unity (John 17). Shortly after uttering this prayer, Jesus died for unity. Jesus died that all might be saved “in one body” by “the cross” (Eph. 2:16—“That he might reconcile both unto God in one body, by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby). *In one body* indicates *location*. All of the redeemed are added by the Lord to His church. *By the cross* indicates *means*. By Jesus’ death and His shed blood, men would be redeemed.

Unity Attained: Remission of Sins

If the goal is to be one with Deity (God, Christ and the Holy Spirit), then sin must be remitted (forgiven). Sin separates man from God. Sin is the barrier to communion with God. Adam and Eve experienced loss of fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden because of their sin (Gen. 3:22-24). All who sin, separate themselves from God. “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and
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your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:1, 2).

Remission of sins is preached in the name of Jesus (Luke 24:46-47). Remission equals forgiveness. Paul declares that our redemption is connected to the blood of Christ, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).

Only the blood of Christ removes sin. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:1-4). Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22). The only person whose blood has the power to remove sin is Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:13, 14).

An obedient faith accesses the power in the blood of Christ to remove or cleanse all sin. On the day of Pentecost, as Jesus predicted (Luke 24:46-47), remission of sins was preached in His name. Peter responded to the urgent question of the multitude on that day who asked, “men and brethren what shall we do?” What shall we do about our sin? Peter had convicted them of the sin of crucifying the Son of God. He replied, “...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Peter proclaimed immersion in water for the remission of sins. He connected baptism and forgiveness of sins. The church (the body of Christ) is sanctified and cleansed “with the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26).

Unity Attained: Regeneration

If the goal is to be one with Deity, then spiritual death must be replaced with spiritual life. All who sin die spiritually. Paul describes the spiritual condition of the

Ephesians before their conversion in these words, “who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). The wages of sin is death (spiritual death) Rom. 6:23.

Only by the power of God can a person be raised to walk in newness of life. Paul writes, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). He continues, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph. 2:5). The word quickened means “made alive.” New spiritual life is produced by the power of God. Therefore, we are His new creation. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

The new birth produces new spiritual life. Jesus declares, “... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This new birth is immersion in water for the remission of sins. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3, 4).

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus declared such in John 3:3, 5. Paul states, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). The word regeneration comes from the Greek term *palingenesis*. This word is a compound form: *palin*, *again*, and *genesis*, *birth* and means *new birth*.² Two operating powers are mentioned by Scripture in producing the new birth. They are: the word of truth, (James 1:18; I Pet. 1:21-25) and the

Holy Spirit (John 3:3, 5). W. E. Vine remarks on the use of the phrase new birth and the word regeneration: “The new birth and regeneration do not represent successive stages in spiritual experience; they refer to the same event but view it in different aspects. The new birth stresses the communication of spiritual life in contrast to antecedent spiritual death; regeneration stresses the inception of a new state of things in contrast with the old...”³

Unity Attained: Reconciliation

If the goal is to be one with Deity, then we must be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:17-21). Reconciliation (from the Greek word *katallassō*) basically means to change, and, of persons, it means to change from enmity to friendship.⁴ In Eph. 2:16, the word for reconciliation is *apokatallasō* which means to *reconcile completely* and denotes the removal of all enmity so that peace and unity can prevail.

Reconciliation means that former enemies become friends. In sin, we are the enemies of God. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). Paul writes, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

Reconciliation means peace. Sin produces rebellion against God. This produces strife and spiritual warfare with God. But, in Christ, we have peace with God. Peace is the tranquility of soul that is the result of oneness with God (Eph. 2:13-18).

Reconciliation means unity or oneness. The idea of reconciliation is “to be made one” with or to be spiritually

united with God. The spiritual union with Christ occurs in the spiritual body of Christ which is the church of Christ (Eph. 2:16).

Reconciliation to God depends upon remission of sins and regeneration. It results in fellowship with God. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13).

Unity Attained: Conclusion

Remission of sins, regeneration and reconciliation to God are all involved in attaining unity with God. You and I cannot claim unity with each other until we both are spiritually united with God through Jesus Christ. You and I cannot claim unity with each other until we have manifested an obedient faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by obeying the commands He has given that affect such unity. Remission of sins, regeneration and reconciliation are accomplished by the power of God through the grace of God when we are immersed into Christ. The only way to get “into” Christ is to be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27). Without this act of obedience, we cannot claim to be united with God in Christ. Baptism is “for the remission of sins.” Baptism is the new birth (regeneration). Baptism results in peace and oneness with God.

II. UNITY MAINTAINED: DISPOSITIONAL AND DOCTRINAL ASPECT.

Dispositional Aspect

The apostle Paul writes eloquently on the theme of unity in Eph. 4:1-6. He addresses the subject of unity from two different aspects. The first is dispositional (the right attitudes and temperament) and the second is doctrinal (the biblical foundation for unity). These verses are not exhaustive with regard to the subject of unity, but they are comprehensive (give a complete picture of what is involved in unity).

The comprehensive sum is stated succinctly: *walk worthy of your calling*. The calling is a high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13, 14). It is received through the Gospel (II Thess. 2:14). The walk (conduct) and calling are to be of equal weight. The conduct must match the calling! Called to be saints (Eph. 1:1), the Ephesians must live a sanctified life. Both the calling and the conduct define them as part of the church (*ekklesia*—the called out) or congregation of the saints of God. As a member of the body of Christ, they have a responsibility to preserve the oneness that they share in Christ. Each part (member) must act to preserve the whole!

Preservation of oneness with Christ and with each other is predicated upon their conscience and conduct. What attitudes preserve unity? Which ones would destroy unity? Paul gives the positive qualities knowing full well that the negative qualities would also be prominent in the minds of the Ephesian brethren.

Four phrases modify the term “worthy.” Two begin with the preposition *with* and two begin with *participles*. The four phrases include **seven** positive qualities that preserve unity. The first is **lowliness** (*tapeinophrosunē*) which refers to lowliness of mind, or having a humble opinion of oneself.⁵ This attitude results from comparing

ourselves to Christ and not to each other. It results whenever we consider what we were before our salvation through Him. Paul's self-description in Eph 3:8 captures the idea: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints." Paul uses the word *elachistoteros* which is translated: *less than the least*. This word is the superlative of *elachistos*.⁶ We might say "leastest." Paul exhibited lowliness in this description.

The opposite of lowliness is pride, arrogance, or self-assertion. Pride slays humility and threatens and destroys unity.

The second quality is **meekness** (*prautēs*). Vine defines this term as follows: "it is an inwrought grace of the soul in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting..."⁷ "This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him for the chastening and purifying of His elect"⁸ Meekness is not weakness! But, it is inner strength. It is power or strength under control. "The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was 'meek' because he had the infinite resources of God at His command"⁹ The opposite of meekness is violence or power out-of-control.

Both lowliness and meekness were ascribed to Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30). To walk worthy of one's calling is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ!

The third virtue Paul names is **longsuffering** (*makrothumia*). Trench defines longsuffering as "a long holding out of the mind before it gives room to action or

passion”¹⁰ Longsuffering is being long-tempered. Its opposite is short-tempered or uncontrolled anger. Longsuffering is a quality that belongs to the nature of God (II Pet. 3:9). To walk worthy of one’s calling is to be followers of God as dear children (Eph. 5:1).

The fourth quality is **forbearing** one another in love. Forbear (*anechō*) is to hold up under a load of vexations piled upon us¹¹ Vine states that when “used in the Middle Voice in the N.T., signifying to bear with, endure...”¹² The opposite is to be easily agitated or upset. *In love* is a prepositional phrase that modifies the word *forbear*. **Love** (*agapē*) is the fifth quality and the supreme virtue (I Cor. 13:13). Love is benevolent goodwill. Love seeks to do what is best for others regardless of their person or circumstances. Love is itself a bond that preserves relationship with brethren. We forbear in love. The difficult brother must be “put up with” in “love” (seeking his highest good). Such an attitude preserves unity.

The next quality is **diligence**. Endeavoring (*spoudazontes*) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *Spoudazontes* means “to be diligent”¹³ We must carefully and earnestly watch for and promote unity. *To keep* means to *hold fast* and *preserve*. *Tērein* means “ever to guard, thus to preserve”¹⁴ Its opposite is slothfulness. Slothfulness is lack of earnestness or zeal. The *unity of the Spirit* is that unity inspired, ordained, and created by the Spirit. The word *unity* comes from a Greek word, *henotēs*, from *hen*, the neuter of *heis*, meaning *one*.¹⁵ This oneness is spiritual and indicates the spiritual union with Christ and other saints. *Bond of peace* means the bond consisting of peace (appositional genitive). **Peace** (*eirenē*) is the final quality mentioned by Paul. Peace is the tranquility of soul that comes from being right with God. This peace is a bond. It acts to hold us together. We are peace-lovers and peacemakers rather than war mongers. God desires a

peace-loving spirit rather than a combative and censorious one. This “peace” exists within the body of Christ. Of course, the Christian must fight the good fight of the faith when it comes to meeting the infidel, irreligious and impious. The opposite of peace is agitation and vexation of spirit.

Doctrinal Aspect

Truth unites, error divides! The doctrinal foundation laid down by Jesus Christ (the chief corner stone) and His apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5, 2:20) forms the basis upon which unity is built. Lenski remarks, “Stroke by stroke Paul simply points to what forms the basis of the unity on which his previous admonition rests”¹⁶ There are **seven** specific doctrinal aspects to this foundation. Each one is objective. Each one is immutable. Each one is indispensable.

First, there is **one body**. The body is the church of Christ. In Ephesians 1:22, 23, Paul uses the terms body and church interchangeably. “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” The church is made up of the “called out” (II Thess. 2:14). These are the saints of God in communion with God. The church has been purchased with the blood of Christ and so belongs to Him (Acts 20:27; I Cor. 6:19, 20). The church is comprised of the redeemed. Christ is the head of the church and the savior of the body (Eph. 5:23-25). While there are many members, there is only one body (I Cor. 12:12). The diversity in the body of Christ is not doctrinal diversity, but individual diversity regarding roles and talents.

Second, there is **one Spirit**. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He possesses all of the perfections of deity and executes His power for the benefit of the saints of God as He indwells them (Eph. 2:22, “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit”).

Third, there is **one hope**. The hope of your calling involves two aspects: immediate and remote. The immediate aspect of the hope of your calling is the salvation from sin and its consequences provided through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The remote aspect of this hope is eternal life which Christians have in promise. “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). Hope is *confident expectation of good things to come*. Hope is tied to relationship with God and the promises He has made in the New Testament. Those in covenant relationship with God share in the hope of being with God forever (II Thess. 4:13-18).

Fourth, there is **one Lord**. The Lord is the second person of the Godhead. In contrast to many lords and many gods, Paul affirms that there is one Lord and one God. “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him” (I Cor. 8:5-6). In Eph. 4:5, the word Lord is used in a soteriological sense. Paul is affirming the lordship of Jesus Christ and that lordship expresses absolute and universal authority (Matt. 28:18). Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16; I Tim. 6:15).

Fifth, there is **one faith**. The word *faith* in this passage is objective rather than subjective. Paul has in

mind the Christian faith. However, our personal faith stems from this body of truth and so we share a common faith in that we believe and obey the same Gospel. The word of truth is absolutely essential to unity in Christ (John 17:17-21). Jesus prayed for unity. Shortly after this prayer, Jesus died for unity. There is only one Gospel (Gal. 1:8-9). The Gospel is the divine record of the saving acts of Christ in behalf of each of us. Our personal faith in the word of truth connects us to God and to each other.

Sixth, there is **one baptism**. The New Testament reveals seven baptisms (listed in chronological order of their administration): (1) in the cloud and in the sea “unto Moses” (I Cor. 10:2); (2) In water by John “for remission of sins” (Matt. 3:1-11; Acts 19:1-5); (3) Of Jesus “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:13-15); (4) In suffering (Matt. 20:22-23); (5) In the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:1-21, 33); (6) In water, for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16); (7) In fire or judgment (Matt. 3:11-12). Which of the seven did Paul have in mind in Eph. 4:5? Paul was writing of the baptism that puts one into spiritual union with Christ. Only one of the seven does this as a part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). It is baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-4). It prescribes one mode: immersion. *Baptidzo* is a specific term not a generic term and specifies the mode of immersion by its literal meaning: to dip, to plunge and hence, immerse. It has one element: water (Acts 8:36-38; 10:47-48), It has the divine purpose: for (in order to obtain) the remission (forgiveness) of sins (Acts 2:38) with the consequence of uniting us with Christ in His spiritual body—the church of Christ (I Cor. 12:13).

Seventh, there is **one God**. The first person of the Godhead. *The Father*—represents His relationship to His children (Eph. 2:19, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints,

and of the household of God”). Paul expresses His three relations to the one body—the communion of the saints. *Who is above all* denotes exaltation and supremacy. *Who is through all* denotes operative power both sustaining and ruling. *Who is in you all* denotes indwelling presence.

This is the climax of the concept of unity which reaches its zenith in God Himself! This is the unity that we must preserve. It is sacred. It is worthy of significant sacrifice. It demands our all to sustain, protect and preserve.

Unity Maintained: Conclusion

How careless we have been to keep this unity. How arrogant we act. How vicious we treat our brethren. How impenitent we are at times when we violate with impunity the sacred trust to preserve it. May God first and foremost forgive us and may God fortify us to resolve **to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

We should renew our interest in scripturally attaining unity and maintaining it. Perhaps this 200th anniversary of the writing of the *Declaration and Address* by Thomas Campbell can help us regain our focus and our commitment to being one with God and with each other.

¹Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 1809 Hester Publications, 23,26

²W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, III, 1966, 267

³W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, III, 1966, 267

⁴W. E. Vine *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, III, 1966, 260

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- ⁵ W. E. Vine Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, III, 1966, 24
- ⁶ J. D. Watson, A Word for the Day, 2006, 125, 126
- ⁷ W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, III, 1966, 55, 56
- ⁸ Trench as quoted by Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, III, 1966, 55, 56
- ⁹ W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, III, 1966, 56
- ¹⁰ R.C.H. Lenski, Interpretation of Ephesians, 1961, 508
- ¹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of Ephesians, 1961, 508
- ¹² W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, II, 1966, 116
- ¹³ W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, II, 1966, 28
- ¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of Ephesians, 1961, 508
- ¹⁵ W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, IV, 1966, 171
- ¹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of Ephesians, 1961, 510

Biographical Sketch

David was born April 19, 1956 at Barrackville, WV (Marion County). He is the son of Earl and Vonda Stevens of Fairmont, WV. He was baptized into Christ May 3, 1969 and began preaching at the age of 15

He graduated from St. Marys High School, St. Marys, WV in 1974. He furthered his training at Ohio Valley College (now University), Parkersburg Community College and Fairmont State College, Fairmont, WV. He has also completed a Masters in Science in Ministry from Southern Christian University, Montgomery, Alabama (1999).

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David began preaching in July of 1971 at Mooresville, WV in a meeting held with his dad (Earl) and his brother (Steve). He has held full-time works at New Lexington, OH (1978-1991) and Groveport, OH (1991 to the present).

He wrote a monthly article for seventeen years entitled *Gems From the Greek for Therefore Stand*, edited by Terry Varner. Also, he served as associate editor of the paper from January 1, 1997 until November, 2008.

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WALK IN THE OLD PATHS

Phil Sanders

Judah was in danger of destruction because she had strayed from the ancient paths of God's righteousness. Though God urged her to walk in the good way where she would find rest, Judah refused. Imagine travelers who have lost their road, stopping and inquiring which is the right way on which they once had been, but from which they have wandered. Imagine getting good advice but rejecting it. That was Judah in the days of Jeremiah.

Prophets were watchmen, assigned to keep an eye on and warn a city of impending danger; but the nation refused to listen. The Lord had given Jeremiah a most difficult task of prophesying to Judah in its declining days. Judah was headed for destruction. Even though Josiah had led Judah back to the service of God, God had sworn to punish his people for the sins they committed during the days of Manasseh. Jeremiah mourned for Josiah when he died (2 Chron. 34:25). 2 Kings 23:25 says, "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him."

Still the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. And the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there" (23:26-27). Jerusalem and Judah were on a path of destruction because of their unfaithfulness to God. So wicked had the people

become, the Lord told Jeremiah, “do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you” (7:16; cf. 14:11). The Lord said,

Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. Is it I whom they provoke? declares the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own shame? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched (7:17-20).

Israel had shamed itself and destroyed itself by its hardened hearts and disobedience.

What had led to this downward spiral of rebellion and apostasy? Jeremiah gives us some pictures of their disobedience in the following passages:

And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands (Jer. 1:16)

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (2:13).

“For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not” (4:22).

“O LORD, do not Your eyes *look* for truth? You have smitten them, *but* they did not weaken; You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent” (5:3).

“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes” (5:30-31)?

“To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold, the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it” (6:10).

Judah did not want to know or hear God’s voice. They wanted his blessing but did not want to repent of sin or to serve the God who made them. They had hardened their hearts to the point God could no longer speak to them and get them to change. It would require drastic action. It is in this context that Jeremiah calls the people to walk in the old paths.

Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’ (Jer. 6:16).

Each day brings us to new crossroads. Each day we must choose the good way, and walk in it. There is no peace like the inner peace that comes from knowing we have done what is right.

Idolatry and apostasy are the modern way; the worship of God the *old* way. Evil is not equal in age with good, but a departure from the good. Jeremiah said of their idolatry, “they have stumbled from their ways, from the

ancient paths, to walk in bypaths, not on a highway” (18:15). The good way is that which has been traveled by the saints from the beginning: it is the old way of the cross, the way of faith and holiness. Believe in Christ, love the Father, obey the Word, serve others, keep yourselves pure, and never forsake the Lord. This is the good way.

If Judah would but return to the ancient paths of the Word, they would find rest for their souls. Those who take up the yoke of Jesus also find rest for their souls (Matt. 11:29). The soul needs rest; it can only find this by walking in the good way. But these bad people said, We will not walk in it. Then they took another way, walked over the precipice, and fell into the bottomless pit; where, instead of rest, they find the wrath of God. Proverbs 4:18-19 says, “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.”

The way of the Lord is always different from men’s ways. They have different paths, different goals, and different destinies. Many people think they have found a better way only to find out their way leads to destruction. Solomon said, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov. 14:12). Jesus warned in the Sermon on the Mount, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13-14).

God Calls Us to the Old Paths

The New Testament calls Christians repeatedly to stay in the Word and not depart from its teaching. Paul said to the Thessalonians, “So then, brothers, stand firm and

hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess. 2:15).

The apostle John said, “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds” (2 John 9-11).

To teach anything that perverts the Word of God leads to eternal destruction. Paul warned the Judaizing Christians in Galatia,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

The New Testament predicted that Christians would fall away from the truth of the gospel into error. God knew the hearts of men would often follow their own paths.

Notice these scriptures:

“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the

insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

“The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Churches of Christ strive to "*do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names.*" They believe they must “discard from their faith and their practice everything that is not found written in the New Testament of the Lord and Savior, and to believe and practice whatever is there enjoined.” The Restoration movement grew out of a conviction that the Bible is the complete and final authority. Just as a seed will produce only after its own kind, so the seed of God’s word will produce the same Christianity today it did in the first century (Luke 8:11).

They wanted something better—a pure and true Christianity free from the stains of human opinions. If they could get away from the human and concentrate on what they knew was truly divine, they could find a basis for unity. They could have unity only by following the truth of

God's Word. This meant they had to cast off everything human and denominational and return to a Christianity that knew nothing of denominationalism.

They rejected human opinions and inventions, since these things find their authority not in God's word but in men. They believed that "nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God." (Thomas Campbell, *Declaration & Address*, proposition 3). They said, "We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent." They wanted unity in essentials, freedom in matters of opinion, and love in all things.

If the church is to please God, it must return to what God wills in the New Testament. Restoration is necessary, because *repentance from error is necessary*. One cannot remain in error and still please God. God has always expected His people to come out of sin when they learn the truth. Repentance means that one leaves sin and embraces the Lord's will.

James 5:19-20 says, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." The work of restoration, then, is actually soul-winning, since it leads a lost soul out of sinful error and back into life. These words ring true:

"It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling

the truth than to be loved for telling a lie.” Adrian Rogers (*Berean Call*, Dec. 1996, 3).

By casting off manmade doctrines and practices, the church could restore the doctrine, worship and organization of the New Testament church.

The intent is not to start a new denomination, but to restore the church according to the ideals of the New Testament. Jesus built His church before any denomination existed. His church is not denominational, inter-denominational, or even non-denominational. The church Jesus built was pre-denominational, undenominational, and anti-denominational. It could never approve of unifying the truth with error.

Let us determine to stand with God, to ask God for guidance in the ancient way, where the good way is, and walk in it. Let us see God’s rest in our lives. Let us never harden our hearts and refuse to follow God.

WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

Charles C. Pugh III

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4)

The theme of the epistle to the Romans is “. . . the gospel of Christ . . . the righteousness of God . . . revealed . . .” (Rom. 1:16-17). Stated another way, Romans argues that God makes man right through the Gospel. Man, who is the result of the creative power of God, was created good (Gen. 1:26-27, 31) but he, by his own choice, has gone wrong. Although God has revealed the origin and accountability of humans through evidence in the world (cf. Rom. 1:18-20), the human race has not lived up to its accountability to God the Creator. Such has resulted in the refusal of humans to acknowledge the One true God to whom all humans owe their origin. Paul wrote, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things that are not fitting” (Rom. 1:28). A. T. Robertson observed: “These people . . . willfully deserted God. . . . The withdrawal of God’s restraint sent men deeper down. . . . [It is] the loss of God in the life of man” (330-31).

The purpose, however, of the first chapter of Romans, as well as that of the following two chapters (2-3), is not ultimately to describe the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual degeneration of an anti-theistic culture. The first three chapters of Romans do that, but they also announce *good news*. They declare, delineate, and defend the proposition that there is a divine remedy for the alienation of humanity from God. John Stott says:

[Paul's] purpose in this passage is to draw up 'the indictment that all, Jews and Greeks alike, are under the power of sin', so that 'the whole world may be exposed to God's judgment'. He does more than bring an accusation; he marshals the evidence against us, in order to prove our guilt and secure our conviction. All men and women (Jesus being the solitary exception) are sinful, guilty and without excuse before God. Already they are under his wrath. Already they stand condemned. It is a theme of great solemnity. It is also the necessarily dark background against which the gospel shines brightly, and an indispensable foundation for world evangelization.

. . . [H]e portrays *depraved Gentile society* in its idolatry, immorality, and antisocial behaviour.

. . . [H]e addresses *critical moralizers* (whether Gentiles or Jews), who profess high ethical standards and apply them to everybody except themselves.

. . . [H]e encompasses *the whole human race* and concludes that we are all guilty and without excuse before God.

Throughout this long passage, in which the apostle gradually but relentlessly builds his case, he never loses sight of the good news of Christ. . . . In 1:16 he has stated that 'in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed'. In 3:21 he will repeat this statement almost word for word: 'But now a righteousness from God . . . has been made known'. It is in between these two great affirmations of the revelation of God's gracious righteousness that Paul sandwiches his terrible exposure of human righteousness (1:18-3:20). (68)

The key word for the first three chapters of Romans is **condemnation**. ". . . [A]ll the world . . . [is] guilty before God. . . . [A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . ." (Rom. 3:19, 23). Distinguished British

philosopher Richard Swinburne well summed up the human condition:

. . . [H]umans have . . . greatly wronged God. Wronging God is called “**sinning**.” . . . [W]e humans are in no position to make proper atonement for sins, despite having an obligation to make that atonement. We owe so much anyway by way of service to God our creator, who has given us so much. . . . [T]he Christian claim [is] that Jesus saved us from our sins. . . . By becoming incarnate and living a perfect human life in Jesus, God provided an act of reparation of which we can avail ourselves. . . . The sacrifice of Jesus is then Jesus (God the Son) giving to God (the Father) the most valuable thing he has: his life—both a perfect life of service to God . . . and which he allowed to be taken away from him by his Crucifixion, whose benefits will flow to those who associate themselves with that sacrifice. . . .

. . . Jesus’s [sic] act makes no difference to us unless in some way we associate ourselves with it. We can say to God, “Please accept instead of the life which I ought to have led . . . this perfect life of Jesus as my reparation.” . . . At their baptism, wrote . . . Paul (in his New Testament book the Letter to the Romans 6:3), Christians [have been] baptized into the death of Jesus. When . . . baptized, they ask God to accept the life and death of Jesus as their reparation for sin. (53, 56, 58-59)

The key word for Romans 4-5 is *justification*. God demonstrates His righteousness (how He makes man right) through the Gospel of Jesus Christ by being both just and the justifier of the one who has an obedient faith in Jesus (cf. Rom. 3:24-36). Not by humanly achieving, but by obediently believing, the condemned sinner is acquitted and justified (set free). It is a gift by the grace of God (Rom. 5:15-17).

The key word for Romans 6-7 is *sanctification*. R. C. Bell explained:

With Chapter 6, Romans passes out of justification (a divine work *for* us), pertaining to becoming a Christian, into sanctification (divine work *in* us), pertaining to living the Christian life. “Justification makes saints, and sanctification makes saints saintly.” God first justifies, that is, cancels the guilt and penalty of past sins; then, the justified progressively grow in purity and sanctity throughout present life; and finally the sanctified mount to glory for future eternity. Justification, sanctification, and glorification are not disconnected states; rather they lie, respectively, one above another, blended into one grand whole. Paul has just laid the deep, solid foundation (justification) of human redemption, and now, for three wonderful chapters, he builds thereon the magnificent superstructure (sanctification and glorification).

The doctrine “Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly” (5:20) may be perverted into let us “continue in sin that grace may abound” (6:1). But instead of grace granting license to sin, it establishes law by providing for its fulfillment. “Grace is opposed to sin and devours it” (Luther). Sin belongs to sinners, not saints. (49-50)

The teaching that salvation is the gift of God by His abundant grace, and that it is the result of the death of Christ, and not by mere human effort, raised some questions. One of these questions is: “If salvation depends on what God has done (His grace), and if where sin abounds God’s grace abounds more (cf. Rom. 5:20), does it matter how the Christian lives?” (cf. Morris 243). Paul asks, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1). Should Christians continue in sin, as before their conversion to Christ, so that grace may increase by increasing sin? “He is thinking of

sinner staying where they are, declining to budge from their habitual sin” (Morris 245). Alford says it means, “*Must we think that we may persist . . . in (our natural state and commission of) sin, that (God’s) grace may be multiplied . . . ?*” (366).

Paul answered the question whether one should persist in sin with the emphatic negation—“**not at all!**” It means “**Never!**” or “**By no means!**” (cf. Morris 155, 245). Paul gave the following lines of argument concerning why Christians must not continue in sin (i.e. live or persist in sin). First, Christians “died to sin.” He asked, “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom. 6:2). “To die to sin is to be wholly disinclined in mind to commit it . . .” (Lard 195). *Died* is from an historic aorist verb which implies an action rather than a state (Alford 366; Lard 195; Morris 245), and the time in history when death to sin occurred is baptism. Chrysostom (ca. AD 185) said, “Being dead to sin means not obeying it any more. Baptism has made us dead to sin. . . . [H]owever many commands sin may give us, we no longer obey it but remain unmoved by it, as a corpse does” (qtd. in Brey, 6. 153). This is the point in time when the Christian “. . . became as separate from and apathetic towards sin as the dead corpse is separate from and apathetic towards the functions and stir of life” (Alford 366). The argument is that if it is the case that one died to sin, then it is as absurd to think that one could live in it. Death to sin marks the beginning of the Christian life. Therefore, to live in sin would be inconsistent with the Christian life which began with death to sin.

Secondly, if one does not understand what it means to die to sin, then he does not understand what it means to be baptized. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Rom. 6:3). Morris explains:

. . . [I]n the first century . . . to “baptize” evoked associations of violence. It meant “immerse” rather than “dip.” It was used . . . of people being drowned, or of ships being sunk. . . . Josephus used it metaphorically of crowds who flooded into Jerusalem and “wrecked the city.” . . . It is quite in keeping with this that Jesus referred to his death as baptism (Mk. 10:38; Lk. 12:50). When it is applied to Christian initiation we ought not to think in terms of gentleness and inspiration; it means death, death to a whole way of life. It is this that is Paul’s point here. Christians are people who have died, and their baptism emphasizes that death. Death runs through this passage and is mentioned in every verse up to v. 13. We should not let the modern associations of baptism blind us to the point Paul is making so strongly. He is saying that it is quite impossible for anyone who understands what baptism means to acquiesce cheerfully in a sinful life. The baptized have died to all that. (246-47)

Paul’s third response concerning why Christians must not persist in sin involves the fact that the Christian life is one of a new quality. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised . . . so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Paul’s argument is that if the Christian is to walk in newness of life, then he must not continue in sin. “To walk” is a metaphor that means “to live” (Lard 201). “Newness of life” means “in life of a new quality” (Denney 633). Paul also wrote, “. . . [I]f anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Therefore, it is the case that Christians must by no means continue or persist in sin, because (1) Christians have died to sin, (2) Christians became such by baptism, and baptism implies death to sin and (3) Christians live a new quality of life. It is this latter characteristic of the Christian life to which we give our attention in the remainder of this lesson.

An Historical Base

Walking in newness of life (i.e. the Christian life) rests on a solid historical base. Christianity is not based merely on ideas. Christianity is based in historical fact. As British author Graham Fisher has stated: “The rationale of Christianity is based solidly in an event, not an idea. An event can be put under the critical microscope of historical investigation and can be interpreted logically and rationally” (16). Precisely, Paul identified the historical base of the Christian life when he wrote that the Gospel consists of how He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4). The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide the sure and steadfast nature of Christian faith. N. B. Hardeman eloquently extolled the significance of these events of history in the following:

. . . [T]here are three fundamental and basic facts of the gospel of our Lord. Here they are: first, the death of Christ for the sins of a lost and ruined world; second, his burial in a borrowed tomb; and third, his bursting the bars and coming forth, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel. That’s the basis upon which all of our hallowed hopes and fondest desires must forever rest. Now, friends, those facts are like three piers supporting a wonderful bridge that spans the arch from the shores of time to the shores of eternity. And just as stable as are those piers, is the Gospel of Christ. In the city of Memphis there are three bridges across the Mississippi River, not more than a hundred feet apart. I’ve watched the building of two of them within my time. I’ve seen men go down deep into the water, down to solid rock and erect great concrete piers. Then they begin to span the arch between them. Finally they pour in the concrete, and thus the structure. But those bridges are no stronger than are the piers which support them. Just so, there is no hope

whatsoever for mankind apart from the sublime fact that Jesus Christ tasted death for every man, that he was buried in Joseph's new tomb, that on the morning of the third day he burst the bars and came forth triumphant. He plucked the rose of immortality from the real of the dead and planted it to blossom and to bloom upon the bosom of His own grave, thus giving hope and joy to mankind. So, preach the Gospel, go tell the world that Christ the Saviour, the Son of God, died for their sins. Go make them conscious of the fact that without such they are helpless, hopeless and hapless in this world. Tell them that Christ was buried, and while He was buried, all the demons of hell and the devil's representatives on earth rejoiced. But their joy was turned to sorrow on the glad morning of the resurrection, when Christianity was born upon the earth and the hope of everlasting life beyond was ours. (40)

The basic theme of Romans 6 is set against the backdrop of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the Christian life (newness of life) is as a *participation* (cf. Alford 367) in all three of these events. Stott observes that these events are "not only historical facts and significant doctrines, but also personal experiences" since one who obeys the Gospel, in some sense, shares in them. Paul stated, ". . . [Y]ou obeyed from [your] . . . heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom. 6:17). We were baptized into His death (v. 3), buried with Him through baptism into death and raised "just as Christ" to walk in newness of life (v. 4). The historical base of the Christian life enables us to know that our faith rests not on "cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16). Furthermore, such enables us to *always* walk in newness of life, because these events center in Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). "[W]ho through Him [you] believe in God, who raised Him from the dead

and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21).

A Conditional Beginning

Not only is it the case that the Christian life has the historical base of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it also has a conditional beginning. The conditional beginning of newness of life (i.e. the Christian life) is baptism. As Everett Ferguson says in his 2009 monumental volume on baptism in early Christianity, “. . . [T]here is no participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ without baptism” (157). “Newness of life” is conditioned on one being baptized *into* Christ. Paul wrote, “Therefore, **IF** anyone is **IN CHRIST**, he is a new creation . . .” (2 Cor. 5:17, emp. added). Leon Morris wrote, “[B]aptism, comes right at the beginning of the Christian life” (246). Concerning Paul’s argument in Romans 6:3ff, F. F. Bruce says that it is certain from this that Paul “. . . did not regard baptism as an ‘optional extra’ . . . and he would not have contemplated the phenomenon of an ‘unbaptized believer.’ . . . In apostolic times it is plain that baptism followed immediately upon confession of faith in Christ” (136).

Read carefully the following statement concerning baptism:

. . . [B]aptism . . . marked the beginning of Christian experience. . . . [B]aptism signified entry into the Christian society. . . . To say “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” is tantamount to saying “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” It is not by accident that Romans Chapter 6 with its teaching on union with Christ in death and resurrection through baptism comes immediately after Romans chapter 5 with its high doctrine of

justification. They belong together. Those who repented and believed the Word were baptized. That was the invariable pattern, so far as we know.

. . . [Baptism] meant such a close union with Christ that the believer was a participant in [H]is death and resurrection. . . . The important thing is that . . . it [is] abundantly clear that baptism and conversion belong together. . . . (Green 152-53)

Who wrote the above statement? The author is Michael Green, prominent Evangelical scholar in the Church of England. The source is Green's definitive volume *Evangelism in the Early Church*. Green's conclusions agree with those of Ferguson in his aforementioned definitive scholarly work where he writes: "The New Testament and early Christian literature are virtually unanimous in ascribing a saving significance to baptism. . . . Baptism . . . was not seen as a human work but as God's work, and the salvation in baptism was premised on the saving effort of Christ's death on the cross and [H]is victorious resurrection" (854).

A Royal Banner

With the historical base of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the beginning of this newness of life conditional on one being baptized into Christ, the Christian life is also characterized by a royal banner. The royal banner is that of King Jesus. The reign of the Lordship of Jesus in the life of the Christian is implied in the following statement made by Paul in his discussion of walking in newness of life: ". . . [R]eckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts. . . . For sin shall not have dominion over you . . ." (Rom. 6:11-12, 14).

Two key words in the above cited verses are *reign* (*basileuto*) and *dominion* (*kurieusei*). The former, *reign*, means “to be king, to rule as king,” and the grammatical construction used in the Greek text here means “do not continue or . . . do not make it your habit” (Rogers and Rogers 327). Richard Rogers observed: “Notice here that we have both the Greek imperative mood and the Greek present tense. This implies that there is a continuous attitude and a continuous action on the part of the believer. Because of our oneness in Christ and His death, we are not to allow the dominion of sin in our life. . . . Christ is our Lord, not sin” (94).

Dominion (v. 14) means “to be lord over” (Rogers and Rogers 327). Note 6:9 where Paul says, “Death no longer has dominion over Him [i.e. Christ].” R.C. Bell has shown the connection between Romans 6:9 and 6:14. He wrote”

After sin had once caused Christ’s death, [H]e was forever beyond its claim, dominion, and doom. Christians are identified with [H]im in death and share [H]is grace with [H]im; their death must be as certain and final as was [H]is. . . . The supreme weakness and tragedy of the church has ever been, even until now, the unwillingness of Christians to be identified with their Lord in death. . . . When temptation assails us, we should say: “No, we cannot hear and feel your appeal and power, for we have been dead ever since we became Christians.” (50-51)

Paul says, “. . . [O]ur old man was crucified with Him. . .” (Rom. 6:6). This is a “. . . vivid way of saying the power of sin is broken in the believer. To come to Christ means the complete end of a whole way of life. There may be slips . . .” (Morris 251), but now sin does not suit us. Buswell wrote, “One who has accepted God’s grace has

thereby accepted God's gracious Son as his sovereign Lord. One cannot have two kings. Your sovereign is either Christ or sin, not both" (26). To walk in newness of life does not mean that sin is no longer a force but ". . . Paul's point is that it is not supreme. Believers are to make sure accordingly that they do not deny their freedom by allowing sin to rule them" (Morris 257). There is a throne above the world, and there's a Man on that throne (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). As those who have submitted to the Lordship of Jesus, and thus the reign and rule of Jesus, we see our hearts as connecting to that throne from which Jesus reigns. The King is in residence there! His royal banner should be flying over the throne of my heart and life.

An Eternal Blessing

With the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ providing an *historical base* of truth, meeting the *conditional beginning* of the Christian life through baptism, and now living under the *royal banner* of Jesus, the Lord of daily life, the Christian life also is characterized by the hope of an *eternal blessing of newness*. Paul wrote, ". . . [T]he wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). There is now the sense in which Christians are made new every day. Paul affirmed, ". . . [W]e do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Although the Christian life is characterized by newness, sometimes even the life of the Christian goes stale, zeal cools, faith weakens, and the spirit is dampened. However, as the Book of Lamentations declares: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; They are new [fresh] every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I will hope in [H]im'" (Lam. 3:22-24, ESV).

We need to claim the mercies of the Lord that are new (fresh) every morning. The prayer of the writer of Lamentations should be our prayer also: “Restore us to Yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old” (Lam. 5:21). Because everything associated with Earth loses its edge, grows old, and dies, we need connected to Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever who provides a new and living way (cf. Heb. 10:20; 13:8).

One day the Christian, as well as all who have lived in other dispensations redeemed by the blood of Christ (cf. Heb. 9:15, 22), will experience as a present reality the newness of heaven that will never grow old, be lost, or pass away. The assurance of this hope is verified by the evidence of the resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4). John described this newness in the following: “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘. . . And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, ***I make all things new***” (Rev. 21:3-5, emp. added).

The revelation of the eternal, ever present newness of heaven is in sharp contrast to the present order of things of Earth. Our houses, our cars and trucks, our clothes, our bodies, and all else, do not maintain newness. Reuel Lemmons pictured it very well in the following:

A little while ago I stood on one of the foothills of the Ozarks and looked through the tops of the persimmon bushes at the old clapboard roof of a little log hut. Then I went down across the hillside and crossed the rocky branch and up the slope on the other

side to what used to be my home. The paling fence around the yard was almost gone, and the gate was hanging from the post by a single hinge. The cedar tree that used to be in the corner of the yard has been blasted by a storm and only the stump remained. The spring that once flowed, clear as crystal at the foot of the hill, was turned into a muddy seep, and the flowers that bloomed by the pathway had long since been choked out by the weeds. The corner of the porch had fallen away, and I had to pull myself up into the doorway. Inside, the dust was heavy upon the floor, and spider webs hung from the walls. The paper sagged in great folds from the ceiling. As I stood in the middle of that big, bare, empty room—still as a tomb—and looked at the circle of black places burned out in the puncheon floor by the live coals that had rolled out from the old stone fireplace, I could not help but think of the happy circles that had gathered there in years gone by. In the deathlike stillness and silence of that room I could not help but think of the happiness that had transpired there. But many of the voices that once there rang with laughter have been stilled forever. Members of those families have scattered, to the north, south, east and west, and some of them are dead. As I left that clearing in the woods that day I knew that a part of me would always be buried there, because that place was home to me when I was a child. Since that time a fire has destroyed the old homestead, and a pile of bleached chimney stones stands like a tombstone upon a barren hill.

The old home was earthly. It had to go back to dust. But as I think of it, I cannot help but think of another home that I have . . . one built on a higher hill. Its streets are paved with gold instead of strewn with stones. Its walls are of jasper, instead of oaken boards, and its gate is a single pearl. In the place of that wasted cedar, there shall be the tree of life, and instead of the muddy spring the eternal, pure river of life. In the place of that old log house there shall be a mansion bright

and fair, and around the throne of God there shall gather all the family of God. From every age and every nation, and all the kindred tribes and tongues, shall gather a circle in a family reunion that shall never be dismissed. . . . They shall never scatter, and they shall never die. When I think of that Home over there, I want to go there, don't you? (129-30)

Conclusion:

Christians are obligated and privileged to live the Christian life. Among the numerous ways this life is described includes that of a walk that is characterized by newness. Walking in newness of life in Christ rests on the *historical base* of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It involves a *conditional beginning* (i.e. baptism into the death of Christ). It is a life lived under the *royal banner* of the reign of Jesus in one's life. Finally, it is lived expectantly in hope of the *eternal blessing* of the forever newness of heaven.

John Stott has related the following timely incident from the life of the Duke of Windsor:

On 28 May 1972 the Duke of Windsor, the uncrowned King Edward VIII, died in Paris. The same evening a television programme rehearsed the main events of his life. Extracts from earlier films were shown, in which he answered questions about his upbringing, brief reign and abdication. Recalling his boyhood as Prince of Wales, he said: "My father [King George V] was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me saying, 'My dear boy, you must always remember who you are.'" (187-88)

Does not the heavenly Father say to His children, "My dear sons and daughters, always remember who you

are and walk in newness of life”? May Christians everywhere hear His plea and meet the challenge.

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Biographical Sketch

Charles C. Pugh III is in his 43rd year of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He is one of the founders of West Virginia School of Preaching where he serves as an instructor. He has studied and taught for more than 30 years in the field of Christian Apologetics and teaches three apologetics courses at WVSOP as well as other courses. He is director of the recently formed Warren Christian Apologetics Center, an informational theistic center that exists for the purpose of affirming and defending the Christian worldview while aiming to challenge the growing global influence of atheistic thought. The Warren Center is scheduled in the Spring 2010 to open its new facility which will be located in Parkersburg, WV.

Since 1999, due to a vocal fold disease, much of his work has been concentrated in the areas of writing and publishing. He is the author of several books and tracts and owner of Threefold Publications. He preaches several Gospel meetings yearly and appears on various

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WALKING BEFORE GOD FROM CHILDHOOD

Andy Robison

At the peak of his career of leadership, Samuel was giving up that mantle to a system God did not desire but would tolerate, and to a man God would choose but who would soon afterward sin. The children of Israel wanted a king in order to be like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:4). Samuel felt rejected by all of this, but the Lord assured him, "...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). After warning people of the governmental excesses with which a king would burden them (1 Sam. 8:10-18), Samuel obediently followed the Lord's bidding to anoint the chosen man to the office God was, in a manner of thinking, abdicating to accommodate the misguided will of the people (1 Sam. 9:15-18; 12:12). It was not long after this that said man, Saul, would have the kingdom ripped from him due to his disobedience (1 Sam. 13, 15).

Samuel was quite the study in contrasts to Saul, firstly in that his career endured in righteousness for a lifetime. Dedicated to the Lord by a godly mother (1 Sam. 1), he had served faithfully in an office (prophet) God not only tolerated but also approved and desired. Samuel would not succumb to personal whims buoyed by some Nietzschean "will to power", but would humbly serve the Lord, and therefore the people all his days, even through rather difficult circumstances. His earthbound time was one of such leadership that he would even be called upon after earth's limiting power was lifted (1 Sam. 28). At King Saul's coronation, prophet Samuel made a speech

with a slight tone of farewell in which he defended with a triumphant chord his integrity.

...“Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you” (1 Sam. 12:1-4).

Samuel’s claims are in direct contrast to the predictions he made of what a king would do (1 Sam. 8:10-18). The people’s answer affirmed Samuel’s innocence in all these regards (1 Sam. 12:5). He had claimed to walk in integrity before God from his childhood. They had agreed.

Walking before God from childhood is a need. Each infant surviving the tenuous travail of the womb is slapped into a world of evil. “Perverse generation(s)” (Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15) persist. Satan is regarded as the temporary “ruler of this world” (John 12:31) and “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). In continuing “perilous times” (2 Tim. 3:1), “evil men...grow worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). If babes stand any chance against forces of evil, they must come to know the loving Father in heaven.

Walking before God from childhood is a blessing. Any gospel preacher of any tenure has looked into the moist eyes of a penitent middle-aged or older sinner whose life has been irreparably marred by his or her own transgressions. Forgiveness is to them offered, but regret

will temptingly haunt (cf. 1 Cor 15:9; Acts 26:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:13). How blessed is the one who has avoided such turmoil by persistent youth-borne godliness. Oh, yes, each individual ends up sinning at some point (Rom. 3:23). But all can see the difference between a life lived in rebellious squalor and a walk in the light with an occasional stumble.

The Parents' Service

In regard to the acquiring of Samuel's soul, Satan may have been dealt the harshest blow by Samuel's godly mother. Barren for some time and suffering relentless ridicule from her rival for it, she did not retaliate but tearfully relied on God in prayer (1 Sam. 1:1-10). Willing to give to the Giver of all life, she vowed dedication of any male child to the service of the Lord (1 Sam. 1:11-18).

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord...” (Psalm 127:3) and must be regarded as such in every society. Observe: The worldly do not so regard them. Some rush into parenthood desiring to have children “because they are so cute.” When responsibility stubbornly presents itself to the juvenile father and mother, selfishness often takes priority over the welfare of the child. Children are on other occasions regarded as accidental fetal tissue conceived in immorality and subject to legalized murder (abortion). If allowed to live, they are often thrust into unstable homes with unprepared parents. Whether living in sin or in marriage, individuality brimming with immaturity causes those on whom the child should be able to rely the most to either mistreat or abandon them to more responsible grandparents or the state. Even if these children are given a home and reasonable sustenance, how often are they dedicated (by constant action, not by an unauthorized religious ceremony) to the Lord? The world, and even the church need to be reminded that children are

not to be brought into this world because they are cute to have around. They are a heritage from the Lord. Once conceived, they are to be treated with respect, dignity, and appropriate nurturing discipline to raise them to be servants of God. Otherwise, parents often end up raising scourges on the world.

This was the case with Eli, the priest who heard Hannah's prayer. He had "honored his sons more than" God (1 Sam. 2:29). Those "sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (3:13). Thus, Hophi and Phinehas became blights upon Israel, abusing the sacrificial system of provision for priests (2:12-17) and committing fornication with the women who came to the tabernacle to worship (2:22). Oh, Eli made belated, verbal efforts to quell their evils (2:22-25), but the judgment of Scripture is against this otherwise godly man for not dedicating his children to the Lord. How could they have been expected to walk before God from childhood when they were left to choose their own ways?

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him (Prov. 22:15).

The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother (Prov. 29:15).

Some children don't stand much of a chance of godliness from childhood because their parents don't genuinely love them. Oh, the parents will buy them everything under the sun, while ignoring the Biblical principles:

He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly (Prov. 13:24).

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Children do not deserve a choice regarding elementary moral choices and church participation. They will exercise their will as trained adults. This is a controversial position to take in a day when the government seeks more control over one's offspring. But it is the position of the Lord.

Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction (Prov. 19:18).

Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).

There are caveats. Discipline (chastening) does not equal merely punishment. It is a whole process of raising the child to be a self-respecting, God-fearing adult. Neither does any connotation of discipline warrant child abuse. Some children raised well will still choose wrongly (Samuel has no rebuke of his parenting skills recorded in Scripture, yet his sons went astray [1 Sam. 8:1-3].) Having dispensed with disclaimers, the truth remains timeless—children look at life with better possibilities and with that enviable quality of hope when their parents purpose them toward godliness from the beginning.

Children deserve parents who are godly examples. The story of one young man living with his girlfriend and her children illustrates it. His defense was the Bible training he was giving the children they might not otherwise get. The response from a Gospel preacher was that his actions negated anything he said. Children deserve parents who have godly interests for the children. Hollywood stage moms illustrate it. They press their children toward fame and fortune, and find them in secular drug rehabilitation centers in late teenage years. How much better would it have been for these parents to push their children toward spiritual worship and selfless living. Parents who guide their children toward godly living serve them well. Children who listen return the favor.

The Children's Service

After being left in Eli's care for the service of the Lord (1 Sam. 1:23-28), Samuel did not rebel, but "grew before the Lord" (2:21) "in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men" (2:26; cf. Luke 2:52). As Samuel did so, Eli received a prophecy of judgment against his house from a third party, an unnamed prophet (1 Sam. 2:27-36). When it was time for this prophecy to be carried out, the deliverance of the final message was entrusted with Samuel (3:1-21). Samuel's anxiety over delivering the decree (3:15) is understandable—he had likely allowed Eli to become a father figure to him. Nevertheless, his commitment to the Lord's will was greater.

The lesson of the Lord to put family after spiritual commitment (Luke 9:23-24; Mark 3:31-35) seems a more difficult task for the child than the man. Children in the sinful world are quite often faced with obstacles seemingly insurmountable. Some parents have so objected to their accountability-aged children becoming Christians that the children have had to leave the home. Others endure

mockery and insults, even at the family dinner table. Sometimes children whose families are in the church are still exposed to everything from minor imperfections to gross hypocrisy. Walking before God from childhood is not often a singsong, pleasant, enjoyable journey.

Children who do follow this commitment, however, grasp the significance of a great promise of the Father. The apostle Paul wrote to children in the church:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3).

Referring to the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, Paul regards it the first with a promise. Previous ones had been buoyed by warnings (Ex. 20:4-7), but this, the first to deal with man's relation with his fellow man rather than man's relation directly with God, is accompanied by a promise:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you (Ex. 20:12).

The promise to the Israelites was that obedience would increase their opportunities as a nation to stay in the Promised Land for generations to come, not necessarily that each individual would endure to old age. That background answers the objections to Paul's passage: "Well, some good, obedient children have died young."

Compare parallel passages. In the restatement of the Ten Commandments, the fifth reads like this:

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long,

and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you (Deut. 5:16).

The admonition to general obedience carries the similar pledge:

You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess (Deut. 5:33; cf. 6:2; 11:8-9).

Israel, inheriting a temporal land, would be allowed to keep it longer if its people were obedient (cf. Deut. 28). God designed, both for the defense of His verity and the benefit of the population, that His works be relentlessly taught and learned (Deut. 6:4-9). He wanted each Israelite to walk before Him from childhood because He loved the individuals therein as well as the nation as a whole.

Today, societal blessing (Prov. 14:34) is still achieved via the training ground of the home. If children learn early respect for authority from godly parents, a culture might just persist longer before suffering judgment from God (cf. Jer. 18:7-10). Individualizing this promise in literality is not the intent of Paul's passage. As a proverb's generalization, the principle is true. Godly parents give good advice that can curb the recklessness which might otherwise prematurely destroy a young life.

Hear my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life (Prov. 3:10-13).

The fear of the Lord prolongs days, But the years of the wicked will be shortened (Prov. 10:27).

That such proverbs are general truths is illustrated by hyperbole of Prov. 10:30:

The righteous will never be removed, But the wicked will not inhabit the earth.

Walking before God from childhood is a service to the child, the parents, and all society. Parents benefit from the service a child offers by walking before God from childhood (Prov. 10:1; 15:20; 17:21, 25; 19:13; 29:3). Society benefits in that a new light to the world and an extra measure of salt to the earth has been applied (Matt. 5:13-16).

The Father's Service

The Father who knows true goodness to children (cf. Matt. 7:7-11) has instructed with pertinent warnings on godliness from childhood. He did so through a man who desperately sought wisdom (1 Kings 3:4-15), then turned his heart to the empty vanities of the world (Eccl. 1:1-2). After an exploration of the hopelessness of his experiential findings (Eccl. 1-11), he offers the sage advice:

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come, And the years draw
near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them."
(Eccl. 12:1).

The colloquial expression, "Getting old is not for wimps," elucidates the meaning of the second half of this verse, but not with the poetic eloquence of the Spirit's

revelation in the remainder of the chapter. Youth is described as a time

While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars,
Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after
the rain (Eccl. 12:2).

These extraterrestrial figures in Scripture at times represent the powers that be in glorious nations (Gen. 37:9-10; Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:31). Could they then, by metonymy, represent man's ruling mental power and understanding, his ability to intelligently function? While young, these powers are at their best. Before they are lost is the time to begin service to God. Such a pattern will avoid later regret.

Old age is described as

...the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And
the strong men bow down; When the grinders ease
because they are few, And those that look through the
windows grow dim (Eccl. 12:3).

Might "the keepers of the house" represent the hands so necessary for daily functioning? Might the "strong men" be the sturdy legs by which a man walks? Might the few "grinders" be remaining teeth? Could "those that look through windows" be eyes, whose acuity diminishes with age?

And what of the "doors (that) are shut in the streets" (12:4)? Could this be the loss of hearing, causing the "sound of grinding" or anything to be "low"? In old age, sleep is often elusive: "...one rises up at the sound of a bird" (12:4). Those muscular abilities by which a man expresses his soul in music weaken: "the daughters of music are brought low" (12:4).

Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. (12:5).

Heights, in old age, are avoided due to problems with balance. Everything becomes a terror. Hair turns as white as the almond tree blossoms. A grasshopper's weight exceeds feeble man's ability. Desire (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12) fails. Death ensues.¹ The time for serving God is over (12:5b).

If obedience to godly parents works toward a benefit of lasting life, youthful godliness affords that "golden years" be fraught not with remorse, but endowed with joy. Have you witnessed the grace of God saving a profligate sinner in his old age repentance? The tender appreciation of such mercy is tempered by the saved one's expressions of regrets: He did not use his energy for a good and lasting purpose; he did not have saving influence on his loved ones. How much better it is to walk before God from childhood. Therefore,

Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well (12:6).

Life ends suddenly as a pitcher shattered in an accident, or the very source of life-sustaining water being broken and unusable.²

Then the dust will return to earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it (12:7).

The conclusion of Solomon's searching for the meaning of life, with and then without God, came full circle back to this:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13-14).

These warnings come as a service from the God who loves. Children are born into this world with capacity for learning beyond what man really comprehends. They grow and they learn, unfortunately, the ways of the world and the distractions of the devil. Things evil and things not inherently evil become obstacles to the one true purpose God has for His creation. He puts them here with free will to see if they love Him. The father of lies (John 8:44), by contrast, seeks to distort all truth about the reason for living. But here it is. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Let young people know that walking before God from childhood is the only reasonable, rational choice! Ask Solomon. And ask the myriads of souls who were almost lost through a lifetime of profligacy, only to be saved when energy for service failed them. And, though impossible to ask, imagine the response of those whom death overcame before salvation intervened.

Appreciate and Augment Your Circumstance.

Circumstances that be and choices that ancestors made (cf. Ex. 20:4-5) make for a wide variance of souls’ situations. Some are raised in the church. Appreciate it, dear one. You may learn persecution at a young age. Ridicule over the things your family does not allow may tear at your spirit at a tender age. Recoil not, nor rebel. Your parents, from love (cf. Heb. 12:5-11), are teaching you. What other motivation could explain their uneasy friction with the ease of following popular culture? And more than appreciating it, use it. You’ve been given gifts most of the world does not know (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). You

have opportunity to learn the Lord's Scriptures while your mind is at its freshest. You have opportunity to serve your fellow man while your limbs so energetically allow (cf. Rom. 6:13). You have occasion to reach out to a multiplicity of friends like the rest of your life will never know. And you have opening to bring those young souls into the loving arms of their heavenly Father, as well—a chance their parents are not affording them. You've been given much. Remember, then, the words of the Lord: "For to everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b).

Are you in the audience of this lecture having turned later in life from a squandered youth? You have special opportunity, as well. The apostle Paul was ever appreciative of the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:9-10), ever vowing to press forward and forget those things that were behind (Phil. 3:12-14). Rejoice! You've given up the sinful lifestyle you know by choice or by (to some degree) default. You may run with endurance the race that is set before you (Heb. 12:2), and warn the masses surrounding you to learn from your mistakes. Perhaps some will listen, and avoid their own.

Conclusion:

At a youth rally men's class, with ages 12 to 75 present, many were lamenting in appropriately guarded vagueness a lifestyle in sin. Lest the youngest perceive a temporary foray into Satan's ways an inevitability, the oldest among the group forcefully proclaimed, "I don't want you (pointing at one of the youngest) to ever know sin." Hyperbole granted, his point is well taken. How much better it is to remember one's Creator in the days of

youth. The potential of difficulties avoided will likely, thankfully, never be fathomed.

That man continues to serve well, though “the sun and the light, the moon and the stars” are being darkened. The “clouds” are beginning to “return after the rain” (Eccl. 12:2d), that is, troubles come increasingly quickly.³ He awaits his reward.

Samuel “walked before God from...childhood” (1 Sam. 12:4). His career path shines with nobility. He “judged Israel all the days of his life” (1 Sam. 7:15). The call now is not to be a great prophet or judge, but a faithful Christian. Learn from an example in the Old Law about the principle of starting young in the New. Be reminded, then, of one who most likely started in the Old Law and lived to see the New come to fruition. To Timothy, who had learned well the yet readily available written revelation of God, Paul wrote:

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

In this last era of completed revelation from God, start young in learning the revealed will of God for worship and living. It will serve you well. Nothing can serve you any better. It will make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus.

Start young. Youth may have escaped, but you will never again be any younger than you are today.

¹ The possible meanings of Ecclesiastes 12's figures are from John Waddey, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon: An Exposition*. Abilene, Texas: Quality Publications, 1985, pp. 69-70.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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Biographical Sketch

Andy Robison has been the preacher for the Hopewell church of Christ, Washington, WV, since 2001. Prior to that he had worked with the Camden Ave. congregation in Parkersburg, WV, the Oakhurst congregation in Farmington, WV, and the Pennsboro, WV church. He taught Bible and directed choruses at Jackson (TN) Christian School for two years. Andy attended Ohio Valley College and received the B.A. from Harding University, with a double major in Bible and Vocal Music. He has done graduate work at Harding University Graduate School of Religion and returned to Harding University for teaching certification. Andy has written a number of songs and helped produce several CDs of a cappella singing for the benefit of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. He and his wife Marsha have two children, Hannah and Andrew.

WALK IN INTEGRITY

Beth Cook

Have you ever wondered what comes to the mind of others when your name is mentioned? Several years ago, in a conversation with a co-worker of a member of the church, reference was made to this member's character. My acquaintance, who was not a Christian, proceeded to say this member practiced his Christianity, even in the coal mines with fellow workers. He said one never heard any inappropriate speech or saw any inappropriate behavior in this person. He spoke of this Christian's honesty and integrity. The Bible speaks on the subject of integrity. "He who walks with integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will become known" (Proverbs 10:9). We read in Proverbs 28:6, "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich. Scripture both commends and commands integrity in God's people. "The integrity of the upright will guide them" (Proverbs 11:3). In Psalm 51:6, after David acknowledged his sin with Bathsheba, he cried out to God, "Behold You desire truth in the inward parts." Integrity and a willingness to do right pleases God (1 Chronicles 29:17). Unfortunately, one only has to look around at our society today to find that integrity is not a very popular practice. Much of the media, including television, makes light of integrity. Sometimes public figures disappoint us with their lack of integrity. And sometimes we, as Christians, struggle to walk in integrity. In Psalm 26, our text for this lesson, the word "integrity" is used twice. David was suffering in some manner, and he was appealing to God's justice to deliver him. "Vindicate me, O Lord, For I have walked in my integrity" (Psalm 26:1). Then in Psalm 26:11 David vowed, "But as for me, I will walk I my integrity." Regardless of what others did, David promised

to lead a life of integrity and uprightness according to God's dictates. David's course was set. May we follow David's example as we study how scripture challenges each one of us as women to "walk in integrity."

Integrity Explained

What exactly is integrity? Integrity is defined as "honesty, sincerity, singleness of purpose" (Nelson 602). Webster's dictionary defines integrity as "a being complete; wholeness, soundness, uprightness." Two words used in scripture that are closely related to integrity are "blameless" and "upright." We are familiar with the term "integer" from which integrity comes. Integer refers to a whole (undivided), as in a whole number. A woman of integrity is not divided or hypocritical. She is not a different person depending on her surroundings. Her "whole" being has a singleness of purpose—to be a faithful Christian. She is that faithful Christian whether in the church building, in her home, on the job, or in the community. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states that "although Jesus did not use the word "integrity, he called for purity of heart (Matthew 5:8), singleness of purpose (Matthew 6:22), and purity of motive (Matthew 6:1-6)" (602). Certainly, integrity also includes moral purity.

Walking in integrity does not mean we are perfect or sinless. But a person of integrity acknowledges sin and takes measures to correct those sins. *The Pulpit Commentary* states that while saints are not morally perfect "they have an 'honest and good heart'" (196). Further, "Whatever may have been their past life, or however much of imperfection may still cleave to them, they are conscious of a pure intent, a firm and steadfast resolve to trust only what is true, to do only what is right, and to order their

whole conduct according to the holy will of God” (Pulpit 196). In a sermon on integrity, Batsell Barrett Baxter said the following:

Integrity demands that a person put on no false front, that he wear no artificial mask, and that he play no deceptive role. It means that a person must be openly honest, making certain that he conveys no false claims either in word or in life. Integrity excludes lying, stealing, cheating, and every form of deception. It is a broad inclusive term referring to one of the deepest and most important qualities of a worthy life. It describes the man who is worthy of complete trust.

As we come to understand the meaning of integrity, we learn that our Christian walk must include honesty, uprightness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, purity and wholeness—all traits of integrity.

Integrity Exemplified

The Lord never requires the impossible from His children. To walk in integrity is an attainable goal for the Christian. The Bible provides examples of people who, though not infallible, walked in integrity.

Joseph walked in integrity. He was sold into Egyptian slavery by his own brothers when he was just a young man. While living in Potiphar’s house, he was falsely accused and sent to prison. Throughout Joseph’s trials he never relinquished his integrity. In fact, as Potiphar’s wife persistently tried to seduce him, Joseph recognized he would be sinning not only against her and her husband, but also against God. How easily Joseph could have rationalized his behavior by saying, “Who would know?” But a wise Joseph said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) Not only did he refuse Potiphar’s wife, he RAN from her

presence. Oh, how we need to learn the lesson to run from sin, and retain our integrity! Ron Mehl in his book, *After Words*, wrote, “When Joseph ran from the crude seduction of Potiphar’s wife, he wasn’t just running from a woman. He was running from anything that would abort God’s purposes in his life” (78). May we, like Joseph, seek God’s purpose and approval in our daily walk. God blessed Joseph. Scripture tells us repeatedly “the Lord was with Joseph.”

Job walked in integrity. “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). But God allowed Job to be tested, because God believed in Job’s integrity. After Job lost all his wealth and his family, he fell before God and worshipped Him. “In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22). In Job 2:3, God reminded Satan concerning Job, “And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.” After losing his health, Job’s wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” Job’s response to her was “shall we accept good from God and not adversity?” A common, erroneous belief during the time of Job was that when someone suffered it was the result of unrighteous living. His friends continued to badger him to confess his unrighteousness and sins. Again, Job declared his integrity and innocence. “As long as my breath is in me, And the breath of God in my nostrils, My lips will not speak wickedness, Nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me That I should say you are right; Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me, My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live” (Job 27:3-6). Knowing he had not lied or deceived anyone, Job appealed to be weighed in God’s balance and to be declared

righteous. “If I have walked with falsehood, Or if my foot has hastened to deceit, Let me be weighed on honest scales, That God may know my integrity” (Job 31:5-6). Even after everything Job endured he did not give up on God.

Sometimes it takes much less for us to become frustrated and say, “I quit!” Though Job certainly expressed anger, frustration and confusion through his sufferings, he never lost his faith in God or his integrity. Even in adversity may we, like Job, say, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

David walked in integrity. When Samuel told Saul that his kingdom would not continue, Samuel said, “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart...” (1 Samuel 13:14). Paul tells us in Acts 22:13 that man was David. After being delivered from Saul, David stated in a song of praise, “I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity” (1 Samuel 22:24). Solomon, speaking to God about David, said, “You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You” (1 Kings 3:6). God, speaking to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:4, stated, “Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and on uprightness.” Perhaps we remember David most for his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). David fell and fell hard, but he was willing to accept correction, get back up and start over. It’s been said concerning David, a man of integrity, “Yet we know about David’s sins. It isn’t a lack of sin that defines the upright man, but his attitude toward sin” (Hamilton). We read in Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 David acknowledged and confessed his sin to God, and he found the joy of forgiveness. David asked the question in Psalm 15, “Who can be considered faithful to God?” He answered, “He who walks uprightly and works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart” (Psalm

15:2). That description of integrity still holds true today! May we say, “I will walk in my integrity.”

Daniel walked in integrity. When Daniel was a young man he was carried into Babylonian captivity after Jerusalem was besieged. Being trained to serve in the king’s palace, Daniel showed great integrity when he refused to violate Jewish dietary restrictions. He purposed in his heart not to defile himself by eating the king’s delicacies. God blessed Daniel, and he rose to a place of prominence under Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. When the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, Daniel again rose to prominence under King Darius. Daniel 6:3 tells us, “Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.” When the governors and satraps, out of jealousy, sought to find some charge against Daniel, they could find none! Daniel 6:4 records, “So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.” What an example of integrity! Could it be said of us that no fault can be found against us? At this point, the only option Daniel’s enemies had was to make a decree concerning the law of Daniel’s God. That decree stated no one could petition any god or man but King Darius for thirty days. Again, Daniel’s integrity shone like a beacon when he went home and prayed to God three times a day with his window open! Though thrown into the lion’s den, God delivered Daniel. Daniel’s integrity had a great impact on the king. He declared Daniel’s God “the living God.” Daniel’s choice to obey God defined his integrity. Oh, that we would live so the world would declare our God “the living God!”

The Bible tells us of many other men and women of integrity. We can learn from the integrity of Paul who said, "...I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). Esther, as well as the virtuous woman of Proverbs, serves as superb examples of integrity. But the greatest example and model of integrity is Jesus Christ. Our lives should exemplify total honesty. Batsell Baxter wrote in a sermon:

Christ lived such a life before us. He taught the highest of principles and then lived his life in perfect conformity to those principles. He was the same to all men. He was the same on every occasion. He was openly honest, hiding nothing, and ashamed of nothing. Eventually, his life so contrasted with those about him that it engendered hatred and jealousy, which ultimately caused his death. How great the cost! But, how inspiring the example!

Integrity Examined

Can it be said that our daily lives are characterized by integrity? As Christians, integrity should be exhibited in every word we say and every deed we do. Our conduct must be consistent with our claims! Am I the same person with my church family on Sunday that I am with my co-workers and friends on Monday? Does my language change to "fit in" with those around me? Does my behavior change to avoid the embarrassment of being different? Does my light grow dim? Do "spots" appear on my character? (James 1:27) Those we meet on a daily basis are influenced by our integrity (or lack thereof).

We cannot properly address the issue of integrity without considering the idea of honesty. Christians, obviously, must be honest people. Honesty is defined as "truthful, trustworthy, or upright." When we open our mouths to speak, others need not wonder if what we say

will be truthful or not. We must be known as being people of our word (James 5:12). “Better is the son who walks in his integrity, than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool” (Proverbs 19:1). Lottie Beth Hobbs tells the following story in her book, *Choosing Life’s Best*.

A small boy, selling berries from house to house, found a buyer. “Take the basket into your house and measure out a quart,” he said. “But aren’t you afraid I will take too many?” the lady asked. “No,” he said, “I don’t worry about that. Even if you did, I’d only lose a few berries; but you would make yourself a dishonest person, and I don’t think you want to do that.” What wisdom! (55)

In Solomon’s list of seven things that the Lord hates, the second one on the list is a lying tongue (Proverbs 6:17). This same Solomon stated, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight” (Proverbs 12:22). Our being completely truthful in all areas of our life is of utmost importance to God. As far as God is concerned, there is no such thing as being a “little” dishonest, or telling “little white lies.” When it comes to lying, God doesn’t color-code them, nor does He rank them according to size. A lie is a lie! We’ve all heard the old adage, “honesty is the best policy.” Sisters, for the Christian, honesty is the only policy. We must be truthful in our speech, as well as our treatment of others. The Apostle Paul gave some timely advice of truthfulness. “Therefore putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25). For those Ephesian Christians, lying was to be a thing of the past. Truthfulness was all that was to proceed from their lips. Paul also instructed the church at Colosse, “Do not lie one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9).

For those of us who are mothers, do we recognize the responsibility we have to our children in teaching them integrity? In those early formative years, our children will learn lessons of integrity that will stay with them throughout life. By watching us, and how we handle issues of honesty and integrity, our children will build character. We pray that our good influence will be taught well, before the evil influences of the world try to invade their innocent minds. Abraham Lincoln said for a man to train a child in the way he/she should go, he must walk that way himself. How true! Am I an example of integrity before my children? Or, do my children see me “bending the rules” to make life supposedly easier? What about those “little things,” those “minor issues” that just come up, and sometimes we are guilty of comprising our integrity? Consider the following examples:

--Do I keep that extra change the cashier accidentally gave me?

--Do I exceed the speed limit and laugh because I didn't get caught?

--Do my children hear me speak kindly to someone, then privately talk about that person in an unkind manner?

--Do I, by my example, teach my children that to get ahead it's ok to lie or cheat a little?

--Do my children see in me the courage to take a stand for right, even if it's unpopular?

--Have we ever told our children that if the phone rings, tell the caller “I am not home,” when we were there the whole time?

Our speech and conduct continually teach. What are we teaching our children? Are they learning honesty and integrity? If they followed me right now, would they

be walking in integrity? By walking in integrity, we leave a beautiful and valuable legacy for our children (and grandchildren). “The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him” (Proverbs 20:7).

Conclusion

We, as Christian women, must “walk in integrity.” We must be real and genuine, not hypocritical. We must be consistent, honest in every aspect of our lives. We must be upright at all times. One slip in our integrity or honesty will be long remembered by others. We must be trustworthy—keeping what others have entrusted to us, including confidences shared. We must make certain we understand the seriousness of a promise, and that integrity requires that we keep our promises.

Who am I when no one is watching? “Integrity says that what I am in public, I also am in private. Integrity is what you are when you’re alone, with no one’s eye upon you but the Lords” (Mehl 79). When we walk in integrity, we don’t have to hide, nor do we have to “watch our backs,” wondering who saw us or heard us. “He who walks with integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his way will become known” (Proverbs 10:9).

A woman of integrity will leave a lasting impression on her sisters in Christ, her family, her friends, her neighbors, and her God. “The memory of the righteous is blessed, But the name of the wicked will rot” (Proverbs 10:7).

Not only will the woman who walks in integrity be blessed here in this life, but also in eternity. God will reward those who walk in integrity. Heaven awaits us, and that hope sustains us as we patiently wait for it to begin. “Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for

you” (Psalm 25:21). May we, like David, say, ”But as for me, I will walk in my integrity” (Psalm 26:11).

Sow a thought, reap an act.

Sow an act, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny.

(as qtd. in Kerby)

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WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

Terry G. Jones

Jesus was very clear concerning His desire to have disciples willing to follow Him and personally called upon many to do so. “Now Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Then they immediately left their nets and followed Him. And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (Mt. 4:18-22). “Then as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And he said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ And he arose and followed Him” (Mt. 9:9). Many, like these, have been eager and willing to follow Jesus.

Some have eagerly followed Jesus for a while, only to become discouraged and quit. The Gospel of John provides a record of some disciples who had difficulty accepting some hard teachings of Jesus and, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (Jn. 6:66). Jesus had foretold that such would happen in the parable of the sower. “But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away” (Lk. 8:13).

Others have a desire to follow Jesus but never do so because they are unwilling to comply with the Lord’s requirements for discipleship. The rich young ruler was such a person. “Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘Good

Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?’ ...Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’ But he was sad at this word, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions” (Mk. 10:17-22). Sadly, some, after counting the cost of following Jesus, are not willing to make the sacrifice. Jesus said, “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Mt. 10:38).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that every person will live in one of two ways. He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Mt. 7:13-14). Notice that only the narrow way leads to eternal life. To follow that course, one must walk in the footsteps of Jesus. The Apostle Peter taught, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). The Apostle John added, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 Jn. 2:6). But what does it mean to “walk in the footsteps of Jesus,” and what is involved in so doing? Let us observe several characteristics of this walk that will help us to have an increased desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

A Submissive Walk

Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (Jn. 6:38). From the cradle to the cross it was Jesus’ purpose to accomplish the will of His heavenly Father. The only

occasion that the Holy Spirit recorded for us in the first thirty years following Jesus' birth was when Joseph and Mary left Him in Jerusalem when He was twelve years old. Upon finding Him in the temple three days later, Jesus replied, "Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business" (Lk. 2:49)? Then, on the last night of His earthly existence, Jesus prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Mt. 26:39).

There are two vital elements that enabled Jesus to perfectly accomplish the Father's will – humility and obedience. "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). Paul elaborated upon this vital theme in Philippians 2:5-8 by saying, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Jesus' submission to the will of the Father was made possible because He humbled Himself and obeyed.

Paul declared to the Corinthians, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23), and has all authority (Mt. 28:18). If we are going to walk in the footsteps of Jesus then we must humbly submit to His authority and obey what He commands. John H. Sammis expressed this vividly in the first verse of that great old hymn, *Trust And Obey*:

When we walk with the Lord, In the light of His
Word,

What a glory He sheds on our way!

While we do His good will, He abides with us still,

And with all who will trust and obey.

Walking in the footsteps of Jesus is a submissive walk.

A Sanctified Walk

The word sanctify means, “to separate from the world and consecrate to God. To sanctify anything is to declare that it belongs to God . . . In an ethical sense sanctification means the progressive conformation of the believer into the image of Christ, or the process by which the life is made morally holy” (Tenney 751). Listen to these inspired words concerning Jesus. “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). In that magnificent prayer of Jesus the night before He died, He appealed to His Father on behalf of His disciples, “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (Jn. 17:16-19). One is sanctified by the truth when he complies with its commands. After condemning a variety of forms of unrighteousness, Paul said to the Corinthian brethren, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). They had been sanctified and justified as a result of their compliance to the command to have their soul washed in

baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 22:16). In his address of the word sanctified in 1 Corinthians 6:11, Earle stated that:

“. . . it will be observed that “sanctified” occurs between “washed” and “justified.” The order of the terms would suggest that the verb *hagiazō* has here its lesser meaning of ‘set apart to God.’ All three terms seem to refer to the initial experience of conversion. At that time those to whom Paul is writing had their sins washed away – the compound verb *apolouō* (only here and Acts 22:16) means ‘wash off’ or ‘wash away’ – they were set apart to God, and they were ‘justified’ (made and declared righteous in God’s sight) (227).

Peter instructed, “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Walking in the footsteps of Jesus is a sanctified walk.

A Serving Walk

The earthly footsteps of Jesus created a pathway of service. What a great biography of Jesus’ life is found in the address of Peter to the household of Cornelius when he said that He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and came in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). In all that Jesus did, He had in mind the will of God and the good of mankind. In Matthew 20:28, He said, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” He provided healing to the sick and help to the suffering. He provided sight to the blind and security to the broken-hearted. He provided food for the famished and preached to the faithless. Finally, His greatest service was the giving of His life on the cross to save the world from sin. The Apostle Paul exhorted the

Ephesian elders to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). The early church demonstrated Christian service by sharing their possessions to help others. “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45). Walking in the footsteps of Jesus is a walk of service.

A Suffering Walk

That the earthly journey of our Lord was filled with suffering of various kinds is well documented. The prophet Isaiah chronicled the suffering of the Messiah.

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare his generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth (53:3-9).

The very idea that He was willing to leave the grandeur of heaven to walk upon this old sinful earth is unimaginable. While here, He did not live the lifestyle of a king but of a carpenter and preacher. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus one must be willing to endure the difficulties and hardships that it will bring. That was the teaching of Jesus Himself in Luke 9:57-58. "Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'" The following words, penned by an author unknown to me, are very thought provoking.

They borrowed a bed to lay his head
 When Christ the Lord came down;
They borrowed the ass in the mountain pass
 For him to ride to town;
But the crown that he wore and the cross that he
bore
 Were his own - the cross was his own!

He borrowed the bread when the crowd He fed
 On the grassy mountainside;
He borrowed the dish of broken fish
 With which he was satisfied;
But the crown that he wore and the cross that he
bore
 Were his own - the cross was his own!

He borrowed the ship in which to sit
 To teach the multitude;
He borrowed a nest in which to rest –
 He had never a home so rude;
But the crown that he wore and the cross that he
bore

Were his own - the cross was his own!

He borrowed a room on his way to the tomb
The Passover Lamb to eat;
They borrowed a cave for him a grave;
They borrowed a winding sheet;
But the crown that he wore and the cross that he
bore

Were his own - the cross was his own!

There is no guarantee that the Christian life is going to be easy. Satan is certainly going to do all that he can to make it as difficult as possible. That is why Peter exhorted, “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Pet. 5:8-10). Jesus provided great encouragement by saying, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt. 5:11-12). Our Lord faced great difficulty and suffering and those who would be His disciples must be prepared for the same. “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Walking in the footsteps of Jesus is a walk of suffering.

A Satisfying Walk

Although walking in the footsteps of Jesus may involve some suffering along the way, it must also be remembered that it is a very satisfying walk. It is such

because the Lord promised to accompany us every step of the way and lead us to our eternal reward (Mt. 28:20).

From prison Paul penned some of the most encouraging words in all of the Bible in his epistle to the Philippians.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus...and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:4-9). The writer of Hebrews provides the satisfying assurance of the Lord’s presence by saying, “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5).

David declared his personal satisfaction in following the Lord in the twenty-third Psalm. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Only the child of God can experience true happiness in this life, as well as, the satisfaction of eternal life in heaven. Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul could have confidence in this because of the promise of Jesus, who said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3).

These things bring to mind the words of that great old hymn:

I'm satisfied with just a cottage below, A little silver and a little gold;

But in that city where the ransomed will shine, I want a gold one that's silver lined.

I've got a mansion just over the hilltop, In that bright land where we'll never grow old;

And some day yonder we will never more wander
But walk the streets that are purest gold.

To walk in the footsteps of Jesus is a satisfying walk.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6). Every right thinking person wants to go to heaven. Only those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus have the hope of so doing.

There are many paths thru this world of sin,
But there's only one I shall travel in;

'Tis the old Cross Road, or the way called
"straight,"

There is just one way to the pearly gate.

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Biographical Sketch

Terry G. Jones was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia and was raised in Toll Gate, West Virginia. He is the son of Glenn and Linda Jones. He married Melinda S. Hilvers on August 10, 1985. They have two sons - Austin and Quintin.

Terry is a 1986 graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching in Knoxville, Tennessee. He received the A.A. and B.A. degrees from Ohio Valley College (now University) in 1996. He worked with the church in Mountain City, Tennessee from 1986 to 1989. He then moved to Pennsboro, West Virginia where he has been preaching to the present.

He serves as secretary on the board of directors of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is on the faculty of West Virginia School of Preaching. In addition, he is a writer for West Virginia Christian and has served as its lectureship director on four occasions. He also has made missionary trips to the countries of Moldova and Ukraine.

DAVID WALKED WITH GOD

Frank Higginbotham

An outstanding servant of God that we read about in the Old Testament is the man named David. He stands as an example for us to follow. The story of his life is recorded in the Bible to help us get a good picture of the things that please God and the things that do not. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The Bible gives us a true picture of David's life. Most writings of men only give us insight into the good side of the person while overlooking the qualities that are not favorable. The Bible gives us the story of a strong servant of the Lord who fell short in some of the things he did in his life. King Solomon was urged by God to follow in the path that David had taken.

And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do, That the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon . And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. But if ye shall at all turn from

following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people. (1 Kings 9:1-7)

David is spoken of as a man who walked with God. There are usually three items that come to mind when we mention the name of David. First, we think about the great battle of David with the Philistine named Goliath. The Philistine nation was a bitter enemy of the people of God. This event was a major battle between the two groups. David gave a great victory to the people of God. A second thought that comes to mind when we speak of David is the terrible mistake he made in his sin with Bathsheba. David showed his weakness as he allowed his 'lust of the flesh' take control over his life. He deeply regretted having made this mistake but expressed that his sin was ever before him. A third thing that we remember about David is the work he did in giving to us the Psalms. He wrote songs that expressed his regret in connection with his sins and rejoicing that God was willing to forgive. Think of how greatly we have been influenced by his words. All do quickly recall his help given at the time of death as recorded in Psalms twenty three and who could forget his words of praise for God and His Words in the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm? These are not the only things that come to mind with reference to David but each event is quickly brought to mind when we mention his name. Now add to these things the fact that God stated he was a man after his own heart and you get a pretty good picture of the life of this great servant of God.

There can be no question that David was a man who walked with God in courage. As you read the seventeenth chapter of first Samuel you get a picture of the courage of David. The Philistines came up with a champion that they felt would give them a clear victory.

And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. (1 Sam. 17:4-7)

Even the appearance of this giant was enough to strike fear in the hearts of the people. King Saul and all of Israel were filled with fear. "When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (1 Sam. 17:11). When David saw the fear of his own people and the boldness of the Philistines, he volunteered to go do battle with Goliath. He would not accept the armor offered to him but took his sling and five little stones and went to vindicate the people of God. David's complete trust in God was apparent.

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. (1 Sam. 17:34-36)

With courage David met the challenge in defeating a lion and a bear and he knew that God would help him with this Philistine who was challenging God's people. We are taught to trust the Lord. (Prov.3:5). There are many lessons we can learn by observing the courage of David. We need to learn not to be intimidated when we are doing the right thing. One of Satan's tools is to back us off in this way. Then we must not wait for someone else to do the job. David looked around and saw no one meeting the challenge but he stepped forward. The work had to be done and David saw an opportunity to serve. Also remember that God always wins. We need not fear if we stand with God. One of the major lessons of the book of Revelation is that God is always on the winning side. Satan is strong but God is stronger. Then we need to see the advantage of having God with us. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom: 8:31). God was with David as he brought victory to the people of God. There is victory in Christ. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:37). These and many other lessons can be learned by looking at the life and courage of David.

The event in the life of David that is perhaps the most disappointing is the time when David became guilty with Bathsheba. This sin was ever a reminder to him that man is not sinless. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom. 3:23). Many times one sin leads to another. This was the case with David. He first fell victim of lust and what it leads to and then was drawn into adultery. He evidently thought that he could keep this sin quiet but this was not the case. When told that he had fathered a child, he began to plan a way out of this sin. This led him in an attempt to bring Bathsheba's husband home in hopes that this would cause people to think he was the father of the baby. When this did not work out, he had to

sink deeper into sin. He planned the death of Uriah the Hittite. A just man became the victim of David's progressive sin. Uriah was killed when in battle because of being abandoned without help according to the wicked plot of David. One sin led to another and David just sunk deeper into sin as time went on. Many of us today fail to realize how far into sin we can go without even planning to be overwhelmed by it.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

Sin makes man think that he is the master when in reality he is the servant. Sin is deceitful. "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Satan knows our weaknesses and dresses sin up so that we think it is harmless and are deceived by it. Notice the word of David as he discusses the problem with sin.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. (Psalms 32:1-5)

David was ever aware of his sin and could not live with the guilt it left on him. He needed a way to rid himself of the

guilt he felt. He came on the right answer that covering up his sin did not relieve him. There are many way that people try to rid themselves of this problem today. It occurs to us that we can blame others for our sins. This has been a common practice ever since the Garden of Eden. When confronted with his sin, Adam made this excuse. "And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). In looking at Adam's excuse he pointed in two different ways. He blamed the woman and then he blamed God. He reminded God that he had given the woman to him. Blaming others did not take away the guilt he had for committing the sin. It is not uncommon to hear of a person who lost their temper, blaming someone else for provoking them to this point. We argue that we would have been alright and would not have lost our temper if the other person had not pushed so hard on us. Does this make us guiltless? This same method of covering sin by blaming another is seen in the life of King Saul. The instruction God gave was very clear. God said for Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul had other plans. He decided to keep Agag the king of the Amalekites and to spare some of the cattle. The people were blamed for sparing the animals for sacrifice. Did this remove the guilt of sin from the King? Blaming our misconduct on another does not relieve our guilt. Committing another sin does not make us guiltless. Telling a lie to cover up our mistakes does not relieve us but just further adds to the problem. Some have taken the position that no sin really exists in our situation. Denying its existence does not do away with it. Look at how the world in general has worked to deny the existence of sin. Some have tried to remove God from the picture so that they have no one to whom they must account. Remove the standard of right and wrong and they feel that they can do just as they please. Notice what was said about Israel when they did not have a king or a standard to follow. "In those days there was no king in

Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The atheist feels safe to do as he pleases if there is no God. Each man then is his own standard of right and wrong. However, ignoring the existence of wrong does not take it away. In our effort to soften the problem of sin we have come up with new ways of speaking about it that we think sounds a little better. We speak about how a person who lies, stretches the truth. A drunkard is just an alcoholic who cannot control himself. A murderer was just temporarily out of control and a gossip is just a well informed person in our neighborhood. Others go to great length to keep their sin under cover. Slipping around and hiding does not keep our action from being seen by God. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). David declared this about the knowledge of God.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Psalms 139:7-12)

There is no way that we can escape the presence of God. Trying to keep our wrongs secret from the eyes of God is an attempt in folly. God knows everything. Why then does David speak with such confidence when he writes the words that are recorder in Psalms thirty two? There is a right way to hide our sin. We remove it by admitting it to God and turning away from it. David stated that he acknowledged his sin and did not hide it. In this way we are able to have our sins removed.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
(1 John 1:6-10)

We rid ourselves of sin only when we are willing to confess our sins and to submit to God's Will.

This testimony was given that David was a man after God's own heart. "And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will" (Acts 13:22). He was not commended because of his sin or shortcomings but in his willingness to set his life in harmony with the Will of God.

He was a man who set an example for us to consider and follow. David walked with God.

WALK IN LOVE

Albert E. Farley

Love lies at the heart of our faith in Christ. Jesus said the first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." He said the second greatest commandment is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Matthew 22:36-40.

The lifestyle of the Christian is often described as "a walk." "(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)" 2 Corinthians 5:7. " *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Galatians 5:16. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, ¹⁶Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:15.

The apostle Paul presented the Christian walk as a "walk in love."

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; **And walk in love**, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness,

but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light. Ephesians 5:1-8

In our old, familiar hymn, entitled, “Just a Closer Walk with Thee,” an anonymous writer penned, “I am weak but Thou art strong, Jesus keep me from all wrong; I’ll be satisfied as long, As I walk close to thee.”

If we desire to walk close to Jesus, we must walk in love – as Christ has loved us. The Bible contains many examples of love. Some of these Biblical examples rise to the height of being examples of uncommon love.

The Uncommon Love of a Man for His Wife

The love that Jacob had for Rachel was an uncommon love. Genesis 29:1-30. Jacob loved Rachel so much that he told her father, Laban, “I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.” (18) When Laban agreed, the Bible says, “And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.” (20)

The Bible calls us to this closer walk of love:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. ²⁹For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: ³⁰For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. ³¹For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³²This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³Nevertheless let every one of

you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband. Ephesians 5:25-33.

Yes, the Lord is calling us to a closer walk of love with our wives and husbands.

The Uncommon Love of a Daughter-in-law for Her Mother-in law

The love that Ruth had for Naomi was an uncommon love. Ruth, chapter 1. After her husband, Elimelech, died, and after her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died, Naomi told her daughters-in-law to return each to her mother's house and remarry. The first, Orpah, did so, but the second, Ruth, did not.

Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried:" (16, 17)

She returned to Bethlehem with Naomi and gleaned the barley fields of Boaz. Bending down low – at times, no doubt, on her knees – picking up enough barley seeds to take home to make a loaf of bread to help them live another day. Day after day, day after day ...

Ruth's sacrifice of love did not go unnoticed. She caught Boaz's eye, and he inquired about her. Learning who she was, he instructed his men to leave her alone, to leave handfuls of barley seeds for her to find, and to let her drink and eat with his reapers. He said to her, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." (2:12)

Boaz married Ruth. They had a child named Obed. Obed grew up, married, and had a son named Jesse. Jesse grew up, married, and had a son named David. David became the second king of Israel! (4:17-22) Also, when we read the blessed genealogy of Jesus Christ, recorded in Matthew 1, we read the name of this one who walked in love toward her mother-in-law.

Truly, the Lord is calling us to a closer walk of love with our families.

The Uncommon Love of Two Friends

The love of Jonathan and David was an uncommon love. When David, the young shepherd boy, came to live in the house of King Saul, Saul's son Jonathan became his great friend. The Bible says,

... the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul ... Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. 1 Samuel 18:1.

Later, when Saul, in anger, sought David's life, Jonathan saved David's life—even at the risk of his own! "And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself:" 1 Samuel 19:1-2

Jonathan's love for David did not negate his love and fidelity to his father. Although he could not, at first believe that his father, Saul, would seek to kill David (20:2), He died with his father on the battlefield, fighting

against Israel's mortal enemies, the Philistines. When David lamented the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, he said, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions." 2 Samuel 1:23. Truly, Jonathan's life may be used to illustrate the honor and trust of a son to his father.

The love between David and Jonathan was truly uncommon. David's lament over him upon his death reveals how deep was their love. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.²⁷ How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" 2 Samuel 1:26,27

Why is it that we do not very often have such friendships in our lives? First, it may be that we have not shown ourselves to be friendly. "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Proverbs 18:24. A second reason is, I believe, we may be afraid that others may misinterpret our friendships and falsely accuse us of being homosexual.

Our society has, largely, embraced homosexuality. The movie and television media promote it, and our government (even through our public school system) sanctions and protects it. The president of the United States, Barack Obama, has publicly announced his strong support of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender life styles.¹

Those who promote homosexuality have gone so far as to claim that homosexuality is a natural phenomenon and certain children are born with genes that cause them to be

homosexual from conception and birth! In 1998, the American Psychological Association published this statement: “There is considerable recent evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person’s sexuality.” Many proponents of the homosexual lifestyle have used this “authority” to bolster their ungodly position. However, other professional groups challenged these claims, chiefly those who believe the Bible is the Word of God. Recently, the APA issued a new brochure entitled, “Answers to Your Questions for a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality.” In this publication, they have withdrawn their previous claims and modified their position. They now state:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors.²

Truly, homosexual acts are sinful. Sodomy is condemned and reprobated by God’s Holy Word – from the wicked inhabitants of Sodom in Genesis 19:1-5 through Paul’s rebuke of them in 1 Timothy 1:9, 10. See Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:22, 23; 20:13, 15, 16; Deuteronomy 23:17; 27:21; Judges 19:22; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Romans 1:24, 26, 27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9.

Advocates of the homosexual agenda influence television “documentaries” and, in their “historical” investigations, impugn the sex lives of certain historical men and women, suggesting the strong possibilities that they were homosexual simply because they had close friends of the same sex. I believe this is a subtle effort to

“manufacture” historical legitimacy for their perverse lifestyle. These are libelous and scandalous statements.

There is a serious danger in the study of this subject that, I believe, needs to be recognized and noted. I believe it is natural and innocent for young boys and girls to develop genuine and sincere friendships with ones of the same sex. Some who have these close feelings of friendship are falsely taught and they, in fact, conclude that they must be homosexual. They may do so and not be homosexual at all! Yet, because they are falsely taught – and, in some instances, are ridiculed by others as “perverts” and “queers,” in time do drift into it. On the other hand, some who have been taught the sin of homosexuality will become alarmed that their feelings of close friendship with one of the same sex are homosexual in nature and will immediately refuse to let this friendship grow into one that is truly innocent, pure, and sincere.

Both of these scenarios are tragic and sad. They rob us of walking in a love with friends that is pure, holy, and innocent.

Truly, the Lord calls us to this closer walk of love between friends.

The Uncommon Love of a Father for His Son

The father had given the younger son his portion of the inheritance, and he went into the far country and wasted it in riotous living. Luke 15:11-32. After a period of great want, he ended in the fields feeding the hogs of a Gentile! He finally came to himself and determined to return home to beg of his father to allow him to be one of his hired servants. He was no doubt ragged, poor, dirty, and tired. How would his father receive him?

Jesus said the father saw his wayward son coming while he was yet a long way off. Does this not indicate that he was looking for his return? He might have been resentful and bitter, but he was not; he was very pitiful and of tender mercy. With compassion, he ran to him, hugging and kissing him. He put the best robe on him, a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. He had the fatted calf killed and had a great celebration with music and dancing! He said, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry:" Sadly, this love is not common. Many fathers have disowned their children for much less than this.

A personal experience with my father taught me of this uncommon love when I was a teenager. In spite of my parents' frequent admonitions and warnings, I had not come home when I should have on one particular night. As I recall, it was well after midnight when I finally reached the end of the cement street that separated the city from the coal town where we lived. A fairly deep ravine or hollow separated the two communities. (We called it "The Dump.") As I started down the unlit path to the bridge across the creek at the bottom, I suddenly noticed a dim, yellowish light moving back and forth on the other side. I recall pausing and watching as it slowly moved back and forth, up and down. I swallowed hard and continued along the path. As I started up the other side, the light rose, and I then recognized my father, holding a dim light and looking up and down the sides of the path. When he saw me, he said, "Albert?" I said, "Yes." He asked me if I was all right and said, "I was afraid you might have fallen down the path and gotten hurt." With very few words, he then turned and led us up the path to our house, which was located on the other side of "The Dump." He never again mentioned this incident to me. He did not need to. I will never forget his coming out with the only light he had – an

old kerosene lantern – looking for his prodigal son in the wee hours of the morning so long ago. As I look back on this incident, I recognize it as a turning point in my life.

A father's care for his children is a matter of love. Paul said, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4. Yes, he must, from time-to-time administer chastisement to his children, and I received my share of it from my father. However, I never doubted that my father loved me.

Surely, the Lord is calling us, as parents, to this closer walk of love and forgiveness.

The Uncommon Love of Some Churches for their Preacher.

The churches of Galatia had, in the beginning, an uncommon love for their first gospel preacher, the apostle Paul. These congregations included those of Lystra, Iconium, Derbe, and perhaps others. They had heard the gospel from Paul and had been saved in their faithful obedience to it. However, after his departure from them, someone began teaching them that they were yet under the law of Moses and needed to be circumcised to be saved! Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians in order to reprove and correct this error.

Paul reminded them of their past relationship in Christ and he wrote of the love they had for him while he was there.

Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye

would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? - Galatians 4:13-16.

What great love! Paul had a “thorn in the flesh.” 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. We do not know what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was, but he had it when he came to the cities of Galatia to preach the gospel. He had asked the Lord three times to have it removed, but the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9.

When Paul had first come to Galatia, preaching the gospel, he brought his thorn in the flesh. It appears to have involved an obvious physical malady – one that some might have viewed as revolting or offending. They did not do so; they did not despise it, *i.e.* count it as a contemptible thing, and reject him for it. Contrariwise, they received him as they would have received an angel of God – even as they would have received Christ Jesus, Himself! Matthew 10:40. They loved him so much that they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him! What an uncommon love these congregations had for the one who had brought them the joy of the soul-saving and life-giving gospel!

Incidentally, this may give us some insight into the nature of Paul’s thorn. It very well might have involved his eyesight. We recall that the light that the Lord sent from heaven caused him to be blind for three days. Acts 9:9. Also, in an obvious gesture to impart the importance of what he was writing to the Galatian Christians, we learn, in Galatians 6:11, that Paul took the scribe’s pen and wrote a closing part of this letter in his own handwriting.³ Some believe that Paul wrote the entire letter with his own hand but Conybeare and Howson disagree.⁴

Regardless of how this may be, truly, the Lord is calling us to a closer walk of love – love of service and sacrifice and a love for those who serve and sacrifice.

The Uncommon Love a Christian had for the Work of Christ

The love that Epaphroditus had for the work of service to Paul while he was in the Roman prison was very uncommon. This story is found in Paul's joyful letter to the church at Philippi. While Paul was a prisoner in Rome, the church at Philippi sent a contribution to him through their messenger, Epaphroditus. Philippians 4:10-20. While there, Epaphroditus worked hard to minister to the needs of Paul. This work caused him to become sick – so sick that he was near death. During his sickness, he became heavy in heart when he learned that his home congregation at Philippi had heard that he was sick! However, God was merciful and healed him.

When Epaphroditus was able, Paul determined to send him back home to comfort the church. Paul sent his letter to the church at Philippi with him. In Philippians 2:25-30, he wrote these words,

Yet, I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death,
not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service
toward me.

O, what love this unselfish Christian had for the
work of Christ. What good you and I might render to the
Lord and to His church if we ceased regarding our own
lives in supplying service to those who minister the gospel
to the lost and who suffer so much in doing so. We are to
receive such in the Lord and to hold them in reputation.

Yes, surely, the Lord is calling us to a closer walk of
love of service and ministry to others.

The Uncommon Love the Father and Son Have for You and Me

The epitome of all true love is the love of God.
There is no other love that can approach it, and we need to
seek and practice it. Where do we find it? Truly, the
heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows
His handiwork, but, if we would learn and know the love of
God, we must turn to His Holy Word, the Bible, and to the
story of Jesus Christ.

Wonderful story of love: Tell it to me again;

Wonderful story of love: Wake the immortal strain!

Angels with rapture announce it,

Shepherds with wonder receive it;

Sinner, O won't you believe it?

Wonderful story of love.

-J.M. Driver

Yes, the immortal strain – the stream of divine revelation from Genesis through Revelation – reveals God’s matchless love.

1. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
2. John 15:13 – Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
3. Romans 5:6-8 – For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
4. 1 John 3:1-3 - Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. ²Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ³And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Conclusion

On Friday, November 11, 2006, President George W. Bush marked Veterans Day by bestowing the country’s

highest military honor posthumously on Cpl. Jason Dunham who died at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland eight days after he threw his helmet over a live hand grenade in Iraq and then jumped on it himself to protect his fellow Marines.

This is uncommon valor; this is uncommon love.

Tertullian, born in Carthage, North Africa in A.D. 160,⁵ published, perhaps in A.D. 197, a work entitled *Apologeticus*. This was written in the midst of great persecution against the church by the Roman government. A brief quote from this writing may reveal the nature of the work of the church of his day. In speaking of the church treasury, he wrote,

These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. *See, they say, how they love one another, ...*⁶

Does a wicked and calloused nation see in the church what they saw then? Can they say what they said – even if it were said in derision?⁷

When we walk in love, our love must be balanced and guarded. Love must be properly placed and in proper proportions. We love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Luke 10:27. If we love father, mother,

son, or daughter more than we love the Lord, we are not worthy of Him. Matthew 10:37.

Walking in love means that we must walk in hatred of evil. “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Psalm 119:97. “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.” Psalm 119:104.

Walking in love demands that we chasten, rebuke, and punish our children when necessary. “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Hebrews 12:5. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” Proverbs 13:24.

Are you walking in love? In what kind of love are we walking? Jesus has given His disciples a new commandment: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples; if ye have love one to another.” John 13:34, 35. Do all men know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ by the way we walk in love?

We can show this love only by keeping His commandments. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” 1 John 5:3

If we know the love of God and if we walk in it, we dwell in God and God dwells in us. “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of

judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.”¹
John 4:16, 17.

When my feeble life is o’er, Time for me will be no more,
Guide me to that peaceful shore, Let me walk close
to Thee.

-Anonymous

¹ See the White House web site:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil_rights/ and read the president’s
statement in support of the LGBT Community.

² <http://www.onenewsnw.com/Culture/Default.aspx?id=528376>
5/14/2009

³ “Usually he employed an amanuensis, and added his name, with a
brief benediction or remark at the close; see Notes, Rom. xvi. 22; 1
Cor. xvi. 21.” Barnes, Albert, *Notes on the New Testament*,
GALATIANS, (Baker Book House Company, Reprinted 2005, Grand
Rapids, MI), p. 396.

⁴ “... Paul does not here say that he wrote the whole Epistle with his
own hand, but this is the beginning of his usual autograph postscript,
and equivalent to the ‘so I write’ in 2 Thess. iii. 17. We may observe a
further confirmation of this view, that scarcely any Epistle bears more
evident marks than this of having been written from dictation.”
Conybeare, W. J. & Howson, J. S., *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*,
Wm. B. Eerdmans’s Publishing Company, (New Edition, 1962, Grand
Rapids, Michigan) pp. 492, 493.

⁵ McClintock, John & Strong, James, *CYCLOPEDIA of BIBLICAL,
THEOLOGICAL, AND ECCLESIASTICAL LITERATURE*, Vol. X,
(Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Reprinted 1981), p. 288.

⁶ Tertullian [Quintus Septimius Tertullianus], *Apologeticus [Apology]*, Chapter 39, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, Fourth printing 2004), p. 46.

⁷ *Ibid.* Footnote 5.

Biographical Sketch

Albert Farley was born at Crum, WV April 26, 1942, the son of William H. and Clista Spaulding Farley and was raised at Longacre, WV, the fifth of eleven children. He is a graduate of Montgomery High School and served four years in the U.S. Navy. He attended Ohio Valley College 1964-66 where he met and married Nancy Ann Brewer.

Nancy and Albert have been married for 44 years. They have four children: Scott, Clista (Heintzman), Rebecca (Ragle), and Elisabeth; and four grandchildren: Bethany and Darren Heintzman, and Aaron and Andrew Ragle. Nancy is retired from Doddridge County Schools, where she taught French and English at Doddridge County High School.

Albert preached his first sermon in 1964 at Red Bush, OH. He began full-time preaching in 1966 at Belington, WV. He has worked with congregations in WV at Chesapeake, Weston, Crum, Webster Springs, and Salem, where he has labored since 1982.

He is a graduate of Glenville State College, with a BA in Elementary Education, and taught the fifth grade at

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Crum. He completed ten hours of graduate work with the Alabama School of Religion, spoke five days each week on the “Gospel Minutes” radio program on WHAW, Weston from 1972-76, and on the “Bible Study Program” from 1980-82. He has published and edited the *West Virginia Christian* since 1993.

WALKING THROUGH LIFE'S VALLEYS

Charles C. Pugh III

In a brief but inexhaustible verse from the incomparable Shepherd Psalm (i.e. Psalm 23), David implied the reality of both the joys and sorrows, peace and anxiety, and highs and lows of life. He wrote, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For you are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4).

Phillip Keller wrote what has become a classic volume on understanding the twenty-third Psalm. Keller wrote his book as one who had “first-hand experience with every phase of sheep management” (10-11). He had worked as both a sheep owner and sheep rancher. Keller’s writing provides much helpful background study for the six brief, but profound, verses that compose the Shepherd Psalm. On the text before us (Ps. 23:4), Keller included the following observations:

. . . Most of the efficient sheepmen endeavor to take their flocks onto distant summer ranges during summer. This often entails long “drives.” The sheep move along slowly, feeding as they go, gradually working their way up the mountains behind the receding snow. By late summer they are well up on the remote alpine meadows above timberline.

With the approach of autumn, early snow settles on the highest ridges, relentlessly forcing the flock to withdraw back down to lower elevations. Finally, toward the end of the year as fall passes, the sheep are driven home to the ranch headquarters where they will spend the winter. It is this segment of the yearly operations that is described in the last half of the poem.

. . .

In the Christian life we often speak of wanting “to move onto higher ground with God.” How we long to live above the lowlands of life. . . . We speak of mountaintop experiences and we envy those who have ascended the heights and entered into this more sublime sort of life. . . .

Every mountain has its valleys. Its sides are scarred by deep ravines and gulches and draws. And the best route to the top is always along these valleys. (82-84)

In an old issue of *Reader's Digest* (July 1960) there is a very interesting article that is concerned with Psalm 23. The article was written by James K. Wallace and originally appeared in *The National Wool Grower* (December 1949). Wallace wrote about a Basque shepherd, Ferando D'Alfonso, a descendant of at least twenty generations of Iberian shepherds:

I sat with him one night under the clear, starry skies, his sheep bedded down beside a sparkling pool of water. As we were preparing to curl up in our blankets, he suddenly began a dissertation in a jargon of Greek and Basque. When he finished, I asked him what he had said. In reply he began to quote in English the 23rd Psalm. There on the desert I learned the shepherd's literal interpretation of this beautiful poem. “David and his ancestors,” said D'Alfonso, “knew sheep and their ways, and David has translated a sheep's musing into simple words. . . . Many of its lines are the statements of the simple requirements and actual duties of a Holy Land shepherd, whether he lives today or followed the same calling 6000 years ago. Phrase by phrase, it has a well-understood meaning for us. . . .

“There is an actual Valley of the Shadow of Death in Palestine, and every shepherd from Spain to Dalmatia knows of it. It is south of the Jericho Road leading from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, and it is a narrow defile through a mountain range. Climatic and

grazing conditions make it necessary for the sheep to be moved through this valley for seasonal feeding each year.

“The Valley is four and a half miles long. Its side walls are over 1500 feet high in places, and it is only 10 to 12 feet wide at the bottom. Travel through the valley is dangerous because its floor has gullies seven or eight feet deep. Actual footing on solid rock is so narrow in many places that a sheep cannot turn around, and it is an unwritten law of shepherds that flocks must go up the valley in the morning hours and down toward the eventide, lest flocks meet in the defile.

“About halfway through the valley the walk crosses from one side to the other at a place where the path is cut in two by an eight-foot gully. One side of the gully is about 18 inches higher than the other; the sheep must jump across it. The shepherd stands at this break and coaxes or forces the sheep to make the leap. If a sheep slips and lands in the gully, the shepherd’s rod is brought into play. The old-style crook circles a large sheep’s neck or a small sheep’s chest, and the animal is lifted to safety. If a more modern narrow crook is used, the sheep is caught about the hoofs and lifted up to the walk.

“Many wild dogs lurk in the shadows of the valley, looking for prey. The shepherd, skilled in throwing his staff, uses it as a weapon. Thus the sheep have learned to fear no evil when in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for their master is there to protect them from harm.” (180, 182, 184).

The meaning of the phrase, “*valley of the shadow of death,*” is much wider in scope than may appear in most English translations. Leupold says, “The Hebrew word used contains no reference to death as such but does refer to all dark and bitter experiences, one of which may be death. So in the common use of the passage the thought of

death need not be excluded, but the reference is certainly much broader” (213). Another source gives the meaning as “. . . [T]he valley of death-shade . . . the profoundest darkness . . . a deep place, often overhung with woods . . .” (Alexander 108). Leslie says the reference is to “. . . gorges, so characteristic of Canaan, which by early afternoon lie in the deep, dark shadows where wild animals lurk and where danger to the sheep may be imminent” (284). Perowne defines it as “‘deep cleft,’ or ‘ravine’; horrid with frowning rocks and long deathly shadows growing deeper and more chilling as the sun sank” (251). Aglen calls the valley of the shadow of death “a dark, gloomy place . . . a deep ravine. Palestine abounds in wild and gloomy valleys, and shepherd life experiences the actual period of them” (91). The following is a good summation of the meaning and application of the valley of the shadow of death: “. . . [It is] one word in Hebrew and probably should not be limited to the experience of death. The phrase really should be seen as including not only the idea of death, but also any horrid, lonely event similar to it. The writer apparently is thinking of the big valleys of life, the ones which cause us to cringe in fear when we think of them” (Cloer 301).

During the Spring and Summer the shepherd would lead his flock to remote mountain meadows for grazing. Here is the picture of the more pleasant (mountaintop) experiences of life. As Fall approached, the shepherd and the sheep would come back to lower elevations. The shepherd would lead the sheep home for Winter. It is the journey to the mountain and back that is pictured in Psalm 23:4. They would pass through the gloomy places where the sun doesn’t shine. Wild animals hide on the sides of the dark place. There are wolves as well as thieves. There is also the possibility of storms, flash floods, and slides. The valley was a place of great danger. To go through the valley

was to go through difficulty. Even so, we must go into the gloomy valleys of life on Earth.

The valleys are emblematic of the days when we walk “in darkness and in the gloom” . . . when unrelieved suffering is our lot; when trouble falls on us like bricks tumbling out of the back of a dump truck—one after another; when we experiences long runs of bad luck, bad health, confinement, criticism, and unrelieved stress.

They bring to mind the day an employer said “clean out your desk;” when a doctor said “your baby will never be normal”; or when you found the stash in your son’s closet; when your teenage daughter told you she was pregnant; when the doctor said you had cancer; when your spouse said he or she had no energy left to put into the relationship.

Those are the dark days when we lose all perspective, when we say in despair, “It’s no use; I can’t go on.” (Roper 103-4)

Life is not always lived on the mountaintop. There are lower elevations physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. There are dark trials, disappointments, and distressful situations. However, as Keller also states, “It should be noticed that the verse states, ‘. . . I *walk through* the valley of the shadow of death.’ It does not say I die there, or stop there—but rather ‘I walk through’” (84).

What are the valleys through which we must walk while living on Earth? More than thirty years ago James D. Bales wrote a wonderful treatment of Psalm 23 which he titled *The Psalm for the Frightened and Frustrated Sheep*. He discussed five valleys through which we are challenged in life. They are (1) the valley of physical needs (2) the valley of physical dangers (3) the valley of sickness (4) the valleys of frustrations and anxieties and (5) the valley of

death (78-90). In the remainder of this lecture we will consider six valleys through which we often must walk while living on Earth. I identify these valleys with the following terms: (1) Deprivation and Disaster (2) Despondency (3) Desertion (4) Disease (5) Diabolical Darkness and (6) Death.

Valley of Deprivation

Deprivation is an act or instance of taking something away (Webster 305). It involves the loss of something. Disaster is “a sudden calamitous event bringing great damage, loss or destruction . . . great misfortune” (324). The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk is an example of walking through the valley of deprivation and disaster. The significance of the name *Habakkuk* is seen in his choice to embrace God, or cling to God, regardless of the deprivation and disaster experienced by him and his nation. He affirmed that he would cling to God even with “no prospect but that of drought and devastation” (Farrar 173). He wrote, “. . . [T]he fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; . . . [T]he fields yield no food. . . . [T]he flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls” (Hab. 3:17). Habakkuk was facing the prospect of complete failure of all the natural resources of Judah. He speaks of not merely a partial loss, or being deprived of some things, but the entire loss of all things (Pusey 221). Habakkuk would experience economic deprivation and disaster that would be extreme and intense.

We have seen some similar valleys of deprivation and disaster in our day. There are those who have been deprived of their jobs, houses, and retirement savings as a result of what many are calling the worst financial crisis in 75 years. Then there are the great losses that are the result of one of the worst disasters in U. S. history—Hurricane Katrina. Homes, businesses, and lives lost. It was gut-

wrenching and heart-breaking. Some would argue that God is blameworthy for having created a world in which there is so much pain, suffering, and loss. They would claim a logical contradiction is involved in the existence of real pain and suffering and the affirmation that God is perfectly good and omnipotent.

On November 1, 1775, Lisbon, Portugal was devastated by an earthquake. It was All Saints Day and churches were full. Thirty churches were destroyed. Within six minutes 15,000 people had died and another 15,000 critically injured. One of those stunned by the news was the French skeptical philosopher, Voltaire. For months Voltaire alluded to these disastrous happenings in his writings. He asked how could anyone believe in God? If God is free, just, and benevolent, how can we suffer under His rule? Either God wants to stop the suffering but cannot, or He could stop it but will not. On the one hand God would not be omnipotent. On the other He would not be good. Which ever it is, Voltaire insisted, how can we worship God? Voltaire would not embrace God because of Earth's deprivations, disaster, and devastation (Stott 311).

Warren answered and refuted the argument of those who attempt to use pain, suffering, and loss as evidence that God should not be embraced but denied and rejected. He wrote:

. . . If man's environment did not provide situations in which he faced the possibility of suffering some truly terrible loss (of property, well-being, life), then it would not provide a situation in which such virtues as fortitude and courage could be developed as they now are. These facts make it clear that the *ideal* environment for man is one which makes it possible for man to suffer—and, not merely to suffer, but to suffer *intensely*. And, it must not only allow men to

suffer intensely, but to suffer intensely over a *long period* of time. . . . [I]t is in harmony with the infinity of God that man should have a probationary life in a world in which it is possible for him to experience pain and suffering, that pain and suffering are things for which we in this life should thank God, that pain and suffering are things without which (during earthly life) the lives of men would be worse than they are, that pain and suffering are things which mark our ultimate relationship with the crucified Son of God. . . . [N]o logical contradiction is involved in the conjunction of these propositions with the remainder of the basic propositions of Christian theism. (*Atheists*, 72, 82-83)

For Habakkuk, the situation was bleak and barren. All was gone. All had failed. Utter deprivation and disaster! “When fig tree and vine and olive fail, fields are barren, flocks and herds are dying, there will be nothing left. Oh, yes, there will be—there will be God” (Morgan 96). Habakkuk did not use the valley of deprivation and disaster to deny God but, like David, he used it to cause him to depend more on God. “. . . You are with me. . . .” He sounds like Job who profoundly embraced God as he went through the valley of deprivation and disaster. Job declared, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him . . .” (Job 13:15).

Valley of Despondency

Another valley through which the person of faith sometimes walks is the valley of despondency. Despondency was that felt by the Psalmist when he asked: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Ps. 42:11; 43:5). *Despond* has been defined as “to become discouraged or disheartened” (Webster 308). Paul seemed to be describing his walk through the valley of despondency when he wrote to the Corinthians the

following: “. . . [W]hen we came to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:5-6).

The word translated *downcast* (NKJV) has also been rendered *depressed* (NASV). The Greek word found here (*tapeinos*) means “humble, used here in the psychological sense of downcast, depressed” (Rogers and Rogers 406). *The Amplified New Testament* has the following rendering: “But God, who comforts and encourages and refreshes and cheers the depressed and the sinking, comforted and encouraged and refreshed and cheered us . . .” (2 Cor. 7:6). Vincent wrote that “cast down” (KJV) “is more nearly true to the idea, which is that of *depression through circumstances*. . . . The neater rendering would be *the downcast*” (3. 327)

Herein is the key to walking through the valleys of despondency: God is the comforter of those who are cast down.

[This] is one of the dominant notes of this epistle [2 Corinthians]. . . . [T]he ascription with which it opens—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our affliction” (1:3f.)—is not a piously framed formality, but the expression of the emotion of the Apostle’s gratitude surging up from the deep wells of *his own experience of divine consolation*. (Hughes 266, emp. added).

While many people recognize that Abraham Lincoln was a truly great American President, comparatively few are aware that Lincoln suffered from great despondency and depression throughout his life. In a

2005 book, *Lincoln's Melancholy*, Joshua Wolf Shenk documents how depression challenged Lincoln, and yet he was able to harness his despondency in such a way that it led him to remarkable achievements and astonishing success. Shenk wrote:

It is a peculiar feature of Lincoln's story that, throughout his life, his response to suffering [melancholy] led to still greater suffering [melancholy]. As a young man, he stepped back from the brink of suicide, deciding he must live to do some meaningful work. This sense of purpose sustained him but also led him into a wilderness of doubt and dismay, as he asked, with vexation, *what* work he would do and *how* he would do it. This pattern was repeated in the 1850s, when his work against the extension of slavery gave him a sense of purpose but also fueled a nagging sense of failure. And as president, he identified the Emancipation Proclamation as the culmination of his life's work. But his commitment to the measure led, over the next year and a half, to the real prospect of his own personal defeat and, more important, the defeat of the cause he valued more than life itself.

With hard work and good fortune, he met and triumphed over the final challenge that lay before him. And then a man came up behind him and put a bullet in his head because of what he had done and stood for. Lincoln died as he had lived, a dramatic illustration of how suffering can be bound up with greatness. His story endures in large part because he sank so deeply into that suffering and came away with increased humility and determination. The humility came from a sense that, whatever ship carried him on life's rough waters, *he* was not the captain but merely a subject of the divine force . . . the "Almighty Architect" of existence. The determination came from a sense that, however humble his station, Lincoln was no idle passenger but a sailor on deck with a job to do. In his strange mix of deference to divine authority and willful

exercise of his own meager power, Lincoln achieved transcendent wisdom, the delicate fruit of a lifetime of pain. . . .

Modern studies confirm the salutary effect of faith on depression. For example, one study of 271 religious and nonreligious adults in treatment for depression found that the former had an edge in their recovery, largely because their beliefs gave them something that depression tends to strip away—hope. . . .

. . . After Eddie Lincoln's [his second son] death in 1850, a recently arrived minister in Springfield . . . James Smith, conducted the boy's funeral. Smith often visited the Lincoln home at the corner of Eighth and Jackson. Like Lincoln, Smith had been a skeptic, but after he converted to Christianity, he published a book, *The Christian's Defense*, that aimed to draw other freethinkers into his flock. According to Smith, Lincoln read his book and found it convincing. "He examined the Arguments as a lawyer who is anxious to reach the truth investigates testimony," Smith recounted. "The result was the announcement by himself that the argument in favor of the Divine Authority and inspiration of the Scripture was unanswerable." . . .

. . . He repeatedly called himself an "instrument" of a larger power—which he sometimes described as the people of the United States, and other times as God—and said he had been charged with "so vast, and so sacred a trust" that "he felt that he had no moral right to shrink; nor even to count the chances of his own life, in what might follow." . . .

. . . [In] the summer of 1863 . . . Lincoln found comfort in the Book of Job. . . . Commenting on the Book of Job, the prominent nineteenth-century theologian Mark Rutherford wrote, "God is great, we know not his ways . . . yet if we possess our souls in

patience, we *may* pass the valley of the shadow, and come out in sunlight again.”

Lincoln probably saw the parallels: Job lost his family. Lincoln lost his child, many friends, and vast numbers of soldiers in his charge. Job lost his great estate. Lincoln, in a real sense, had lost his country, for by 1863 the war was no longer about preserving the Union; it was about building something new. What distinguished Lincoln was his willingness to cry out to the heavens in pain and despair, and then turn, humbly and determinedly, to the work that lay before him. (191-92, 95-97, 200)

Praise and service provide the practical conjunction that enables one to walk through the valley of despondency. Christian faith is rooted in *the Person and work of God in Christ*. “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For you created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev. 4:11). “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12). And it is also the Person and work of God in Christ that gives a human being *the ultimate purpose* for living—“. . . that those who live should live no longer for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15).

When the low mood comes, open your New Testament. Read it imaginatively: stand on the shore at Capernaum; visit the home at Bethany; sit by Jacob’s well, and in the upper room; look into the eyes of Jesus; listen to His voice; take a walk around by Calvary; remember the crown of thorns; then tell yourself (for it is true) “*All this was for me!* The Son of God loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.” And see if a passion of praise does not send the low mood flying. *Praise and service are great healers.* (Cowman 209-10).

Valley of Desertion

In addition to the valleys of deprivation and despondency, there is also the valley of desertion. *Desertion* is “state of being deserted or forsaken: DESOLATION” (Webster 307). It involves, “Loneliness. That must be the most desolate word in human language” (Baxter, Hazelip, and Barnett 35). For the Christian, desertion and the loneliness attached involve a great paradox. Such is evident from the words of the Lord when He said, “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that *you* will be scattered, each to his own, and *will leave Me alone*. And yet *I am not alone*, because *the Father is with Me*” (John 16:32, emp. added). Earlier Jesus had said, “. . . *I am not alone*, but *I am with the Father* who sent Me” (John 8:16, emp. added). Jesus walked through the valley of desertion and loneliness, and yet He was not deserted and lonely. The Father was with Him. He was with the Father.

It is significant to note the placement of the Shepherd Psalm when considering the valley of desertion and loneliness. Psalm 23 is preceded by Psalm 22 (the Psalm of the cross) and followed by Psalm 24 (the Psalm of the crown). Both of these Psalms have Messianic application (i.e. both Psalms contain statements that apply to the Person and work of Jesus Christ). For example, Coffman believed that Psalm 22 contains at least twenty specific details of events connected to the crucifixion of Christ. He wrote:

[T]he 22nd Psalm portrays a more vivid picture of the Lord’s death on Calvary than a man can write today, with the literature of [twenty] centuries at his fingertips. . . . The crucifixion of our Lord fulfilled to the very letter the marvelous prophecies which foretold it. In view of the remarkable detail of this great

prophecy, it is not unthinkable that Christ was calling attention to it by quoting its opening lines. (509-10)

The opening lines of Psalm 22 to which Coffman referred are “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Ps. 22:1a). This is the meaning of the cry of our Lord as reported by Matthew: “and about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matt. 27:46). Leslie Badham, in his brief treatment of the seven statements of Christ on the cross, wrote, “. . . [T]here is no sentence in the Gospels more authentic than this. No wonder Schmiedel, the German critic, listed it among the many passages that . . . would never have been invented” (37). Pharr calls these words “the most startling of all words ever spoken” (95). In an excellent study of these words he provides the following helpful explanation:

. . . It defies comprehension that deity could be severed from deity, that God could be forsaken by God.

On the other hand, it must be true that Jesus was never wrong in what he said. We can sympathize with the despondency of David, who in his distress thought he had been forsaken. He was wrong, of course, but spoke from the limited perception of one whose depression caused him to doubt God’s assurances. David’s cry was out of confusion. But Jesus was never confused. His cry was not mere misdirected emotion. Under great burdens men may say things that in better times they do not believe. Not so with Jesus. His was not the complaint of a disoriented or doubtful mind.

Here, then, are two awesome and seemingly paradoxical facts that stand before us. First, the Father would not forsake his Son; second, that Jesus could not be mistaken in the words he spoke. . . .

It is not possible for God to be other than the God that he is. He is perfect in holiness and absolute in justice. He is also a God of love and mercy. Calvary is

where perfect justice and gracious mercy are merged together to give us redemption. Some have naively imagined that God in his power might have chosen some other plan for saving men. But God being who he is, and sin being what it is, there could be no other way. Only in suffering of the sinless Savior could the penalty for sin be paid.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). On the cross Christ was forsaken by God so that we could be accepted by God. He sensed the full weight of every man’s sins crushing upon his soul and felt how dreadful it is to bear sin’s penalty. . . .

Paul reminded the Galatians that the law said, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree,” and explained that we are redeemed from the curse because Christ was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). The curse of sin is alienation from God. That curse was endured when he in “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

. . . Jesus experienced the death of his body, but at the same time in some unfathomable way he experienced the awful penalty due for the sins of the whole creation. (97, 99-100)

As a follower of Christ, the apostle Paul knew what it was like to walk through the valley of desertion and loneliness. He described such when he wrote, “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. . . . And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim. 4:16-17). This experience from Paul’s life evidences the practical fulfillment of the Lord’s promise referenced by the Hebrews writer: “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5). To “never leave” or “forsake” here means “to

leave without support . . . to leave someone in distress, to leave in the lurch, to desert” (Rogers and Rogers 549). Lockyer summed up how the Christian can successfully walk through the valley of desertion and loneliness:

Oh, what a gracious promise, “I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee”! We cannot read these words, falling as they did from the lips of our blessed Lord Himself, without realizing that they drip with His own heart’s blood, for there at Calvary, as His mangled form was stretched upon the tree, He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). He was forsaken in that lone hour that He might have grace to say to His bloodwashed people, “I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee.” (95)

Valley of Disease

Another valley through which the Christian sometimes must walk is the valley of disease. There is a real sense in which the Bible is a book about sick people. One of the more prominent cases is that of Job. In addition to the loss of his children, loss of his possessions, loss of friends, the loss of his wife’s support, and his loss of prominence, Job lost his health because of a terrible disease. Jackson described this disease in the following:

The nature of Job’s disease has been discussed at length by scholars. The two most common identifications have been leprosy and elephantiasis. Whatever it was, it appears to have been incurable and characterized by: boils (2:7), itching (2:8), mental depression (3:25), worms and running sores (7:5), shortness of breath (9:18), darkness of eyes (16:16), odorous breath (19:17), loss of weight (19:20), corroding bones and gnawing pain (30:17), blackened skin and fever (30:30). The indication seems to be that this horrible condition continued for months (7:3, 29:2). (95)

The days and nights were long and restless for Job because of his illness (Job 7:1-5). When he did sleep, he was terrified with nightmares (Job 7:13-14). He wanted to die (Job 7:15-16). It reminds me of W. A. Bradfield who was a great gospel preacher and educator at Freed-Hardeman College for many years. He became ill with cancer from which he died in 1972. I heard James McGill, a friend of W. A. Bradfield, tell of visiting Bradfield when he was dying of cancer. Bradfield asked McGill if he would pray that he might die. Jimmy McGill told his friend that he could not do that. In relating this, McGill said what he remembered most about W. A. Bradfield's final days on Earth on his sickbed was that he repeatedly quoted the Lord's words to Paul concerning his thorn in the flesh—"My grace is sufficient for you . . ." (2 Cor. 12:9). The Psalmist wrote, "The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed" (Ps. 41:3).

A preacher who had been struggling for several years with a disease that played havoc with his life's work shared with me how he learned to cope with his situation. He said, "I finally decided my motto would be-'Let Go and Let God.'" Then one day, while reading from the Psalms, I happened on that great verse in which God said, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). A more recent translation of this is as follows: "Let go, relax" (NASV). The reason why one can "let go" and find strength in the midst of life's troubles is revealed in the opening lines of the aforementioned Psalm: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). Repeatedly, the Psalmist declared that God is with us (Ps. 46:1, 5, 7, 11), and "therefore we will not fear" (Ps. 46:2), because God is in the midst, and God shall help (Ps. 46:5). (Pugh 126)

Because God is with us, God is in the midst, and God shall help, we can walk through the valley of disease and sickness.

Valley of Diabolical Darkness

The word *diabolical* is derived from the Greek (*diabolos*) meaning “slanderer, accuser, devil” (Bietenhard 468). *Diabolical darkness* has reference to the challenges of the devil through temptation and sin which are represented biblically by great darkness. John wrote, “. . . God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Christians have been delivered out of the power [kingdom] of darkness and into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). They have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). The valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4) entails “. . . the profoundest darkness . . . a deep place . . . and naturally darker than a plain or mountain” (Alexander 108). As implied in the above considerations, the valley of the shadow of death is not limited to the darkness of temptation and sin. However, the valleys through which the Christian must walk certainly include this valley of the diabolical darkness of temptation and sin. None of us is immune to temptation. Even our Lord walked through the valley of diabolical temptation. “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1). The writer of the Hebrews’ epistle says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Herein lies one of the means provided for the Christian to enable him to walk through the valley of temptation. Warren explains the meaning of this for our lives:

. . . Christ has “been tempted in all points like as we,” not in the sense that He has actually undergone each item of human suffering, but that in suffering the greatest suffering of all (the indescribably agony of bearing the sins of man on the cross), He is, in a sense, involved in every lesser suffering which man endures (Heb. 4:15). Because He has suffered, being tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted because of their suffering. . . . (*Jesus*, 165-66)

Peter wrote, “. . . [T]he Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations . . .” (2 Peter 2:9). The Lord delivers out of temptation by providing that by which we can be delivered from the evil one. He taught all His disciples to pray, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13). He does not tempt man to sin (James 1:13-14). He does allow us to be brought into situations where we may be tempted. However, He is able to deliver us through this valley of the devil’s temptations.

How precious the springs that flow into the places of temptation, for there is nothing in life so trying as the touch of Satan’s hand, and the breath of the destroyer. Oh, how sweet it is, *even there*, to find that the light is as deep as the shadow and heaven is nearest when we are hard by the gates of hell. . . . “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.” (Simpson qtd. in Cowman 2)

Among the great provisions available to enable one to walk through the valley of diabolical darkness are [1] *the panoply (panoplia-armor) of God* (Eph. 6:10-17) [2] *prayer* (Eph. 6:18) [3] *providence* (1 Cor. 10:13) [4] *perseverance* (Eph. 6:18; 1 Peter 5:8-9) [5] *the person and work of Jesus Christ* (2 Tim. 4:16-18). When darkness veils His lovely

face I rest on His unchanging grace (Mote). The threefold cord of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is dipped in the crimson blood of the Lamb of God who takes away my sins (John 1:29)! This threefold cord of salvation enables me to walk through the valley of diabolical darkness, because its fiber results in: [1] salvation from the condemnation of sin (Rom. 5:9; 8:1) [2] salvation from the control of sin (Rom. 6:14, 17-18) and [3] salvation from the corruptibility of sin (Rom. 8:19-21).

It is reported that if one visits the Wartburg where Martin Luther for a time was secluded, he would observe a black spot on one of the walls of the room the great Reformer occupied. Legend has it that one night during this solitude he suffered great depression because of the weakness of his flesh. He had a dream that Satan appeared to him with a long scroll in which were written Luther's sins and transgressions, which the devil proceeded to read aloud. The devil mocked Luther telling him that one who had sinned as he could never do service for God and could not escape himself from hell. Baron completes the story with the following:

As the long list was being read, Luther's terrors grew, and his agonies of soul increase. At last, however, rousing himself, he jumped up and exclaimed: "It is all true, Satan, and many more sins which I have committed in my life which are known to God only; but write at the bottom of your list, '*The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin,*' and grasping the inkstand on his table he threw it at the devil, who soon fled, the memorial of it being left in the ink-splash on the wall. (93-4)

The story may only be legend. However, reality is the blackness of our sins, and the weakness of our flesh, that cause us, if honest, to cry out as Paul in sin's valleys, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this

body of death?” (Rom. 7:24). The answer: “I thank God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:23).

John wrote, “Having received the piece of bread, he [Judas] then went out immediately. *And it was night*” (John 13:30, emp. added). “And it was night” is a reminder of the darkness and separation of sin. It was night for Jesus who went out and was met with lanterns, torches, weapons, arrested as a common criminal, and nailed to the cross on which He was hanged for six hours, three of which were in profound darkness. It was night for Judas who betrayed Him, and it was night for Peter who denied Him. Both were in the valley of diabolical darkness. Judas did not successfully walk through the valley but went out into an eternal night of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30). Peter also went out in the night and wept himself back to repentance and faith through the look and the word of the Lord (cf. Luke 22:61-62). Which will it be for us?

Valley of Death

The final valley with reference to our sojourn on Earth, which every one of us will be called upon to face, is the valley of death. We will not experience only the valley of a “shadow” of death, but we will experience death itself with the only exception being ‘we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord’ (1 Thess. 4:15). Biblical testimony and human experience both verify that the valley of death is inescapable. “. . . [I]t is appointed for men to die . . .” (Heb. 9:27). “No man has power over the spirit to retain the spirit . . .” (Eccl. 8:8). Truly, we are going down the valley one by one.

Although everyone must die all do not view the valley of death alike. Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899)

was an American lawyer who, through his philosophy of agnosticism, attacked Christianity. On May 31, 1879, the funeral for his brother, E. C. Ingersoll, took place in Washington, D. C. The *National Republican* (June 3, 1879) described the funeral as follows:

It was the largest gathering of distinguished persons assembled at a funeral since that of Chief Justice Chase. . . . The only ceremony at the house, other than the viewing of the remains was a most affecting, pathetic, and touching address by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, brother of the deceased. . . . [H]e bowed his head upon the dead man's coffin in uncontrollable grief. It was only after some delay . . . that Colonel Ingersoll was able to finish reading his address. . . . The scene was heartrending. . . . (qtd. in Ingersoll 389).

“This “most affecting, pathetic, and touching address” included the following words of the famous agnostic concerning his view of the valley of death:

. . . [W]hether in mid-sea or ‘mong the breakers of the farther shore, a wreck at last must mark the end of each and all. And every life, no matter if its every hour is rich with love and every moment jeweled with a joy, will, at its close, become a tragedy as sad and deep and dark as can be. . . . Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing. (390-91)

Twenty years later, on July 21, 1899, Robert Ingersoll himself experienced the end of what he had called “a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities.” He went through the valley of death. His body was kept at home because of his wife's reluctance to part

with it. The body finally was removed because the health of the family was at stake. Sweeting wrote, “The memorial service included the notice, ‘There will be no singing’” (100). Is there any wonder why?

In contrast, B. C. Goodpasture was a great preacher and editor. He was one of the most prominent among churches of Christ in the 20th century. On a February morning in 1977 Goodpasture had been reading that very morning from the pen of one of his favorite authors, John Henry Jowett. He circled a paragraph in his reading that said: “And yet I must die. Yes, but the old enemy shall now be my friend. He will not be my master, but my servant. He shall just be the porter to open the door into my Father’s house of unspeakable blessedness and glory. Death shall not hurt me” (qtd. in Henley 585). As a Christian, I can face the valley of death with the assurance that since Jesus has conquered it I can safely go through it. He has the keys of Hades and Death (Rev. 1:17-18). I am able to confront the issues of life and death with the historical fact of Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead. This is assurance of an historic nature.

The resurrection of Christ, perhaps the best authenticated fact in ancient history . . . was the central point in the teaching of the early Christians, the edge of their appeal. . . .

Jesus Christ . . . is the world’s one hope. Arnold Toynbee, the great historian, examines twenty-six human societies and is driven . . . to a moral explanation of human greatness and human disaster. At the close of his sixth volume he concludes an examination of history’s “saviors.” . . . They have failed one and all. “Or have they?” asks the historian. . . . “At the final ordeal of death, few . . . have dared to put their title to the test by plunging into the icy river. And now as we stand and gaze with our eyes fixed on

the further shore, a single figure rises from the flood and straightway fills the whole horizon. There is the Saviour, ‘and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand, and He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.’” In how many words did the great scholar reach this conclusion. . . . A Galilean fisherman once reached it with greater clarity in half-a-dozen. “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). (Blaiklock and Blaiklock 70-71)

“And then one day I’ll cross that river; I’ll fight life’s final war with pain, And then as death gives way to vict’ry, I’ll see the lights of glory and know He reigns” (Gaither).

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philip. 1:21). “Yea, though I walk through the valley . . . of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me . . .” (Ps. 23:4).

Conclusion

Most of us do not want the valleys of life. We would rather be on the mountaintop in the sunshine of success, blessing, achievement, and accomplishment than to be walking through deprivation, disaster, despondency, desertion, desolation, disease, darkness, and death. However, the question is not whether we want to experience life’s valleys, or whether the valleys will be challenging. Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The question is how will you and I respond to life’s valleys?

A native American’s version of Psalm 23 manifests the attitude each of us needs in order to overcome and successfully walk through life’s valleys: “Sometime, it may be a long, long time, He will draw me into a place between mountains. It is dark there, but I’ll draw back not. I’ll be

afraid not, for it is in there between the mountains that the Shepherd Chief will meet me . . .” (Cowman 278). The valley may be economic ruin, a job loss, family failure, a terminal disease, natural disaster, a terrorist attack, a problem child, a broken heart, nuclear war, a shattered dream, spiritual defeat, a loved one’s death, depression, devastation, desertion, despair, discouragement, disease, deprivation, or death. However, we can be more than conquerors as we go through life’s valleys. Paul wrote, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither . . . height nor depth . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:37-39).

In an article titled, “The Sequatchie Valley,” published in the *Gospel Advocate* more than a quarter of a century ago the inimitable Guy N. Woods spoke of the preacher T. B. Larimore (1843-1929). When Larimore was just a boy it was necessary for him to work to help support his mother and sisters. When only ten years old he hired out to plow for \$4 per month. He was so weak and frail that the plow handles were often covered with blood from his nose, and the loss of blood caused the lad to reel and stagger between the plow handles (555).

Larimore stated:

. . . I always went home-a mile and a quarter away-after dark Saturday night. My way lay along the riverside, up the river on the right bank. On one side were tall mountains that cast their shadows over the river every bright day. On the other side of the road was the river, and, as I walked along, I could hear it rippling over shallow places and murmuring against the bank. At one place a deep ravine cut across the road, and down in that ravine it was always dark as I

passed along going home. I was timid and afraid. My sweet little mother knew I was timid, and, notwithstanding she was timid, too, she always came to the edge of the ravine nearest home, to meet me. As I approached that dark place, she would hear me and call softly: "Is that you, my son?" Then all my fears were gone. We would meet in the ravine and go home together happy, no longer afraid or timid. I sometimes wonder if, when I come to cross the valley of death, I shall hear my mother's voice on the other side as she waits for me to come. I know she will be there, if she can. (48)

A few years later, following a visit to the Valley, Larimore wrote on the theme "A Broader Vision" and said,

. . . [I]n life we plod on day by day, scarcely realizing we are on the upward road. But if we move steadily on, striving to fulfill duty's demands as each day presents them, occasionally a clearer spiritual vision is granted us—a vision of the lowlands we have left behind us and of the heights toward which we are striving. At such points on our journey we press on with renewed courage and determination, our hearts fixed on the heights above.

"Just as our vision broadened and brightened while we climbed from the valley to the top of the mountain, so, in the light of Love Divine, may our spiritual vision broaden and brighten till upon our enraptured gaze shall burst the blissful realization of God's eternal home." (91-92)

Across the shores of time, and into the dark valleys of life, comes the voice of Him who is the hope of glory. He speaks words that can forever heal our broken hearts, calm our apprehensive souls, wipe away our blinding tears, relieve our pains, quell our doubts, and give us hope of life forevermore. He bequeaths us the richest legacy as we walk

through life's valleys when He says—" . . . I am with you always . . ." (Matt. 28:20).

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WALKING ON HEAVEN'S PEACEFUL SHORE

Phil Sanders

"If God hath made this world so fair where sin and death abound, how beautiful beyond compare will paradise be found" (James S. Montgomery).

If we could open the graves of saints, who are at rest with God (Rev. 14:13), they would say with one loud, clear voice, "Do everything you can to stay right with God! Heaven is too good to miss!"

Jesus said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:1-3). Heaven is the place where Jesus is right now. He went there to prepare a place for you and for me, so that we can be with Him forever.

As a place, heaven is perfect; it doesn't have all the flaws of our homes on earth. Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Who will be in heaven?

God, the Father, the one we have been praying to all these years will be there. Jesus, the Son and our Savior, who died for our sins will be there. The Holy Spirit, who gave us the Bible and dwells in us, will be there. Angels, heavenly hosts, cherubim and seraphim, will all be there. Great saints will be there: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, the prophets, Ruth Esther and many others. The apostles and prophets of Jesus will be there, Christians who loved the Lord and served him. Every faithful child of God will be there, every person who has been washed in the blood of Jesus and whose name is in the Lamb's book of life.

Paul assures us, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

I long for the day when I can see my Lord. I want to see Him in all His glory. I remember all He went through, his pierced hands and feet, the wound in his side, and his crown of thorns. I remember all my sins and how they were atoned at the cross. I want to say to Him from the bottom of my heart, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." Yes, I know I can do that in my prayers and by my life now; but I long for the day I can see my Savior and my God face to face. I long for the day I can look into His eyes, thank Him, express my love for him, and praise Him.

But some people won't be there. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all

liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:8)

Some religious people also won't be in heaven. The Lord Jesus, who will judge us all, said, “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 *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23). One cannot ignore the teaching of Jesus and expect to enter heaven one day.

Most people think almost everyone's going to heaven; but Jesus said in Matt. 7:13-14, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” You see, no one stumbles by accident into heaven. Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. You must enter that narrow gate.

What will we do in heaven?

First, *we will be praising God*. John wrote in Revelation 4:9-11 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

People who love God and love worshipping Him will love heaven. Worship in the assemblies of the saints prepares us for heaven. Psalm 16:11 says, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” These are holy and righteous times filled with pure joy found in being able to express love and adoration to our great God and Creator.

Second, *we will have a time of rest*. Rev. 14:13 says: And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.” In this world we have struggles and labors, but there we have glory and comfort. Heaven is the place those who work hard for the Lord will inherit for their efforts. We can hear no greater commendation than that which the Lord gives to us. His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21, 23).

So glorious is heaven the apostle Paul felt he could ignore all the struggles and pains of this life, because the next life is so much greater. He said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18). Paul looked at heaven as his eternal home, a place so much better than the earth. He said, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain....But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better” (Phil. 1:21-23).

The Revelation of Jesus to the apostle John reveals heaven will be a place without the discomforts we experience on earth. One of the blessings of heaven comes from thinking about all the things that will not be there. John says:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” All the heartaches, diseases, hurts, problems we face in this life will be absent in heaven. We could not dream or imagine how wonderful it will be to be in God’s presence (Rev. 21:3-4).

Third, we will have a time of service. Again Jesus reveals to John what service we will render in heaven in the closing chapter of Revelation:

“His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.” The word for serve refers to those who serve in worship. We don’t know all the things we’ll do there, but we know there will be a place and a task suited to us as we serve around the throne (Rev. 22:3-5).

When you love someone, you want to serve and please the One you love. Heaven will give us that opportunity. In Matthew 25 those faithful stewards who used their money (talents) to make more were given greater roles of service in the kingdom. Service implies a kind of worship that glorifies God. If you do not enjoy serving down here, you

probably will not enjoy heaven, for it is a place where serving God will be pure joy and overflowing!

The Tree of Life

God placed the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, but Adam and Eve forfeited a right to eat of it when they sinned (Gen. 3:22-24). God forced them out of the garden and stationed the cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. What man lost in leaving the garden, however, God restores to those who enter heaven. The tree of life will be there.

John reveals, “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-5). The tree of life assures us that we will indeed be able to live forever (Gen. 3:22). Unlike fruit trees on earth that bear only once or bear only in their seasons, the tree of life in heaven continually yields its fruit every month. One of the most intriguing thoughts is that the leaves of the tree are “for the healing of the nations.” No doubt, every human needs healing from some hurt or imperfection. The nations have endured language and cultural conflicts that have erupted into war through the centuries. How God will heal all the things we do not know. How He uses the leaves we do not know, but we give thanks that God has a plan in heaven to bring about peace.

God wants to bless you eternally.

God is looking forward to the end of this world and the beginning of heaven. The Lord Jesus is preparing a

place just for us. We should realize that our homecoming will have the attention and blessing of God; it will not be some small thing in His eyes. He is bringing His children home to live with Him. Paul said in Ephesians 2:4-7:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Just as any parent wants to bless His children, so God wants to bless us with surpassing kindness. He wishes to shower on us all the riches of His grace in kindness. We cannot imagine all the glory, beauty, and joy God has prepared for us on that day when He is glorified in His saints (2 Thess. 1:10).

The author of Hebrews reminds us how God sees and values His people. He says in Hebrews 11:13-16:

All these [Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob] died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Our home is not here, but in heaven with God. We long to hear God’s welcome. Paul was a Roman citizen with many rights and blessings, but he recognized his real citizenship was in heaven. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from

which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

If you could live in perfect health forever, with never a need or problem, never a sorrow or hurt, with only good people who love you, what would that be worth to you? That’s heaven! The way to heaven is in Jesus. Many people get their priorities so mixed up. One day the things of this life will all be gone. The Scriptures teach that the earth and its works will be burned up (2 Pet 3:10). All that will be left for you are your soul and your eternal destiny. Nothing else will matter. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). People wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb. That takes place when people trust in the Lord, repent of sins, and are baptized into the *death* of Christ, where His blood is shed. God cleanses us with the blood of Christ when we are baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3-7), giving us new life and hope for heaven. God’s heart is big enough for everyone, and we hope your heart longs for God. Don’t let anyone, anything, or any circumstance rob you of your place in heaven.

