

1990

## 1990: Abilene Christian College Bible Lectures - Full Text

ACU Press

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ACU Press, Jim Mankin, Adron Doran, Frank Pack, Kregg Hood, Tony Ash, Harold Shank, Doug Parsons, Howard Norton, Rick Atchley, Bob Rigdon, Charles Stephenson, Clyde Woods, Duane Warden, and Gary Colvin

**LUKE:  
A GOSPEL FOR  
THE WORLD**





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A GOSPEL FOR  
THE WORLD**

*being the*

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Abilene Christian University  
Annual Bible Lectures

**1990**

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## **PREFACE**

The Lectures, Biblical Forum presentations and the feature class contained in this volume are those which are given at the 72nd Annual Bible Lectureship at Abilene Christian University on the theme: "Luke: A Gospel for the World."

In this year's Lectureship we look again at the Savior. We see Him through the eyes of Luke, who was not an eyewitness nor a Jew, but one who sought the Lord with all his heart. The Gospel of Luke is said to be "the most beautiful book ever written" and it is certainly about the greatest life ever lived.

The primary purpose of the Annual Bible Lectureship is to further the cause of Christ in the world. The Lectureship Committee seeks each year to bring outstanding men and women of God to the campus to speak on the most relevant and helpful subjects facing the people of God. It is hoped that these lectures will be helpful not only to those who were able to attend in person, but also, through this volume, to thousands of others for years to come.

**CARL BRECHEEN**  
Lectureship Director



**THEME  
SPEECHES**

## JIM MANKIN

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## The Rich Fool

Jim Mankin

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' '

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Last summer in a North Carolina outlet shopping mall I saw a car with a provocative bumper sticker. It read, "The one who has the most toys when he dies, wins." This could well be the motto of our culture. It seems that materialism - the desire for things - is the roaring cry of today's society.

The young people entering college are a barometer of the value system of our world. The University of California, Los Angeles, has been surveying a representative sample of some 300,000 entering college freshman since 1966. In the 1987 survey, over 75% identified "being well off financially" as an essential or very important life goal, compared with 44% in 1967. In contrast, only 35% of the freshman chose "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" as a top personal goal, down from 83% in 1967.<sup>1</sup> Paul Chance has called these same students pragmatic and materialistic to a fault. He writes, "It is likewise reflected in the majors they chose for life's careers," then adds they avoided "becoming a physician, lawyer, social worker, teacher or scientist"<sup>2</sup> because these are either service oriented professions or required years of preparation. Their desire is to get on with life quickly and start making money.

We have not yet learned Jesus' sage observation, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." The Parable of the Rich Fool is therefore not only "as old as time" but also as "new as today."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the rich fool portrayed in Jesus' story is Everyman and Everywoman. The basic details of one person's success, his plans to enjoy himself in his own way, when suddenly death intervenes, is a story that happens in every age. William Barclay's comment that a "parable is essentially a sword to stab men's minds awake"<sup>4</sup> seems especially true of this parable which Luke recorded with its obvious warning against materialism and greed. It speaks to our times.

Neil Lightfoot has well written, "If the Parable of the Good Samaritan is the most practical of the parables, the Parable of the Rich Fool is the most necessary."<sup>5</sup>

### A Warning of Concern

While Jesus was teaching a crowd of thousands of his disciples, a man from the audience interrupted him. "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me," he cried out. Perhaps he brought his problem to Jesus out of respect for Him and his ability to solve his case. He does not, however, seem to have been as concerned with spiritual matters as he was with material things.

Jesus did not come to be a judge or arbiter; he refused to have anything to do with settling a family quarrel. The law of Moses was specific in this point, anyway. The law, as stated in Deuteronomy 21:15-17, said that the oldest son received a double portion or two-thirds of the father's inheritance, and the remainder was to be divided among the other sons. It seems obvious that the man who raised the question to Jesus was a younger brother who in some way was saying, "Foul! Not fair! I want more!"

It is at this point that Jesus gives the man - and us - a warning concern about material greed. "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." Covetousness or greed has been described as drinking salt water: The more you drink the more you crave, for it is not satisfying. "This present life is so absorbing to us that we are easily fascinated by the things of this world and led astray as this man was."<sup>6</sup> Do we hear the warnings?

Paul wrote to Timothy,

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered

from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

In the same context of teaching the multitudes, Jesus spoke to his special "little flock." Seeing the greed of the man who asked for more goods from the inheritance, Jesus said,

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there is your heart also (Luke 12:33-34).

Based on Jesus's teachings we need to learn these simple lessons: Our lives are more than what we own. People are more important than things. A purposeful life-philosophy is better than being well-off financially. This sentiment is expressed in the old hymn,

Earth holds no treasures but perish with using,  
How precious they be,  
Yet there's a country to which I am going,  
Heaven hold all to me.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Lesson Illustrated**

Jesus then tells the story of the successful farmer. Here was a man who prospered beyond his fondest dreams. His bumper crops were so great that his barns could not hold all the harvest. He had to do something, so he decided to tear down his old barns to build bigger ones. Success and prosperity were his. Now at last he could rest from his labors and be at ease.

As Ronald Wallace has observed,

We think of the sense of security and the relief from financial strain that wealth could bring, of the desirable things it could purchase, of the opportunity it would give for doing good, and after considering all this we conclude that it is good to be rich.<sup>8</sup>

Instead, God's pronouncement on this man was, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you." Daniel Seagraves has made this observation,

The word "fool" is a fascinating word, particularly when you look at some of the synonyms: buffoon, clown, dunce, halfwit, idiot, jester, nincompoop, simpleton - or at some of the slang expressions: bonehead, chump, dummy, fathead, jackass, knucklehead, meathead.<sup>9</sup>

He was a fool because he had a false sense of security - relying on his wealth.

He was a fool because he planned for his future alone - without consulting God.

He was a fool because he only had earthly, physical riches - not spiritual treasures.

In this parable about a fool, it is apparent that God has a better idea. The truth, as Seagraves points out, is that "God is no fool, nor is he fooled. We may have to wait until the life to come before God will prove his point, but he guarantees to do so."<sup>10</sup>

We still need to take the teaching of Jesus from this parable to heart. Greed is a deadly sin. Materialism is still rampant in our day as it was then. We would do well to study this Rich Fool and observe how he missed the way in his view of life. It can be seen in the important things that this man forgot.<sup>11</sup>

## He Forgot Other People

As you read the parable, the soliloquy of the Rich Fool is full of the first person singular. He thought within himself; he talked the matter over, held a dialogue and discussion with himself.<sup>12</sup> “What shall I do? I have nowhere to bestow my crops. . . This is what I’ll do. *I* will tear down *my* barns and build bigger ones, and there *I* will store all *my* grain and *my* goods.” Six times the pronoun “I” is used, and five times “my” is used. It is evident that he forgot other people due to his self-centeredness.

Everything he did and planned was for himself; not once did he think of others. He could have shared his abundance with his neighbors, the poor, the widowed and orphaned, but he seemingly did not see these people at all. He was just going to take his ease - to eat, drink, and be merry. Keeping all of the enjoyment and happiness for himself.

Yet we also are so prone to forget other people. One man supposedly prayed, “O Lord, bless me and my wife, son John and his wife. Us four and no more. Amen.” As Christians we are called upon to see the needs of others.

Do you help to feed the hungry? Do you give clothing to the poor? Do you visit the sick? Do you counsel those in trouble? Do you befriend the lonely, the downtrodden, the young and the old? Do you speak a word about Jesus to the lost? Do you give to help spread the gospel?

Sir J. M. Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, said, “Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from their own.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus, in talking about our serving the needs of others, states, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

### **He Forgot that Man is More than What He Owns**

The Rich Fool concentrated on the things of this world - material things. He failed to make the distinction between what a person *is* and what a person *has*. He had everything to live with but nothing to live for.

The Spanish have a proverb that puts it graphically, "There are no pockets in a shroud." While living in Chattanooga, a prominent attorney called one day to ask if I would conduct the graveside service for one of his clients. I agreed to do so. When I arrived at Memorial Park Cemetery at the appointed hour of the service, I was met by the funeral director, the attorney, and six pallbearers. Though the deceased had lived a prosperous life, no one else was present. After the brief service, the attorney gave me a check, then gave each pallbearer a check and asked the funeral director to send him the bill for his services. We were all paid to be there! Yet when this man died he left behind all that he had. As God asked the Rich Fool, "Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

Perhaps this is why Paul gives this instruction to Timothy:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them *to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share*. In this way they will be able to lay up treasures for themselves. . . . (1 Timothy 6:17-19, emphasis added).

Don't forget that you are more than what you own! Your life does consist of more than mere possessions,

trinkets, and toys. Lightfoot has written these perceptive insights, "Money can buy much, but money cannot buy a sense of usefulness, a clear conscience, and a mind content with God and man. These are the true riches, without which no man can be really happy."<sup>14</sup>

### **He Forgot God**

The greatest blunder of the Rich Fool is that he forgot God. He never ever took the Divine Being into account. He lived his life and planned for the future as if God did not exist.

This is the tragedy of our culture's mindset as well. People live as if God does not matter. Somehow God is like a benevolent grandfather, loving but remote, merciful but uninvolved. So we live out our days as though God could not make a difference. We depend upon the resources of the scientific world to solve and cure our ills. We don't even seem aware that there is a void in our lives - a hunger of the soul - that only God can fill.

In our world people are increasingly living as though God does not exist. Some go through the motions of living as if they are utterly self-sufficient. These persons seem to enact William Henley's poem, "I am the captain of my fate, I am the master of my soul." God is not in their plans because the mindset is to live completely as if God is only a figment of the religious imagination. How surprised this one will be when God invades his consciousness and announces, "You are today's fool!" It will come in the events of life, perhaps when least expected — in malignity, in bankruptcy, in an auto accident, in the death of a child.

James wrote for us to absorb,



Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money!” What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:13-15).

### **He Forgot Death**

The Rich Fool was happy with himself. He had all of what he wanted out of life, and now was planning to take it easy. He conceived that he would be supremely happy for many years, yet in reality he had only one day. God said, “This very night your life will be demanded of you.” The fool forgot the certainty of death.

We likewise deceive ourselves into thinking we have plenty of time. We all live as if others will die, but we think we are immune to death ourselves. It will be their obituary in the paper, not ours. It will be their son or daughter involved in a car accident, not ours. It will be their mate who is diagnosed with a malignancy, not ours. Our tomorrow of dying will just not come.

The devil no longer says to mankind, “You will not die” as he did to Adam and Eve. He now says, “You will not die *so soon*.” And the unsettling truth for all of us is that we believe him. Yet the Bible still declares,

All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because of the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:6-8)

The Rich Fool stands as a classic monument of one who failed because he was not rich in the things that matter most, the things of God. The end of his life is a sad one.

There is an old story of three apprentice devils who were coming from hell to earth to serve their time. They were telling Satan before they left what they intended to do.

One said, "I will tell men there is no God." "That," said Satan, "will not do because in their heart of hearts they know that there is."

"I will tell men," said the second, "there is no hell." "That," said Satan, "is still more hopeless for even in life they have experienced the remorse and the regret of hell."

"I will tell men," said the third, "that there is no hurry." "Go," said Satan, "tell them that and you will ruin them by the millions."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*The Futurist*, Nov/Dec 1988, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>*Psychology Today*, May 1987, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>See Barclay, William, *And Jesus Said: A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus*, (Edinburgh: The Church of Scotland Youth Committee, 1952), p. 113.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>See Lightfoot, Neil R., *Lessons from the Parables*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 78.

<sup>6</sup>See Wallace, Ronald S., *Many Things in Parables*, (San Francisco: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 149.

<sup>7</sup>See Teddlie, Tillit S., *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2, Hymn #36.

<sup>8</sup>See Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup>See Seagraves, Daniel R., *The Parables*, (Lyndale House, 1978), p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup>See Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>12</sup>Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup>See Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup>See Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

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**Work:** Served as a high school teacher, basketball coach and principal for 15 years. Director of Teacher Education and Certification, Kentucky State Department. Secretary, Kentucky Council on Public Higher Education. Member, Kentucky House of Representatives and Speaker of House for three sessions. President of Morehead State University (KY) for 23 years. Member, Board of Trustees of Freed-Hardeman and International Bible College.

**Ministry:** Began preaching in 1928 at age 18. Preached in 30 states. Local preaching in Kentucky and Tennessee.

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# Fishers Of Men

Dr. Adron Doran

Ernest Hemingway, an American novelist, wrote a book entitled *The Old Man of the Sea*. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote narratives describing activities of young men of the Tiberias Sea in Galilee. In all probability, Jesus and the apostles, whom he chose from among his early disciples, were all young men in their thirties. Those who wrote about “all things that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:2) placed at least five of the apostles (Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip) as living in Bethsaida on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, where they were engaged in the occupation of fishing and working in auxiliary enterprises. The early experiences of the apostles, who lived in the seashore villages of Galilee, greatly affected their personal growth and development and eminently prepared them for the difficult work which Jesus called them to do. The early lives of the other seven apostles likewise qualified them to become “witnesses (unto Christ) in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

## The Galilean Ministry

Though Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea under extenuating circumstances, his adolescent years and early adult period were spent with Mary, Joseph, and siblings in Nazareth which was located in the southern part of

Galilee, about fourteen miles west of the sea. It was in Nazareth "where he was brought up" that Jesus entered the synagogue on a Sabbath and stood up to read from the book of Isaiah. Christ interpreted the prophecy as applying to and being fulfilled in him. Opposition among the people of Nazareth developed against him, so he went to live in the northern city of Capernaum, where he became intimately associated with the fishermen operating around the sea.

### **The Lamb of God**

At the age of thirty years, Jesus left his native city and traveled into the southland where "John, the Baptist (was) preaching in the wilderness of Judea" (Matthew 3:1). John made an appeal to the Pharisees and Sadducees that they repent because he was preparing "the way of the Lord." John styled the coming Christ as one "who is mightier than I" who would baptize his listeners with the Holy Spirit.

John was baptizing in the Jordan River "in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there" (John 3:23). It could well be that Andrew, Peter, John, James, Philip, and Nathanael had gone from Galilee to where John was baptizing in Judea to hear and be baptized by him. At any rate, these disciples were in the audience when Jesus appeared and John pointed to him as the Lamb of God (John 1:28).

Christ had made the twenty-five mile journey to Jordan to be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Though John Baptist had been telling the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea about the Christ who would come after him, John was not fully assured himself

that this was the Messiah until the moment that Jesus came “up straightway out of the water” and he saw the “Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon” Christ and he heard the voice saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:15-17). John later told his disciples that God had identified Jesus to him by sending the dove as evidence of the Spirit (John 1:32-34).

Following the day when John had baptized Jesus, he pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God to two of his disciples—John, the son of Zebedee, and Andrew, the brother of Peter and son of Jona—who were invited by Jesus to go with him to his dwelling place and abide. Here, then, was the first introduction which James, John, Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael (Bartholomew) had to Jesus Christ. After the visit which Andrew had with Jesus, he sought and found his brother Simon Peter and “brought him to Jesus.” Later, Christ called Philip to follow him. Philip went in search of Nathanael and when he found him, he “saith unto him we have found him of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). Though Nathanael was skeptical that any good thing could come out of Nazareth, Christ was able to convince Nathanael that he was “the Son of God, the king of Israel.” These significant and impressive experiences were the first that the disciples of John, the Baptist, had in bringing others to Christ (John 1:29-42).

### **Christ Returns to Galilee**

Subsequent to his baptism by John the Baptist, in Judea, Christ returned to Galilee where at the city of

Cana, the birthplace of Nathanael, which was about five miles northeast of Nazareth, he performed the miracle of turning water into wine at the marriage feast. The mother of Jesus and his disciples who had accompanied him out of Judea, were present (John 2). From Cana, Jesus, his mother, his brethren, and his disciples “went down to Capernaum” (John 2:12-17). Evidently, after a few days, Jesus went to Jerusalem where he “cleansed the temple,” and after the imprisonment of John Baptist, by Herod, Jesus returned to the city of Capernaum in Galilee. It was about this point in time that Jesus formally called the twelve apostles to become fishers of men (Mark 1:17; Matthew 10:1-4).

### **Bethsaida By the Sea**

Bethsaida, the house of fish, was a city in Galilee on the west shore of the Sea of Genessaret, the home of Peter, James, John, Andrew, and Philip. Jesus was a frequent visitor of this city as he went throughout the province preaching the gospel of the coming kingdom. There were a number of other villages near the sea which were familiar to Jesus and his disciples. Christ seemed to have found rest and relaxation in these villages when he escaped from the great multitudes which pressed upon him.

Jona, a successful fisherman of Bethsaida, was the father of Peter and Andrew; and Zebedee, an equally wealthy fisherman who lived in the same city, was the father of James and John and the husband of Salome.

Jona and Zebedee had taught their sons from childhood the art and science of fishing—how to handle the oars, how to row a boat, how to set the sails, how to cast their nets, and how to read the weather signs. These families



were intimate friends, and the four boys were business partners. It is reasonable to have expected the sons of Jona and Zebedee to go together to seek out John, the Baptist, and to be brought to Christ. It remained for Jesus to call these expert fisherman to become fishers of men.

### **The Sea of Galilee**

The Sea of Galilee was also called the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret. It was the center of gravity for a very lucrative fishing enterprise. The sea was fed from the north by the mountain spring waters of the Jordan River. The sea is over twelve miles long and seven miles across at the widest point. It is 682 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea and has a depth range of 80 to 160 feet. A line of houses ringed the west and north shores of the lake and made up the villages of Bethsaida, Tiberias, Magdala (home of Mary Magdalene), Capernaum, and Chorazin, ranging in population from 1,000 to 15,000.

The fish from the Sea of Galilee supplied the markets in most of Palestine, especially those at the fish gate in Jerusalem. The fishermen used various types of fishing equipment including casting nets, drag nets, and rods with line and hook. Almost any time boats and ships could be seen anchored, with fishermen casting their nets into the water or mending their nets on shore. It was on the waters of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus walked, on which he slept in a boat and was awakened to still the waves, and in which he ordered Peter to catch a fish to find tax money. Jesus often was to be found walking along the sea, and in this setting he called fishers of fish to become fishers of men.

G.S. Smith wrote:

Christ went to a trade which had no private wrongs, and called men, not from their dreams but from work they were contended to do, from day to day, until something higher touched them. And so it came to pass that not the jargon of the fanatics and brigands in the highlands of Galilee, but the speech of the fishermen of her lake, the instruments of their simple craft, have become the language and symbolism of the world's religion.<sup>1</sup>

### **Fishers of Men**

The call of Jesus Christ for a select group of his disciples to become fisher-apostles was a dramatic decision on the part of Jesus and a thrilling moment for the honored disciples. The decision of Christ to invite these twelve men was not made suddenly nor considered lightly. He had been associated with them intimately, had listened to their conversations, and had observed their personal pattern of behavior. These men had also become deeply impressed with the unusual mission of Christ and astonished by his intense desire, determination, and competence to accomplish his purpose. They were completely ready to forsake all that they had and to follow him with only the promise, "I will make you fishers of men."

Most Bible commentators think that the records of the calling of the Galilean fishermen in Matthew 4:18-22, in Mark 1:16-20, and in Luke 5:1-11 all refer to the same incident in time and place, with Luke giving a more detailed version. Christ called seasoned men of the sea, a Roman tax collector, a fanatical Zealot, an Israelite without guile, a doubting twin, a man of courage, and one who proved

to be a traitor—and made them fisher-apostles. Matthew states that Jesus said, “I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19), and Mark records the words of Jesus as, “I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). There is no doubt but that Jesus meant that his transforming power, the example of his life, the truth which he taught, and the light which he shed upon them eventually would remove from their hearts the love and desire they may have had for their former way of life, favorite economic pursuit, and political loyalties. Christ indicated to his apostles that when they severed all of their ties of allegiance to any but to him, then they would become dedicated, skillful, and successful fishers of men. One of the evangelists sums up the whole purpose of Christ in choosing and ordaining the twelve apostles in these words:

And he goeth up into a mountain and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him and he ordained twelve, that they should be with him and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sickness and to cast out devils.

Mark 3:13-15

It is important to understand that Jesus wanted and needed to feel that the apostles “should be with him.” He often felt lonely as he stood in the midst of a hostile multitude. He solicited the personal support of fellowship of the twelve. He sought their reactions to his sermons, his parables, and his wondrous works. Though he went through a series of temptations alone, at the hands of Satan, he found the angels present when the ordeal ended (Matthew 4:1-11). However, he took the disciples to “be with him” on the mount of transfiguration (Luke

9:28-36), to the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39), and at the last supper (Luke 22:14). However, Jesus must have been deeply grieved when he was being "led away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled" that "all of the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matthew 26:56-57). Christ must have been filled with great sorrow when he announced his betrayal by Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:21-22), when he found his disciples sleeping in Gethsemane (Mark 14:37), and when Simon Peter denied him at the trial before Pilate (Luke 22:61-62). But the disciples looked forward with expectation of great joy to the time when Jesus would fulfill his promise to meet them again in Galilee after his resurrection (Matthew 26:32).

In the total process of the disciples becoming fishers of men, it was exceedingly important for the apostles to have been with Jesus. It was preparation for the greater things which the apostles would do for them to have been with Jesus when he made the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dumb to speak, the diseased to be healed, and Lazarus to be raised from the grave. The fishers of men were impressed when, in conversation with them, Peter confessed him as the Christ and Jesus promised to build his church (Matthew 16:13-20). Ah, but it was meaningful for John to have leaned on the breast of Jesus and to have stood with Mary at the crucifixion. Peter and John whom the rulers, elders, and scribes thought to be "unlearned and ignorant men," later "marvelled" and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus, after the apostles healed the lame man and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead (Acts 4).

Jesus Christ chose the twelve apostles, not only that

they might be with him and that he might be with them, but also “that he might send them forth to preach.” The great obsession which Christ had while he was upon the earth was to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He needed the apostles to help him accomplish this task during his lifetime and following his return to the Father. They were to become the torch-bearers of the truth. They became witnesses of all that they heard Jesus say and all that they saw him do.

In the prayer which Christ spoke unto the Father, which John recorded in chapter seventeen, he said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were and thou gavest them to me and they have kept thy word” and “as thou hast sent me into the world, even have I sent them into the world.” In answer to a question asked by Judas (not Iscariot), Jesus said unto the apostles, “But the Comforter which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said to you” (John 17:6,18,26). Mark recorded a conversation which Christ had with his apostles on the Mount of Olives, in which he said, “When they deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speaketh but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11).

When Christ sent his apostles into the world to “become fishers of men,” he stipulated that they preach the gospel and baptize in water the penitent believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20) (Mark 16:15-16) (Luke 24:46-48). He instructed them to go into the city of Jerusalem, where the

Holy Spirit would come upon them. There they would receive power, the kingdom would come, and they would become witnesses. In response to these instructions of Jesus, the apostles went into the city after his ascension and waited for the promises of the Father to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

On April 25, at the early morning hour of nine o'clock, in 33 A.D., the apostles began their work as fishers of men. All of the apostles spoke "with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). However, it remained for Simon Peter to represent the other eleven and clarify the situation and happenings to the assembly. He admonished those present, who constituted the "house of Israel," to "know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ" (2:36). The facts that Jesus had died, was buried, had been raised again, and was sitting on David's throne which Peter preached, pricked them in their hearts "and they said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren what shall we do?'" Luke recorded that Peter replied to the question by saying, "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 Spirit" (vs:37-38). Three thousand, therefore, "gladly received his word and were baptized" (2:41).

On the day of Pentecost was the first time that the apostles had preached the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit, though it was not the first time the disciples had baptized. John wrote that "came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea and there he tarried with them and baptized" (John 3:23), but the writer goes on to explain that though "Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (Baptist), Jesus baptized not but his

disciples” (4:1-2). It could well be that some of the 120 who were assembled with the apostles in the upper chamber, along with the women and brethren of Jesus, (Acts 1:12-15) had been baptized by the Galilean fishermen. Suffice it to say that these men whom Christ had chosen and called were at this point in time full-fledged and experienced fishers of men, made so by Jesus of Nazareth. Christ told the Father that he had trained and kept all of them to “catch men” and lost none of them “but the son of perdition” (John 17:12).

The work of the fishers of men comes into comparison with their efforts in sowing the seed of the kingdom. Jesus spoke in a parable about “a sower who went forth to sow seed” and made the application to his apostles in sowing seed which is “the word of God” (Luke 8:5-15). The apostles had learned that there were times and seasons in which they could not catch fish, so Christ warned them that similiar situations would obtain in their teaching the truth and sowing the seed. Christ said that some of the seed would fall on hard soil, some on rocky and thorny ground, while others would find lodging in good ground. Jesus gave his sowers instructions regarding those who would not hear: “whosoever shall not receive you nor hear your words, when ye depart from that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet” (Matthew 10:14). This is exactly what the apostle Paul did in the city of Antioch in Pisidia in the face of overt rejection and persecution. Luke wrote that “they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came to Iconium” (Acts 13:51). Paul warned Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” but charged him to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

While the apostles were fishing for men and sowing the

seed, they were also recruiting and encouraging young men, some of whom they had converted, to become evangelists. Among those who did the work of an evangelist and made full proof of their ministry were Philip, Stephen, Mark, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Silas, and Barnabas. As a result of disputes with the Jews in Jerusalem, Stephen met his untimely death as the first Christian martyr by being stoned (Acts 7). Philip was among those who "were scattered abroad" from Jerusalem as a result of the "great persecution against the church." He went down to "the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them." Many of the Samaritans "believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ and were baptized both men and women" (Acts 8). Others of the evangelists accompanied the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, on their missionary journeys.

Though the Bible does not give detailed and specific accounts of all the apostles as it does in the cases of Peter, James, John, Andrew, and Philip, we must nonetheless conclude that all of them became active as fishers of men and seed sowers. We do not know the exact amount of success each one of the apostles enjoyed but Christ assured them, in response to a question asked by Peter, that "ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). Great is the reward of the apostles not only through the success which they had as fishers of men and sowers of the seed, but in the hope which they provided to succeeding generations who have obeyed the gospel, have continued in the apostles doctrine, and have walked in the light as Jesus Christ is in the



light in true fellowship with one another.

It is indeed disturbing to find that most of the current literature, written by representatives of sectarian denominations, in the field of evangelism is devoted to the development of complicated procedures and complex activities that the gospel might be spread. The more simple and Biblical plan for evangelism is that which the apostles followed and proposed for us. The apostle Paul told Timothy that “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). The apostle John warned that “if there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine (of Christ) receive him not into your house, neither bid him God’s speed” (2 John 10). All that fishers of men need today is a fishing hole, stocked with fish, a pole, a line and a hook (Gospel).

God be thanked that he gave to Jesus twelve men from out of the world and Christ ordained them as apostles and made them “Fishers of Men.”

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## FRANK PACK

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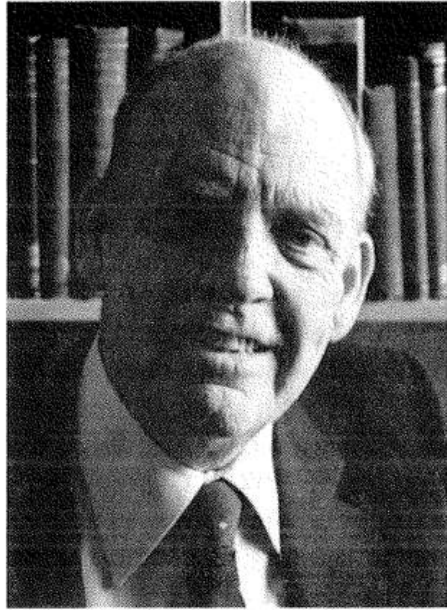
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# The Waiting Father

**Frank Pack**

This morning I should like to think with you about one of the greatest passages in all the New Testament, a passage that has touched the hearts of men and women down through the ages because it so well represents the very heart of God himself. I am talking about the 15th chapter of Luke. This chapter begins by giving us the setting for the telling of these three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. I read now from Luke 15:1,2 in the New International Version, and we begin to see why the Lord told these three parables. "Now the tax-collectors and the 'sinners' were gathered around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, " 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' " Now, as the result of this comment, Jesus told these three great parables. His point was to help them realize that the reason he eats with those who are tax-collectors and sinners is because that is the way God is. It is the very heart of God that Jesus is endeavoring to help them understand and worship and dedicate their lives to. I want to focus our attention on the last of the three parables, the lost son, because this parable helps to explain to us more than any other passage, I think, the very nature of God himself.

There are two points of emphasis in this parable. Scholars differ with one another about which is the

more prominent, but there is no other way to do that than to look at both of them. The first looks at the wayward son as the major point of the parable. He leaves the father's house and goes off on his own wayward way. The second looks at the waiting father as the major point of emphasis, the father who through all the time the son is away continues to love him, to be concerned about his welfare, to care for him, and to expect him to come back home one day. We will look at both sides as we are studying the parable.

Interestingly enough, the Old Testament prophets presented as their major message to the people of their time that God had richly provided for Israel. He had shown his love to them in sparing them and caring for them as they came out of Egypt. He had given them his steadfast love despite their straying. He was a God of infinite love and compassion, forgiving and merciful, who called them to repentance, and welcomed them on their way back home. When you look at passages like Hosea 11:1-9 or a number of passages in Jeremiah, you are made aware of the love and compassion that God had showered on Israel. God warned Israel and Judah of the betrayal of God when they went off after pagan gods and worshiped them. Though they repeatedly strayed off into idolatry, practicing things that were abominations in the sight of God, he called them and assured them that he would bless them and protect them. His plea through the prophets was to be loyal and faithful to God. God agonized over Israel. His heart grieved over their failures to be obedient to his will.

Jesus was doing this same thing all through his ministry. He took the plea of the prophets and taught

the people in his day that God was one who loved them and supremely showed his love for them through his Son. He made the plea more insistently. He called them to the righteousness of the kingdom of God. He reminded them that God is a God who cares for them, who loves them, who forgives them. He also taught them that he was the Christ. For this confession at his trial before the high priest and council he was condemned as a blasphemer to die on the cross. But he was careful to make such an acknowledgment and to accept such a confession from his disciples only sparingly. The God Jesus talked about is a God who is concerned with saving the lost and who takes knowledge of the most insignificant things, because nothing escapes his knowledge or transcends his love. Unfortunately his critics complained because he spent time with the tax-collectors and listened to them and ate with them, which his critics thought was the worst thing Jesus could do. It marked him as an imposter. So it is against this background that the plea of Jesus in this parable is to be seen.

The same problems that plagued the people of the Old Testament and the contemporaries of Jesus were also characteristic of the pagan world of that time. Throughout the middle east there has been in modern times a great interest in archeology, in digging out the remains of ancient cities and cultures. Recently a papyrus letter was uncovered in the ruins of an ancient village in Egypt preserved by the accidents of history. It was a letter from a son to his mother asking for her help, and confessing how he had made mistakes for which he was sorry. Let me read this letter to you and notice the

similarity to the experiences of the wayward son. It reads, "Greetings: I hope you are in good health; it is my constant prayer to Serapis (a pagan god). I did not expect you to come to Metropolis, therefore I did not go there myself. At the same time, I was ashamed to go to Kanaris because I am so shabby. I am writing to tell you that I am naked. I plead with you, forgive me, I know well enough what I have done. I have learned my lesson. I know I made a mistake. I have heard from Postumus who met you in the area of Arisnoe. Unfortunately he told you everything. Don't you know that I would rather be a cripple than owe so much as a cent to any man? I plead, I plead with you. . . .(Signed, Antonios Longus, your son.)" The letter breaks off because the papyrus is very brittle and across the centuries this last part is lost with the exception of the signature. So the pagan world had its problems as well, which makes this letter sound so modern.

Let us now look at the first section of this parable, the request of the younger son of a Jewish father. This man had two sons. The younger son was freer perhaps to go his own way than the older son because of the inheritance laws found in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 21:17). In distributing property, the older son received twice as much as the younger son. So when you boil it down it means that the older son received  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the estate and the younger  $\frac{1}{3}$ . The younger son approached his father and asked him, "Divide your estate and give me my portion of it now." The father did not have to do that but in his grace and compassion he did divide his estate. We will see that the elder son received  $\frac{2}{3}$ , or all the rest of the estate by the way the father addresses him down in verse 31. The younger son with his

$\frac{1}{3}$  had no further claim on his father's estate.

After translating his wealth so that it could be easily taken with him, he went away to "a far country." In an age without rapid transportation it was a much longer journey than we are accustomed to today. This son wanted to go just as far away from home as he could possibly go. He wanted to get away from his father, his elder brother, that homestead, and all the rules of the old place and be free to do what he wanted to do. This is what he would call freedom. He lived wildly in that far land, thinking only of his fun and "good times." He was going in the way of sin and error. He gave no thought to what might happen to him when his money ran out. As the text says, "He squandered his wealth." He did not have any sense of what the value of it was. After all, he had not been responsible for running the household of his father. He had been planning to follow his own appetites and desires. He was kicking overboard all the patterns of life his father had followed. He wanted none of that. He gathered about him "friends" who could help him in having fun by spending his father's money. Have you ever met anyone like that?

About the time his money began to give out, he began to realize that a famine, a depression was coming on the land. This would make it harder to get food and to find work. Prices would go up and food would be scarce. There began to be that scramble for food and the necessities of life that takes place in famine-stricken countries. He began to look for work but he found no job. Nothing was open. Finally, after being in real want and searching for a job, in desperation he joined himself to a citizen of that country, a Gentile obviously. He sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. Now you should



know about the Jewish law regarding pigs. Keeping pigs for sacrifice was forbidden. The eating of pork was also forbidden. To be around the pigs would make one ceremonially unclean, for the pig was regarded as ceremonially unclean. What the young man was doing would not only be an unclean place to work, but also would make him ceremonially unclean. His uncleanness made it impossible for him to worship God in the way Jews worship. He was ceremonially kept away from observing the sabbath, the feast days, and other festive times. He could not come into the presence of God with others of like precious faith in the synagogue. Maybe in that far country they did not have many synagogues. I don't know. At any rate, this is his situation. He became so hungry that he would have eaten the pods the pigs were eating. "But no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16).

As he faces his situation, starving, dirty from the dust of the pig pen, and muddy, none of his old "friends" had anything to do with him. They had forgotten him. No one cared anything about him and his condition. In a far, far country, far away from home, he was alone, without friends, without food, without anything to ward off starvation. For the first time in his life he looked at himself honestly and saw his situation as it was. As the NIV puts it, "He came to his senses." He looked honestly where he was. He came to see that he himself was really responsible for the condition he was in. He was the one who made the choices. They were his. They turned his life in a certain way. He was the one who brought himself down to degradation and ruin. Facing this from the depths of his being, he was very clever in one respect. He honestly looked at himself in

comparison to the hired men on his father's farm. That is where he would be involved if his father would let him come home and work. He would be with the hired men. The text reads, "Make me like one of your hired men." (15:19). He did not have any property. That had all been squandered. All he had was to throw himself on the mercy of his father. So he said as he surveyed his situation, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death." He had no way to improve his situation.

It is interesting to see what a different memory he now had of his father's home than he had once had. Now he remembered the security of the home, and the necessities of life he would have furnished, and the memory drew him to make a decision. When he had done so, he rapidly prepared to carry out his decision. He did not procrastinate. He would make his way back home. He felt somehow that his father would not completely turn him away. He began to make his way. What a sight he was! Ragged, with the dirt, dust, and mud of the pig pen, gaunt and starving for food, so hungry that he would eat the pods the pigs ate, half naked, probably bare foot. He made his way slowly from that "far country" toward his home, slowly because he was emaciated from the lack of food.

Now let us look at the other side, the other emphasis of this story. This is a most marvelous picture. There is his father, waiting, the waiting father. The patient, waiting father! His father has been looking down the road ever since he left, although the son did not know about that. The father surmized that something like this might happen to his son. Anyway he was looking for him to come home. He continued to wait day by day for

that familiar walk that let him know that it was his son. The father loved him, he cared for him deeply, something the son found hard to understand. "He was filled with compassion for him." (15:20). Compassion means that you have love mixed with pity for the one who is needy which leads you to try to do something for him. The father had that kind of feeling for his wayward son.

The father is the hero of this story. The father was the only person who came out to meet him. None of the others came, surely not the elder brother. The father's deep love was there before there was any confession by the son of his sin. Remarkably, one day the father saw that boy "a long way off." That was his boy, all right. O yes, he knew that walk. Forgetting all about his age, he ran to meet his son. Regardless of his dreadful condition, the father threw his arms around him and kissed him. All this was happening before they ever reached the house. The wayward son began the words of his confession, words he had so carefully rehearsed since he made the decision to go home and ask his father to give him a place among the hired men. He had been honest with himself and knew he had no legal claim to anything belonging to his father. The son began his confession by saying to his father, "I have sinned against God and against you. I am no more worthy to be called your son." But the son does not get the opportunity to finish his confession. His speech is overshadowed by the louder commands of his father, commands that mean he is being restored to the family. The best robe in the house is to be his, a ring of gold is to be on his finger, and sandals on his feet since he probably came home barefoot. The fat calf that had been reserved for some special occasion is brought out and killed as the chief

part of a feast, a feast of celebration because the wayward son has come home, often a stubborn and willful son, but now home wiser and mature. Rejoice and celebrate is the call from the father. Why? Because one who was dead had come to life again. It is a resurrection in a different form. One who was lost has been found, rescued, and is now at home.

The father did not say to his wayward son, "Let's see, we've got to clean you up before I can greet you, before you can come in. We've got to prove you and see if you are the kind of person you should be. Have you learned your lesson? We'll start you out here at the bottom and then if you are good enough and faithful enough we will then accept you." Nothing like that was said. The love, compassion, and forgiveness were there before the father ever met the boy. In this parable Jesus draws an analogy between the father patiently and lovingly waiting until the wayward one comes home and the love of God for us. God is happy over his children, and rejoices just as much over the wayward who come back to him acknowledging their need of forgiving grace as he is over the ones who have remained faithful. The theme of the joy of the shepherd finding the lost sheep, the woman finding the lost coin and the glad father rejoicing over the return of his son points to the promise of the "messianic banquet" for the redeemed. The celestial kingdom of God looks toward the "marriage supper of the Lamb" where in the company of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the holy angels the redeemed will rejoice and the glad choruses of God's glory are shouted forth. The ones who have been cleansed by the powerful blood of Jesus Christ will celebrate the triumph that is theirs because Jesus Christ made it so. It is through his

love and redeeming grace that any of us can feast at the banquet table of the Lord. Echoes of the messianic banquet are in the background of these parables.

God is a welcoming God, a God of infinite love, a special kind of love that it is hard for us to grasp and harder for us to exhibit in our lives. Because He loved and saved us through Christ, our service and good deeds are done out of gratitude for all he has done without a thought of payment back for his grace. Our lives are filled with thanksgiving for a God who cares for us and for all people and wants all people saved and knowing the truth. What a wonderful God and what a glorious future for those who let him rule in their lives. What a wonderful Savior and Friend who so beautifully exhibits the overflowing love of our Father.

## KREGG HOOD

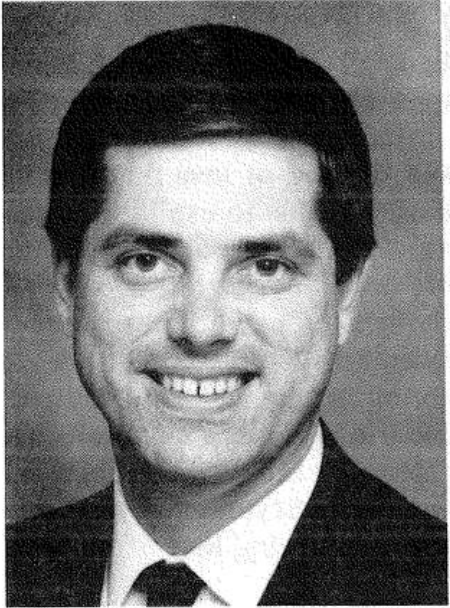
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## **“Ministers Of Mercy”**

**Dr. Kregg Hood**

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the one who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.

(Luke 10:25-37)

### **Introduction**

Several years ago I heard a friend of mine who is a Christian college professor tell of an unexpected encounter with one of his college students. The student was limping slightly as he walked past the professor. He noticed the limp and asked him, “Jim, did you hurt your ankle?” The young man said no, but that he had suffered from polio as a child. He was fine by then, but the limp was an on-going reminder of his earlier ordeal.

Jim went on to tell a most unusual account of his life as the deserted, illegitimate son of an American service man and a Korean woman. Jim and his brother were left in an orphanage where Jim contracted polio and his brother tuberculosis. Their future looked bleak indeed.

One day, another American serviceman and his wife came to the orphanage. The man told the director of the orphanage that he and his wife wanted to adopt two children. The man said, “I want two kids. And I want the two that are in the worst shape.” Jim and his brother were

adopted and, in the care of their new parents, recovered from their diseases.

As my friend told the story, his voice broke and his eyes welled up with tears. He concluded by saying that the couple who showed such great love and mercy were not Christians; the husband was an unbeliever and the wife a Buddhist.

My friend's emotional response to this story came from his realization that this couple did a more Christian thing than most Christians would do. Sometimes the truth hurts because we who claim to understand the love of God most accurately often fail to live it. God showed us His mercy because He loves us, but He also showed us mercy so we will treat others with mercy, as well.

My friend's story reminds me of Luke 10:25-37, Jesus' "Parable of the Good Samaritan." Not only is it one of the best known stories in the Bible, it is also one of the most difficult to put into practice. Why? Maybe because most Christians see this parable simply as instruction for us to do "benevolence." We know we are supposed to help those less fortunate, but God wants our help to go beyond "relief work." He wants us to be people who show mercy.

The real meaning of the parable is much deeper than telling us what we are to do. It tells us what we are to be. Jesus wants His followers to be in tune with the heart of God. This parable calls us to be "ministers of mercy" to hurting people wherever they are.

### **Why Was The Parable Needed?**

The scene at the start of this section of scripture seems quite familiar. A very religious person confronted Jesus.



This man, an expert in the Law of Moses, attempted to pull Jesus into one of the current quarrels in synagogues circles. He probably wanted to make Jesus look bad. He definitely wanted himself to look good. So he asked a tempting question that sounded correct and proper — on the outside. “What do I do to get to heaven?”

Jesus played along. “What do you think?” The answers rolled glibly from the rule-keeper’s tongue. “Number One: Love God. Number Two: Love others.”

Jesus played along some more. “Right! Do that and you’ll make it.” At this point the deeper meaning of the parable begins to become clear. Luke says that the religious expert wanted to “justify himself.” He wanted to impress people. Perhaps he hoped Jesus would give him the opportunity to recount all of the good deeds he had done or the alms he had given. That was his religion, remember?

But Jesus knew that the rule-keeper had missed the point of the law. So He told an unusual story of true compassion. A Jewish countryman was robbed, beaten nearly to death, neglected by his religious brothers, and rescued by an outcast Samaritan. Then Jesus drove the point of the parable home: “Who was the real neighbor?” The rule-keeper answered, “The one who showed *mercy* — the Samaritan.” Jesus replied, “Go and do likewise.”

### **Problems That Stop People From Being “Ministers Of Mercy”**

This man had two problems that were keeping him from being a minister of mercy. His problems were not unique to him, either. Most of us Christians struggle with these problems today, too.

### **Theologizing About Mercy Instead Of Showing Mercy**

The context of Luke 10:25 indicates that the man was a conscientious religious expert in the Law of Moses. He probably loved to argue about the latest and greatest issues of the day. He must have enjoyed a good debate between his brethren. Plus, he gave the correct responses to Jesus' questions. But he failed to see the first of his own big problems: *correct answers in the head do not guarantee right answers from the heart*. Jesus' story took the lawyer by surprise. The story showed him that he was theologizing about mercy instead of showing mercy.

This careful rule-keeper could analyze the action and give plenty of reasons why the victim could not or should not expect help. He may have reasoned that the man was foolish to travel alone on the desert road to Jericho. That area was a favorite ambush site for thieves. Plus, the priest could not be expected to help; he was headed to worship. If the victim was dead and the priest touched the body, the priest would be ceremonially unclean. The Levite also had an excuse for passing by, too. It was common knowledge for roadside robbers to use a "decoy" to get other travelers to stop. A situation like the one Jesus described looked pretty dangerous. No one should be expected to stop!

Excuses like these sound all too familiar. When you theologize about mercy instead of showing mercy, you need the message of this parable. As one man wrote, "I was hungry and you formed a humanities club and discussed my hunger. I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release. I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your help. I was homeless and you preached to me of the

shelter of the love of God. I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me. You seemed so holy, so close to God, but I am still very hungry, very lonely, and very cold.”

We can cook up plenty of reasons that justify our decisions not to be ministers of mercy. Reasons like, “So-and-so’s got himself into this mess. It’s his fault.” Or, “She needs help but look what group she is a part of.” Or, “They are in need but I can’t do anything long-term to help them help themselves so I’ll leave it to someone more qualified.” Maybe even, “I should help, but I have enough problems of my own.”

Good excuses are often bad reasons for not helping someone. Talk is cheap and analysis is easy. But Jesus calls us to be ministers of mercy.

Several years ago I heard a true story about a 10-year-old Jewish boy living in Poland during World War II. The Nazi soldiers stationed in the boy’s village rounded up all the Jews in the area and prepared to execute them. The young lad was captured, too. Next, the soldiers forced the Jews to dig a shallow ditch, stripped them naked, lined them against a wall and brutally murdered them with machine gun fire. Their mutilated bodies fell into the shallow ditch and the soldiers covered them with dirt.

But none of the bullets struck the little boy. He laid still in the shallow grave with the blood of his parents splattered across his naked body and waited for darkness to fall. Then, he uncovered himself from the dirt and rose to steal away in the night, terrified, lonely, and cold!

He went to a nearby villager’s house, knocked on the door and begged for help. A woman answered the door, recognized him as one of the Jewish prisoners, and screamed to him to, “Go away!” Then she slammed the

door.

Time after time, until the early hours of the morning, family after family turned the little boy away; all were unwilling to help. They, too, feared the dreaded SS soldiers and wanted to escape the Nazi wrath, as well.

Finally, in his misery and fear, the little boy thought of something unusual for a Jewish person to say. At the next house he knocked quietly on the door until someone finally answered. Then he cried, "Don't you recognize me? I am the Jesus you say you love!" There was a long pause. Then a woman opened the door, clasped the orphan child in her arms and kissed him. From then on, the little boy lived as a member of her own family.

### **Concern For Others That Is Based On Self-Interest**

The rule-keeper's second problem surfaced after he mentioned the importance of loving his neighbor. He answered Jesus correctly; but, to him, the command was only "Biblical theory." What he really cared about was justifying himself.

The rule-keeper could imagine helping a Samaritan because there was a pay-off. He thought that would make him look good to God and to his fellow Jews. It might also give him a psychological lift because he had "stooped to help one of the little people." This kind of paternalism reeks of self-interest.

This is where Jesus' parable is laced with irony. The Samaritan, considered "low life" by the Jews, had nothing to gain by helping the Jew. But he was the one who stopped. Amazing!

Here is one of the most important reasons for telling this parable to a legalistic person. Jesus was not just en-

couraging people to *do* good. He was encouraging them to be in love with God and people. When you love the Lord and others as yourself, you will become a minister of mercy. If not, the best you can do is to justify yourself.

Sure, we want to know right and do right. But why? Is it only because we are worried about what God will think about us? The truth is, God wants us to be ministers of mercy, not just for our own sakes, so we can say that we fulfilled His Law. He wants us to be ministers of mercy for the sake of the people who are hurting. That is why the God of the Universe sent His only Son to die. He loved us first!

This teaching is often very difficult to understand. It is even harder to accept and to feel deep down in our souls. Think about these illustrations. Have you ever given a donation to help the poor so that you would not have to give your time? Do you go door-knocking or invite others to an evangelistic service just so you can feel better about obeying the Great Commission? Is your biggest concern with divorce tied to your fear of not being known as scripturally correct on the issue?

In all of these situations you might have felt relieved of guilt and absolved of responsibility by your action. But, what does the God who knows our hearts think? He will always ask, "Is this your neighbor? Then *love* him or her; don't just try to justify yourself."

We may keep the laws and obey the rules, but that alone will never make us people who *show mercy*. People who need mercy can tell why you or I seem willing to help. If our motives are not like Christ's, our assistance will be a big let-down for them.

### **Becoming Ministers of Mercy**

The good news is that these two problems can be overcome. We will start to become ministers of mercy as we resolve to live by the following decisions.

#### **Always Care About Hurting People**

Jesus was always touched by the pain of the hurting people He saw. He grieved with the woman who was burying her only son and brought him back to life (Luke 7:11-17). He forgave the woman who was caught in the act of adultery and challenged her to live for God (John 8:1-11). He was angered by the cynical disregard of the Pharisees and healed the man with a withered hand — on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). He did all these things because people were important to Him (Mark 3:1-6).

Jesus never forgot that hurting people should receive help. In fact, if Jesus were here today, some brethren would accuse Him of advocating a “social gospel.” He was always willing to help a hurting person, even if the people did not follow Him. Remember the ten lepers? Only one responded in faith (Luke 17:11-18). But that did not stop Jesus from helping all of them.

I will never forget the time I heard an elder say, “It doesn’t do any good for us to feed the hungry if they don’t become Christians.” Shame on us for thinking like that! Sure, we should want to lead every person to Christ and should link “felt needs” to spiritual needs. But it is never wrong to do right. The willingness to show mercy needs to be knit into the fabric of our hearts. We help who we can, where we can, when we can, however we can. Why? Because we want to be ministers of mercy.

### **Never Limit Mercy To The Needs Of The Body**

There is a second decision we need to make if we are to become minister of mercy. Never limit the application of this parable to “benevolence” work. The concern in Jesus’ mind is much broader. If you care about a person’s physical hurts, you will also care about his or her emotional and spiritual hurts and problems.

Christians need to remember the priority given to the command, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” It is God’s *second most important* command. It not only means to help others; it means to love them. Love means meeting all the needs that another person has, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Remember 1 Corinthians 13:4, 7-8? “Love is patient, love is kind. . . It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

Think of the number of marriages that would be saved if each mate showed the other spouse mercy when they made a mistake. Imagine how many damaged relationships between parents and children could be repaired if they would make personal allowances for each other. You can show mercy by forgiving.

Another way to show mercy is by giving people attention when they feel insecure and lonely. One of my favorite stories is told by Tony Campolo in his book, *Who Switched The Price Tags?*<sup>1</sup> He tells the story of a school teacher named Miss Thompson and one of her students, Teddy Stallard. Miss Thompson was conscientious and tried to treat all of her students alike. But one of them, Teddy Stallard, was a very difficult child for her to like. He was not interested in school, was not attractive, did terrible school work, and had an awful attitude. Miss Thompson felt a lot of resentment toward Teddy and

almost enjoyed giving him “F’s” on his assignments.

But Miss Thompson also knew something about Teddy’s background. His school records indicated that in the first grade he showed promise as a student. The records also noted that he had problems at home. In the second grade Teddy’s mother became seriously ill. Teddy started to fall behind. In the third grade Teddy’s mother died and he gained the label, “slow learner.” In the fourth grade, Teddy was behind and his father showed no interest in his lack of progress. Inside, Miss Thompson struggled with this knowledge.

Then, at Christmas time, the boys and girls brought their presents to Miss Thompson. Even Teddy brought a crudely wrapped gift. When Miss Thompson opened Teddy’s present she found a gaudy, rhinestone bracelet with half of the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. The other children started to snicker but Miss Thompson quickly snapped on the bracelet and dabbed a little perfume on her wrists. She asked the children to smell the perfume. “Doesn’t the perfume smell lovely? And isn’t the bracelet beautiful.” The boys and girls “oohed” and “ahhed” the now presentable gifts.

At the end of the day, a shy, little Teddy came up to Miss Thompson’s desk and stammered, “Miss Thompson. . .Miss Thompson. . .You smell just like my mother. . .and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I’m glad you liked my presents.”

After Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and prayed to God. She asked him for forgiveness for her resentment toward Teddy and determined to be a new teacher. From that day on, her attitude toward Teddy changed, and Teddy’s school work started to improve.

Years later, Miss Thompson received a letter from



Teddy. It announced that he was about to graduate from high school, second in his class. It was signed, "Love, Teddy Stallard." Four years later she received another letter from Teddy. This one informed her that he was graduating from college, first in his class. Then, four more years later Miss Thompson received a third letter. This one announced Teddy's latest accomplishment: he had graduated from medical school and was now Theodore Stallard, M.D. The letter continued. Teddy was getting married and his father, like his mother, has passed away. Teddy asked her if she would be willing to come to his wedding and sit where his mother would have sat. He wrote, "You are all the family I have left now."

Miss Thompson accepted quickly and sat proudly where Teddy's mother would have sat. Her willingness to be a minister of mercy gave her that honour.

### **Make Showing Mercy An On-Going Commitment Of Your Life**

This third decision is the key to becoming a minister of mercy. It is one thing to help someone occasionally or when asked. It is something totally different to decide in your heart to be committed to showing mercy every time and every place you can.

A significant element in the story was the Samaritan's on-going interest in the well being of his Jewish neighbor. His compassion did not end at the inn. He was willing to help as long as it was needed.

One of the lessons that God's people need to learn is to show mercy after the immediate crisis of a problem. The needs and hurts continue for months—maybe years. I have some friends whose precious son was killed in a tragic boating accident more than 10 years ago. People

remember them and show their love in other ways, too. Why? Because they are ministers of mercy.

Tender expressions like that come from people who are truly ministers of mercy. They keep on caring and keep on remembering. A couple of years ago the Chicago Tribune ran a story by Bob Greene that illustrated this commitment so well. Greene told the story of Douglas Maurer, a 15-year-old Missouri boy with leukemia. For several days Douglas felt the effects of a bad case of the flu. His mother decided to take him to the doctor. He was admitted to Children's Hospital at Washington University Medical Center in St. Louis. The tests showed leukemia.

For two days Douglas received treatment, including blood transfusions, bone marrow tests, and chemotherapy. Next he contracted pneumonia. Douglas was so scared about what was happening that he even asked his mom to sleep next to him in his bed. She replied tearfully that she could not because of the IV tubes in his body and the smallness of the bed.

The doctors told Douglas the truth about his illness. He was facing three years of chemotherapy. The treatment would probably cause him to go bald and gain weight. He was very discouraged, in spite of their assurance that there was still a good chance that the disease would go into remission.

But Douglas was not alone. On his first morning in the hospital he looked around at the stark walls of his room and said, "I thought you get flowers when you're in the hospital." That comment motivated his aunt to call a local florist and order an arrangement. The sales clerk who took the order sounded young and inexperienced so the aunt was careful to request just the right planter and arrangement for a teen-age boy with leukemia.

The arrangement was delivered and Douglas opened the envelope to read the card from his aunt. Then he saw a second card. It read: “Douglas - I took your order. I work at Brix Florist. I had leukemia when I was seven years old. I’m 22 years old now. Good luck. My heart goes out to you. Sincerely, Laura Bradley.”

Needless to say, Douglas brightened up. Finally, after days of discouraging tests, comments, and predictions, he had a message of hope that sparked him in the direction of recovery.

When Bob Greene heard the story, he called Laura at the florist’s shop. Laura told him, “When Douglas’ aunt told me that the boy had leukemia, I felt tears coming to my eyes. It reminded me of when I first learned that I had it. I realized what the boy must be going through. I wanted him to know that you really *can* get better. So I wrote the card and slipped it into the envelope. I didn’t tell anyone. I haven’t been working here very long, and I was afraid I might get in trouble.”

Amazing, right? And what an effective minister of mercy! Laura Bradley did what expert doctors using millions of dollars worth of sophisticated equipment could not do: encourage a young man to go on.

Every single one of us needs to keep the goal of showing mercy constantly before us. When we do, we will become more like Jesus and less like the rule-keeper. In short, we will become ministers of mercy — for God and to the people He loves.

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<sup>1</sup>See Campolo, Tony, *Who Switched The Price Tags?*, (Waco: Word Books, 1986).

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## **Jesus Teaches Us To Pray**

**Anthony Lee Ash**

I am convinced that this is the classic New Testament text offering us instructions for prayer. There are other passages on the subject, but none as comprehensive as this, or as directly instructive for disciples of Jesus. Here we have a specifically “Christian” prayer, given in contrast to any previous prayers found within scripture. Here, too, we have the strongest assurances of God’s concern and of his desire to respond to the petitions of his people. And here the power of the Holy Spirit is connected to God’s answer to prayer.

John had taught his disciples a prayer. So, we presume, had various rabbis taught prayers to their disciples. Thus the question put to Jesus was not unusual. The disciples would have known how to pray. They were not asking instructions about an act strange to them. Rather, they wanted to know what the content of prayer should be. How should prayer be addressed to God in order that his purposes, as unfolded by Jesus, could be accomplished? This is an important point. The request to be taught implied that previous prayers were not adequate for Jesus’ followers. The implication for Christians is that if they pray in terms of Jesus’ answer, they will be praying a new prayer, not those prayers found within Israel in previous centuries. The request implied an understanding of new divine intentions focused in Jesus.

We can put it another way. Jesus' answer would be saying, in effect, "Here are the matters that are so important we carry them before the Father." "Here are the requests the Father is concerned to grant." "Here are the real needs of man." Praying this prayer, then, would be to move past trivial concerns into the very center of God's will. It would be to move away from self centered prayers into God centered prayers.

Do we need to be taught to pray? This text indicates we do. Though man in trouble will "naturally" pray, such prayers are often selfish. They summon God to attend to human problems, which, though seeming large at the time, may ultimately be trivial. Surely God is concerned about any human problem and will give us what is best in any circumstance. But sometimes the best will be to allow the problem to continue, and to empower us to cope with it. The point is that we humans are so inordinately selfish (even Christians must struggle at this point) that we think God should dance to our tune. Thus we easily fall into a "big me, little God" complex. When the Lord has instructed us how to pray and we follow his instructions, we escape this human failing.

Prayer is such an emotional thing that we find it easy to forge our conclusions about it before examining biblical evidence. Our theology of prayer may have come from popular devotional writings, or from the TV screen. But these views of prayer, I am convinced, may be misguided. Since we are a "Bible only" people, convinced of the importance of examining the scriptures, it is essential that our understanding of prayer be an instructed one. It must be formed from our investigation of the text. It must not be a view garnered from other sources which then comes to the Bible seeking proof texts.

It should be clear from what has been said that I am convinced the prayer Jesus gave his disciples is the one we should pray. Let me invite you to try an experiment. Read through the entire New Testament, and make a list of all the things for which we find Christians praying, or for which they were instructed to pray. Then compare this list to the petitions of the prayers Jesus taught. If you see the material the way I do, you will notice that virtually all of the New Testament requests fall under one of the headings of this prayer in Luke 11:2-4.

By the way, some of us have heard that we ought not pray this prayer because of the petition “thy kingdom come.” We can understand this point of view in the light of past debates about premillennialism. But surely the meaning of Jesus’ words is broader than a debate about the last things. We should be careful not to circumscribe a great teaching of the Lord on the basis of doctrinal polemics. I do not consider that praying these words makes us premillennialists. We can pray for the kingdom to come without denying that it did come on Pentecost, since there are varying ways and degrees in which these words can be fulfilled.

How did Jesus answer the disciple’s request? First, he told them God is to be addressed as Father. The term was an intimate one. God cares. In context, looking at verses 9-13, we can understand “Father” as implying God is a Giver. This is not the first biblical prayer addressing God as Father, but the usage was unusual enough that it could have surprised Jesus’ hearers, as they might have been surprised when they had heard him address God in this way previously (Luke 10:21). I am glad Jesus gave me this perspective on God, for it tells me he wants to save me, not to condemn me. He is my friend, not my enemy. For

too long I have been afraid that he was out to damn me, and that all the optimistic words about salvation would be shattered on the last day by his words of condemnation. Knowing he is Father assures me he is more interested in my salvation than I even am myself.

Then Jesus told disciples to pray “hallowed be thy name.” At first glance this appears to be an ascription of praise, like “hallelujah!” But it is more. To “hallow” is to make holy, to sanctify (the way the Greek is usually translated). How does God make his name (or his person) holy? How can he be any holier than he already is? After all, he is the very source of all holiness. Why should we pray for something to happen which is already a fact, if God is perfectly holy already? The truth is that Jesus instructs men to ask God to help them make God’s name holy. And men do this, or are aided by God to do it, as they live lives that are holy, because God is holy. Thus a Christian life is a proclamation of the holiness of God. We think as we do, speak as we do, live as we do, because a holy God has called us to holy lives. Thus, when disciples pray this prayer, they implore God to make them holy. It is a prayer for personal consecration. We know that moral problems are only going to be resolved as people are changed on the inside. This prayer brings God’s power to bear to create that change. Consequently we can see its enormous importance.

Next we are to pray “thy kingdom come.” C. S. Lewis, in his *Letters to Malcolm* make several interesting suggestions about the dimensions of this petition. He understands kingdom to mean the reign or rule of God, in harmony with scholarly consensus. He suggests we pray that the rule of God may be realized here as it is in nature; as it is in the best human lives; and as it is in heaven (remember



the “on earth as it is in heaven” of Matthew’s account). We can pray, then, for the rule of God to conquer more of earth that it has conquered now. Of course, God is always absolute Sovereign of all that is. But because men have free will, they can choose to reject that sovereignty. Thus we share God’s concern that all men freely accept his rule. This means in some way that those outside need to be brought in. And this is what we call evangelism. “God, help us to bring people to you. Give us the caring, loving hearts we need to have, a passion for the lost that you have. Give us the wisdom to know how to speak to others in ways that they will hear. Give us the inner strength to overcome our fears and introversions so that we can make the approaches, say the words, and live the lives that are necessary. And open doors for us, so that connections can be made between those who seek and those who can give direction toward you.”

We do not claim that evangelism exhausts the possible dimensions of “thy kingdom come.” We will probably pray this prayer without knowing its full possibilities. But certainly as we pray we ask that we can be used by God as he wills us to become part of the answer he will give. Those of us who did not grow up in Christian homes, but were won by the touch of a friend, remain deeply thankful for that loving intercession. How many others now await the contact of a loving life to assist them to come into the kingdom? How many who have little interest today will be brought in life to a future situation when they will be concerned. We must be vigilant in our prayers, for the opportunities constantly surround us, like fields waiting to be harvested.

The prayer for daily bread seems a strange one in a country where welfare programs and unemployment com-

pensation are commonplaces. But we must remember these are not world wide phenomena. People in many nations hear and pray this prayer with a great deal more intensity than do those in America. The petition is reminiscent of the provision of food in the wilderness where Israel wandered. Even in our "land of plenty" the praying of these words reminds us that God, not the national economy, is the Great Provider. Food should not be assumed as a given because of our economics or national citizenship. Disciples of Jesus see past earthly things to the real source of provision. Every time this prayer is prayed that recognition comes to the fore. An understanding of Jesus' instructions should cure us of our undue attachment to material things, and should make us people who are moved by gratitude for God's care. Luke's gospel stresses God's ability to provide for his people. Remember the miraculous catch of fish (5:1-11), the feeding of the 5,000 (9:7-9), and the promise that we need not be anxious about material needs (12:22-34).

We are next told to pray for forgiveness of sins. In time we become insensitive to the murmur of sin that is constantly heard in our lives. We come to terms with our failures, and thus lose keen sensitivity of knowing God forgives people totally unworthy of forgiveness. Then on those occasions when some enormous wrong captures us, and we find ourselves in deep trouble, the meaning of this petition descends upon us with full power. We know we are sinners, and must be beggars. How could God forgive such a thing as we have done? Yet he will, and there is the wonder.

What a marvel to be situated in life so that we are constantly offered cleansing! And how much more this means to us when we are touched by the actions of Jesus that

make it possible. There are times when, praying for God to forgive me, I am made almost breathless with the wonder of it. There are other times when it becomes a humdrum matter of rote recitation. When we claim this promise, may we recognize its immensity, and may the praying of the prayer with the hope of an answer produce at the same an enormous gratitude that such a thing can be true.

The corollary has to do with forgiving others. God's forgiveness is our motive and model, though we never deceive ourselves into thinking feeble human forgiveness can even begin to echo perfect divine forgiveness. Because harbored injury seems so delicious, and is so hard to expunge, years of sermons need to be preached on this topic. That is not our purpose here. But we must urge that all of us devote urgent attention to what can potentially be the darkest corner of our lives.

At last, "lead us not into temptation." The unfortunate nature of this translation sometimes leads to the question "would he, without our prayers, lead us into temptation?" Or course not! The request is not asking to be free of any temptation, for the only person so protected would be divine himself, or dead! Perhaps we ask God to help us recognize where temptation lurks for each of us—those spots of weakness. Then "keep us from the trouble spots. Show us the door of escape." Even "help us to pass through the door." To be forgiven is a blessing of enormous magnitude. But what about tomorrow? We are still not out of bowshot of the tempter. So, "lead us not into temptation."

I think it is all here, in this Lord's Prayer. God is acknowledged as the giving Father. He will give us the resources we need for personal consecration. He will use

us to bring his rule to prevail among men. He will bless us with the material goods that respond to the needs with which he has endowed us. He will heal our inner selves in the forgiveness of sins. And he will empower us in the struggle with temptation. What else matters? What else could we want?

Granted, these realities may not be as exciting as the typical bright eyed testimonials about raised batting averages, or mysteriously repaired automobiles, or irresistible impulses to turn left instead of right. But when weight, and not sensation, is the determining factor, how the trivializing of prayer so often witnessed today fades when compared to the things for which Jesus instructs his followers to pray.

A final thought. But though final, it is so important that it might well have occupied our whole time tonight. This text is given a marvelous exclamation point by verses 9-13. Jesus assures us that God will answer prayers—not any prayer, tainted by human selfishness, offered unaware of God's ultimate purposes, but this prayer—the one we have been taught.

God answers. That is too weak. God implores. He promises. He opens for us a treasury, and invites us to enrich ourselves. Ask! Seek! Knock! No doubt here. He will answer. He will give the Holy Spirit—his prayer-answering power (v. 13). If an earthly father gives a child good things, how much more will the heavenly Father respond. Hear it, Christian. Have we allowed ourselves to be poor, when we could be rich? And does the Father, desiring to use us so powerfully to accomplish his purposes for us and the world, grieve that we persist in our independence? What might the history of the church, or the world be, if Christians took God's invitation as truth, and

opened themselves to the promises here—promises so magnificent as to be almost unbelievable? Would you like to know? Then why not find out, and let God make you a part of his glorious working among men!

## HAROLD SHANK

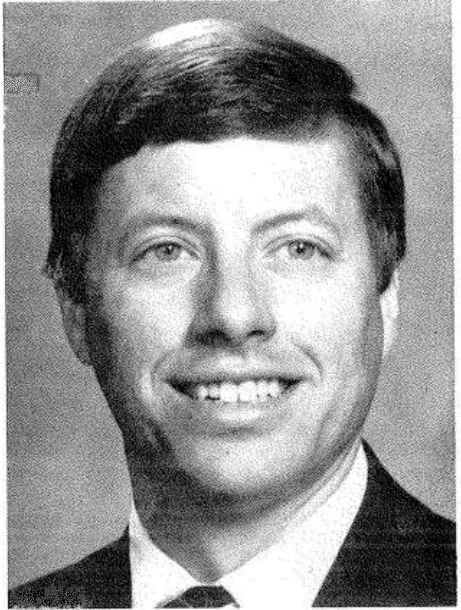
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# A Change Of Heart Toward Business As Usual

Harold Shank

## Distractions

A close friend of mine recently told me about a family in a Tennessee Church of Christ who started working with handicapped children. They brought them to church. After a few weeks, the elders told them not to bring them to services anymore because the children were a distraction. The family didn't understand and eventually left.

Those elders said the children were a distraction. That raises a question: Who would these handicapped children distract?

**Would they distract God?** God's sense of justice for the down and out is well known. The Old Testament's treatment of the unfortunate offers a series of safety nets.

**The first safety net prevented injustice.** The exodus out of Egypt was used to remind the people not to mistreat others because they were once mistreated. Jubilee saw to a redistribution of the land twice each century to prevent ongoing domination of the land.

**The second net helped the able-bodied.** Gleaning enabled those who could work but who had fallen on hard times to survive. Slaves were freed after six years and given provisions for their new life.

**The last net helped the helpless.** Every three years the tithe was given to fatherless, widows, and aliens. The Old

Testament contains admonition about generosity.<sup>1</sup>

Given what the Old Testament says, it hardly seems reasonable to think that handicapped children in church would distract God.

**Would they distract Jesus?** Christ spoke about social justice in Matthew 25 in terms of death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Jesus imagined the virtuous person asking him,

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?” Jesus answered, “Insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”

Early Jesus said this in Luke 4:18-20:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set a liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Jesus not only proclaimed liberation to the oppressed, but he placed himself on the side of the down and out. It doesn't seem reasonable to think that Jesus would be distracted by handicapped children.

**Would they distract visitors?** A Texas Church of Christ recently conducted a survey of the community around their building. They asked just one question: “If you were looking for a church to attend, what is the main thing you would look for?” An overwhelming majority of the peo-



ple who came to the door said they were looking for “a church that ministers to the poor.”<sup>2</sup>

Gallup polls repeatedly point out that people who don't go to church are interested in the down and out. Often they stay away from church because they perceive that the churches don't care about anybody but themselves.<sup>3</sup>

**Who would be distracted by the handicapped children?** Not God. Not Jesus. Not the visitor. The people who were distracted by the down-and-out children were the members of that church who didn't want these people in their midst.

That raises a series of questions. Is this church which was distracted by handicapped children the exception or the rule? Am I distracted by handicapped children? Am I a racist? Do I want to keep poor people out of sight?

Beyond that, other questions emerge. Why do handicapped children distract me? What keeps me separated from those who are different? What makes me say, “I see you are poor or homeless or deformed or cast off by society. Stay away from me. I'm sorry you were born that way.”

It's not just handicapped children who affect us this way. Last summer a woman whose son was dying of cancer told about a situation in her church in Arkansas. She had started a program to help people from southeast Asia who had migrated to the United States. Several others got involved in teaching them English and helping them understand the Bible. Then the elders stepped in and stopped the program because they said it wasn't part of the church's purpose to help those kinds of people.

What is it that we're supposed to do if helping the down and out know the Gospel isn't part of our purpose? Could it be that another group of Christians found certain peo-

ple to be distractions? Distractions not to God, not to Jesus, not to the visitor, but to the members?

### **Inconsistencies**

Life is baffling sometimes. How can people say they love Jesus and then treat others as distractions? How can we deal with the massive inconsistency of large numbers of people who swear up and down on Sunday about their faith in Jesus Christ, but then do not believe him when he clearly and repeatedly tells us to be concerned about the poor? How can we sing “Jesus is all the world to me” and then follow a clearly materialistic course in life? What makes us read passages where Jesus says that he has come to seek and save the lost and then go away with no sense of urgency about damned humanity? What are we to make of people who construct elaborate opportunities for praise and meditation on the great God of heaven and then remain mum about him outside of church?

What are we to do?

**What are we to do?** That general question occurs at least eight times in the New Testament. In Acts 22:10, Saul, in retelling his story, asked the question “What shall I do?” He’s sent into the city where he’s told to be baptized. In Acts 16:30, the Roman warden made the same inquiry; he’s told to believe and be baptized. In Acts 2:37, when what they had done hit home to the crucifiers of Jesus, they asked, “What shall we do?” Peter told them to repent and be baptized.

In these three cases, the people asked the question, “What shall we do?” Shortly after their baptisms, they were helping other people. Perhaps it is striking in light of what is to come that the people who repented and were baptized were soon sharing all they had.

In Luke 18:18, a rich man asked the question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus told him to sell what he had and give to the poor. Shocked, the man refused to follow instructions. Someone asked Jesus the same question in Luke 10:25. He answered with the story of the Good Samaritan. The questioner learned that the whole world was his neighborhood and that he was to love his neighbor as himself.

So far the question has been asked five times. Three times they are told to be baptized. Four times they are told to repent.

### **Luke 3:10-14**

The same question is asked three times to John the Baptist in Luke 3. This text might serve us better than we can imagine. It may be here that we find people more like ourselves than in the other passages. It may be here that people have the same distractions, the same lack of focus, the same wonder about the purpose of their spiritual lives.

It is a primer text in that it’s not about the main act in the New Testament. It’s only the warm-up show, yet it’s so convicting that it may be the place to begin. The chapter starts out giving dates, just like the Old Testament prophecies began with a time frame. We are about to hear a prophet. What the prophet has to say applies to everybody because his words are from God.

Then in Luke 3:4-6, it moves to the highway image with the passage from Isaiah. This prophet came to level ravines, smooth out stony places, and make dangerous curves into long, straight roads. God’s prophet has some road work to do because the people on earth made mountains where God had valleys. They put in ditches where God had hills.

It's not a reference to civil engineering, it's a demand to deal with pride, moral and religious indifference, selfishness, and complacency. It's a call for intellectual and moral change in Israel during the return from captivity, in Palestine prior to the coming of Christ, and by implication, in America at the close of the second millenium.

Verses 7-9 offer selected tidbits of John the Baptist's preaching. He said more than this, but Luke only mentions some selections. It's similar to the if-I-only-had-one-sermon-to-preach approach, with the twist that Luke says, "If I had only one sermon of John the Baptist to hear, this is what he would say."

Most speakers address their audiences as "dear friends" or "people of this fair city," but not John. He calls them reptiles. It reminds us of Isaiah 59:5 where the Old Testament prophet called the people spiders and accused them of hatching snake eggs. Once he had their attention, he told them there was a right and a wrong way to act. "Don't start talking about Abraham. Traditional securities won't help. If God needs more Jews, he can make them out of the stones."

John called his audience trees which looked great from a distance, which had a rich, dark green top full of leaves but no fruit. John came with an ax. John saw that some of the people who approached him thought that only outward appearances counted. They saw baptism as a way to get on the bandwagon of the new movement. John's response indicates that he thought they were trying to patronize God.

John's strong words alarmed the crowd. I suppose if I were standing in the hot sun at the edge of the desert having traveled several miles to be baptized by this desert preacher only to be told I was a nasty snake and a dead-

looking tree, I'd be alarmed, too. It's a good thing John wasn't working under an eldership; the phones would have rung all afternoon.

Keep in mind that verses 7-9 merely summarize what John said. I may be that Luke has done us a favor in merely hitting the high points of what was apparently one of the most convincing Gospel meetings ever held. At least three times someone in the crowd cried out, "John, stop the strong metaphors. Hold up a minute. I'm convinced. *What do I need to do?* Tell me how to correct these problems in my life." There's that question again: "What do we need to do?"

Suddenly John dropped his prophetic rhetoric in Luke 3:10-14 and called them to unselfishness. "What shall we do?" asked the man with the black beard and the Samaritan accent. John saw that the man wore two coats and carried a sack lunch. The prophet fired back a personal answer. "You've got two coats. Give one away. You've got a lunch. Share it with others."

"What shall we do?" was the question from the well-dressed tax collector standing off by himself. John looked him in the eye and told him, "I want you to change your agenda *from* get what you can and pad your pockets *to* do what is just and treat others right."

"What shall we do?" inquired the soldier standing at the edge of the crowd with his copper helmet and menacing spear. John issued additional orders: "Don't take money by force. Don't accuse falsely. Be content with your wages."

If the people were expecting unreasonable demands, then John's invitation disappointed them. John replied that what must be done lies close at hand. If the people were expecting something new, then John let them down.

John's point was that if you are going to truly repent and follow me or follow the one who follows me, then you are going to have to change your personal attitudes and personal actions with regard to other people.

### **John's Point**

Is John calling for social justice? By all means he's calling for social justice! But he's calling for personal repentance that takes away the restraints that keep people barred from each other, that keep people at arm's length from each other, that make people say, "This is mine, and it's just too bad you were born in the ghetto."

John repeats what the prophets like Isaiah and Amos told Israel. He anticipates what Jesus would tell the Jews. John calls them to a life of service. He echoes the theme of the entire book of Luke. Look at Luke 4:43: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." Check Luke 19:10: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." Jesus called the people to repentance, John called the people to repentance. Jesus called the people to the ministry of salvation, John called the people to a ministry of salvation.

If we think our walk with God has nothing to do with how we treat others, especially with how we treat the unfortunate, then we're sadly mistaken. If we think that a change in our attitude toward the poor and lame and blind is not part of the repentance that we began at conversion, then we're sadly mistaken. If we believe that an attitude of justice and compassion has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God, then we're sadly mistaken. Because if we fail to change our attitudes toward people less fortunate than ourselves, then we have done nothing but

empty ritual without repentance, and John calls it manipulation and an attempt to patronize God.

Few of us want to manipulate. Not many desire to patronize the Father. But objections come to mind. How would John deal with some of our questions? Let's look at three.

### **Isn't What We Do Good Enough?**

First, we might object, "John, we already do things for the unfortunate. We distribute Christmas food baskets. We give away our castoff clothes. We put money in the church for the poor."

Frederick Buechner tells of a memory from his own youth when his church would collect used Christmas cards that they had received that year. The young people would tear off the section with the message and the sender's name and then send them to East Harlem. They thought the poor people who couldn't afford Christmas cards would enjoy looking at the rich man's scraps, show them to their children, maybe even paste them in their scrapbooks.<sup>4</sup>

Is that what John the Baptist is after? Are we okay with God if we give up one shirt? Is that enough? So we feed the poor at Christmas. Can we stop now? We institute political controls against fraud and abuse. Let's go home now. Is that what John wants?

John rather links our own spiritual health with the way we respond to others. Can we repent without changing our attitudes and actions toward others? No, we can't. Can we properly minister to others without a spiritual center? No, we can't.

This is not a literal list of things to do that we check off one by one, then go back to living whatever way we want.

John by this list is trying to get at a life perspective, at a repentant spirit. It's a tailor-made list of which steps come first on the road to a repentant heart among terrible sinners. This passage concerns our spiritual condition.

John called the people to repentance. He saw the people coming from around the country to get saved without repenting. They wanted to continue their lifestyles and their attitudes and their wicked ways, but still be inside the Kingdom of God. John knew that they could do all sorts of things for the poor, build all kinds of programs, and engineer all manner of helps, but still be unrepentant in their hearts.

He knew there were valleys in their willingness to help others that had to be filled in. He knew that there were mountains of pride that had to be brought low. He knew there were crooked ways that had to be straightened. He knew there were rough spots in their hearts that had to be smoothed.

So John called for a radical reversal in the way they looked at other folks. He called them to responsibility to their fellow human beings. He called for a spirit that flowed with compassion and concern for others.

Indifference is nothing new. During the Bolshevik revolution, the Orthodox Christians who refused to cooperate with the new communist system were thrown into prison. The few of them who survive today are called **Babushkis**, the Russian word for grandmother. One elderly Babushka named Shura felt not only a responsibility for herself in prison, but also for others. Someone asked her why. She imagined a future conversation with God. He asked if she had sinned and she said no. Then God inquired about the people around her. She reported that they sinned. Then God asked, Did you point out their er-



ror?<sup>5</sup>

Shura learned in her life to have an ever present concern and compassion for others. She wasn't a watchdog ready to pounce on the intrusion of error, but a St. Bernard waiting to rescue the hurting. She didn't fill a quota and then turn deaf ears to cries for help. She had the spirit that John calls for here.

In George Bernard Shaw's play, *The Devil's Disciple*, there is a scene where Mr. Anderson tells his wife Judith that he had stopped to warn Dick Dudgeon that his life was in danger. Judith protested because Dudgeon was despised by the community. Her distress increased when her husband told her that Dudgeon was dropping by the house. Anderson calmed his wife by telling her, "The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that's the essence of inhumanity."<sup>6</sup> Shaw's character knew the meaning of what John calls us to. He knew the danger of indifference.

John the Baptist insists that we repent of injustice, prejudice, and indifference to the needs of human beings. He calls for a reevaluation of all our systems to determine if they reflect a repentant heart.

### **But I'm Just One Person**

A second response we might raise with John would be to say, "I can't possibly make much of a dent in injustice. Helping the 35,000 people who die of starvation every day is beyond me. John didn't know that injustice is a political problem, a pawn used in international power struggles. I'm just one person."

It's striking that John was just one person, too, yet he stood so firmly that people traveled miles to hear him

speak. John was vastly outnumbered. The list of his problems was huge. Prejudice against certain groups of people reigned supreme in his day. Tax collectors and the soldiers who stood on the outskirts of his crowds were also outcasts from society.

A second century document written by Lucian of Samosata listed the undesirables in society as the “adulterers, pimps, tax collectors, yes-men, and informers.” Yet to John, the tax collectors and other outcasts were potential converts. He told them they, too, needed to repent and become full persons.

There’s no indication that John sent them to the church for tax collectors across town with some vague reference to the fact that they’d be happier in their own culture. He didn’t patronize them. He didn’t reject them. John stood alone against culture’s injustice.

By himself, John attacked wrong when he saw it. He not only would stand in front of the crowds and call them snakes, he not only would go eyeball to eyeball with the hated tax collectors and challenge them to change their ways, he not only would address the heavily armed soldier and issue new orders, but he courageously went right to the top and called for repentance in the highest office of the land.

He reproved Herod. Wife-swapping was as wrong then as it is now. Advisors might have said, “John, if you mess with the top, he’s going to shut down your ministry. Why not leave the biggies alone, we can reach more people that way.”

No pragmatism here. If it’s right, it’s right. If it’s wrong, it’s wrong. John didn’t care who was unrepentant. John didn’t care who was unjust. John didn’t care who trampled on people. If they were wrong, they were wrong.

The question is not whether we stand alone or not, but do we stand? The question is not do we make a dent in injustice, but do we make the attempt? What matters is not the number of those who are helped, but are we numbered among those who are helping? Are we standing on the sidelines as expert critics, or are we playing the game?

World Vision has a poster out with a picture of a mass of human suffering. Below, the question asks, "How do you help one billion hungry people?" In the corner is the picture of a malnourished child. The caption underneath says, "One at a time."

John was saying a better social order begins with each individual. Feed the hungry. Share with the naked from your own closet. Change your own behavior. Alter your own attitudes. John would not let his listeners delegate this work. He called for a personal response.

Some might say, "I can't make any difference at all in my community and what this preacher is saying must surely misrepresent the Gospel." Look at the latest **Good Housekeeping** magazine and see who is the most admired woman in the world! Look at the Memphis newspapers and see which woman they brought in from India to give them advice on how to deal with poverty in America's poorest city! Look and see who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. Then those doing nothing to help the poor can hang their heads in shame at what the woman they call Mother Theresa has been able to do.

In one interview she said, "I do what I can where I am with what I have." If you have two coats, give one away. If you have food, share it. Now you tell me who is preaching the Gospel in the twentieth century.

Where in the New Testament does it tell us to hire a minister to do our Gospel preaching for us? Where in the

Bible does it say hire a man to do our work of compassion for us? Where in the Bible does it say that showing compassion to the poorest people on earth is to be done only by Roman Catholic nuns?

An unfeeling man saw a small boy without shoes. He said, "If God loves you, why doesn't he tell somebody to give you a pair of shoes?" The boy responded, "He did tell somebody, but somebody forgot." He didn't call us to solve the world's problems, he just called us not to forget them.

### **The Down and Out Are Beyond Help**

A third objection we might make to John is that it's useless. The poor don't want help. The unfortunate won't respond.

A group of young people from a Church of Christ in the northwest part of the country conducted an effort last spring to raise money for the homeless in their city. They canvassed businesses during the day and telephoned individuals at night. The organizer of the event said, "We were surprised at how many people didn't care and wouldn't listen. They'd say the homeless 'want to be that way,' or 'they are working the system'." Some gave, most did not.<sup>8</sup>

Again, a certain group of the have-nots had become a distraction to the haves. They rattled off solutions to homelessness when they themselves did not know any homeless people nor had they worked with them. They joined the host of people who say things like, "People wouldn't be poor if they didn't have so many babies" or "A lot of these people don't deserve to be helped."

But look at what John calls us to do. John the Baptist was not calling these people to open coat factories. John

was not asking them to establish soup kitchens. He was not demanding that the Kingdom of God provide taxpayer assistance. He didn't suggest that his followers establish legal aid centers. He didn't ask for the church to hire lawyers to combat legal injustice. He didn't call for marches demanding higher wages. All of those activities are fine, but John has a different focus.

Notice the restraint of John. He doesn't charge them to put clothes on all the people, rather if you have two coats, give one away. He doesn't charge them to feed all the people, rather if you have food, share it with those who don't.

He doesn't charge them to change the political order or to overthrow the government, but to execute the commands of the political overlords fairly. He doesn't ask them to remove the military machine, but he strictly forbids his followers to participate in financial fraud, to bring false law suits before the courts, or to draw more than one's fair wage.

Look at the context. He called people to see Jesus. He wanted people to see the Christ. He wanted people to know the Gospel. John is part of Luke's attempt to lead people to the cross of Jesus Christ, not to a bit of legal advice or a bite of surplus cheese. He wanted people to know the cup that Jesus took for all the world, not a cup of cold clam chowder.

Our central and primary task is the Gospel. Just after our text, Luke does a striking thing. No sooner does the dust and flying grime of the harvest scene in verses 15-17 fade away, no more than eight words after talking about the fires of hell burning unrepentant human flesh, in the next sentence after this graphic picture of judgment, Luke tells us that John exhorted the people with the good news!

Did you hear what Luke is saying? John talks about filling in valleys of wickedness and chopping down mountains of pride. John calls his listeners slimy snakes and diseased trees. The prophet orders the people to empty half their closets, invite the poor to their dinner tables, and to institute honesty and integrity in society. The desert man predicts that around the corner there is one who will sweep the earth clean of wicked and wasteful people.

Then Luke tells us John preached good news! The repentance needed to bring about social justice, the changes needed to usher in forgiveness and inward renewal is good news. John knew it. Luke knew it. Jesus knew it. The question is: Do we know it? What the world needed there at the edge of the desert was good news. What the world needs at the end of the twentieth century is good news. It's the story of death, burial, and resurrection. It carries with it a call to bear our own cross, or in the words of John, to repent.

### **Jesus Is The Color Of Hope**

The ax of John's text is still poised for action. Its blade aims at any who think that this passage is fulfilled by a roomful of castoff clothing in a red brick building. It aims at those who are insensitive to the broadening gulf between the prosperous and those who have only time, love, and luck. It damns all those who use the church as a guise for injustice, prejudice, and indifference to the needs of human beings. Prophets didn't risk their necks so we could deliver Christmas baskets.

This passage condemns those who seek and preach baptism without a change of heart and without a heightened conscience from the people God cares about. John's ax slashes at complacency and selfishness. There is no com-

fort here for people who find the handicapped distracting. There is no comfort here for people who find immigrants outside God's purpose. There is no comfort here for people who send the poor used Christmas cards and think they're doing God's work.

It's not a call to change society as much as to call to change ourselves. It's not a demand to set up hardware or software to rid the world of injustice but a call to changed hearts and inner spiritual strength to lead the world to Christ. It's not a call to be useful as much as a call to be faithful. God is not judging us by our ability to change the system, but by the effectiveness with which we change ourselves and our actions.

It's a demand for a change in heart to understand that we, of all people, need redemption and that just because we have big cars doesn't mean we have a way to heaven. Just because we have nice houses doesn't mean we have a heavenly home. Just because our clothes are new doesn't mean we are clothed in the spirit of God.

Rather it's a call that God's people be known as the people who will give another the shirt off their back. It's a vision of a people who will invite anybody into their lives and share their food. It's the dream of a kingdom where the haves share with the have-nots, where there is no graft, cost overruns, payoffs, kickbacks, or torn up tickets.

Where do we find this group of people? Not in the government. Not in social service agencies. Not in political action groups. Not in industry. Not in business. Not in education. Where do we find people who have repentant hearts and who are committed to the cause of telling the good news to all people? Only in the church.

The British Broadcasting Company filmed a six-part documentary on Christianity in the world. Part of it was

on churches in America. They picked Memphis as typical of Christianity in the United States. The first scene is a large Memphis church of people in aerobics class and bowling on the church's bowling lanes. The voice over says, "This is one of the most successful churches in Memphis. It's success depends to some degree on its sports facilities. To be a member of the church is to get involved at playing games with like-minded people."<sup>9</sup>

A critic for the **London Times** who saw the piece wrote that the film "tried to set up an equal balance between those American Christians who are campaigning for justice for the underprivileged and those who are using their religion to bolster the worst prejudices of the establishment."<sup>10</sup>

People in the world can distinguish between those who care only about themselves and those who care for others. I pray God that we will see the light of which John speaks.

Irina Ratushinskaya is poet in residence at Northwestern University. In her book **Grey Is the Color of Hope**, she tells of how once in a while she pulls out the grey uniform she wore in a Russia prison from 1983-1986. She's now 35. In the Russian camps criminal inmates, or zeks as they called them, wore black. The people in prison for writing poetry about human justice and freedom or for demonstrating against totalitarianism wore grey. In her book, she tells of how she and her fellow political prisoners never gave up hope. They would call a hunger strike and not eat for weeks rather than allow injustice. They made the wardens force feed them rather than concede to a wicked system. The criminal inmates had given up, but the political zeks never quit. In Russian prisons, grey is the color of hope.<sup>11</sup>

The world needs spiritual help. Surrounded by death, it



needs the hope of life. Overcome by decay, it needs the promise of resurrection. Chest deep in sin, it needs the call to righteousness. Oppressed by misery, the world needs to know of blessedness. The world needs to know that that tint of universal hope is shaded by the cross and is worn by his followers around the world. Churches of Christ, let us rise up and let the world know that the color of hope is Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Phil Skotte, "The Problem of Poverty and the Old Testament," *The Bible Today* 26 (1988): 87-93.

<sup>2</sup>"Feed Your Neighbor Day," *Rejoice* [Richland Hills Church of Christ] 13 (June 25, 1989): 1.

<sup>3</sup>George Gallup, Jr., and David Poling, *The Search for America's Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 97-98, 153J.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick Buechner, "What Have We to Give?" *Leadership* 9 (1988): 20.

<sup>5</sup>Irina Ratushinskaya, *Grey Is the Color of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 54.

<sup>6</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *The Devil's Disciple*, in *Seven Plays* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1951), 300.

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 89.

<sup>8</sup>R. Scott Damascus, "Students Spend Night on Street to Help Homeless," *Christian Chronicle* 46 (May 1989): 7.

<sup>9</sup>Tom Bailey, Jr., "Churches Rebuked in Series," *Commercial Appeal* 29 May 1989, A1 and A12.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ratushinskaya, *Grey Is the Color of Hope*, 357.

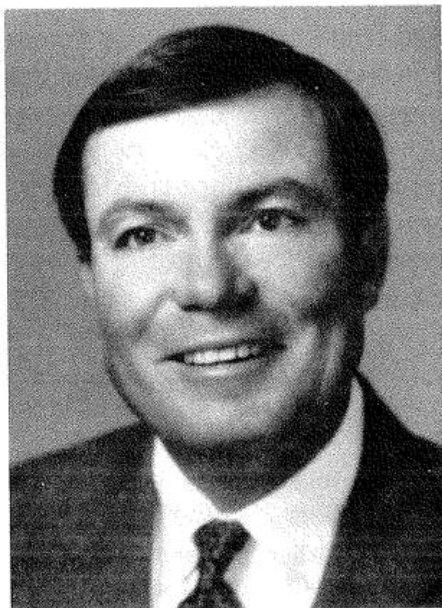
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## **A Universal Savior**

**Doug Parsons**

Suppose a group of us found ourselves marooned on a desert island. All our physical needs were supplied; but we had no books at all, not even a Bible. We had plenty of blank paper and pencils, and so we decided to compile the stories and verses we could recall. Each of us would remember and describe the stories and sayings of Jesus that had stuck in our minds, and we would put them all together and write them down. It would be a gospel according to us. What stories about Jesus would you remember and want included?

In a sense, that is how the first Gospels were written. Years after Jesus was gone, the early church felt a need for a written record of what he had said and done. Memories were searched, stories collected; and then, aided by the Holy Spirit, an author wrote them down. Four times that happened, and those four versions of the life of Jesus were placed at the first of our New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the four Gospels, each containing a collection of stories remembered about Jesus, each different from the others.

A famous Christian once argued that if four witnesses should appear before a judge to give an account of a certain event, and each should tell exactly the same story in the same words, the judge would probably conclude, not that their testimony was exceptionally valuable, but only that they had agreed to tell the same story.

If, on the other hand, each man had told what he had seen, as he had seen it, then the evidence would be credible. When we read the four Gospels, is not that exactly what we find? The four men tell the same story each in his own way.

Back, then, to our imagined predicament. Suppose that we were doing this ourselves. With no access to written records, we have to offer what we remember hearing about Jesus. Which stories would you remember? What each of us would remember and write down would tell almost as much about us as about Jesus. What we remember about Jesus is filtered through our own set of strengths and weaknesses.

Some of us who are facing health crises might remember the stories of Jesus healing persons who were ill. If we are quite young, we might remember his kindness to children. If we tend toward aggressiveness, we might remember and share the story of Jesus chasing the money-changers out of the temple. If we tend to be somewhat hawkish, we might remember Jesus saying, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Simon Peter was famous for his violent temper and in one of his letters recalled with amazement that when Jesus was reviled, he did not revile in return (1 Peter 2:23).

### **Luke's Gospel Reveals A Universal Savior**

When we assemble all our own recollections and write them down, we will have told something about Jesus and about ourselves at the same time. Focus, then, on the gospel of Luke. As the light of God shines through that book into our lives today, what do we learn about Jesus and about what those who follow him are to be and to do?

Luke's Gospel enters into a controversy that was raging

in the early church. They had furious disagreements in those early days, and one of those disagreements concerned the reach of the gospel. Is it for the Jews only, or is it intended for all people everywhere? Many were saying that Jesus was born a Jew, he was the Jewish Messiah, and, therefore, the gospel was only for Jews and not for Gentiles. Inasmuch as Luke himself was a Gentile attracted by the beauty of Jesus' teachings, one can quickly guess which side of the argument he was on.

Luke wanted no walls around Christianity; and, in his Gospel, he argued for the universality of the gospel. How did he do this? He did it in a number of small ways. Other Gospels traced Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, the father of the Jews. Luke traced it back to Adam, the father of all people (Luke 3:38). In the beautiful story of Jesus' birth, Luke states specifically that Jesus was to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles. . ." (Luke 2:32). The other Gospels omit this. In the instructions given to the disciples after his resurrection, Jesus told the disciples they were to go and preach ". . .to **all** nations beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47, emphasis added).

Christianity was intended, and is intended, for all people around the earth. Whenever our own religion and our own compassion tends to become clubby, reserved only for our kind of people, we need to remember the appeal for universalism found in Luke's Gospel.

But the most remarkable emphasis of the book is its repeated description of Jesus' concern for mistreated, downtrodden people. When Luke wanted to describe what Jesus' mission was, here is the way he had Jesus put it:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He

has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

You hear those words? "He has sent me for. . ." the poor, the captives, the oppressed. "That sounds pretty radical," someone says. "It sounds pretty scriptural," someone else answers. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus got very specific in his championing of the downtrodden in life.

The most hated minority in Israel in those days were the Samaritans. Because of historic enmity going back for centuries, there was great hatred of the Samaritans. They were despised by the best people. Yet look what Luke alone among the Gospel writers has Jesus saying about the Samaritans. Remember the parable about the traveler from Jericho who was set upon by robbers and badly wounded? Not a single Jew stopped to help, in Jesus' story, not even a Jewish priest. The only one who stopped was a Samaritan. The parable of the Good Samaritan is found only in one place in Scripture, and that is in Luke 10. Or remember the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers? Only one came back to thank him, and that one was a Samaritan. Only in Luke is that detail noted (Luke 17:16).

Another group in Luke's Gospel received gentle concern from Jesus. There was no discussion of deadbeats on welfare rolls on Jesus' part, but rather, a genuine grieving at economic conditions that produced poverty and hunger, generation after generation. More than in any other Gospel, there is on Jesus' part in Luke a concern for the poor and the suffering.

Remember the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus? That is found only in Luke (Luke 16:20-31). Or the Parable of the Rich Man who ignored human needs about

him and built bigger barns? That occurs only in Luke (Luke 12:16-21). Or the long list of Beatitudes for the poor and woes to the rich? Only in Luke! (Luke 6:20-26). Time and time again in Luke's Gospel, Jesus champions the cause of the poor.

Other social outcasts as well received Jesus' strong concern in Luke. What about the hated tax collectors? The story of Zacchaeus, one of the most hated of them, occurs only in Luke (Luke 19:1-10). The parable of the self-righteous Pharisee and the hated Publican? It occurs only in Luke (Luke 18:9-14). The lepers? Again and again in this Gospel written by a physician, Jesus' healing ministry is highlighted. What about outcast young people? The most beautiful parable of all, that of the runaway boy and his waiting father, the Prodigal Son, occurs only in Luke (Luke 15:11-32). Even criminals. Remember the conversation on the cross, when Jesus turned to the penitent thief and said, “. . . Today you will be with me in Paradise”? That story is found in only one of the four Gospels—only in Luke (Luke 23:42).

Do you begin to see, then, the special flavor of this Gospel—a universal Savior with a universal gospel? The sick, the outcast, the despised, the poor, the rebellious, the criminal—all of them feel the focus of Jesus' love and compassion. From all of this that Luke remembered, we know more about Jesus, and we know more about Luke, too. He had been transformed by the universality of the gospel.

### **Jesus Has A Universal Ministry**

No wonder, then, that after Luke has established who Jesus is and the confirmation of it by collecting data of his birth and baptism and temptation, he then has Jesus

return to his hometown of Nazareth to describe the kind of Savior he would be. In the wilderness Jesus had rejected certain methods. But what did he select in their place? Reading Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue on the sabbath may have been the designated reading for that day or Jesus could have selected it because of its description of the Servant upon whom the Spirit of Jehovah was sent and who performed such gracious service.

No matter. What Luke wants his readers to understand is that, despite the fact that Jesus' ministry had been underway for nearly a year, it was inaugurated with an appeal and emphasis on the universality of the Savior and his gospel. It is significant that this occurred in his hometown where he had lived as a boy. He went to the place where they all knew him as the carpenter. What emotions must have filled his heart as he remembered the earliest times, when with faltering footsteps he had gone as a child and listened to the reading of the law.

There at the synagogue among familiar people he "read himself in" to the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah. He began to speak to them from this text by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This is the only time in the Gospels where Jesus says a prophecy is fulfilled today. That is significant because Jesus was very conscious of what He was to do and to be.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. . ." The idea is pressing down upon him heavily. ". . . because he has anointed me" means the Spirit is a holy unction from on high, equipping, appointing Jesus for the work. The remainder of the quotation describes the work. Let's take it a phrase at a time.

**"To preach good news to the poor."** A universal Savior has good news of consolation. Poor people are in every



city and county of every state and in every nation of the world. They are in every pew of every church. Jesus reminded us that “the poor would always be with us.” Paul told the Corinthians that not many of them were wise, influential or of noble birth (1 Corinthians 1:26). The poor must not be discriminated against in the preaching of the gospel.

**“. . .sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.”** Jesus presented the good news of emancipation. John 8:34 reminds us that “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” People who live under the bondage of sin need to hear the good news of emancipation.

**“Recovery of sight for the blind.”** Jesus presented good news of illumination. The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). Spiritual blindness is even worse than physical blindness. Jesus restored the sight of many people who were physically blind, but He came primarily to give sight to those who were spiritually blind.

**“To release the oppressed.”** Jesus presented the good news of liberation. He came to set a liberty those who were oppressed or bruised. These are the people who are downtrodden. Oppression is much deeper than slavery. It means that a person has been crushed, defeated, whipped down by life. Jesus came to give hope to those who were hopeless.

**“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** Jesus presented the good news of salvation. He stopped at this point. If you continue to read the quotation from Isaiah, there is no comma or other punctuation as the verse continues, “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Jesus did not include that in his reading that sabbath. He stooped, rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant. Is

all that was written in Isaiah which comes after that unimportant? By no means. Jesus stopped where his present mission in the world was to end. Jesus was not in the world for vengeance. He had come to “seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Luke gives us the record of all he began to do and to teach. His work is going on still. The first coming of Jesus demands a second. It will be a day of vengeance, of judgment for those “who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). But, for now, Jesus is the Evangelist, the Healer, the Emancipator, the Illuminator, and the Comforter to all who would come to him for salvation.

This incident concludes with yet another appeal of the universal Savior. First the hearers admitted amazement at what he said. But then a question of unbelief was posed, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” They were not prepared to yield to the claim he had set forth. They had felt the wonder of his words; they were strangely moved by them; but there was a compelling sense to avoid them, and so they adopted the despicable method of discounting his claim by labeling him. They thought they knew everything about him and they did not know anything.

Jesus interpreted their thinking by quoting a proverb, “Physician, heal yourself. Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.” Then he uttered that tremendous truth, “No prophet is accepted in his home town” (Luke 4:23-24). He gave them two illustrations of how the power and the blessing of God had gone outside their nation. He went back to Elijah and Elisha, mighty prophets, and reminded the Jews that only the widow of Zarephath had been fed during a famine and only Naaman, the Syrian, had been cleansed of leprosy. Jesus was driving home the truth that the benefits and the

blessings of the divine kingdom were coming in answer to grace and faith and not because of any racial relationship.

Anger was their immediate response. They drove him out of the town and attempted to throw Jesus over a cliff but their hostility had no effect. "He walked right through the crowd and went on his way" (Luke 4:30).

### **Our Ministry Is To Be Universal**

Our response to all of this is revealing. Frankly, some of us do not like this picture of Jesus that Luke paints. What is this? Jesus always taking up for the rabble of the day? Jesus speaking up for the poor! Jesus being sympathetic to the "sinners" of his day! Jesus warning the rich! Doesn't Jesus know who pays the bills at the synagogue? We would prefer a different picture, then, one of Jesus well-dressed, Jesus associating with only the better class of people and commiserating with them about how hard it is to get help nowadays, and about how strange it is that there are so many shiftless, lazy people to be dealt with. It might be that this is the kind of gospel we would turn out, were we doing the writing.

Isn't this why we need a Gospel like Luke to show us how universal Jesus is as Savior? How all-encompassing his gospel is? In our brittle day of alienation and brokenness, we need to remember what sort of people our Savior came to serve. We need to think a bit about why we do not have more compassion for them. How was it Luke put it? ". . . Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Luke 5:31). It is only in Luke that we are reminded that Jesus ". . . came to seek and save those who are lost" (Luke 19:10).

Divorce. Single-parent households. Blended families.

Marriages in crisis. Premarital issues. Drug abuse. Alcoholism. Prescription misuse. Addiction. Co-dependency. Families caught in the horror. Poverty. Homelessness. Affluence. "Thing-sickness." Materialism. Hollowness. Meaninglessness. Illness. Cancer. AIDS. Grief. Loss. Fear. Anger. Guilt. Shame. Sadness. Loneliness. Anxiety. Depression. Rage.

Negative? You bet! But these threads unwind about us to produce the fabric of modern life and reality in our community.

Not a pretty picture, you say? Correct. But, a very real picture; better, an emotional, psychic, spiritual photograph of the problems of our culture.

And they are **our** problems. Surely we cannot pretend that we have no need. Oh yes, we build up little facades of respectability about us and outwardly do not look like the poor, the outcast, the despised. But down deep, down inside the fortress, behind the masks, we know what we are. We know our hidden need. We know the kind of poverty there is inside of us. We know that we are twisted and crippled inside. Behind our respectability, we know our own corruption, our own predicament. Yes, those of us in the church and called "Christians" face and wrestle with these kinds of problems. The only difference between me and many people who battle in my world is Jesus.

Years ago a London newspaper asked its readers to respond to this question: "What is wrong with the world?" Letters poured in and were printed. One simply said, "Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely / G.K. Chesterton."

What should the church be in such a world? A herald of Jesus? Yes! A supporter of people? Absolutely! A haven for the broken? Of course. A network for meaningful communication in non-threatening, affirming groups of

faithful, fellow strugglers? Without a doubt.

The church must **be Jesus** in a world gone mad. The church must **bring Jesus** to a world gone mad. The church must continue to **suffer like Jesus** for a world still in need of life, to say nothing of hope and purpose.

Stephen Brown indicates that when IBM hires a new manager, one of the first things they do is train someone to take that manager's place. That way there's always a back-up. When the terrible plane crash occurred in Dallas in August of 1985, several key IBM executives were on board. IBM could have been devastated, except that they had already trained people to step into those roles.

That's what Jesus did. He trained his disciples—and us—to occupy his place on earth and carry on his work. And he does it by living in us.

Those of us who have heard Jesus and followed him must share a vision of offering a universal Savior with a universal message. The vision includes being the body of Christ, faithful in reproducing the life and ministry of Jesus as we live out his presence in this time and place. We want, like Jesus, to have our eyes and hearts on others. We want to reach out to people where we live, meeting them with our lives at the point of their needs, sharing with them God's good news of reconciliation and healing.

This vision must also include being a church that is free in the Spirit to move out of ineffectual forms into new approaches as we search for that which is effective and meaningful for us in carrying out the mandates of the Universal Savior. A church ignited by the universal Savior will be aflame with the love and life of God for others.

Sitting in a New York nightclub years ago, W. H. Auden was struck by the desperate look on the faces of those present. He took his menu, and on the back, he

wrote these lines:

Faces along the bar cling to their average day,  
The lights must never go out, they must always play;  
Lest we should see where we are, lost in a haunted  
wood,  
Children afraid of the night, who have never been  
happy, or good.<sup>1</sup>

“Lost in a haunted wood!” Yes, we are, the best among us. I am, and I need a picture of one who comes searching, searching, even for me in my well-hidden lostness. And in Luke, that is the kind of Savior I find. In this universal Gospel, God comes, willing to accept my imperfections, and, through Christ, offers me life.

David Redding, in a little book called **Jesus Makes Me Laugh**, writes a clever work with good humor. But underneath is a real message. He writes toward the end of the book, “I remember going home from the Navy during WW II. Home was so far out in the country that when we went hunting we had to go toward town. We had moved there for my father’s health when I was 13. We raised cattle and horses. Some who are born on a farm regard the work or the solitude as a chore. But coming from town as I did made that farm home an Eden to me.

“We lived in a beautiful bank house that had been built from bricks made on the place by the first settlers in the Northwest Territory. A bank house was one where you could step into the second story from the ground level on one side or step into the first story on the lower side. There was no heat upstairs at all. And I slept in a room with the window and door open all winter in sub-zero weather. I was under about ten blankets and often under a blanket of snow, too. I got up at five o’clock in the dark and ate

breakfast of sausage that we butchered and seasoned in our own smokehouse.

“I started a little flock of Shropshire sheep—the kind that are completely covered by wool, except for a black nose and the tips of the legs. My brother helped them have their twins at lambing time. I could tell each one of the flock apart from a distance with no trouble. I had a beautiful ram. The poor man next door had a beautiful dog and a small flock of sheep that he wanted to improve with my ram. He asked me if he could borrow the ram. In return he would let me have the choice of the litter from his prize dog.

“That’s how I got Teddy—a big black Scottish shepherd dog. Teddy was my dog and he would do anything for me. He waited for me to come home from school. He slept beside me. And when I whistled, he ran to me even if he was eating. At night no one would get within a half-mile of our house without Teddy’s permission. During those long summers in the field I would only see the family at night but Teddy was with me all the time.

“And when I went away to war, I didn’t know how to leave him. How do you explain to someone who loves you that you are leaving him and won’t be chasing woodchucks with him tomorrow, like always! So coming home that first time from the Navy was something I can scarcely describe. The last bus stop was fourteen miles from the farm. I got off there at night about eleven o’clock and walked the rest of the way home. It was two or three in the morning before I was within a half mile of the house. It was pitch dark but I knew every step of the way. Suddenly, Teddy heard me and began his warning, barking. Then I whistled only once. Ha. The barking stopped. There was a yelp of recognition and I knew a big black form was

hurdlng toward me in the darkness. Almost immediately he was there in my arms.

“What comes home to me now is the eloquence of which that unforgettable memory speaks to me of my God. If my dog, without any explanation would love me and take me back after that three year separation, wouldn’t my God?”<sup>2</sup>

Yes! A thousand times yes! Why? Because we have a universal Savior with a universal message of love and hope for all people.

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<sup>1</sup>Auden, W. H., “September 1, 1939,” from *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, edited by Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, Inc.) Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

<sup>2</sup>Redding, David A. *He Makes Me Laugh*. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1964) p. 161.





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# The Lord Of The Harvest

Howard W. Norton

Both the Old and New Testaments are full of allusions to agriculture. These references to farm and field simplify, and at the same time, complicate Bible study for me. They complicate my understanding because I know so little about agriculture and rural life. This is somewhat of an embarrassment since my father grew up on a farm, and my state of residence, Oklahoma, depends to such a great extent on agricultural products for its economic well-being. Wheat, sorghum, corn, soybeans, and peanuts, along with one of the nation's largest beef cattle herds, help provide my salary each month at Oklahoma Christian.<sup>1</sup>

While all of this is true, I am from the city. I grew up in Fort Worth, worked some 16 years in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with a population today of about 16 million people, and now work in Oklahoma City with a metropolitan population of nearly one million souls. Bible references to rural life, to crops, to flocks and herds, to water rights, and to struggles over grazing privileges are not always clear to a man who spent a life-time total of four months on the farm when he was in the fourth grade! The Bible might be easier for me to understand if it had more illustrations from the city. What happened in Athens or Corinth, in Antioch or Rome, in Jerusalem or Ephesus is sometimes easier for me to comprehend than is a reference to a vineyard or a field of grain.

Once I grasp an agricultural concept, however, Bible passages that refer to rural life have an amazing clarity. Phillip Keller's *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*,<sup>2</sup> for example, has explained the work of a shepherd with such precision that Psalm 23 will always have a meaning for me that I would not have appreciated as much without the explanation of a man who actually worked as a shepherd during a part of his life. I am confident that the people of Jesus' day quickly grasped the meaning of his words when he illustrated them with examples from field and flock.

In Luke 10:1-4, for example, Jesus mentions the idea of harvest. He was preparing to send out 72 people to preach to the towns and villages of Israel. The evangelistic strategy of Jesus was simple but effective. The 72 people were to precede him to each town and place that he himself planned to visit. He told them that a magnificent harvest awaited them. The harvest, however, was a harvest of souls and not of grain. "The harvest is plentiful,"<sup>3</sup> Jesus said. He carefully explained the difficulty of their mission by saying that they would be like lambs among wolves. He told them how to dress for their journey, explained where they should stay and how they could survive physically. He told the 72 what to do if the city they visited was receptive and what to do if it was not. He anticipated that some places would not receive them or their message at all and pronounced woes on those communities that dared adopt such an attitude. When they returned from their mission, Jesus listened to the results of their work and encouraged them in their mission of following him.

What particularly interests us in this lesson, though, is what he said about the harvest of souls before the 72

messengers departed on their various journeys. He said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” In this lesson, we will point out some concepts about the Lord of the harvest and the ingathering of souls that we believe are true in any age. We believe these truths will help us fulfill the Great Commission given later by Jesus in Luke 24:45-49. What Jesus says about the Lord of the harvest is as applicable to our evangelistic task as it was to the work of the 72.

### **God Is The Lord Of The Harvest**

Jesus instructs the messengers to ask the Lord of the harvest “to send out workers into his harvest field.” Jesus did not want these 72 valiant servants to feel that they themselves were totally responsible for gathering the harvest. The harvest did not belong to them. It belonged to God the Lord of the harvest. He had prepared it and knew all about its size and the number of workers needed to gather it in. Their job was to do their best, but it was not their responsibility to assume the worrisome role of ownership. We can learn much from Christ’s words concerning our work in his harvest field.

First, since God is the Lord of the harvest, we understand that he prepares people and nations for ingathering. We do not always understand his methods, and we certainly do not comprehend his timetable. We just know that it happens. Perhaps at a moment of uncertainty in Paul’s ministry, the Lord communicated with Paul in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city”

(Acts 18:9-10). Almighty God prepared these people for harvest.

Second, since God is the Lord of the harvest, he provides the seed that results in new life. Peter explains to a group of Christians who had already been harvested that their new life was the product of imperishable seed.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

(1 Peter 1:23-25)

No seed, no harvest. Even the seed that produces new growth is from the Lord of the harvest.

Third, the Lord of the harvest provides every condition of growth. At a recent outdoor celebration on our campus in Oklahoma City, Dr. J. Terry Johnson, the president of Oklahoma Christian, mentioned that there were some things about the beautiful September day that had been provided by the work of human beings. He then added that the beauty of the day itself, however, had nothing to do with the work of any man or woman. God had provided it. And so it is with the conditions of growth that result in a harvest of souls. Paul the apostle said it best when he urged the Corinthians to quit giving men credit for their salvation: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). No harvester has the right to claim any credit for any soul who is gathered in for the Lord of the harvest.

Fourth, it is the Lord of the harvest who has the power

to send additional workers into the field when the harvest is ready. Dr. Carl Mitchell of Harding University once stunned me at a Pan American Lectureship when he chided the audience because of a suspected lack of prayer on behalf of additional workers for Latin America. I don't know about the others who were present, but I know his gentle rebuke was one that I needed. I had worked for years in one of the ripest evangelistic fields of the Third World, but I had prayed relatively little that the Lord of the harvest would send additional workers into the fields that were "ripe."

In summary, the harvest field of souls belongs to the Lord God. It is his work from beginning to end, and we must never forget it. He allows us to work, but the work is all his possession. As Paul says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). The next time we talk about our church, or our work, or our mission field, let us humbly remember that it is God who is the Lord of the harvest. Only he can make the harvest happen.

### **The Harvest Is Plentiful**

While only the Lord of the harvest can bring about the ingathering of souls, his efforts on behalf of mankind have produced bountiful harvests throughout church history. It is obvious that the world of the first century was ripe for the gospel. In John 4:35, Jesus urged his disciples to open their eyes to the ripeness of their own age, saying,

Do you not say, "Four months more and then the harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the

fields! They are ripe for harvest.

It was no accident that God selected the first century for the coming of the Messiah. It was exactly the right time. People were ready to hear, ready to obey. The book of Acts demonstrates this truth repeatedly in such growth passages as Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31. Paul found people ready for harvesting all the way from Jerusalem to Rome, and he was convinced that there were many more ripe for the gospel in faraway Spain. Reading about the receptivity of the first century sometimes makes missionaries wish that they had lived in that age rather than today.

It is a mistake, however, to long for the past when there is evidence on almost every hand that we are living in one of the ripest periods for harvest in the whole history of the church. Three examples will illustrate this claim.

First, the presence of foreign students on the campuses of American universities gives us unbelievable opportunities to reach out to the entire world with the gospel and never leave the very towns and cities where we live. An article in NEWSWEEK underlines the significance of this influx of students under the title "Diplomats in Our Backyard."<sup>4</sup> A window within the article sums up the matter in these words: "How we treat foreign students on our campuses can have lasting consequences for our country."

I care about our country, and I pray the very best for it, but my primary interest is for the kingdom of God here on the earth. When the article was written, there were 343,777 foreign students from 187 different countries studying in this country. Closer to home, this school year, we have 25 foreign nations represented within the 1700-



member student body of Oklahoma Christian. Central State University in Edmond, Oklahoma, has 820 foreign students from 73 foreign countries.

Mark D. Rentz, an English professor in the department of international studies at Arizona State University, quotes Lawson Lau, author of *The World at Your Doorstep* as saying that

one-third to one-half of the world's top positions in politics, business, education and the military will be filled in the next 25 years by foreign students attending colleges and universities in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Think of the implications for the harvest. Sadly, many of these students who are so far from home and feeling good about their education are not favorably impressed by the apparent coldness of the American people. They long for relationships with us. Rentz says,

Although most foreign students are satisfied with their academic experience in the United States, many also have said that they hate America because they feel that Americans don't know or even care if they exist. For example, in a study published in 1976, 40 percent of the 247 foreign students surveyed at 38 Southern universities felt "unwelcome, lonely, and isolated," and the situation is not much different in the North. One of my foreign students, representing the view of many, made this damning observation: "Americans are very friendly, but they don't make good friends."<sup>6</sup>

How strange that we will spend millions of dollars each year to send missionaries to preach in other countries, but

we will not even make the effort to be friendly to foreign students who are studying right in our neighborhoods. How strange that we will send missionaries abroad with the major assignment to locate and teach prospects difficult to surface and usually from the lower classes when we have the opportunity to teach the leaders of tomorrow's world right in the cities where we live. Suddenly Jesus' words make so much sense: “. . . Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

Second, liberation theology is making the world ripe for harvest. Phillip Berryman, a former Roman Catholic priest, has written an excellent work concerning their new approach to the Christian message entitled *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (1987). Berryman says,

As an initial description, we may say that liberation theology is (1) an interpretation of Christian faith out of the suffering, struggle, and hope of the poor. (2) A critique of society and the ideologies sustaining it. (3) A critique of the activity of the church and of Christians from the angle of the poor.<sup>7</sup>

This is not a bad definition. If I were defining liberation theology in my own words, I would say that it is an approach to Holy Scriptures that places more confidence in the ability of the poor to interpret those Scriptures than in the ability of the rich and powerful to interpret the written word of God. Depending on the particular liberation theologian, liberation theology stimulates the struggle for social and economic equality between the weak and the

powerful. In its more radical forms, it can even motivate its followers to take up arms in the pursuit of social and economic goals. Stephen Neill has been quoted as saying that liberation thinking finds more kinship with the Exodus from Egypt than it does from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

I find this approach to Scripture erroneous, but it is not in the rightness or wrongness of the theology that we view it as a factor in the ripeness of our present age. The truly remarkable contribution of liberation theology to the Lord's harvest is that it is bringing millions and millions of people into contact with the Bible and its message. At least one observer believes that liberation theology "may turn out to be the most important religious movement since the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century." If this assessment is true, it will be primarily because of the power of the word of God working in the hearts and minds of people. I am personally less concerned at this time about the rightness or wrongness of liberation theology than I am about the single fact that Latin America is slowly but surely becoming a Bible-reading people. Eventually, Bible readers will figure out for themselves whether their approach to Scriptures is correct or not.

Leaders in liberation theology are turning out small group leaders by the thousands who organize neighborhood Bible studies for the purpose of raising the consciousness of peasants and the elite concerning the social and economic inequities in Latin American society. It is just a matter of time, in my opinion, until these students of the word of God will see that there is something much more important than social and economic equality, and that more important "something" is being

in a right relationship with God. They will discover that the real problem underlying all other problems in the Third World, as well as in our own, is that man is a sinner in need of salvation. Churches of Christ can expect an ever ripening harvest as a result of what the Lord of the harvest is doing to spread the imperishable seed in lands that, until a relatively few years ago, discouraged and tried to suppress the reading of the Bible by any except a handful of religious elite who were judged capable of handling it correctly.

Third, the Lord of the harvest is apparently making major changes in the communist countries of the world. We have all witnessed changes in Russia and its satellites that until recently would have been unthinkable. What has happened is that communism has not been able to keep its economic and social promises to the people it governs. Enlightened communist leaders of the world have found that communism does not work. For this reason, at the human level anyway, these leaders are now willing to incorporate free enterprise into their nearly defunct economies. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former Director of the National Security Council during the Carter Administration, has written a dramatic book entitled *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (1989). He begins his book with this descriptive paragraph:

This is a book about the terminal crisis of communism. It describes and analyzes the progressive decay and the deepening agony both of its system and of its dogma. It concludes that by the next century communism's irreversible historical decline will have made its practice and its dogma largely ir-

relevant to the human condition. Prospering only where it abandons its internal substance even if still retaining some of its external labels, communism will be remembered largely as the twentieth century's most extraordinary political and intellectual aberration.<sup>10</sup>

This is an astounding assessment of the present state of communism by one of this century's most astute observers. What we need to see, however, is not the fact that this may change the balance of power between Russia, China, and the United States but rather that the one-half of the world's population that has been closed for evangelism during much of this century has the bright prospect of becoming one of the ripest harvests in the history of the world.

No one, of course, knows what the world will be like when the present communistic order passes away. New forms of totalitarianism could arise that will be as fiercely antagonistic to Christianity as communism has been. Although we do not know the future, it does seem imperative that Christians begin now to prepare for the new world that seems to be breaking on the horizon. We should optimistically pray that billions now living in darkness will have the opportunity to enter into the kingdom of light.

### **Workers Are Few**

There never have been enough workers when it was time to harvest souls prepared by God. There were not enough workers in the time of Joseph, not enough in the days of Moses, not enough when Elijah lived and not enough during the personal ministry of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual workers are too few everywhere. We need more workers in our own country. The United States has to be one of the ripest fields in the world. The growth of Oriental religions, of Islam, of Buddhism, of New Age religions, of Satan worship, of harmful so-called Christian cults all attest to the deep religious interest of the American people. Our own fellow Americans to a great extent are "like sheep without a shepherd." Independent Bible churches and the strong movement away from fierce denominational alignment hold promise for New Testament Christianity within our own national borders.

As badly as we need more workers in our country, though, we must never forget the cries of the lost in foreign nations. From every direction, we sense the plea to come and help. I am confident that there is not a nation on earth that does not need workers in the harvest field even though the very nation that needs them may prohibit their legal presence. The question is, "What are our responsibilities for seeing that the number of workers increases?"

### **Our Duty to the Lord of the Harvest**

The Lord of the harvest does not hold us responsible for any more of the harvest than we are capable of reaping. Here are some duties that the Lord of the harvest has placed in our hands.

First, we ourselves must be involved in the harvesting of souls. Ivan Stewart was right when he said, "Go Ye Means Go Me."<sup>11</sup> The Great Commission was not meant to be a direct command for apostles only, but also for every faithful child of God. It is possible that not everyone will be a capable teacher, but everyone can use his or her

talents for the purpose of reaching out in love and truth to bring people to a complete commitment to Jesus Christ.

Second, we must remember that the harvest is the Lord's, not ours. The Lord of the harvest is the one who can make the harvest happen even to the extent of increasing the work force that is involved in gathering in the crop of souls. For that reason, Jesus urged his disciples to "ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." It is necessary for harvesters to know what they themselves can and cannot do in the harvest field. One of the things that workers can do is pray constantly about the shortage of manpower in the place where souls are ready to be harvested, and there are not enough people to accomplish the task. Is the harvester to feel powerless and discouraged in such a situation? God forbid! Rather, he is to go to the only person who can do something about the number of workers; and the Lord of the harvest is his name.

It is he who has prepared the crop for this moment, and he knows precisely what the needs are. He knows exactly how many foreign students are studying in this country in 1990 and what positions of leadership they will occupy in their home countries within the next few years. He will listen to our prayers about this ripe harvest.

He also knows what liberation theology is doing to shake up the traditional religious ideas of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. He knows just how many people are studying their Bibles in the cities, towns, and villages of the Third World; and he knows the condition of each single heart. He is aware that the revolution in Bible study is far beyond the ability of present missionary personnel to care for, and he is attentive to our prayers as we beseech the Lord of the harvest to send reapers into the ripe fields.

The Lord of the harvest knows full well that the communist world is in the throes of quiet revolution. He knows that these communist countries have practiced atheism as an official part of their ideology. In his own good time, the Lord of the harvest seems to be preparing atheistic communism for extinction. How can our small forces minister to half of the world's population if it suddenly comes open for the gospel? We need help, and Jesus had told us where to get it. The Lord of the harvest controls the manpower, and Jesus urges us to ask him to send reapers into the harvest field. He cares about the harvest, and he will hear our prayers because the harvest is his.

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<sup>1</sup>*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1989* (New York: World Almanac, 1989), 617.

<sup>2</sup>Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>All Bible quotations, unless otherwise indicated, in this lesson are from the New International Version (NIV).

<sup>4</sup>Mark D. Rentz, "Diplomats in Our Backyard," *Newsweek* (February 16, 1987): 10.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 5-6.

<sup>8</sup>From a conversation on September 27, 1989, with Dr. Don Vinzant, teacher at Oklahoma Christian College. Dr. Vinzant heard the late Stephen Neill say this in a 1981 lecture at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

<sup>9</sup>See *Liberatin Theology* (back cover), a quotation from Robert F. Drinan, S. J.



<sup>10</sup>Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), 1.

<sup>11</sup>Ivan Stewart, *Go Ye Means Go Me* (1974).

## RICK ATCHLEY

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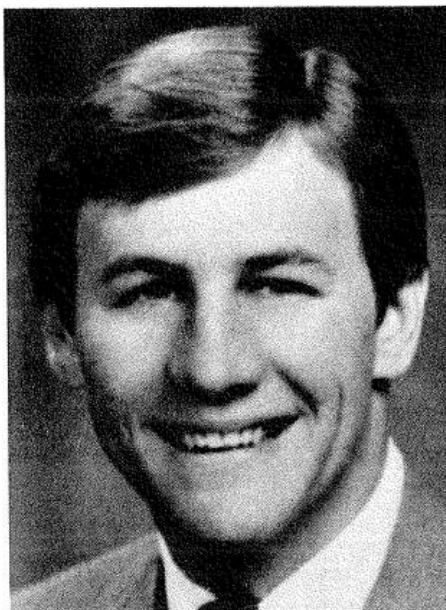
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**Education:** He received his B.A. from Abilene Christian University (1978); M.A. from Abilene Christian University (1982); and is currently completing an M.Div. at ACU.

**Work and Ministry:** Interned at various congregations in the Dallas area. Southern Hills Church in Abilene (1978-1989); Richland Hills Church in Fort Worth (June 1989 - Present).

**Publications:** Articles in *Firm Foundation*, *Christian Family Magazine*, *Gospel Advocate*, and *20th Century Christian*. Currently serves as a staff writer for *Image* magazine.

**Other interests:** Golf, tennis, and racquetball.



## Discipleship

Rick Atchley

“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. . .”

The television evangelist’s dream — masses of followers with open hearts and open wallets! But Jesus was never one to be taken in by crowds. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem not to be coronated, but to be crucified. He knew that, as it became clear that his mission led to the cross and not to the throne, the multitude would vanish. Yes, it was going to take a very special kind of follower to be a part of his plan. So, surrounded by quantity, Jesus stops and talks about quality. And thus we come to Luke 14 and Jesus’ description of what a disciple really is.

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with

ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:25-33

The most striking thing about these words is the phrase Jesus uses three times: “cannot be my disciple” (v.26,27,33). What a sobering thought! You see, there is a great difference in being *with* Jesus and being *like* him. This is a lesson that twentieth century Christianity desperately needs to learn. It is easy to drum up huge masses of people to tag along with Jesus. But who is willing to pay the price to be like him? Before answering too quickly we should reconsider just what the cost of discipleship is.

### **The Cost of Discipleship**

Jesus’ first demand for discipleship is that he must come before *the closest people in your life*. That is what he means when he says in verse 26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters. . .he cannot be my disciple.” Imagine all the raised eyebrows that statement must have created. I can almost see the crowd beginning to dwindle.

Now we must interpret Jesus’ words in light of other biblical teaching to cherish our families. Jesus is not calling for a sense of animosity but for a sense of priority. To be a disciple is to choose Christ as Lord so unconditionally that all other loyalties become subordinate. Anyone who

can pass this test is well on the way to becoming a disciple.

Perhaps some illustrations of people I have known in my life will make this point clearer. I remember, for example, a teenage boy who was told by his parents that if he became a Christian they would throw him out of the house. He accepted Christ as his Lord, however. Why? It was not because he stopped loving his parents, but he loved Jesus more.

Another friend of mine decided in college that God was calling him to spend some time in the mission field. Upon learning of his plans, his family voiced their vehement objections. In spite of their opposition, he went. Again, it was not because he no longer cared about his family, but because the call of Christ was to him an even higher priority than the will of his family. He understood the demands of discipleship.

One of the best illustrations of this demand was shown me by a young single girl several years ago. A few years out of college she met a young man who became very interested in her. He was an extremely attractive and wealthy young man, and since few people considered her particularly attractive, everyone was quite surprised by his feelings for her. He wanted to marry her, and everyone told her he was quite a catch and she was fortunate that he would be interested in her. There was one problem, though. He was not a Christian, and she was a very dedicated Christian. She made every effort to convert him to Christ, but he was not interested. To everyone's surprise, she broke off the relationship. At the time of this writing, she is still single. I know most people would say that she was crazy, but if you asked her why she acted as she did, she would tell you that Christ and his will must come first in every decision she makes. She is a disciple.

Are you a disciple? One way of knowing is by examining your closest relationships. You cannot choose your family, but you can certainly make choices which will determine what your relationships will be like. Do your choices reflect that Christ is first in your life? Jesus Christ demands that we develop relationships that will enhance, not cripple, our being disciples.

Jesus' second demand for discipleship is that he must come *before the dearest dreams for your life*. Verse 27 reads, "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." My personal opinion is that we have so descouped and decorated the cross that most of us have trouble really understanding what Jesus meant. His listeners did not. They knew that if you saw a man carrying a cross you wouldn't be seeing him again. Crosses were not for jewelry. Crosses were for dying. Again, I have a feeling that the crowd got smaller.

Of course, those men were forced to carry their crosses. Yet, when Jesus talks, he speaks of a deliberate act of the will. A disciple makes the conscious choice to carry his cross. In other words, he makes the deliberate decision to live a life of continual dying to himself so that he can continually live for Jesus. That is what Jesus demands. To all would-be applicants for discipleship, he says, "Don't follow unless you are prepared to die to self and its desires, goals, and ambitions. Every decision you make from now on must be made in light of my will."

Consider for a moment what would qualify as a cross to carry. I think many people confuse a cross with the everyday hardships of life. For example, I often hear of people who speak of giving up smoking or not playing golf on Sunday mornings as the cross they must bear now that they are Christians. Others might view their handicap, or

caring for someone with a handicap, as their cross to bear. Others refer to the common difficulties of life as their crosses. My problem with all of those definitions of a cross is that you don't have to be a disciple of Christ to do those things. Many people who are not Christians give up smoking or care for ailing relatives. While I am not trying to diminish the goodness of any of those things, do you really think they should be called crosses if devotion to Christ is not necessary to do them? I think for a sacrifice to be called a cross it should be something that a person does only because he is following Jesus. Crosses are those demanding personal sacrifices we specifically make for the cause of Christ. It is not a cross if life has forced it on us, but it is a cross if we make the deliberate choice to bear it out of love for Jesus. Choosing to deny self for Christ is what crosses are all about. Crosses are for people ready to die. And disciples must face that truth "daily." (Luke 9:23)

This, then, is the second test for discerning if your discipleship is in shape. Have you taken all of your dreams, desires, and plans for your life to the throne for Christ's approval? Are you open to any sacrifice for his sake? Notice that Jesus says that every man must take up *his* cross. He seems to be implying that every disciple has a cross waiting for him, specifically destined and appointed by God. If you will look honestly into your heart, it may well be that you know what that cross is right now.

Then, in verse 33, we come to Jesus' third demand of discipleship. "Anyone of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." Can't you just see all the perplexed and worried looks on the faces of the crowd by now? No doubt they wondered just what kind of kingdom that was going to be. For now Jesus was in-

sisting that he must come before *the finest possessions of your life*.

This third demand might be the most difficult to accept for those of us raised in the modern American culture. Experts say that by the time we were in our early teenage years we had already watched 350,000 commercials on television, and the message behind those commercials was always the same — want, buy, possess, own, or you will never be happy. I sincerely believe that we have been influenced by the blatant materialism of our age more than we realize. How many of us do not need to cringe a bit when we dare to echo Paul's statement. . . "I have learned to be content in any and every situation?" The truth is that we are not content, that we have been trained all our lives to want, and so we leave the pastures of the good shepherd to chase what we think we must have.

If only Jesus had stopped after that second demand, but he didn't. Getting my discipleship in shape demands that I ask myself some hard questions about my relationship to and need for material things. Certainly the problem is not in owning things, for the scriptures are full of godly people who had great possessions. The problem is that tendency for things to begin owning us. Things are not to be loved for their own sake, but to be used for Jesus' sake. The disciple must decide that everything he owns must be secured by shallow tent pegs. In that way he can head quickly wherever his master points and not be tied down to all his things that won't budge. If he can't take it with him, he must decide to leave it behind. He understands that he himself is owned by Christ, and that the true riches of the kingdom are things which cannot be bought, sold, or even seen.

Do you understand these things? Perhaps the real prob-



lem is not with understanding them but with living them. If you would be a disciple, though, there are no other options. Anything you would keep Jesus must have, if you would be a disciple.

### **Counting the Cost**

One of the things that made Jesus such a great teacher was his ability to illustrate the truths he taught. Even the simplest listener could understand. He did so on this occasion with two illustrations drawn from building construction and warfare. The underlying principle of both illustrations is the importance of counting the cost of discipleship. Just as a builder should consider how much money and time it will take to finish a project, and as a general should consider if victory is likely before he engages the enemy in battle, so the one interested in following Jesus should consider if he is willing to accept Jesus' terms for discipleship or not follow at all.

I think of this passage every time I travel to visit my in-laws. About forty miles outside of their city, on the east side of the highway, there is an unusual site out in the middle of a pasture. Standing about six stories high is the steel frame of an office building never completed. Apparently someone with more dream than money began to build but ran out of funds and was unable to finish. Now there stand six stories of rusting steel as a monument to his folly.

Jesus understood how foolish such half-completed projects appear, and he did not want that kind of folly associated with his movement. That is why the terms are so strict. He was about the business of establishing and building a kingdom, and he was even now on his way to engage the enemy at Golgotha so he could do so. He

looked ahead and counted the cost and saw that it would demand the laying down of his own life. How could his kingdom thrive if his followers were not willing to do the same? He realized that what was needed was not more people *with* him but more people *like* him. What he needed was not fans but disciples.

Counting the cost does not mean we can decide how committed we will be. It means deciding whether we will accept Jesus' one and only offer for complete commitment. For those wanting a little religion to round out their lives, Jesus has nothing to offer, for discipleship demands that Jesus come before our finest possessions, our dearest dreams, and even the closest people in our life. Our task is not to decide the cost. Our task is simply to decide if we will pay it.

Of course, the church of Jesus Christ is overrun (and hindered) by people who have not made that decision. Too many follow along thinking that as long as they just hang around Jesus they don't really have to be like him. They are just like the people of his day to whom he addressed the words in Luke 14. Let someone challenge them to really pay the price of genuine discipleship and they will either leave or start a movement to silence the one who is making them so uncomfortable. I hope that is not what you will do with this message. Before I conclude my thoughts on this text, let me leave you with a couple of implications about Jesus' words that I hope will persuade you not to fall in with the half-hearted crowd.

The first is that *to follow Christ as anything but a disciple is thoughtless*. Notice that Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me. . ." Unlike many of the pressure tactics evangelists of today, Jesus forced no one to make a decision nor did he twist the arms of his inquirers. In fact, he

tried to discourage thoughtless applicants. He wanted anyone interested in following him to think about what they were doing. He knew that then, and today, there would always be those who wanted a thin veneer of Christianity — just enough to make them respectable without making them uncomfortable. But you cannot build a kingdom with those kinds of followers. Their path is littered with battles not won and towers not finished, and the whole movement is discredited. So he laid out his terms very clearly and up front to encourage only the truly committed to participate.

Have you ever really thought through his terms? Perhaps when you first considered following Christ someone told you how you could accept him as your Savior. But did anyone explain what the word “Lord” means? Did anyone sit down with you and tell you the cost of your decision as determined by Christ himself? Have you realized that the road Jesus is on leads to your cross as well as his? Jesus wants you to consider all these things before you decide to follow him. To follow him is to renounce all lesser loyalties. Sure, he could attract bigger crowds if he didn’t do things this way, but he would also get a lot less accomplished. Only the truly committed build things that last.

The second implication of Jesus’ words only further reinforces the things we have already considered. Notice how Jesus chose to close his address on genuine discipleship.

Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; *but* men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 14:34-35

The second implication of Jesus' words is that *to follow Christ as anything but a disciple is worthless*. Now salt was a favorite metaphor of Jesus for a believer's influence. Preachers have for years enjoyed finding all the ways that the uses for salt can be compared to the Christian life. But it seems to me that the most obvious general characteristic of salt is that it is essentially different from the medium to which it is applied, and it is applied to that medium to improve it. If the salt was not different and therefore incapable of improving the substance on which it had been put, it was utterly useless. It was thrown out, not even being considered fit for the soil or the manure pile.

The same principle is true of disciples. Their power in the world lies in their difference from it, and the thing that makes them different is the absolute priority of Christ in every arena of their life, as clearly seen by the three demands we have already considered. Now if they do not pay that price, then, in spite of all their religious jargon, they are not significantly different from the world about them and therefore are unable to influence or improve it. They, like "unsalty" salt, are good for nothing. Now I know that is a strong thing to say, but I remind you that is not my comparison but the Lord's.

Jesus desperately desires for his church to get its discipleship in shape. It will never start at the congregational level, though. Such a revival must begin with individuals like you and me making deliberate choices to be disciples on Jesus' terms and not our own.

He asks no more than he gave. He asks a cross for a cross. Only as we consider his cross will we be motivated to take up our own. And as we follow, we are no longer

just with him; we are becoming more like him. This is discipleship.

“He who has ears, let him hear.”



**FEATURED  
CLASS**

## BOB RIGDON

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**Family:** His wife is Evelyn Rigdon. They have one daughter, Sherry (Mrs. Glen Barron) and one son, Greg. They have two grandchildren, Kristen and Chad.

**Education:** He received his B.A. from Abilene Christian University (1953); M.A. from Western Carolina University (1963); and Ph.D. Ed. from University of Georgia (1978).

### **Work and Ministry:**

Preached/taught Bible classes (5 times per week) for 36 years. Elder of Sylva, North Carolina, Church of Christ. Professor of Counseling at Western Carolina University and has a private counseling practice. Published three books; one, *Discovering Yourself*, is being translated into German, French, and Chinese. He has held over 200 meetings/seminars/workshops. He has assisted in beginning nine congregations in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. Conducted a weekly radio program for 36 years and preached for the same congregation for 32 years.

**Other Fields of Special Interest:** The practical everyday aspects of Christianity (I Timothy 4:8), marriage and family counseling, and TV ministry.





# Emotions And The Scriptures

**Bob Rigdon**

(Note: Much of the following material is excerpted and adapted from my three books to which I hold the copyright - *Discovering Yourself*, *Happiness Explained*, and *How to Initiate and Maintain a Conversation*)

We use the words "emotions" and "feelings" interchangeably. Webster's defines each one:

"Emotion . . . to start out, stir up . . . to move . . . 1. A physical or social agitation, disturbance or tumultuous movement . . . in feeling or sensibility . . . . A physiological departure from homeostasis that is subjectively experienced in strong feeling (as of love, hate, desire or fear) and manifests itself in neuromuscular, respiratory, cardiovascular, hormonal and other bodily changes preparatory to overt acts which may or may not be performed . . . . The affective aspect of consciousness: feeling . . . ."

"Feeling . . . one of the five senses of which the skin is the chief end organ and of which the sensations of touch, contact, temperature and pressure are characteristic. A sensation experienced through this sense . . . . A generalized sensation involving . . . pain or pleasure . . . . The undifferentiated background of one's awareness considered apart from any identifiable sensation, perception or thought . . . . The overall quality of one's aware-

ness especially as measured along a pleasantness-unpleasantness continuum. Compare with affect or emotion. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

God made us with the capability for thinking, speaking and acting. Emotions are feeling laden thoughts. Sometimes, emotions can be created by thinking about something terrible or wonderful that we experienced or that we want to experience. Sometimes, emotions are caused by stimuli outside our minds or bodies. Perhaps we see a person or object and immediately an emotion comes over us. Sometimes, hormonal flow in the body causes us to have an emotion. For example, sexual urges. Certainly, a diseased organ will bring forth an emotion such as pain. Emotions can be created by observing something happening to another person. What went through your mind and body as you saw the hanging body of our marine hostage?

Emotions are the fuels that drive us. But, like all fuels and their containers they must be handled with care and controlled. Emotions cause us to act. We must reason first before we act.

The Greeks had a saying, “Emotions must warm the reasoning, but reasoning must rule the emotions.”<sup>2</sup>

In Genesis 4, God told Cain, “. . . you must master it (his anger). Unfortunately, he, like many of us, did not control his anger and it destroyed his brother physically and him (spiritually).

Emotions acted upon without being brought into harmony with the Scriptures may be sin. They will bring pleasure for a short time (Hebrews 11:25) but eventually they will bring heartache and pain—usually in this world and, unless forgiven, in eternity (Galatians 6:7-8).

Emotions, like thoughts, speech, and action, if uncontrolled may become mental illness or criminal behavior.

God has given us the spirit of self control (a sound mind [KJV]) instead of timidity or fear-anxiety (1 Timothy 4:8).

Sometimes, we should express emotions to be Scriptural. “Weep with those who weep, Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15). Younger women are to be encouraged to love (phileo - communicate delight in their husbands - their children) (Titus 2:4).

We must learn how to express emotions appropriately and how to suppress them when they are unscriptural.

To a great extent emotions are spontaneous. They come and go, and many times we are not able to figure out why. We must accept this fact.

Emotions can be so wonderful, and they also can be so devastating. Life would not be worth living without them.

I have gathered together 51 categories of words that are emotional in nature. I am sure there are more:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
Abhor	Afraid	Affection	Afflicted	Amazement	Appalled
Hate	Fear	Philia	Distressed	Astonishment	Disgusted
Enmity	Anxiety	Dear	Anguished	Surprised	Enraged
Hostile		Like			Exasperated
7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Anger	Arrogant	Ashamed	Vengeance	Believe?	Bitter
Wrath	Proud	Guilty	Avenge	Faith	
Indignation	Haughty	Shamed	Revenge		
	Conceited	Sick Inside			
		Sinful			
		Unclean			
		Defiled			
		Worthless			

13. Burn Passion Eros Lust	14. Cheerful Happy Laughter	15. Compassion Sympathy Empathy	16. Comforted	17. Cowardly Timid	18. Crying Weeping Sorrowful Sad
19. Desire Wish Want Crave Covet	20. Despise Reject Scorn Spurn Loathe	21. Disappointed Disheartened Discouraged Distressed	22. Eager Zealous Fervent	23. Earnestly Sincerely	24. Encouraged Hopeful Happy Blessed Joy Satisfied
25. Feel Emote Moved	26. Foolish Stupid Dumb Ignorant	27. Grief Sorrow Groaning	28. Stubborn Resist Hardness	29. Insolence Sullen	30. Jealous Selfish Envy
31. Saved Forgiven Reconciled	32. Thirsty	33. Hungry	34. Thwarted Hindered Stopped	35. Weary Faint	36. Admiration Honor Respect
37. Bold Certain Sure	38. Ridiculed Disrespected Rejected Despised	39. Hesitant Unsure	40. Lonely Forsaken	41. Possessed Driven	42. Concerned Interested Caring
43. Conflict Torn asunder	44. Silly	45. Tempted	46. Relief	47. Persuaded Convicted	48. Pain
49. Vengeance Revenge Get Even	50. Hope	51. Worry Concern			

The Bible teaches that some of these are sinful. A partial list of emotional sins would include:

Matthew 5:22	Anger (Colossians 3:8 & Ephesians 4:26)
Matthew 5:28	Lust
Matthew 5:43	Hate (1 John 3:15)
Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40	Timidity, Cowardice
2 Timothy 1:7; Revelation 21:8	
Mark 7:22	Coveting
	Envy
	Pride
Romans 1:26-27	Degrading passions (homosexuality)
Romans 1:28-29	Greed
Romans 1:30	Insolence, arrogance
Romans 12:19	Revenge, vengeance
Galatians 5:20-21	Jealousy, envy
Colossians 3:5	Impurity, passion, evil desires
Colossians 3:8	Wrath, malice
1 Timothy 6:4	Evil suspicions
2 Timothy 2:24	Quarrelsomeness
2 Timothy 3:2-4	Lovers of self, lovers of money, ungrateful, unloving (astorge) haters of good, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.
Hebrews 12:5	Faint, quit, give up
Hebrews 12:15	Bitterness

God tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points like each of us is tempted but he had no sin (Hebrews 4:15). How is it possible to be tempted to sin emotionally and yet not be guilty of the emotional sin? To find the answer to this question is of the utmost importance if we are to have inward peace and the joy that Christ promised us.

I believe the Scriptures teach that when an emotion which is sinful first makes itself known in our minds/bodies that if we say something such as “This is not what God approves,” and we mean it, then that is being tempted to sin emotionally but not yielding to sin.

For example the Bible reads, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.” Yet, anger by itself is listed as a sin. Read Ephesians

4:26 and Colossians 3:8. This has to be what self-control is when applied to emotions.

Examine with me the subject of sexual desires, lust, fornication, and adultery. There has to be a differentiation between these three principles: (1) the need for sexual fulfillment, (2) temptation, and (3) lust. Why is it necessary to make these three distinctions? First, because the Scriptures do. Second, as a counselor and as a teacher of counselors, I have encountered many people who had no peace or joy in Christ, who were emotionally upset, even mentally ill, from the confusion over this subject of our emotions and the Scriptures. Many suffered false guilt because they treated being tempted the same as being guilty of sinning.

Compare the following three definitive statements with the Bible:

1. **The need for sexual intercourse:** To realize you have the need for a sexual mate, a need for sexual intercourse, is not sinful. God made us with this need.
2. **Temptation:** To be sexually interested in, sexually aroused by a specific person, to find the emotion in your mind of wanting that person sexually is a temptation, but it is not yet sin. If you say to yourself something like, "No, he/she is not my legal scriptural mate," then you have not sinned. You did not yield to temptation. To be interested in, sexually aroused, and wanting sexual intercourse with your own husband/wife is never sinful. That can never be even temptation. Yet, I have counseled many miserable humans, even Christians, who thought they were terrible sinners because they confused these points.
3. **Lust:** To give the consent of the mind to commit sexual intercourse with someone not your lawful (civil), Scriptural mate. Lust is sinful - Matthew 5:28; 2 Peter

2:10,14; etc. Lust is not the same as temptation because temptation is not sin. Therefore, the definition of lust given above is Scriptural.

### Fear

The emotion of fear must be understood Scripturally for us to lead an abundant life. Consider 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity (fear, anxiety), but of power and love and discipline (self-control, sound mind)."

Timidity, fear, and anxiety will be used synonymously. It seems as if all people, professional and nonprofessional, have different meanings for each; yet I believe there is a very broad range of common meaning so that some important principles can be communicated by taking this approach.

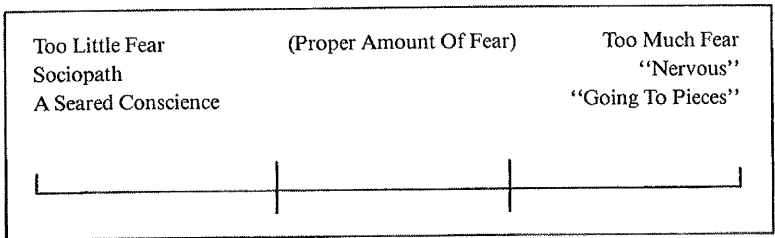
Extreme fear-anxiety keeps more humans from accomplishing good things than any other emotion. Professional therapists are fairly well agreed that too much fear-anxiety is the thread that runs through most cases of mental illness.

2 Timothy 1:7 could be stated: Too great a degree of fear-anxiety makes us powerless, unable to love or be loved and causes us to lose self control, which is mental illness. Power to meet and overcome the problems of daily living comes from knowing the answers and then acting appropriately in each situation.

If I am too fearful, people do not enjoy being in my presence, and I am unable to think rationally or to verbally and nonverbally communicate love. Certainly the opposite extreme, too little fear-anxiety, will not bring happiness. A common problem of teenagers is that they do not have *enough* fear-anxiety to safely drive an

automobile, and as a result they have a disproportionate number of car wrecks.

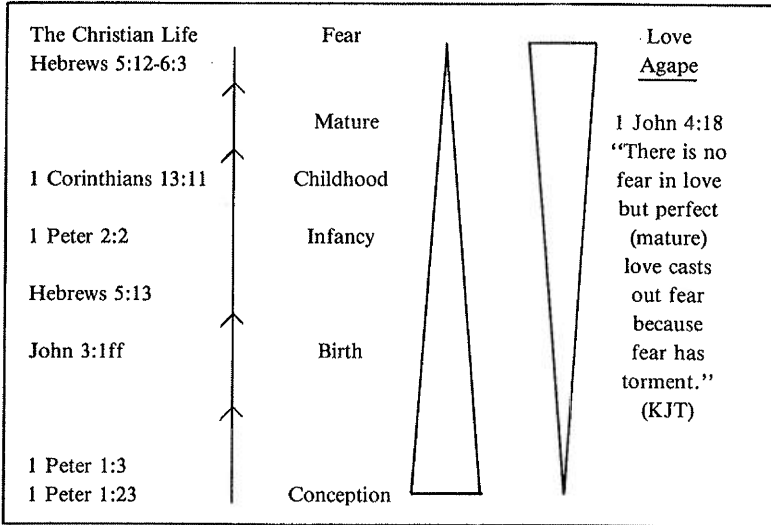
The Scriptures list a cause of many sins against God and fellow humans as “. . .there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18). Or Proverbs 1:7 “. . .the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Too little fear causes some humans to be conceited, living only for self, riding roughshod over the feelings of others without compassion. The extreme example is a sociopath, a person who can rape or murder without any regret or guilt. The Scriptures express it as “. . .having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (2 Timothy 4:2). As in most Biblical teachings, the two extremes are condemned. See Figure 1.



Now examine Figure 2.



Figure 2.



The line on the left represents the sowing of the seed—the Word of God, spiritual conception, spiritual birth, spiritual infancy, spiritual childhood, and spiritual growth into spiritual maturity. The middle section of the figure depicts fear-anxiety as more potent in motivating humans to become Christians and then decreasing as Christians mature and love is increasing.

There is no fear in love; but perfect (mature) love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18). The word “love” is from the Greek *agape* which does not mean “affection” or “delighting to be with” as much as it means, “you will seek that person’s welfare regardless of whether you have affection for him/her or not.” You will under God’s will, seek to think, speak, and act toward him/her as you want him/her to do toward you regardless of how he/she is treating you.

By continually practicing *agape* love, fear-anxiety will decrease. On the other hand, if we refuse to practice *agape* love, fear-anxiety about our relationship to God and to humans will increase.

### Guilt

The emotion of guilt demands our attention. It has to be, if not the most powerful emotion, one of the most powerful emotions that humans experience. To understand it we have to study values, conscience, and guilt.

W. E. Vine defines conscience as “the process of thought which distinguishes good from bad and which praises the good and condemns the bad.”<sup>3</sup>

Freedman, Kaplan, and Sadock write:

Guilt begins with parental disapproval and becomes internalized as conscience in the course of superego development. Guilt has normal psychological and social functions, but special intensity or absence of guilt characterizes many mental disorders, such as depression and antisocial personality.<sup>4</sup>

Please refer to Figure 3 for a diagram of two extremes.

Figure 3

<p>Too little guilt lack of real guilt</p>	<p>Normal guilt has normal</p>	<p>Too much guilt or false guilt psychological and social</p>
<p>may cause anti-social personality sociopath, etc.</p>	<p>functions. It is necessary to control individuals so societies can have peace and safety.</p>	<p>may cause high anxiety, depression, etc. May be caused by leaving out grace and mercy (Pharisaism).</p>

Hinsie and Campbell write: “. . .the function of conscience is to warn the ego to avoid the pain of intense guilt feelings.” Walters states from his research: “Conscience is common to all people in all cultures. Accumulated evidence indicates that no primitive people is without conception of right and duty.”<sup>5</sup>

“Values” are used in this context as meaning acts, customs regarded in a particular, especially favorable way (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*). There are at least twelve other meanings for the same word. For our purpose, think of values as morals, the distinction between right and wrong, the right thing to do or to refrain from doing, or the right or wrong time to do something.

The Bible teaches that there are absolute values-morals, and there are relative values or morals as discussed in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-11. According to Romans 14, the eating of meat is a relative value. It was sinful for some to eat it because they believed it to be wrong, even though God said it was not wrong. “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatsoever it not from faith is sin”

(14:23). Yet, God through Paul has said all meat is clean. “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who *thinks* anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (Romans 14:14).

There are absolute values-morals in the New Testament; that is, some things are sinful whether a human *thinks* they are sinful or not sinful.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:25-32).

All words must be accurately and Scripturally defined

in context, and where exceptions are given, those exclusions must be taken into account. But there are both absolute and relative values in the New Testament. The preceding are only examples of the many relatives and absolutes that exist. Therefore, Christians must give attention to studying and differentiating between absolute and relative values.

Christians should respect the relative values of others and not unnecessarily offend people. "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15).

This principle also applies to customs (a usual practice, habit) as long as the custom does not violate a direct commandment of God. Remember, Jesus rebuked Simon for not washing his feet when Jesus entered Simon's house (Luke 7:44). Jesus used this example to teach us to follow the customs of the area in which we live (John 13-17). But if anyone says, "It is our custom *not* to preach in Jesus' name," Christians should respond, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Paul wrote about observing customs and respecting relative values of others in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak, that I might win the weak. I have

become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 10:32-33 says:

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they might be saved.

Galatians 1:9-10:

As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

The two sets of Scriptures are not contradictory when the context is considered and when one recognizes relative values (customs) and absolute values. Application of the above principles will reduce guilt and relieve a tender conscience.

Return now to Freedman, Kaplan, and Sadock's statement that "Guilt begins with parental disapproval." This agrees with the Scriptures which state in part, ". . . fathers . . . bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." A good upbringing will include avoiding Pharisaism (Matthew 16:1-12).

Some parents drive their children to anger and/or to mental illness by creating too much guilt by teaching things are sinful when they are not sinful, or by making absolute values out of relative values. On the other hand, some parents do not teach and create enough guilt. The

result is a child who becomes a menace to society, a sociopath, etc. “A child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15). Sadduceeism creates too little respect for God since it denies the power of God and declares that we will not be resurrected (Matthew 22:23,29).

The goal of Christian parents is to avoid these two extremes concerning guilt and to create the proper amount of guilt in the child so that eventually righteousness will be internalized; that is, the child does not even think about committing a sin because he has known it is wrong for so long that avoiding it has become part of him. I am convinced that is what Jesus meant in the 6th chapter of John when He said, “It is the Spirit who gives life. . .the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (verse 63). “I am the bread of life” (verse 48). “. . .if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever” (verse 51). “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him” (verse 56).

When you and I eat and drink literal food, part of everything we ingest becomes a literal part of us. The word given by the Spirit should be taught and learned until it is part of us. Then it is internalized.

Too much guilt, or false guilt, can be internalized with disastrous consequences. The opposite, too little guilt, can be internalized with different consequences but can be equally disastrous. Also, a conscience can be too hard. Paul referred to some whose conscience had been seared as with a hot iron. Humans can sin so much and so often that the conscience quits bothering them and they have no guilt. They, too, may become anti-social (sociopaths). When the first began sinning, violating their consciences, they had guilt, but as they continued sinning the scar tissue

formed on the conscience, and the feeling of regret slowly ceased. They became hardened to sin.

Some people have too tender a conscience. They are like Martha, who became bothered and anxious about Mary's not helping to serve dinner. The Lord rebuked Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things. . ." (Luke 10:41). An opposite extreme of Martha's worries is procrastination. James tells us of a businessman who put off doing what he said he was going to do. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). The businessman should have included "if it is God's will" and then have bought, sold, and received profit. These are examples from the Scriptures of extremes concerning values, conscience, and guilt.

As Walters stated, "conscience is common to all people."<sup>6</sup>

The Holy Spirit through Paul said, "Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law. . ." (Romans 2:14). Although there is something innate in humans, the Bible teaches that *most* of the conscience—the process of thought about what is right and wrong—is learned. Paul had lived in all good conscience (Acts 23:1); yet, he had previously persecuted and helped to kill Christians. He was wrong (sinning) even though he earnestly believed God wanted him to persecute Christians. His conscience was a result of Jewish teachings of his time.

All wise parents will recognize their own blind spots, weaknesses, and sins and will teach their children to look beyond them (the parents) to Christ and His word for their final authority. This admonition should increase as the child matures. The truth of God, His word, is com-

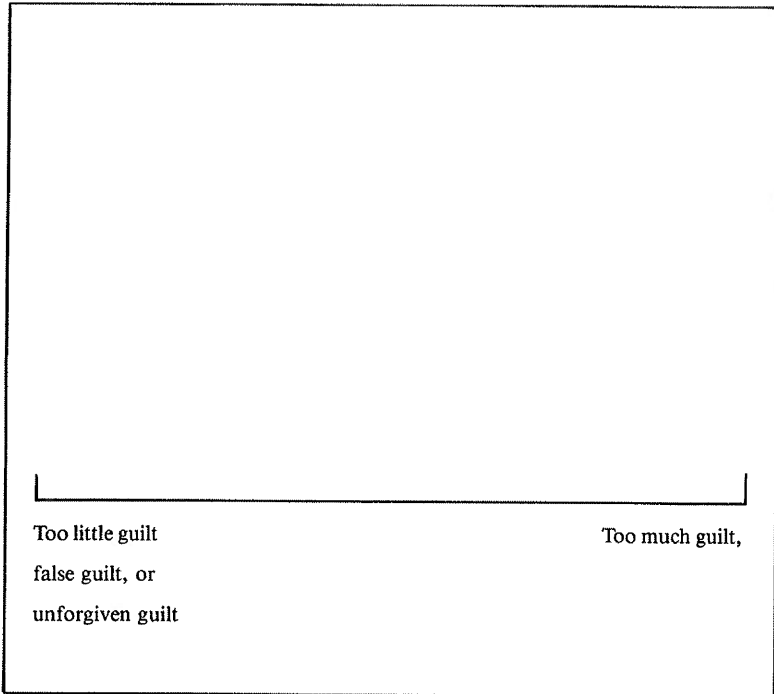


municated through human vessels, but we should look behind the human vessel eventually. That is difficult to do, but spiritual maturity depends on it, and wise parents encourage it.

### Grace and Guilt

Most therapists agree that intense guilt is *a* major cause of mental illness. Many therapists would say guilt is *the* major cause of mental illness. Before it becomes severe enough to be labeled mental illness, excessive guilt certainly causes untold misery and unhappiness. See Figure 4.

Figure 4



Consider these modern definitions of mental illness that agree with figure 25.

The madness that destroys the personality is the madness that afflicts us all, only expressed in greater degree (K. Menninger).

The abnormal individual never creates, invents, or uses any new behavior. He uses normal behavior that normal people use but uses it inappropriately and/or to extreme (Dr. Cecil Mann).

Further justification for my not discriminating between the use of experiences gained in the treatment of the more serious mental disorders of the psychotic and those of the milder forms of problems in living of the neurotic stems from another conviction. It is my belief that the problems and emotional difficulties of mental patients, neurotics or psychotics, are, in principle, rather similar to one another and also to the emotional difficulties in living from which we all suffer at times. Should these difficulties become so great that a person is unable to resolve them without help, thereby feeling the need for assistance, he may become a mental patient in need of psychotherapy (Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, M.D.).<sup>7</sup>

Earlier, false guilt and its consequences were examined. Now let us consider real guilt. Try as we may, no human, except our Lord, is/was sinless. The Apostle John wrote to Christians and included himself, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Later he warns us not to take that statement to the extreme and think we do not need to try to keep from sinning. "I am writing these things to you

that you may not sin, And, (But), if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins. . .” (1 John 2:1-2). “No one who is born of God practices sin. . .” (1 John 3:9). Many Christians have ignored one of these Scriptures and violated the other as illustrated in Figure 5.

See Figure 5.

I can sin all I want	I must try, but I still have sin.	If I try hard enough
because grace takes care of it.	As long as I try and I remain in Christ, I will be saved by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus Christ.	I can be sinless, and I must be sinless to go to heaven.
FALSE 1 John 3:9	TRUE 1 John 2:1-2	FALSE 1 John 1:8

Paul also dealt with this problem in Romans, chapters 1-3. After pointing out the sinfulness of all people, he emphasizes how we are saved by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus. Knowing some would conclude they could sin all they wished, he added: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be!” (Romans 6:1-2). Speaking of his own sins, he says:

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God

through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other with my flesh the law of sin.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 7:24-8:1).

We must enter into Christ. Paul summarizes how that is done in Romans 5 and 6.

Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand. . . All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death (Romans 5:1,2; 6:3).

He also wrote that if we *continue* in His kindness, we will receive His kindness (Romans 11:22).

This is the only final and complete answer to real guilt that I know. The removal of guilt is in Christ Jesus and what He has done for us. Read carefully the following Scriptures:

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14).

Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men always (Acts 24:16).

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5).

From personal experience and from interactions with counselees, I have discovered that many Christians find it

difficult to apply grace to themselves and to forgive themselves. It is far easier for many to forgive others than to forgive self. I think part of the answer is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 where we read of a Christian who committed a sexual sin. The church was commanded to withdraw fellowship from him. Later, he evidently repented and returned to Christ, after which Paul wrote the following in his second letter. Notice the underlining.

But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the **majority**, so that on the contrary **you** should rather **forgive** and **comfort him** lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge **you to reaffirm your love for him**. For to this end also I wrote that I might put **you to the test**, whether you are obedient in all things. But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:5-10).

People cannot know they are forgiven unless fellow Christians *communicate that to them by words and actions*. Remember, the Holy Spirit also said through Paul, “. . . we have this treasure in earthen vessels. . .” (2 Corinthians 4:7). This statement is usually applied to the preaching of the gospel, which is one application, but the Holy Spirit says that “. . . you should . . . forgive . . . comfort . . . reaffirm your love . . .” We have the respon-

sibility of communicating, “You are forgiven. We/I forgive you.” If we don’t, we fall into a trap of Satan, and others may be overwhelmed by sorrow over their sins.

Another misconception often encountered is that many Christians rank sins and apply grace to themselves if they tell “white lies,” steal a pencil, etc., but they evidently think God’s grace and Jesus’ blood are not enough to forgive murder, adultery, drunkenness (alcoholism), etc. My Bible and your Bible teach: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:13).

Of what sins were God’s heroes—Noah, Abraham, David—guilty? Noah was drunk (Genesis 9:18-23). Abraham lied to save his own life, placing his wife’s life in danger (Genesis 12:11-20; 20:1-18). David lied, committed adultery, made a man drunk, and committed murder (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12 and Psalms 51). They were forgiven. God’s grace and Jesus’ blood are sufficient to cover all of our sins, no matter how great, when we obey God and Christ. Believe it, apply it to self, and preach it to the world. Guilt is a horrible burden to bear, but there is peace through Jesus our Lord and Savior.

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<sup>1</sup>See *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (Unabridged), Springfield, Mass.: G & C Merriam Co. Publishers, 1976.

<sup>2</sup>See Short, Ray E. *Sex, Love, or Infatuation*, Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishers House, 1978.

<sup>3</sup>See Vine, W. E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966.

<sup>4</sup>See Freedman, A. M., Kaplan H. I., and Saddock, B. J. *Modern Synopsis and Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1972.

<sup>5</sup>See Hinsie, L. E. and Campbell, R. J. *Psychiatric Dictionary*, New York: Oxford Press, 1970.

<sup>6</sup>See Walters, O. S. *The Anatomy of Psychotherapy*, (unpublished memographed article), 1974.

<sup>7</sup>See Fromm-Reichmann, Freda, *Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.





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## CHARLES B. STEPHENSON

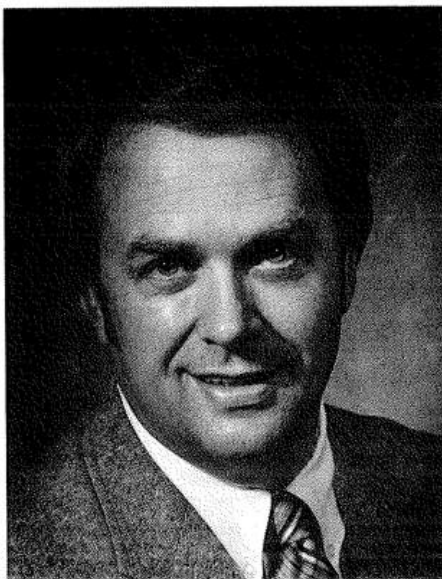
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**Work and Ministry:** Minister in Lone Camp, Texas, in 1963; Minister in La Pryor, Texas, and school teacher from 1964-66; Associate Minister in New Orleans, LA from 1966-67; Minister in La Place, LA, from 1967-75; Administrator for La Place Christian Children's Foster Care Home from 1972-75; Minister for Northside in Lubbock, TX, from 1975-Present; Member of Bible Faculty at LCU from 1974-Present; Chairman of Biblical Studies Division at LCU from 1980-Present; and received the F.W. Mattox Teacher of the Year Award for 1984-85.

**Other Fields of Special Interest:** Membership in the Evangelical Theological Society. He published articles in *Restoration Quarterly*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Image*, *Power for Today*, *Alternative*. Book reviews in *The Journal of the Evangelical Society*.



# Baptizing in the Holy Spirit and Fire

Charles B. Stephenson

John's prediction that Jesus would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" is a part of his answer given to the people who were wondering "if John might possibly be the Christ" (Luke 3:15 NIV). Possibly Luke used the aorist middle, *apekriato* (answered), which appears less frequently than the passive, to give emphasis to John's words.<sup>1</sup> Emphatically, John pointed to another.

Because the people had come to understand John's ministry in the light of their messianic expectations, he was given an opportunity to turn their attention to one greater than himself. Luke 3:16-17 contains several indications of the superiority of Jesus over John.<sup>2</sup> Only the lowest of servants was given the task of removing the sandals of guests in his master's house. In comparison to Jesus, John was not of enough worth to remove his sandals. Jesus would be the one to clean the threshing floor in judgment. John had no such authority. Clearly, Jesus was to be John's superior.

Undoubtedly, Jesus' superiority was to be demonstrated by the superior nature of the baptism which he would administer.<sup>3</sup> John baptized with water. For emphasis Luke places *hudati* (water) before the verb *baptizo*.<sup>4</sup> The medium of John's baptismal act was only water; but, Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire.<sup>5</sup> This is a contrast between the preparation for the real thing and the real thing.<sup>6</sup> Jesus, the one to come after John, was to be

known by the powerful nature of his ministry.

It should be understood that John was speaking of Jesus' future ministry by positioning for it a baptism which would be analogous to his own baptism. Whenever Jesus' ability to baptize in the Holy Spirit is mentioned, it is always in the context of, and in contrast to, John's baptism (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16).<sup>7</sup> This analogy should be seen as a part of John's teaching concerning the superiority of Jesus.

Both Luke and Matthew added that Jesus also was to baptize "in fire" (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). Such language points to a metaphorical use of the baptismal idea to further enhance the understanding of the power of Jesus for those who were listening to John. Jesus' ministry would bring the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> This metaphorical use of baptize is similar to its use in Mark 10:38-39 and Luke 12:50 where Jesus spoke of his future suffering as a baptism.<sup>9</sup> It would seem that too much is often made of the term "baptism in the Holy Spirit." Much of the study and teaching done on this topic seem to be done in anticipation of current Pentecostal teaching.

As just noted, Matthew and Luke are the only two references to a baptism which is associated with fire. Because of the difference between these and Mark, it has been postulated that the original saying did not mention the Holy Spirit. John is seen as making a contrast between a baptism of water and one of fire. For those who accept that John mentioned *pneuma*, it is understood as a reference to wind, not spirit. For these critics the elusive Q source did not mention the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> But there is disagreement among critics as to what Q does contain. Though it may be held that John only predicted a baptism with fire, it is believed that Q contained the saying about

Jesus' baptism as it appears in Matthew and Luke.<sup>11</sup> Such disagreement on the content of this supposed source places any argument based upon it, at least, in question.

In the quest for the answer as to why the citations of John's statement vary, sometimes it has been assumed that the Pentecost event—the tongues like fire—was that which was predicted. This does not recognize that those tongues like fire hardly constitute a baptism with fire.<sup>12</sup> If it is presumed that a baptism with fire was the original saying, then the Pentecost event has been seen as influencing the development of the text by the church's association of fire with the coming of the Spirit. This view has the author of Q adding the Holy Spirit to the original saying.<sup>13</sup>

Reasoning in these directions does not take into account the possibility that John actually said "with the Holy Spirit and fire."<sup>14</sup> On the basis of Old Testament prophecies, John and others of his day may have been anticipating the coming of the Spirit of God and the fire of God.

Without doubt the Old Testament tells of God's promise to bestow his Spirit upon his people (Ezekiel 36:27; Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28). On Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2:28 to explain what was happening. The audience readily accepted his explanation. Furthermore, the Messiah was to be endowed with the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2). This association of the Messiah and the Spirit was known also through extrabiblical Jewish writings (Song of Solomon 17:42; 1 Exodus 49:3). In the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," it is possible the Messiah was believed to have the power to give the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> With this teaching among the Jews, would it not be probable that John understood the age of the Messiah to be attended by the power of the Spirit?

Additionally, the Old Testament is filled with associations of God and fire. In Deuteronomy 4:24 it is stated that “the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (also Deuteronomy 9:33; Isaiah 33:14). God said that his word is like a fire (Jeremiah 23:29). Fire is God’s servant (Psalm 104:4). Fire was associated with the sacrifice in Abram’s dream (Genesis 15:17). God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). A constant element in the Israelite understanding of God’s care was his guidance from Egypt by cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:24; Numbers 9:15-16; 14:14; Deuteronomy 1:33; Nehemiah 9:12; Psalms 78:114; 105:39). The mountain top appearances of God at Sinai were in smoke and fire (Exodus 19:18; 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:11-36; 5:4-26; 9:10,15; 18:16). Prayers over sacrifices were answered by fire from heaven which accepted the sacrifices through that fire (1 Kings 18:24,38; 1 Chronicles 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3). Fire is a part of the throne scene in Daniel 7:9-10. A chariot of fire came for Elijah (2 Kings 2:11).

There are two passages which use fire to tell of God’s protection and glory for his people in a new Jerusalem. In Zechariah 2:5 God is described as a wall of fire. The city will not need a wall because God will be its protection.<sup>16</sup> Isaiah wrote of a time when God’s fire would be a canopy over Jerusalem like the guiding fire which led Israel from Egypt (Isaiah 4:2-6). It is possible that this passage was associated with the Messiah’s kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

Fire was used by God to purify and refine. The touch of the coal on Isaiah’s tongue removed his sin (Isaiah 6:6-7). Israel could be returned to usefulness by the purifying fire of God (Jeremiah 6:29; Ezekiel 24:12-13; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2).

Fire was often an expression of God’s wrath (Ezekiel

22:20-22; Malachi 4:1). Surely, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah influenced Israelite ideas concerning God's wrath and judgment (Genesis 19:24).<sup>18</sup> This influence would have been strengthened by the punishment of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2). All of God's enemies would be punished by fire (Isaiah 66:15f.; Ezekiel 38:22; 39:6).<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 66:24 describes a punishment where the worm does not die and the fire does not go out. The consuming fire does not end.

During the interbiblical period, the association of fire and punishment continued as a statement of God's judgment on the wicked. This appears in 1 Enoch 10:6; 18:11; Judith 16:17; 4 Maccabees 9:9 and in the Sibylline Oracles 2:196-205, 252-254; 3:54. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain this idea (1QS 2:8, 15; 4:13; 1QpHab. 2:11-13; 10:5,13; 1QH 3:29-33; 6:18ff.).

The fact that fire from God was seen as both purification and judgment may grow from the idea of his holiness.<sup>20</sup> His holiness would demand a pure people. The same would destroy his enemies.

In view of all this material, it is evident that both John and the people of his day could have held an understanding of the time of God's Messiah that included both the Holy Spirit and fire. In Joel 2:28-30 the great Day of the Lord would bring both the Spirit and fire (see 1QS 4:13, 21). But, with all of this background, what would the Spirit and fire have meant to them?

Four possibilities have been suggested for fire in the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire: 1. the tongues of Pentecost, 2. a baptism of judgment, 3. a baptism of purification, or 4. trials of persecution.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned above, the tongues on Pentecost which were like fire do not seem to give a proper interpretation for fire in Luke

3:16, even though the event is associated with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this suggestion is to be rejected. The suggestion concerning persecution as a baptism of fire separates this baptism from the Holy Spirit. It seems that this suggestion is made on the basis of the metaphorical use of baptism in Mark 10:38-39 and Luke 12:50. The same suffering idea is contained in the cup metaphor in Mark 10:38-39 and Matthew 20:23. These ideas, with the "fiery trials" of 1 Peter 4:12, seem to give an acceptable interpretation, but these do not fit the context. Therefore, persecutions are also to be rejected.

Because of the burning of the chaff in Luke 3:17, often fire in 3:16 is interpreted to mean judgment.<sup>22</sup> With the separation of the grain from the chaff there is room to find a judgment of both blessing and punishment. Thus, various combinations of destruction and purification have been postulated for Jesus' baptism. Yet, the use of fire in this statement has caused most frequently an interpretation for a baptism of judgment.<sup>23</sup> These interpretations place too much emphasis on the negative judgment and do not allow for the positive aspects of the baptismal motif.<sup>24</sup> Generally, a baptism would have been seen as a cleansing, not a judgment.<sup>25</sup>

To maintain the positive aspects of the baptismal motif the "baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire" has been interpreted as either a baptism of blessing (Spirit) and a baptism of judgment (fire).<sup>26</sup> or as a baptism with the two aspects of blessing and judgment.<sup>27</sup> Either interpretation would preserve possible meanings for the combination of the Spirit and fire. The second possibility seems the better of the two as it preserved the unity of the baptism.

The final suggested meaning of a baptism of Spirit and fire is a baptism of purification. Here the fire is seen as



emphasizing the purifying and refining work of the Spirit in the life of the penitent.<sup>28</sup> This may echo the refiner's fire of Malachi 3:2-3. Also this interpretation preserves the unity of Jesus' baptism.

The significance of this unity is indicated in three ways. First, the grammar calls for one act of baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. *Kai* draws Spirit and fire together under one preposition, *en*.<sup>29</sup> Then, in that Jesus' baptism was to be analogous to John's, the comparative statement of Luke 3:16 calls for Jesus to administer one baptism, not two. This would be, like John's, a baptism which offered a new positive relationship with God. Thirdly, John addressed his statement to one group of people (*humas*) which was to receive the benefit of Jesus' baptism.

In light of Isaiah 4:2-6; 11:2; Joel 2:28-30; Zechariah 2:5 and Malachi 3:2-3, it is possible that the final suggestion is the best interpretation of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. Furthermore, Luke is the only author to mention John's prediction more than once. In Acts 1:5 and 11:16, fire is left out of the statement, like the saying in Mark 1:8 and John 1:33. Possibly, this can be taken to mean that "the Holy Spirit and fire" was understood to be an enhanced form of "with the Holy Spirit." Thus, John's prediction can be understood to mean that Jesus was to administer a baptism which would purify and refine the recipient for life in the coming age of the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>See Marshall, I. Howard, "The Gospel of Luke," in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>See Fitzmyer, Joseph A., "The Gospel According to Luke" (I-IX), in *The Anchor Bible*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1981), p. 466.

<sup>3</sup>See Braumann, Georg, "Strength, Force, Horn, Violence, Power," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 399.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, "The Gospel of Luke," p. 146.

<sup>5</sup>See Childers, Charles L., Luke, in Vol. VI of *Beacon Bible Commentary*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), p. 463.

<sup>6</sup>Dunn, James D. G., *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1970), 19.

<sup>7</sup>Reiling, J., and Swellengrebel, J. L., *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, Vol. X, "Helps for Translators," (Leiden: E. J. Brill, United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 173.

<sup>8</sup>Morris, Leon, "The Gospel According to St. Luke," in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1974), p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup>Bultmann, Rudolf, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 246; Manson, T. W., *The Sayings of Jesus*, (London: SCM Press, 1949), pp. 40f.; see also, Beasley-Murray, G. R., *Baptism in the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 36; cf. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 8; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 146-147; cf. Glasson, T. Frances, "Water, Wind and Fire (Luke III. 16) and Orphic Initiation," *New Testament Studies*, 1956/7, pp.69-71.

<sup>11</sup>Fledderman, Harry, "John and the Coming One (Matthew 3:11-12/Luke 3:16-17)," *SBL 1984 Seminar Papers*, pp. 377-384; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 473.

<sup>12</sup>Inch, Morris A., *Saga of the Spirit: A Biblical, Systematic, and Historical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 79; Leaney, A. R. C., *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), p. 40; cf. Boles, H. Leo, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1940), p. 83.

<sup>13</sup>Stagg, Frank, *New Testament Theology*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), p. 214; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 474;

see also Caird, G. B., *The Gospel of St. Luke*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963), p. 74.

<sup>14</sup>See Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, pp. 73-74; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup>T. Leviticus 18:6-11; T. Judges 24:2; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup>See Leupold, H. C., *Exposition of Zechariah*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), p. 56; Watts, John D. W., "Zechariah," Vol. 7, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), pp. 317-318.

<sup>17</sup>See Leupold, H. C., *Exposition of Isaiah*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), pp. 101-107; Watts, John D. W., Isaiah 1-33, *Word Biblical Commentary*, (Waco: Word Books, 1985), pp. 49-51.

<sup>18</sup>Lang, Friedrich, "Pur," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), p. 936.

<sup>19</sup>See Miller, Jr., Patrick D., "Fire in the Mythology of Canaan and Israel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 1965, pp. 256-261.

<sup>20</sup>Good, E. M., "Fire," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 269.

<sup>21</sup>Ash, Anthony Lee, *The Gospel According to Luke: Part I*, 1:1-9:50, (Austin: Sweet Publishing, 1972), p. 74; Lamar, J. S., "Luke", *The New Testament Commentary*, Vol. II, (Dallas: Eugene S. Smith, n.d.), p. 67.

<sup>22</sup>See Summers, Ray, *Commentary on Luke*, (Waco: Word Books, 1972), p. 48; Lang, "Pur," pp. 941-942; Sayers, Stanley E., *Reflecting on the Spirit*, (Delight, Ar.: Gospel Light Publishing, 1972), p. 48.

<sup>23</sup>Reiling and Swellengrebel, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 173; Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 10; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 228, n. 2; Geldenhuys, Norvel, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), p. 140; Moule, C. F. D., *The Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, p. 2; McGarvey, J. W., and Pendleton, Philip Y., *The Fourfold Gospel*, (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Foundation, n. d.), p. 79.

<sup>24</sup>Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, pp. 473-474.

<sup>25</sup>See Lenski, R. C. H., *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 201.

<sup>26</sup>Unger, Merrill, F., *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit*, (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1953), p. 28; Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup>See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, p. 473; Liefled, Walter L., "Luke," in Vol. 8, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 856-857.

<sup>28</sup>Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Theology*, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 516; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup>See Tolbert, Malcolm O., "Luke," in Vol. 9, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 83; Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 11.



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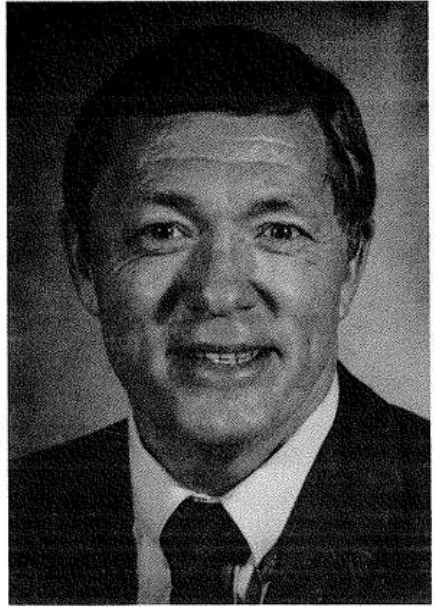
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## Are Tongues for Today?

Clyde M. Woods

The Charismatics are growing.<sup>1</sup> Paralleling this growth is increasing interest in tongue speaking. Few subjects have been so widely and intensely discussed during the last quarter century as has glossolalia. One has only to survey the helpful recent anthology by Watson E. Mills (*Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia*, 1986) to gain some idea of the energy with which this subject has been pursued. In this brief presentation I explore a few of the more salient problems and issues relating to this controversial phenomena.

Charismatics in numerous religious bodies join somewhat revitalized Pentecostals to advocate tongue speaking as a vitally significant outpouring of the Spirit for confused contemporary Christendom. In a 1973 article "The Place of Glossolalia in Neo-Pentecostalism," William G. MacDonald lists nine values which he thinks mark glossolalia as "the most significant gift:"<sup>2</sup>

- (1) Glossolalia and its companion gift, the interpretation of tongues, are the only New Testament gifts not found already in the Old Testament.
- (2) Glossolalia allows a person to participate in the suprarational without compromising his rationality or mental integrity.

- (3) Glossolalia is the most beautiful of the charismata. . .
- (4) Glossolalia affords a momento of authentic first-century, New Testament experience.
- (5) Glossolalia revolutionizes the habits of prayer and praise for many Neo-Pentecostals.
- (6) Glossolalia serves as a sign of submission to God.
- (7) Glossolalia, while being an intimate, individual experience with God, nevertheless is conducive to a feeling of unity with Christians of all languages.
- (8) Glossolalia has a way of uniting Christians who have been theologically deadlocked for centuries.
- (9) Glossolalia is especially suited for self-edification in a manner other gifts are not.

In light of this exuberance why should anyone question the immense spiritual good MacDonald and others find embodied in the experience of glossolalia? But question it we do, and that most severely. Aside from the obvious fact that these claims relegate all non-charismatics to a permanent position of spiritual inferiority, we believe such statements consistently assume what must be proven, namely that modern glossolalia corresponds in nature, purpose, and value to the spiritual gift described in the New Testament. Did God intend the miraculous charismata to be available throughout the Christian age? Is modern tongue speaking the same phenomena as the Biblical gift? To address these concerns we must consider the purpose, duration, and definition of the Biblical tongues.



In consideration of the purpose of tongues, a general overview of Biblical data on the subject is in order. Assuming the questioned validity of Mark 16:9-20, only five New Testament passages specifically mention the gift of tongues. These are Mark 16, Acts 2, Acts 10-11, Acts 19, and 1 Corinthians 12-14. In all of these, as we shall see, stress is found on the evidential value of tongues as a confirmatory miraculous sign.

Mark 16:17-18 lists “new tongues” alongside exorcism, picking up serpents or drinking poison without harm, and healing as “miraculous” signs which will accompany those who believe. Acts 2:1-4 includes speaking in “other tongues” as part of the Pentecost apostolic experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Acts 10:44-48 and 11:15-17 relate that Cornelius’ household in like manner received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, and Acts 19:6 mentions speaking in tongues and prophesying as evidences of the Spirit experienced by disciples in Ephesus, who had formerly been baptized with John’s baptism after they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and after Paul had laid his hands upon them.

Although the word “sign” does not occur in these passages with specific reference to tongues, in each instance the tongues do confirm the presence of the Spirit in power, and this presence is the source of the signs and wonders performed (Acts 2:19, 43; 5:12; 8:13; 14:3). This is especially true in Acts 2. Following up on the work of J. D. Davies and others, Josephine M. Ford argues<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that Luke intended the account of the first Pentecost in Acts to appear as the reversal of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 12). The “parable” relates that God created diversity of languages (ac-

ording to the Targum, seventy in number) to divide mankind and prevent the world from becoming man-made instead of God-made.

Thus, tongues are seen as symbolizing international unity. Ford also see tongues as signifying "international revelation" as suggested by "the correspondence between the Lucan Pentecost and the traditions about the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai" which was commemorated annually on Pentecost.<sup>4</sup>

In Acts 10 tongues clearly signified for Peter the acceptance of Gentiles and their reception of the Spirit. Similarly, in Acts 19 tongues confirmed the uniqueness of Christian baptism for the erstwhile disciples of John. In Acts, then, one can argue special evangelistic purposes for tongues as they are seen at critical junctures in the narrative of the development of the church to confirm dramatically the presence of the Spirit.

Finally, the most extended discussion of tongues in Scripture is found in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In chapter 12 tongues and its companion gift, interpretation, occur last in the apostles' enumeration of nine miraculous gifts which reflect the diversity of the one Spirit's activity in the infant church. Chapter 13 contrasts the "way of the gifts" with the "more excellent way," the imperishable way of love, and chapter 14 provides inspired apostolic guidance for the exercise of the gifts in congregational life. Paul's purpose in this whole passage was evidently to deal with Corinthian abuse or corruption of the gifts, especially tongues. The goal of the gifts, Paul argued, was edification, an aim seriously undermined by the Corinthians' misuse of tongues. As a matter of interest, while the specific sense in which Paul used the term in this context is

debated, the text does specifically call tongues a “sign” in 1 Corinthians 14:22.

In summary, the Biblical data consistently presents tongues as one of a “package” of miraculous gifts which authenticated the apostolic message by evidencing the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in the early church. In all the Biblical texts this emphasis upon confirmation occurs, although it is more sharply drawn in Acts than in Corinthians, which stresses instead the value of the spiritual gifts for congregational edification.

Were these miraculous confirmatory sign gifts intended to continue throughout the Christian age? No Biblical text so states. Not every first century experience was intended to be repeated throughout the history of the church. We argue that such experiences as inspiration and apostleship in the church were unique distinctives of the first Christian century and that the apostolic message, once confirmed, stands now inscripturated for all time. Just as Jesus’ signs could be written to produce faith (John 20:31), so also the confirmatory witness of signs and wonders need not be repeated indefinitely (compare Hebrews 2:3).

The miraculous sign gifts, moreover, seem to be associated in Scripture with both inspiration and apostleship. There seems no reason why the gifts should continue if in fact inspiration and apostleship have ceased. On the other hand, continuation of the gifts logically involves a concept of continuous revelation. A Biblical mechanism for cessation of the gifts seems provided by Acts 8:18 with its teaching that the Holy Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands.

Paul speaks of the duration of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 and in Ephesians 4:11-16. In both these passages the gifts are associated with what is temporary and with

spiritual maturation. In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Paul identified tongues, (inspired) knowledge, and prophecy as “the imperfect” which would pass away when “the perfect” comes. While the precise meaning of “the perfect” has proven enigmatic to interpreters,<sup>5</sup> it is difficult to understand as temporary that which endures to the parousia. If the temporary and immature ends only with the parousia, why should not the church have continued to possess all the gift manifestations? Paul also said specifically, “as for tongues, they shall cease” (1 Corinthians 13:8), and the historical evidence is that they did cease, a point conceded by many Pentecostals.<sup>6</sup> The “latter rain” concept which Pentecostals utilize to argue that tongues would reappear long after ceasing seems to be exegetical fantasy.<sup>7</sup>

In point of fact one can argue from the New Testament itself a gradual de-emphasizing of the miraculous and an increasing affirmation of non-miraculous means of spiritual edification during the first century. Is it accidental that mentions of the Spirit are less frequent in Paul’s Prison Epistles than in his early books and rarer yet in the Pastorals? Similarly, the last sixteen chapters of Acts contain less than half as many references to the Spirit as the first twelve chapters.<sup>8</sup>

In the light of all these concerns what is abundantly clear is that one cannot simply assume the continuation of tongues or any other of the miraculous sign gifts. Biblical proof is demanded, not merely the claims of unsupported experience. Where is the proof?

The nature of Biblical tongues is another area of major controversy. We have traditionally held, on the basis of the clear implications of Acts 2:4-11, that Biblical tongue speaking involved the inspired ability to speak in human

languages foreign to the speaker without his previously having studied them. Acts 11:17 expressly identifies the experience of the household of Cornelius as the same gift as that which the apostles had received on Pentecost, and there seems to be no reason to assume any different meaning for the tongues at Ephesus in Acts 19. Reasoning then from the known phenomena in Acts we have assumed the same meaning for the similar language in 1 Corinthians. Admitting that 1 Corinthians 14 presents difficulties, we remember that, after all, the Corinthians had in some way distorted the tongues experience, and we make appeal to the manifest strangeness of languages one has never studied.<sup>9</sup>

This line of explanation satisfied neither the old line Pentecostals nor many contemporary New Testament scholars. As J. G. Davies, who upholds the above synthesis, put it,<sup>10</sup>

It has become a commonplace of New Testament scholarship that the speaking in tongues discussed by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians refers to incoherent ecstatic utterances of the kind to be witnessed at revivalist meetings. On this basis it is argued that the account of Pentecost in Acts 2, where glossolalia is identified with speaking in foreign languages, was either written by someone not a close companion of St. Paul and unacquainted with the phenomenon at first hand or reinterpreted, and also misinterpreted, by a later editor.

This contention has created for many investigators a change in methodology which Ernest Best summarizes:<sup>11</sup>

But few scholars today regard the underlying experience in Acts 2 as foreign language speaking, though they do not dispute that Luke understood it in that way. Today it is Acts 2 which is the difficult passage and 1 Corinthians 14 is used to explain it.

Those who accept the Lucan authority, unity, and historicity of Acts have great difficulty in denying the Acts definition or, for that matter, in assuming a different definition in Corinthians than in Acts. The linguistic terminology of Acts and Corinthians in regard to tongues is sufficiently similar that one expects the two to be describing the same phenomena.<sup>12</sup> This more recent scholarly understanding, however, follows Engelsen in suggesting that Paul gave new and unprecedented significance to the terminology.<sup>13</sup> Thus one is forced to admit that this exact use for the relevant terminology is nowhere else found outside the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> This is a serious problem for the newer synthesis.

Further, if one assumes on the basis of the complexity of the tongues material in 1 Corinthians 12-14 that the same language elsewhere denoting speaking in known languages cannot carry the same meaning in Corinthians, how can we define what did happen at Corinth? One wonders if Luke would have been surprised by whatever Paul did if Paul had spoken in a tongue in Luke's presence.<sup>15</sup> To call what happened at Corinth "ecstatic utterance" or "unintelligible speech" without further definition is not sufficient to justify identifying the Corinth experience with modern glossolalia. As Aune says, "The category 'ecstatic,' however, is one that has little meaning."<sup>16</sup> Where is the ancient model to provide a less diffuse and vague definition for Corinthians tongues

or to demonstrate the identity of those tongues with the supposedly parallel modern experience?

The search for such a model has proven quite perplexing. As Mills says, "Contrary to the conclusions of many modern writers, it is not easy to establish the existence of parallels to glossolalia among the religions of the first century."<sup>17</sup> Many recent writers have suggested glossolalia can be paralleled in Hellenistic popular religion, especially in the Pythian oracle at Delphi, but the supposed models invariably break down upon closer analysis. After carefully examining these claimed parallels the classical scholar Christopher Forbes concludes,<sup>18</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that the attempt to parallel early Christian inspired speech from phenomena drawn from Hellenistic oracle cult procedure ought to be abandoned, in the form it has so far taken, as highly misleading. The respective terminologies are significantly different, and the phenomena under discussion have very little in common. Nor can the supposed parallel be found in Old Testament prophetic ecstasy which itself continues to be somewhat of a mystery for investigators.<sup>19</sup>

Without a clear ancient model, even assuming the Corinthian experience was "ecstatic utterance" (whatever that was or is), one commits a logical fallacy (undistributed middle) in identifying the ancient experience with modern glossolalia. What all this means for our study is that the newer scholarly synthesis which drives a wedge between the clear meaning of Acts 2 and the Corinthians experience involves itself in unprecedented usage of terminology, vagueness of definition, assumptive models,

and fundamental logical fallacy. This is poor basis upon which to ground either doctrine or practice.

While this paper is not a detailed examination of modern glossolalia, contrasts between this phenomena and Biblical tongue speaking can easily be drawn. After surveying the distinctive features of the modern practice, Klemet Preus contrasts these with the Biblical phenomena, as follows:<sup>20</sup>

The Biblical accounts are beyond linguistic investigation since no speech in these tongues was recorded, although three thousand witnesses understood them on one occasion (Acts 2) and Paul expects a translation in another situation (1 Corinthians 14). Psychologically, it would be inaccurate to say that the apostles were in an altered mental state. Peter himself discounts drunkenness, and nothing in any of the relevant episodes indicates anything psychologically abnormal. Sociologically, at least in the book of Acts, the tongues of which Scripture speaks have none of the elements which modern tongues do. There is no evidence of coaching or driving, no mention of tension which needed relief, nor of any trauma. There is no mention of any leader dependency; in fact, the opposite is implied (cf. Acts 8 and 10). No mention of group camaraderie is made. No one seems to have been indoctrinated previously. In short, none of the present sociological or psychological manifestations inherent in the tongues of today are present in the Biblical narratives.

Thus, for numerous reasons, we are not prepared to ac-



cept any easy identification of Biblical tongue speaking and modern glossolalia. As before, the burden of proof rests upon those who claim such identity. Charismatic claims and assumptions are insufficient; Biblical proof is demanded.

We do not question the sincerity of the Charismatics, nor do we question that their experience is real to them; we deny that their experience is Biblical.

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<sup>1</sup>See K. Kantzer, "The Charismatics Among Us," *Christianity Today* 24 (4, 1980) 245-9. Hollenweger estimates that "in the not too distant future there will be more Christians belonging to this type of Christianity than to the Anglican community. They will number almost as many as all other Protestants together." See W. J. Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years Research on Pentecostalism," *Theology* 87 (November 1984): 403.

<sup>2</sup>MacDonald, William G., "The Place of Glossolalia in Neo-Pentecostalism," *Speaking in Tongues: Let's Talk About It*, ed. by W. Mills (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1973):84ff.

<sup>3</sup>Ford, Josephine M., "Toward a Theology of 'Speaking in Tongues,'" *Theological Studies* 32 (1971): 24.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>5</sup>The Pentecostal writer Gordon Fee gives a convenient documented summary of viewpoints which understand "the perfect" to refer to the end of the apostolic age. According to these viewpoints "the perfect" is (1) love itself; (2) the full revelation given in the New Testament; or (3) the maturing of the church. Fee himself takes the expression as eschatological, while he rather harshly disparages the completed revelation view as an impossible one which Paul "could not have articulated" and which "neither Paul himself nor the Corinthians could have understood." See Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI., 1987): 644-45.

<sup>6</sup>E. Glenn Hinson, for example, calls the period from 250-1650 AD a "long drought." See E. Glenn Hinson, "The Significance of Glossolalia in the History of Christianity," reprinted in *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia*, ed. by W. Mills (Grand Rapids, MI., William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1986): 195.

<sup>7</sup>The Biblical passages alluding to early and latter rain refer to rain. As Edgar states, "There is no passage suggesting that God gave gifts in the first century, then let them fall into disuse for eighteen hundred years, and is now giving those gifts out again." T. R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, N.J., Loizeaux Brothers, 1983): 301.

<sup>8</sup>Don Jackson calculates the references to the Spirit in Paul's early books as 88 in 59 chapters (1.49 per chapter), in the Prison Epistles as 16 in 15 chapters (1.07 per chapter), and in the Pastorals as 5 in 13 chapters (.38 per chapter). Similarly Acts 1-12 averages 3.25 mentions per chapter while Acts 13-28 averages 1.13 mentions per chapter. See Don Jackson, "Luke and Paul: A Theology of One Spirit from Two Perspectives." Paper read at the 1987 Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Mass.

<sup>9</sup>This analysis is reflected in studies made by Jimmy Jividen and Frank Pack nearly two decades ago. See Jimmy Jividen, *Glossolalia: From God or Man?* (Fort Worth: Star Bible Pub., 1971): 24-34, and Frank Pack, *Tongues and the Holy Spirit* (Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1972): 51-74. Some have, however, understood the Corinthian experience as ecstatic utterance while accepting the limitation of tongues to the apostolic age. See Carl Holladay, *A Commentary on First Corinthians* (Abilene: A.C.U. Press, 1979): 168,174.

<sup>10</sup>Davies, J.G., "Pentecost and Glossolalia," *Journal of Theological Studies* (October 1952): 228.

<sup>11</sup>Best, Ernest, "The Interpretational Tongues," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28:1 (1975): 55.

<sup>12</sup>An excellent brief summary of the linguistic data is provided by Robert H. Gundry, "Ecstatic Utterance (N.E.B.)?" *Journal of Theological Studies* New Series 17 (Oct. 1966): 299-307.

<sup>13</sup>See Niles Engelsen, "Glossolalia and Other Forms of Inspired Speech According to 1 Corinthians 12-14" (Doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1970): ii,60.

<sup>14</sup>See Niles Engelsen, p. 20. In this conclusion he is followed by W. E. Richardson, *Liturgical Order and Glossolalia: 1 Corinthians 14:26c-33a*. (Doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, 1983): 91.

<sup>15</sup>Acts 19 provides an interesting case. Luke makes no distinction between the tongues of Acts 2 and Acts 19. Paul was present in Acts 19, yet makes no distinction between the tongues in Ephesus and those in Corinth.

<sup>16</sup>Aune, David E., *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983): 366. Further, the implication in 1 Corinthians 14:27 that the tongue speaker in control shows clear difference between tongues and what is called pagan ecstasy. See Fee, *ibid*, 692.

<sup>17</sup>Mills, Watson, *Understanding Speaking in Tongues* (Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972):23.

<sup>18</sup>Forbes, Christopher, "Early Christian Inspired Speech and Hellenistic Popular Religion," *Novum Testamentum* 28, 3 (1986):268. Forbes interacts with such representatives of the contemporary consensus at J.D.G. Dunn, N.I.J. Engelsen, and T.W. Gillespie. Aune also shows a clear difference in this statement that "In all these instances there is not the slightest suggestion that the inspired utterances of the Pythia or of any other *promantis* or *prophetes* of which we have knowledge was incomprehensible until 'interpreted' by other cult officials." David E. Aune, *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>19</sup>Engelsen appeals also to this possibility. See Niles Engelsen, pp. 24-32. I have long felt that ecstasy cannot be regarded as a fundamental of Biblical prophetism. See my article "The Nature, Activities and Teachings of the Non-Literary Prophets," *Restoration Quarterly*, 10,1 (1967):14-16. Any parallel argued here faces also the problem of Paul's clear differentiation between prophecy and tongues.

<sup>20</sup>Klemet Preus, "Tongues: An Evaluation from a Scientific Perspective," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (Oct. 1982):289.

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# Born Of Water And Spirit

Duane Warden

We judge the following passages to be central to the study of being born of water and Spirit: John 3:1-8, Titus 3:5, and 1 Peter 1:3, 23. Other passages illuminate the concept, but these are enough to introduce important questions. We judge the following questions to be important: (1) What does Jesus mean by the words γεννηθη α-ωθεν and γεννηθη εξ υδατος και πνεματος in John 3:3, 5? (2) What is the relationship between the new birth or regeneration and Christian baptism? (3) Do other New Testament teachings and figures of speech illustrate and describe the spiritual phenomenon of the new birth? We will examine these three questions in turn as we look at the topic before us.

## What Does It Mean to be Born of Water and Spirit?

The latest edition of the Nestle-Aland text of the New Testament uses the verb γεννω 97 times. It covers roughly the same range of meaning as τιτω, i.e., both words encompass the entire process from conception to birth.<sup>1</sup> In the great majority of cases (41 times in the first chapter of Matthew) it is used literally. It is the figurative use of the word that interests us now. Paul speaks of himself as having, so to speak, begotten his readers in the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15; Philemon 10; cf. Galatians 4:19). John

writes of God's begetting believers (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18), and Jesus speaks of the necessity of being begotten from above and of water and Spirit (John 3:3-7). In each instance the figure of speech draws our attention to the point of origin of the begotten ones. The figurative use of γενναω is expanded by Paul in Titus 3:5 when he writes of the washing of regeneration or rebirth (παλιγγενεσια) and by Peter when he reminds his readers that they had been born anew (αναγενναω).

The New Testament appears to call on the powerful images of conception and birth in order to evoke in us the awesome sense of creation, newness, and change integral to becoming a disciple of Christ. One "born of water and spirit" has adopted a whole new life. New standards of rightness and decency guide him, new values give his life meaning, a new hope directs his vision, and a new relationship with God fills him with joy and peace. So different is life with Christ from life without him, that the Lord compares it to a child's emerging from the womb.

There is little doubt that the most compelling narrative about the new birth is in John 3. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus with questionable motivation. What he had seen the Lord do had amazed him. His curiosity had been piqued, but he apparently was unwilling to risk too much in order to learn from this marvelous teacher. "Rabbi," he says, "we know that you are a teacher come from God." The darkness itself called into question his words of praise. Jesus will have none of it. As he does at other times in this enigmatic gospel, the Lord seems to ignore altogether the words directed toward him. He has no time for superficial, half-meant niceties that conceal more than they reveal. It will take more than this, Nicodemus, if you wish to enjoy the blessings of God. To stand in the

darkness and admire him is not enough. It is only by being born anew/from above that you may hope to see the kingdom of God.

The dialogue had taken a direction that the learned Jew had not anticipated. What could this mean? Is one to enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again? Jesus clarifies, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit,<sup>2</sup> he cannot enter the kingdom of God." At first glance it is unclear just what Jesus means by Spirit. The Greek has no article before the word and, of course, it is not capitalized. An early patristic interpretation of the verse understood Jesus to be directing Nicodemus to accept his words in faith and hence to live the spiritual life.<sup>3</sup> In such a case the statement makes no direct reference to the Holy Spirit and would be translated, "born of water and spirit." While this interpretation cannot be dismissed out of hand, the context seems to disallow it. When John uses spirit as a characteristic of godly living it is normally in a context where the Holy Spirit is not under discussion, e.g., worship "in spirit" (4:23). Further, the article is used before Spirit in 3:6, 8 where the Holy Spirit is clearly the subject. We take the Holy Spirit to be the referent of Jesus in John 3:5. However, we are not to infer that being born of water and the Spirit means the believer is passive in the new birth. One converted to Jesus must believe in Him, accept the way of life He taught, and bend his own will to conform to the Lord's.<sup>4</sup>

Direct continuities between the statement of Jesus to Nicodemus and the Old Testament, rabbinic, or pagan sources are difficult to see though often asserted.<sup>5</sup> The fatherhood of God or even the begetting of the king in Psalm 2:7 describes a relationship between God and his people which sheds light, e.g., on James 1:18, "Of his

own will he had brought us forth by the word of truth. . . .” but suggests little of the radical change implied in John 3:3, 5. Statements in Ezekiel 36:25-26, Isaiah 44:3, and Jubilees 1:23-25 suggest a radical change God will make in his people, but the passages do not use the analogy of a new birth. The rabbis sometimes spoke of a proselyte as a newborn child, but there is little sense of the wholesale change and reorientation of life that John 3 demands.<sup>6</sup> To be born anew/from above appears to be a distinctly Christian concept.

The Reformed tradition of protestant theology goes considerably beyond the simplicity of “You must be born anew” in its doctrine of regeneration. The new birth is said to come about through a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit in which the believer himself has no part. On one who is dead in sin the word of God is able to produce no effect. Only after regeneration, i.e., after the Holy Spirit has supernaturally acted on an utterly depraved heart, is the sinner capable of believing and turning to God.<sup>7</sup> This view of regeneration is bound up with the doctrinal intricacies of Calvinism and would require far more time than we have here to address properly. Suffice it to say that such an interpretation of John 3 removes the element of human responsibility inherent in the passage. In such a case we would have expected Jesus to say to Nicodemus, “You must wait patiently for a new birth,” instead of addressing him with a direct imperative.

An interesting view of the new birth is offered by Rudolf Bultmann. He sees the passage as turning on verse 6 and the contrast between *σὰρξ* and *πνεῦμα*. Man stand between two possibilities of existence. *Σὰρξ* symbolizes existence as nothingness, an existence where man is a stranger to himself, ignorant of his origin, destiny, or



meaning. Πνευμα is authentic existence in which man understands himself and is no longer threatened by non-existence.<sup>8</sup> Appealing as Bultmann's interpretation is, it has more to do with existential philosophy than it does to the conversation going on between Jesus and Nicodemus. It is not a higher level of human existence to which Jesus invites those who would enter the kingdom but to a new relationship with God.

Nicodemus had found in Jesus an interesting, miracle-working rabbi of which there were many in Jewish tradition. When he said, "We know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him," Jesus found his confession altogether inadequate. The Lord was unwilling to take his seat among the other rabbis. Nothing less than a radical, wholly extraordinary change brought about through the working of the Spirit is the result when one takes the message of Christ seriously. Nicodemus had gotten more than he had bargained for from this excursion to Jesus by night.

### **Is the New Birth to be Equated With Christian Baptism?**

The accretion of two millennia of theology has the tendency to make of regeneration a doctrine of great complexity. We must not overlook the basic simplicity of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. An individual enters into being and time through conception and birth. To enter a new mode of spiritual being he must, so to speak, be conceived a second time and born anew. The profundity of the concept is in the change it implies and not in a miraculous work of the Spirit on a depraved

human nature unable to respond to God without it.

Had the Lord only said “born of spirit” his words would have been uncertain of meaning. Birth by its nature is a culmination. It implies a moment in time, a specific, climactic act. In John 3:3 Jesus plays on the word *ανωθεν* to say that the birth he spoke of was both new and from above. In response to the confusion of Nicodemus the Lord explains that to be born again is to be born *εξ υδατος και πνευματος*. One preposition governs both words. This birth from above is both of water and Spirit. The way the words are put together makes it highly improbable that the Lord is referring to two separate events, i.e., a birth of water followed by a birth of Spirit. Why the reference to water? The readers of John would have understood it well. In the water of baptism one is spiritually joined to Christ, has his sins taken away by Christ’s blood, and partakes in the kingdom of God.

We refer to no mechanical act when Christian baptism is the subject. Like physical birth, it is the culmination of a process. The process begins when the word of God is implanted in the soul of an individual like a seed (1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9). The seed germinates and is brought forth when one has his sins washed away in the water of baptism. The efficacy of baptism is not in the mechanical act, but in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the spiritual response of an individual to the message of what Christ has done and what Christ wants him to do. When the word of truth has germinated in one’s heart and life and he meets the Lord in baptism, it is then that he is born anew/from above.

Paul uses the same figure of speech in Titus 3:5 when he writes of the “washing of regeneration.” There is no doubt but that the Apostle refers to baptism with the term

“washing,” and the word “regeneration” means no more than the born anew/from above of Jesus to Nicodemus. There can be little doubt but that the Apostle Peter was referring specifically to his readers’ baptisms when he speaks of their being born anew (1 Peter 1:3, 23). It is only in these two passages that the verb *αναγεννω* “born anew” is used in the New Testament. The theme of baptism is so pronounced in 1 Peter that some scholars of liberal theological persuasion have argued that the document is basically an adaptation of a baptismal liturgy or homily from the second century.<sup>9</sup> While we must reject the overall conclusion, it does draw attention to the importance of baptism in the letter. In fact, the basic same things said of the new birth in 1:3, 23 are said of baptism in 3:21. That Peter understood them to be the same cannot seriously be doubted.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, T. W. Brents published *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* in which he addressed, among other things, the new birth.<sup>10</sup> The distinction he attempts to make between being begotten, on the one hand, and born again on the other, is based on a distinction in the English, not the Greek words. When Jesus uses the phrase, “born of water and Spirit,” he uses the same verb and the same preposition used by John in 1 John 5:1, 4, 18. The argument that one is begotten by God when the word enters his consciousness, but born anew at baptism, makes a distinction that concerned neither Jesus nor John. Neither birth in the flesh or the Spirit has meaning apart from the whole process that accompanies it. Birth necessarily implies conception, and conception brought to fruition culminates in birth. One is both begotten and born of God, for the two are not to be considered separate things. One must be begotten and born of God to

enter the kingdom of God.

### **What Other Figures of Speech Illuminate the New Birth**

Paul, on the whole, prefers other figures of speech than birth to describe the transformation that God brings about in his people. In Romans 6:3-6 he uses the metaphor of crucifying the old man, burying him in baptism, and being raised for a new life (cf. Colossians 2:12). In Galatians 3:37 Christ is said to be put on in baptism as a garment. In Romans 8:15-17 the Apostle speaks of receiving the adoption of children (cf. Galatians 4:5), and in Colossians 1:13 he writes of having been translated into his kingdom. The figures of speech differ, but the spiritual process is the same. It is none other than regeneration that Paul is writing of when he describes one being buried with Christ in baptism or of his being adopted as a child.

This impression comes through clearly: It is no trivial thing to enter the kingdom of God. The values and ideals that govern the man of the flesh are left behind when he is born anew. It is mistaken to mystify regeneration by equating it with a supernatural act wrought by God which allows one to believe, but it is also mistaken to equate it with a mere mechanical procedure. Rebirth is all that precedes and culminates in one's being buried in baptism for the remission of sins. It is a radical change in heart and life. It is a new relationship with God through the death of Christ. How is such change possible? We only observe that the Spirit blows where it wills, and we but hear its sound.

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<sup>1</sup>F. Buchsel, γεννωω, *TDNT* (1964), 1:665.

<sup>2</sup>So the AV, ASV, RSV NIV, *et al.* translate.

<sup>3</sup>See I. de la Potterie, "Naitre de l'eau et naitre de l'Esprit," *Sciences Ecclesiastiques* 14 (1962):351-74 who accepts this interpretation. He cites *Shepherd of Hermas*, Justin, Irenaeus, and Augustine as favorable to the view.

<sup>4</sup>See the discussion in R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 1:140.

<sup>5</sup>Opinions range from C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 358 who asserts that Jesus' words have affinities with Hellenistic thought to F. Buchsel, αναγεννωω, *TDNT*, 1:674 who argues that it is in the Old Testament and Judaism that we must look for the origin of the thought of regeneration.

<sup>6</sup>See K. Rengstorf, γεννωω, *TDNT*, 1:666-67 for references.

<sup>7</sup>See R. Knudsen, "The Nature of Regeneration" in *Christian Faith and Modern Theology*, ed. C. Henry (New York: Channel Press, 1964), pp. 311-315 for a summary of Reformed theology on regeneration and the modifications of Barthian theology.

<sup>8</sup>R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. by G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 141.

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., F. Cross, *I Peter: A Pascal Liturgy* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1954).

<sup>10</sup>T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, n.d.), pp. 189-208.

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## “You Are Not In The Flesh, You Are In The Spirit”

Gary Colvin

The eighth chapter of Romans is one of the great chapters in Scripture. It can rightfully be called the greatest chapter in the Bible on the Holy Spirit. The Greek word *pneuma* (spirit) is found 34 times in the Book of Romans with 21 of these occurrences appearing in Romans 8. Nowhere else in the entire New Testament is there such a concentrated use of *pneuma*. It is in the context of this rich Pauline discussion of the Holy Spirit that we attempt to explain Romans 8:9: “You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit.”

**Historical setting.** Romans 8 and the rest of the book should be put in historical context for best results of interpretation. Unfortunately, this is not so easily accomplished. There is a widespread difference of opinion as to why Paul composed the letter to the Roman church, and no consensus view is presently looming on the horizon.<sup>1</sup> Many have seen the Roman letter only as some outline of Paul’s theology, reflecting no historical setting in Rome. Others find the occasion for the letter in Paul’s personal struggle with the Jewish element in the church at large, again unrelated to the historical scene in Rome. John Drane expresses the view of many that “there is no real evidence in Romans to suggest that actual individuals, or groups of people, or situations were in view.”<sup>2</sup>

Though a majority of scholars may presently discount

the idea that the Roman letter addresses a local situation, a case can be made to the contrary. All other Pauline letters in the New Testament address some local situation. Why not Romans? The lack of knowledge among modern scholars about the ancient Roman church is not a valid reason for discounting a Roman historical setting for Paul's most famous letter.

Many scholars are quick to assume that the Roman letter did not address a local situation because Paul had never visited Rome and did not personally know the situation. But too much is made of this assumption. Though Paul had not visited Rome when he wrote, it is logical to assume that the apostle was quite familiar with the church in Rome. Granting the integrity of Romans 16,<sup>3</sup> the apostle sends greetings to 24 Christian individuals by name, as well as greetings to five different households or "house churches" (Romans 16:3-16). Of particular interest are Prisca and Aquila, co-workers of Paul who lived in Rome and had a church meeting in their home at the time of writing (Romans 16:3). In a day when there was much travel and letter writing in the empire, it is illogical to assume that the church friends of Paul did not keep the apostle thoroughly informed about the brethren in Rome. This is especially so in light of the apostle's plans for an eminent visit.

If it be acknowledged that Paul knew about the church situation in Rome, then what was the motivation behind the Romans letter? Noting a trend that moves through the whole letter, Roger Hahn suggests that Romans addresses "the issue of the relationship of Jew and Gentile in Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Hahn's suggestion is likely correct, at least in a general way. There can be no doubt that a large Jewish communi-



ty existed in Rome during the middle first century A.D.,<sup>5</sup> and that some Roman Jews became Christians when the gospel was preached. With the Gentile church also growing, certain problems surely existed. Indeed, the primary purpose of Romans may have been to deal with the Jew-Gentile problem in the church. Certainly this was a problem that often received treatment in other Pauline letters, and certainly Paul was the brotherhood expert on such matters. Could Jew-Gentile Christian relationships have been so different in Rome than in other major cities of the empire?

There may even be a secular historical note that lends credibility to this idea. Suetonius, the Roman historian who served as recording secretary for Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), wrote that the Emperor Claudius earlier expelled the Jews from Rome (ca. A.D. 49) because they “constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.”<sup>6</sup>

Most scholars interpret “Chrestus” as an uninformed secular reference to Christ.<sup>7</sup> With this understanding of Suetonius’ comment, it was the preaching of Jesus as Christ that caused the Jewish riots in Rome. Thus, Jewish Christian leaders like Aquila and Priscilla were forced to leave Rome (cf. Acts 18:2) until after the death of Claudius (cf. Romans 16:3). Similiar riots and expulsions occurred in Ephesus when Christ was preached (cf. Acts 19:23f.).

Though a situation in Rome that relates the Jewish riots to Christian preaching is based on certain assumptions, those assumptions are plausible. Such a situation, or one quite similar, could easily have existed when Paul wrote Romans. When the Gentile element of the Roman church is added to the problem, one may be coming even closer to

the real situation. Perhaps the Gentile membership strongly dominated the Roman congregations during the years that Christian Jews were expelled. When the Jewish Christians returned after the death of Claudius, perhaps there was serious tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians that needed attention from an apostle like Paul. The exhortation in Romans 15:5, "to live in harmony with one another" seems to be directed to both Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Though there is not enough information to pinpoint an exact situation in the Roman letter, the one proposed here may not be too far wrong. It is thus suggested that Paul had some elements of the Jew/Gentile conflict in mind when he wrote, "You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit" (Romans 8:9).

### **The Immediate Context**

When Paul describes the Christian as being in the Spirit and not the flesh (Romans 8:9), he is describing one of the marvelous blessings of faith-salvation. In Christ, the believer comes under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit. In a non-miraculous way (humanly speaking), the Spirit enters the believer's life and breaks the power of sin, enabling the believer "to live for God" in a successful way.<sup>8</sup> Cranfield is correct in understanding Romans 5-8 to be a description of the positive life that God promises to those who are righteous by faith. The peace with God, the sanctification, and the freedom are all capped by the Christian receiving the Holy Spirit. Cranfield analyzes (outlines) Romans 5-8 in the following way:

1. A life characterized by peace with God (5:1-21)
2. A life characterized by sanctification (6:1-23)

3. A life characterized by freedom from condemnation of the law (7:1-25)
4. A life characterized by the indwelling of God’s Spirit (8:1-39).<sup>9</sup>

According to this interpretation, Paul makes the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit a major happening for all Christians. This is emphasized by his concluding statement in Romans 8:9: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

In Romans 8, the apostle is asserting that one cannot be a Christian unless he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Even further, one cannot successfully complete the Christian life unless he is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is great news accompanied by great power that Paul describes for the Christian who is “in the spirit and not in the flesh.”

**Flesh and Spirit in Paul.** Commentators are generally quick to point out the lavish use of *pneuma* (“spirit”) in Romans 8 while often neglecting to emphasize Paul’s use of *sarx* (“flesh”) in the same passage. “Flesh” is a personal trade word that Paul uses with a variety of meanings. Of the 147 times *sarx* appears in the New Testament, 91 of those times are from the pen of Paul. Romans 8 provides the setting for the most concentrated use of *sarx* in the New Testament, the word appearing some 19 times in the chapter.

The term “flesh” (*sarx*) literally denotes the soft part of the physical human body (cf. “flesh and blood,” 1 Corinthians 15:50), but most often the New Testament uses “flesh” in a figurative sense to signify what is human and earthly in man.<sup>10</sup> In Romans 8:9 *sarx* (“flesh”) is used to describe the sinful and weak human attitude that is in opposition to the perfect Holy Spirit of God.<sup>11</sup> Paul is saying

that the Christian is no longer controlled by the things of the world (“flesh”), but rather by the Holy Spirit who now dwells in the believer. The direction of the Christian life is “determined not by the flesh but by the Spirit of God.”<sup>12</sup> The Christian receives a new “mind-set” at conversion. His pattern of thinking and acting is conditioned not by the “flesh” but by God’s Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Being under control of the Spirit does not completely annihilate the influence of the flesh in the Christian’s life. Paul has already made that plain in Romans 7.<sup>14</sup> Even when the believer wants “to do right, evil lies close at hand” (Romans 7:21). In his inmost self the believer delights in the law of God, but in his physical body is another law at war with his mind (Romans 7:22,23). With his mind he serves the law of God but with his flesh he serves the law of sin (Romans 7:25). It is enough to make any believer cry out: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

As the believer in Chapter 7 cries out for deliverance from his human weakness (“flesh”), Paul in Chapter 8 tells of the deliverance that God gives; namely, the Holy Spirit. In Christ the believer is given special help from the Holy Spirit to overcome the flesh and live successfully for God. The believer, then, lives under “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” and has been “set free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). The believer “walks not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). And the believer does not “set his mind” on the flesh, but “sets his mind on the Spirit” (Romans 8:6). In summary, the Christian is no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit (Romans 8:9).

**Practical meaning.** One may accept the claims of Romans 8 about the Holy Spirit, but what does this mean

for the Christian in a practical way? To answer, it means that the Christian is not alone in his attempt to live for Christ. God is with him through the indwelling Spirit to assure the believer the possibility of victory. Every Christian is thus empowered by God to conquer the flesh and win the crown of eternal life. In Romans 8 the following claims are made for the Spirit's empowering activity:

1. The Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies as he gave life to the resurrected body of Jesus (8:11).
2. We are enabled by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body (8:13).
3. There is a sense in which we are led by the Spirit (8:14).
4. The Spirit makes us aware that we are children of God and able to call upon God as Father (8:15).
5. The Spirit helps us in our weakness, especially in our communication of inmost thoughts to God (8:26).
6. In the providence of God, the Spirit is working so that in everything God works for good with those who love him (8:28).

According to the other Pauline letters, there are more empowering activities of the Holy Spirit besides those in Romans 8. Even by themselves, however, the statements in Romans show the powerful role that God has assigned to the Holy Spirit in everyday Christian life.

**Conclusion.** Romans 8 has received enormous attention through the centuries. Commentators have interpreted its statements in ways that range all the way from extreme Pentecostalism to outright denial of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Both extremes should be avoided. As is taught throughout

the New Testament, the believer receives the Holy Spirit when baptized into Christ. Jesus described this phenomenon when he explained to Nicodemus the necessity of being born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. The 3,000 on Pentecost entered the kingdom by being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38,39). Christians have been receiving the Spirit at baptism every since.

Receiving the Holy Spirit does not enable one to work miracles or speak in tongues. Rather, the Spirit empowers the believer to overcome the flesh and live successfully for Christ. Without the Spirit's help the believer would fail. It is because of the wonderful and powerful Holy Spirit in our lives that Paul can write:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:37-39)

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<sup>1</sup>See: Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Pub. House, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>John Drane, "Why Did Paul Write Romans?" *Pauline Studies. Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 70th Birthday*, Hagner and Harris (eds.) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans and Paternoster Press, 1980), 212.

<sup>3</sup>In a rather thorough discussion of the problem connected with Romans 16, Leon Morris concludes that there is no compelling evidence that separates the last chapter of the letter from the rest. On

the contrary, the evidence supports the ancient document that has been handed down complete with its final chapter of greetings. See L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1988), pp. 24-31.

<sup>4</sup>Roger L. Hahn, “Pneumatology in Romans 8: Its Historical and Theological Context,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 21 (1986):74-90.

<sup>5</sup>Estimates of Jewish population in Rome during the first century range from Juster’s calculation of 50,000-60,000 to Penna’s calculation of 20,000. See: J. Juster, *Les Juifs dans l’Empire Romain, I*, Paris, 1914, p. 209; Roma Penna, *Juifs A Rome Au Temps De L’Apotre Paul*,” *New Testament Studies* 28 (July, 1982):328-341.

<sup>6</sup>Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, xxv. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Scholars like Judge and Thomas do not agree that “Chrestus” is a reference to Christ. Judge and Thomas, *The Reformed Theological Review* 25:84f.

<sup>8</sup>James Denney, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961), p. 644.

<sup>9</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans, A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985, xv, xvi).

<sup>10</sup>Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1986), p. 58.

<sup>11</sup>Gunther Bornkam, *Paul* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), p. 133.

<sup>12</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary, Romans I* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Limited, 1975), p. 387.

<sup>13</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Romans 1-8* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), p. 428.

<sup>14</sup>It is assumed here that the apostle is talking about Paul the Christian and not Saul, the man under the law. So: Cranfield, Morris and a host of other commentators.

<sup>15</sup>C. M. K. Hewitt, *Life in the Spirit: A Study of the History of the Interpretation of Romans 8:12-17*, Ph.D. Diss. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, n.d.).

