

BALANCE IN AN UNBALANCED WORLD

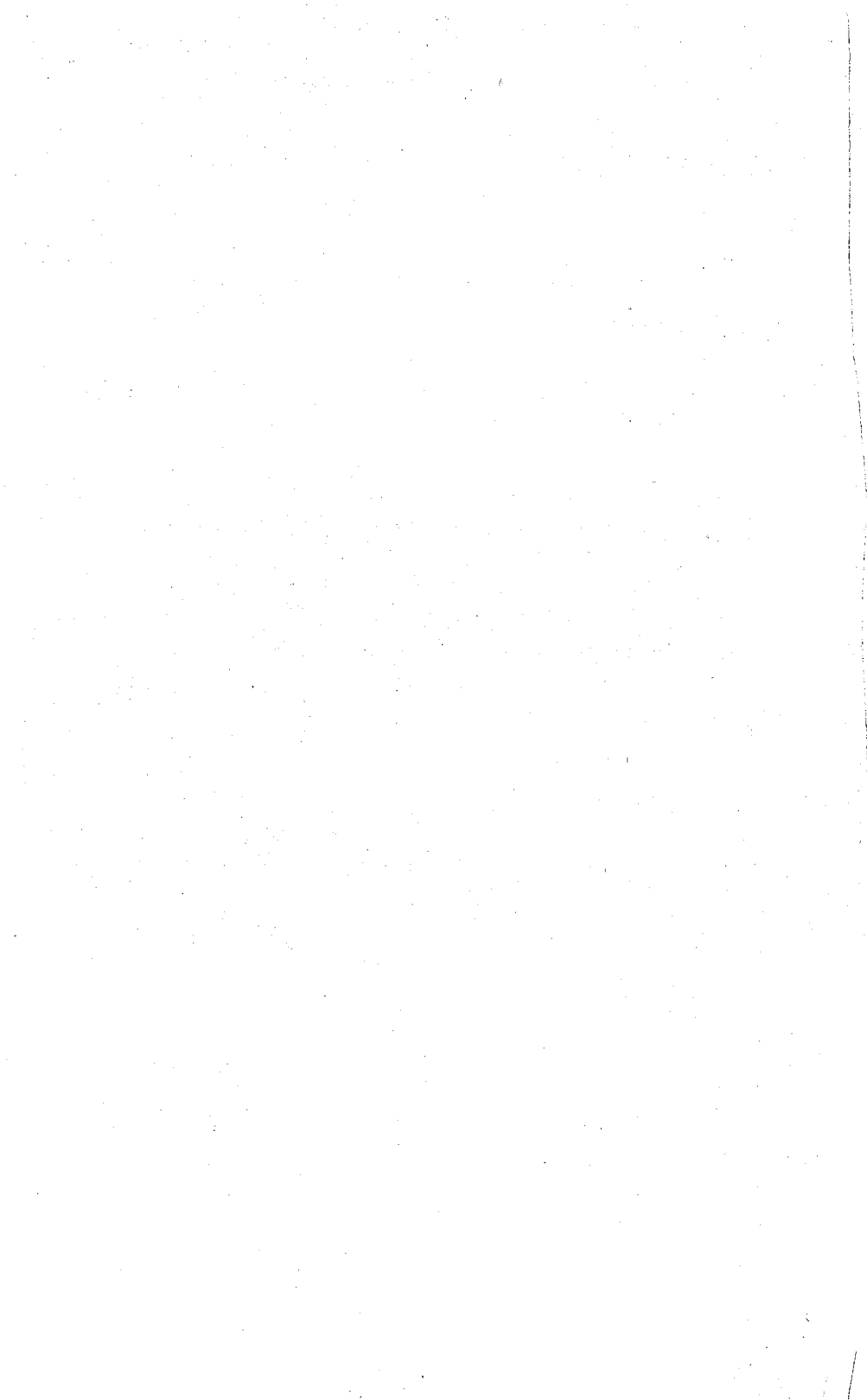
2008

**The 34th Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions
Knoxville, Tennessee**

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BALANCE IN AN UNBALANCED WORLD

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PREFACE

Riding a bike seems so easy to those of us with years of experience. However, to a child trying to stay up on two wheels for the first time, it can be a daunting task. They wobble all over the road until finally collapsing into a heap. Dad and Mom pick them up, brush them off, and steady the machine for another try. A grin spreads across the victor's face when he finally is able to stay balanced on his own.

Christians confront much the same problem. Our world seems to insist we keep up with all the latest innovations. Those talking around the water cooler at work or school simply must be conversant with the latest movie, song or television program if they want to be accepted by their peers. All religious views must be tolerated, except the belief in only one God. Clearly, these and other concerns call for all Christians to maintain *Balance in an Unbalanced World*.

Each lecture speaker this year will try to help us avoid falling off to the right or left. We will be challenged to seek the middle of God's road as revealed in the Bible. At the same time, we will be urged to maintain a love for every soul struggling with false doctrine, temptation and sin.

Several people deserve special thanks for the roles they played in the production of this book. Charles Brown and Amanda Genter read and made corrections to the manuscripts. Nell Rich assembled the manuscripts and other materials and assisted with the proofing and corrections. Amparo Atencio made the manuscripts camera ready for the publisher. A very special thank you must go out to Wallace Alexander and the Gospel Light Publishing Company for printing the book.

Our earnest prayer is for this study of *Balance in an Unbalanced World* to result in stronger Christians better prepared to carry out God's will. May God bless our efforts to grow in knowledge and give us wisdom to apply it to our daily lives.

Gary C. Hampton, ETSPM Director
34th ETSPM Lectures

DEDICATION

TO NELL RICH, ETSPM SECRETARY

**Efficient. Cooperative. Pleasant. Cheerful. Trustworthy.
Creative. Dedicated.**

These words all describe Nell Rich, secretary for the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions.

Faculty, staff, and students alike appreciate Nell. More than one student has asked, "Doesn't she ever have a bad day?" The answer is always the same: "I'm sure she does, but she never shows it." Nell comes early and leaves late, and always does her work without complaining.

When asked what she liked about her job, she gave two answers. "I really like the variety involved in what I do. And, I am thankful to work with fellow Christians." Many people would see the wide variety of tasks (answering the phone, handling finances, keeping student records, preparing mailings, editing books like this one, etc.) associated with being the secretary at ETSPM as an aggravation, but not Nell. She sees them as a challenge and a cause for thankfulness.

Nell has been married to her husband, Jerry, for thirty-three years and is the mother of two children, Jennifer and Brian. She is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University with a degree in Business Education. She worked ten years for the Tennessee Valley Authority as a secretary. After rearing her children, she wanted to return to the workforce. In 2001, she became the ETSPM secretary, and we are glad she did.

It is with much affection and genuine appreciation that this 2008 lectureship book is dedicated to a wonderful secretary and an exemplary Christian lady, Nell Rich.

Tom Miller
Dean of Academics, ETSPM



**EAST TENNESSEE SCHOOL OF PREACHING AND MISSIONS
CLASS OF 2007**

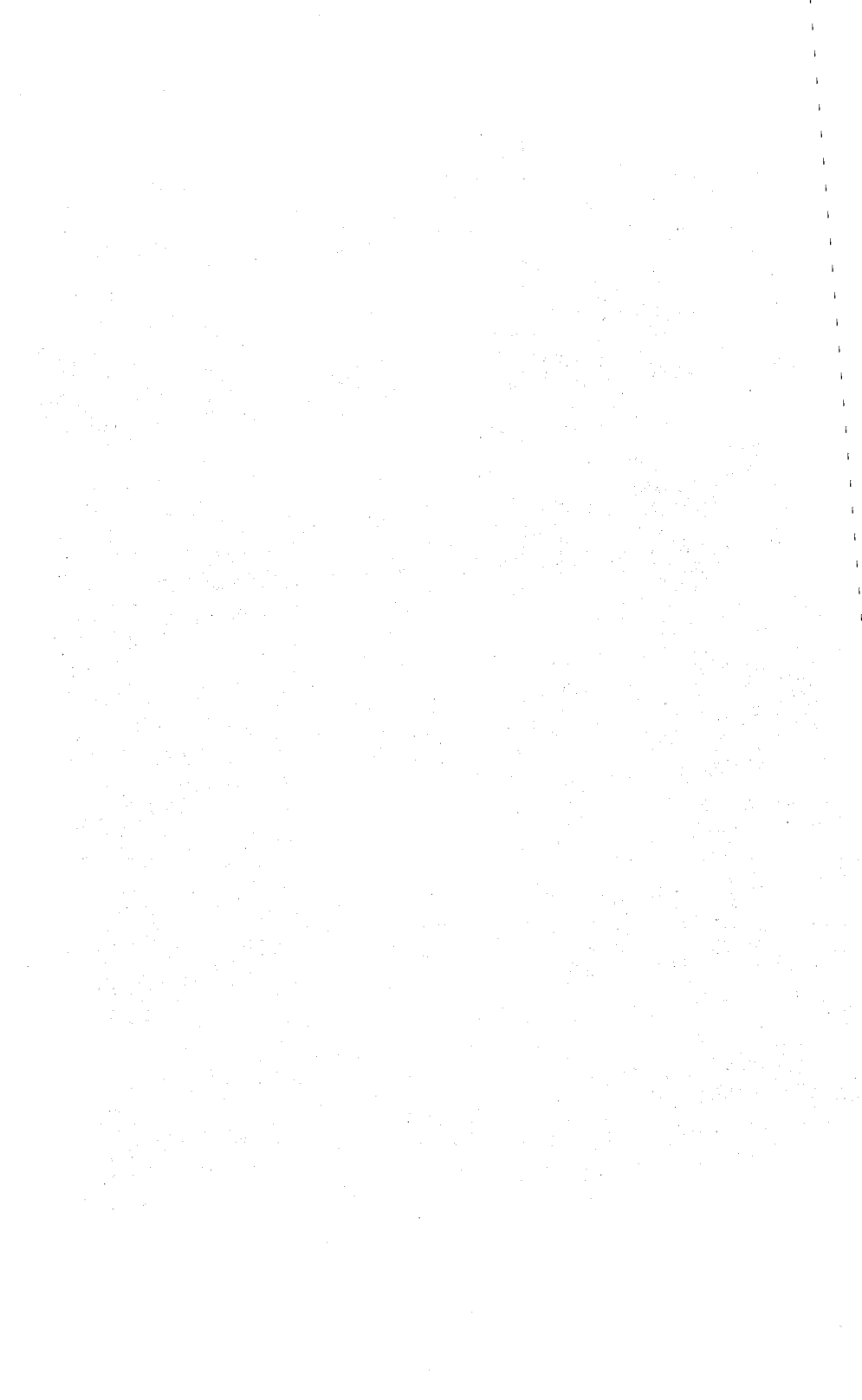


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SECTION I
GENERAL LESSONS

WHEN BALANCE WOULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

SAM BARTRUG

INTRODUCTION

Few preachers associated with churches of Christ in the Nashville area were better known than the late Ira North. His ministry with the Madison church of Christ has been so well documented that it would be virtually impossible not to know of him and his contributions to growth within our brotherhood. For all his accomplishments over the years, however, arguably his greatest contribution to the Lord's church may be one of his last. Near the end of his life, he authored a book entitled Balance: A Tried and Tested Formula for Church Growth. At the beginning of that book North made the following observation:

After over 40 years in the ministry, hearing lectures on church growth, reading books, magazine articles, visiting active churches and having been the minister of a congregation that came from a little basement congregation to the largest in the world among the churches of Christ, I have come to the conclusion that there is a key word in church growth if it is solid, stable and lasting. That key word is *balance*.¹

Sam Bartrug is a graduate of Ohio Valley University and currently serves as an elder and preacher for the Seventh Street Church of Christ in McConnelsville, Ohio. He preached his first sermon at the age of 13 and has been preaching on a full-time basis since 1972.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of balance. In almost any realm of life balance is a vital component to healthy and meaningful existence. Whether it be our diet, our emotional makeup, or the fluid in our inner ear, balance is essential. This is no less true when it comes to the matter of religion. Throughout this lectureship, attention will be given to a variety of aspects in which balance, or a lack thereof, affects our brotherhood. The purpose of this particular lecture is to point out occasions when being better balanced would have made a difference in the way some biblical situations turned out.

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF WHEN BALANCE COULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

The Old Testament is rife with examples of times when imbalance in some crucial area resulted in either warning or disaster. Since these things were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4), let us take a few moments to look at some costly examples of imbalance.

After God gave Saul an edict to utterly destroy the Amalekites, due to an earlier aggression on their part toward the Israelites, we are told that he spared their king and some of the best of the spoils captured in battle. When Samuel confronted him about this variation from God's edict, Saul replied that it was done so that sacrifice might be made to the Lord (1 Sam. 15:15). Samuel's response to King Saul illustrates the danger of imbalance in our relationship with God. He said in part:

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king (1 Sam. 15:22-23).²

One would never argue that sacrifice was not important to God. The Old Testament is too full of commands and instructions regarding the what, when, and how of various sacrificial rites to deny their importance to God. Samuel was not telling Saul that sacrifice was not important to God; he was reminding him that sacrifice was no substitute for obedience. Had Saul added sacrifice to obedience, things could have worked out quite differently than they did for him and his potential dynasty. It was his imbalance between sacrifice and obedience that sealed his fate.

The danger of imbalance is also seen in a tragic episode from the life of King David. It was not until several years after David ascended to the throne that he was able to solidify his rule over all of Israel. He moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem. Eventually David determined it was time to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem as well. Plans were made, people were appointed, and the move was undertaken. The record tells us:

So they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. Then David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets (1 Chron. 13:7-8).

What a thrilling spectacle that must have been! God's people were excited and poured every emotion of their hearts into this well-intentioned act of devotion to Him. Yet, despite all the emotion and excitement things did not turn out well at all. The record continues:

And when they came to Chidon's threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God (1 Chron. 13:9-10).

Had this been the end of the story we might have been like David and felt some frustration and anger toward God for being somewhat petty (1 Chron. 13:11-14). But a little later in the narrative we learn the true problem that led to this tragedy. The writer goes on to tell us:

Then David said, "No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the Lord has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minister before Him forever." And David gathered all Israel together at Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord to its place, which he had prepared for it....And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites: for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. He said to them, "You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order....So David, the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-Edom with joy (1 Chron. 15:2-25).

When the joy and excitement of the people stood alone, and the ark was moved contrary to God's revealed instructions, tragedy and angst prevailed. When the excitement and joy of the people was accompanied by a reverent submission to God's instructions on moving the ark, the ark was moved safely and without incident. How much tragedy and angst could have been avoided if that balance had been there in the first place? I might add here that perhaps the church could learn a valuable lesson on the folly of allowing emotion to override obedience to God's revealed will concerning worship! It is not acceptable worship simply because there is emotion and excitement! It is acceptable worship when, with emotion and excitement, God's will is honored!

When David's grandson, Rehoboam, ascended to the throne following Solomon's death, a crisis arose that could well have been settled through a balanced approach to the concerns of the people from the northern sections of Israel. The reign of Solomon was a glorious one in many respects, but it was a glory that was realized through what the people conceived to be unreasonable demands upon them by the king (1 Kings 12:1-4). When Solomon's son ascended to the throne, the people of the north pleaded with him to ease those demands and promised their service if he would do so. Rehoboam sought the counsel of the older men who had served his father and was advised to meet the request of the people in order to unify the nation and assure the success of his reign. Unsatisfied with their counsel, Rehoboam then sought the advice of the younger men who had grown up around him. They advised him to make greater demands of the people than even his father had done. This advice, for whatever reason, seemed better to him than the former, and he made his decision. The end result of this choice was to divide the nation and create weaknesses that would eventually lead to the destruction of both resulting kingdoms. While we would not argue that the throne had to enforce some type of tax and labor burden upon the people in order to function, we would suggest that a lessening of the oppressive tactics of Solomon would have saved the day for Israel. Rehoboam failed because he did not pursue a balance between what was necessary and what was perceived to be excessive.

One final Old Testament example of how balance matters in one's religion can be seen in the writings of the prophet Hosea. In Hosea 6:6 the Lord spoke through the prophet and proclaimed, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." In commenting on this passage, Wiersbe states:

God doesn't want our relationship with Him to be one of shallow, transient feelings and empty words and rituals, hearts that are enthusiastic one day and frigid the next...A superficial ritual can never take the place of sincere love and faithful obedience..."³

Jesus referred to this same text in Matthew 9:9-13 and in Matthew 12:1-8. In each case He was trying to get his listeners to understand the importance of balancing religion with compassion or mercy. Certainly God desires our participation in religious rituals or He would not have instituted them in the first place, but He will not accept them as a substitute for other things that matter to Him just as much (in the context of Hosea it was in the place of social justice and faithful service to God, while in Matthew it was in the place of being kind and caring to those around us).

From these few examples it is easy to ascertain that God is concerned with the totality of our religious expression. Ritual is important and vital to one's religious experience, but so is the yielding of one's heart to God and to Godlike characteristics. God will not accept one in the place of the other! He demands both.

NEW TESTAMENT DIRECTIVES REGARDING BALANCE

Jesus once chided the religious leaders of His day for their tendency to overemphasize minor matters of the law while, at the same time, underemphasizing its more major elements. He said:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Matt. 23:23-24).

It is obvious from this text that Jesus desired the recipients of this rebuke to be more balanced in their approach to their religious expression. Jesus was not condemning them for carefully observing the tithes He mentioned, He was merely reminding them that there were more substantial matters of the law that demanded their participation as well. In other words, they had come to lack balance in their faith, and the results were devastating both to them and to those they influenced. Jesus' solution was really quite simple: balance. They "ought" to be

striving to honor God through attention to both the mentioned tithes and the "weightier matters." What difference can balance make in our relationship with God? In this particular incidence it would have, at the very least, lessened Jesus' complaint against the religious leaders of His people. All of God's commands are important! We cannot afford to become imbalanced and seek to concentrate on either minor or major areas of submission to His will while ignoring the rest.

Inspiration again addressed the matter of balance when John, in the first epistle bearing his name, wrote:

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

Would any of us read these words and suggest that John was telling us not to verbalize our love for one another? Isn't it obvious that he was merely telling us that verbalizing our love for others is not enough; it must be balanced by deeds of compassionate kindness? What difference would balance make in this area of life? Would it not allow our feelings for another to find complete expression? Those we love need to hear us speak of that love as well as see it worked out in our behavior toward them. Merely verbalizing love would eventually begin to sound empty and repulsive unless our actions adequately backed up the words.

Paul suggested the importance of balance between desire and knowledge when he wrote the following:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the

righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:1-4).

Paul both loved and admired his fellow Jews. He desired their salvation even to the point of wishing he could be condemned in their place (Rom. 9:3). However, he realized that the major problem they faced in being saved was the imbalance between zeal and knowledge when it came to their religion. That they wanted to be true to God could not be argued; that they failed to understand that Jesus was God come unto them was equally undeniable. Until they could balance their zeal in wanting to please God with the correct understanding concerning Jesus as their only means of salvation, they would remain lost.

In another place in his epistle to the Romans, Paul again turned their attention to the need for balance when he exhorted them to "consider the goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). One's concept of God can easily become unbalanced if not carefully developed. It is all too easy to emphasize the qualities we like about God, such as His love (1 John 4:8), His patience (2 Pet. 3:9) or His generosity (Jas. 1:5), while at the same time ignoring those qualities that we might like to eliminate, such as His wrath (Heb. 10:31), His judgment (2 Cor. 5:10-11), or His willingness to discipline when necessary (Heb. 12:5-11). Paul's observation in Romans 11:22 was designed to prevent us from ignoring one aspect of God's nature in order to embrace another. We need to have a balanced view of who our God is in order to successfully serve Him.

James carried the need for balance into the arena where faith and works collide. He wrote:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the

body, what does it profit? Thus also faith, by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Jas. 2:14-17).

James continued on for several verses pointing out that there must be a balance between faith and works in order for either to be acceptable. He was not saying that works cement our place in God's heart, nor was he saying that faith is all that matters. He was trying to get us to see that, as a practical matter, one cannot have, exhibit, or be saved by faith, apart from the works that logically follow it. How much of a difference would grasping that balance between faith and works make in the religious world in general? Do you suppose we could all be a little closer to unity if we could accept that balance?

One final New Testament example comes to mind in regard to the difference balance would make in our religion. In John 4 Jesus addressed worship in a conversation with a woman in a Samaritan village. In part He said:

...Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

So much could be said about this matter of worshipping God acceptably, but it is worthy of note that God does demand a certain type of worship and worshipper! He will not accept worship that is void of emotion no matter how biblical it is, for worship must be "in spirit." He will not accept worship that is void of biblical authority no matter how loud, emotional, or exciting it appears to be, for worship is to be "in truth." It is important for us to remember three truths about our worship: 1) God is the one being worshipped, not us; 2) worship is to please God, not us; and 3) He will determine acceptable worship, not us! Acceptable worship is that which balances "spirit" (one's heart or attitude) with "truth"

(the teaching of God's revealed word – John 17:17). It is not, nor can it ever be, one or the other; it is always the perfectly balanced offering of both.

CONCLUSION

Balance in religion, or the lack thereof, is a crucial matter. When religious expression becomes unbalanced kings lose their thrones, people lose their lives, minor things replace major things, faith dies on the vine, and we find ourselves at odds with the very One we seek to please!

ENDNOTES

1. Ira North, Balance: A Tried and Tested Formula for Church Growth (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate Company, 1983) 9.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New King James Version.
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary: Prophets (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2002) 329.

BALANCE IN AN UNBALANCED WORLD

WINFORD CLAIBORNE

The word “balance” in the sense it will be used in this lesson never appears in any version of the Bible with which I am acquainted. Old Testament authors used the word “balance” several times, but always with the meaning of weights and measurements. God warned the Israelites: “You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard (an old English word meaning “measures of length,” w. c.), in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall you have: I am the Lord your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:35-36). The wise man Solomon insisted: “A just weight and balance are the Lord’s: all the weights of the bag are his work” (Prov. 16:11).

Winford Claiborne is currently the speaker on the International Gospel Hour and one of the preachers at the West Fayetteville church of Christ, Fayetteville, TN. Married for fifty-three years to Mary Lou (Molly) Doron. Two sons and three grandchildren.

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary provides a number of definitions of the word “balance.” For my purpose in this lecture, I shall adopt the following definition: “Balance suggests a steadiness that results when all parts are properly adjusted to each other, when no one part or constituting force outweighs or is out of proportion to another” (Gove, 164). While the Bible does not use the word “balance” in the sense I am employing it in this study, there are biblical passages that emphasize balance. God instructed the Israelites: “You shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God has commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God commanded you, that you may live, and that it may

be well with you, and that your may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess" (Deut. 5:32-33).

The Pharisees were often unbalanced in their teachings and in their practices. Our Lord severely criticized them for their hypocrisy. "Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23). Our Lord was not condemning the Pharisees for offering these three garden herbs, but for neglecting "weightier matters of the law," such as judgment, mercy, and faith. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:24). Samuel asked King Saul, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). Balance always demands doing what God commands in the way he commands it.

TELEVANGELISTS

How many times have you heard television evangelists speak on the establishment of the church, the absolute necessity of being a member of the church to go to heaven, the gospel plan of salvation, the inspiration and authority of the scriptures, and similar topics? Most of the television evangelists—though not all—harp constantly on three themes: the immediacy of the Lord's second coming, their need for money and modern miracles. The tragedy is that most of them know nothing about these themes. They twist the scriptures to try to prove their views on these subjects. Is it any wonder that most Americans have little or no respect for television and radio preachers? All preachers desperately need to follow Paul's example. "Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am free from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

FAITH AND WORKS

Calvinists strongly emphasize faith and neglect or even repudiate the Bible's teaching on works. The late James

Montgomery Boice was one of America's most influential Evangelicals. He preached for more than thirty years for the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and was chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. Shortly before his death from cancer in 2000, he wrote a book entitled Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?: Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World. At the time of his death, he was writing another book, The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel. Philip Graham Ryken, Boice's successor at the Tenth Presbyterian Church, completed the book after Boice's death. If a preacher is writing books on the gospel of grace or the doctrines of grace, should he not emphasize all the Bible says about doing the will of God? In the scripture indexes to these two volumes, there is not one verse that demands obedience to the gospel. Was that a deliberate oversight or did James Montgomery Boice not know about the scriptures that stress obedience to the gospel?

"Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). But faith alone is dead (Jas. 2:17, 26). Many of our Calvinist friends believe they can find salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the book of Romans. Yet Romans constantly emphasizes obedience. Paul speaks of the "obedience of faith," that is, obedience that comes from faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). God "will render to every man according to his deeds (Greek *erga*: works): to them who by patient continuance in well doing (Greek *ergou agathou*: good works) seek for glory and immortality eternal life." If men do not obey the truth, God will give them indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish (Rom. 2:6-8). Paul said that some have not obeyed the gospel (Rom. 10:16). If we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, what possible difference could it make if some had not obeyed the gospel?

Don Rhodes is a prolific writer. He has done extensive research on the New Age movement. He rejects the idea that children of God *must* do anything. He argues: "The great majority of passages dealing with salvation in the New Testament affirm that salvation by faith alone....Salvation is said to be by faith alone close to 200 times in the New Testament" (Rhodes, 274-275). The passages he lists, such as John 3:15 and 5:24, teach salvation by

faith but not by faith alone. The only times faith is modified by the word alone or only, there is a “not” connected with them. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone....You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:17, 24). The tenses of the verbs in James 2:17 are very significant. When we take into consideration the tenses of the verbs, the passage reads: “Even so faith, if continues not to produce works, continues to be dead, being continually alone.”

Don Rhodes also argues: “Maintaining holiness is not a condition of salvation” (Rhodes, p. 274). If we have to maintain holiness to sustain our salvation, we are not saved by grace alone. Has Don Rhodes ever read these words: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14)? The tense of the verb “follow” (*diokete*: present imperative active) and demands continual action. Charles Williams renders the Greek: “Continue to live in peace with everybody and strive for that consecration without which no man can see the Lord” (Williams, 503). We must maintain a balance of faith and works.

ORTHODOXY AND OTHROPRACTY

The word “orthodoxy” is derived from the Greek words, *orthos*, meaning straight or right, and *doxa*, meaning opinion or belief. So the word “orthodoxy” literally means right opinion or right belief. The word is generally used in modern times to mean the teachings that originated with Christ and his apostles. The noun *orthos* appears two times in the New Testament and is translated “upright” (Acts 14:10) and “straight” (Heb. 12:13). The New Testament uses the adverb *orthos* four times. The word is translated “rightly” in the following verse. “Simon answered and said, I suppose he, to whom he forgave much. And he (Jesus) said unto him, You have judged rightly” (Lk. 7:43). The Greek *orthos* is combined with the verb *temno*, meaning to cut. Paul used the combination of those two Greek words in this well-known passage. “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The expression, “rightly dividing,” comes from the

Greek word meaning to cut straight. Ancient writers used the word to mean "plowing a straight furrow."

The New Testament never uses the word "orthodoxy." But it constantly emphasizes the absolute necessity of being orthodox. The apostle Paul often used the term, "sound doctrine," instead of the word "orthodoxy." He reminded Timothy: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). The same apostle commanded Titus: "But speak the things that become sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1). The word "sound" is from the Greek *hugiano* from which we derive our word "hygiene." The Greek word means healthy or wholesome. R. Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, asserts: "Doctrinal soundness is arrogant theological nonsense" (Godsey, 17) He is either denying that healthy doctrine exists or that we can know it. He has embraced postmodernism. Brian McClaren, the leading figure in the Emerging Church movement, has written a book with the title, Generous Orthodoxy. How can anyone be generous with God's inspired revelation?

The word "orthopraxy" means right conduct. As important as right belief is, it is not adequate. Our right belief must be translated into right practice. The church at Ephesus had many commendable features. The members were working to the point of exhaustion. They endured many trials and temptations. They could not bear evil members in the congregation. They tried those who said they were apostles and were not and found them to be liars. Under some very difficult circumstances, they had not fainted. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans which the Lord also hated (Rev. 2:2-3, 6). The church is not accused of being doctrinally unsound, but the Lord had somewhat against them: They had left their first love (Rev. 2:4).

ZEAL AND KNOWLEDGE

Some members of the church have great zeal for the cause of Christ. They are on fire for the spread of the gospel but have little or no knowledge of what the church is or should be. They are unable to distinguish between the true church and

denominations. Winterfest at Gatlinburg, Tennessee, is a good example. Paul knew that many of the Jews exhibited zeal in their religious beliefs, but were ignorant of God's demands on them. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." The Jews probably worshipped regularly and believed they were being faithful to God. They almost certainly sacrificed for their beliefs. Tragically, they were "ignorant of God's righteousness" and went "about to establish their own righteousness." They had failed to submit to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3).

The expression, "God's righteousness," does not mean that God is righteous. It refers to God's way of making men righteous. The most familiar passage in Romans makes that truth very plain. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein (that is, in the gospel of Christ, w. c.) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16-17). A careful reading of the book of Romans and other New Testament books will confirm the necessity of zeal and knowledge.

The Jews had zeal without knowledge. Many members of the church have knowledge without zeal. They know the plan of salvation, what we must do to worship God acceptably, the moral values Christians must honor and how to teach the lost. But they are allowing "the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this life" to keep them from bringing forth any fruit unto perfection (Lk. 8:14). The Christians at Laodicea were satisfied with being lukewarm and neither hot nor cold. The Lord challenged them: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent" (Rev. 3:19). The ideal for every Christian is zeal based on knowledge. Zeal without knowledge is dangerous. Knowledge without zeal is like faith without works; it is "barren and unfruitful" (2 Pet. 1:8).

WORK AND FAMILY

Every observant person in the world knows how vital the family is to the welfare of all human beings, especially to the welfare of children. Children need and deserve parents who love the Lord, each other, and their children. Troubled families make troubled children and a troubled nation. Historians have argued that the powerful Roman Empire fell, at least, to some extent, because of broken homes. Some of the women in Rome did not give their age based on their birth, but on the number of times they had been married. Some of them had been married thirty times, more than Elizabeth Taylor. It is not possible to have a strong and stable society without stable homes. Neither is it possible to have strong churches without strong homes.

Many men and some women are so determined to succeed at their occupations or professions that they neglect their homes. The Bible urges men to take care of their families and that includes widowed mothers, grandmothers and aunts. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica to withdraw fellowship from those who would not work. He discouraged the members from supporting those who would not work (2 Thess. 3:6, 10).

Parents must work to take care of their children. But there is more to providing for children than simply feeding and clothing them, as important as that is. Parents must not neglect to spend time with their children. Tragically, many of us preachers are the chief offenders in this area. Many dedicated preachers spend seventy or eighty hours each week in helping people outside the family. As I look back on my own life, I know there were times when I should have taken our sons fishing or hunting but I was too busy reading, writing, visiting and doing other kinds of work. Fortunately, they had a mother who was completely dedicated to them. If a preacher plans to devote all of his time to other people's families, he should remain single.

WORK AND THE CHURCH

I have already stressed the importance of a person's working to provide for his own family. We must also work to be able to help others who are less fortunate than we. But millions of Americans are so committed to their occupations or professions they have little time for the work and worship of the church. I have known members who almost worked around the clock. They did not have time to read their Bibles, to attend the worship services of the church, to visit widows and orphans in their distress (Jas. 1:27), to take an active part in leading the lost to Christ. Do they not realize that God will hold them accountable for not working in his vineyard? In his Parable of the Vine and the Branches, Christ warned: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Branches that do not bear fruit are cast into the fire and burned (John 15:2, 6). How can we bear fruit in the Lord's vineyard when we devote twelve, fourteen or even sixteen hours each day to our jobs or professions?

Many of us who have lived through the forties, fifties, and sixties of the twentieth century know the church is not growing today as it was back then. There probably are many reasons for that. Could one of those reasons be that we have not learned or have not made an effort to balance our work with our service in the kingdom? Have we forgotten our Lord's commandment? "But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33)? Working to take care of one's family and to have to give to others is part of "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," but we must not neglect to study God's word and to worship God regularly (Heb. 10:24-25).

There have been cultic groups and other religious organizations that have been unbalanced in their approach to serving God. Some of the groups, with which I am very familiar, have a perverted view of fruit-bearing. They appeal primarily to high school and college young people because they know they can control many of those young people. The leaders in those movements even tell their members what their college majors can

be, whom and how often they can date, how much time they can spend studying and whether they can visit their parents. The leaders have been known to discourage their members from attending their own parents' funerals.

The leaders of some of those groups seem to believe that the only way one can bear fruit in the Lord's vineyard is by setting up Bible studies and doing evangelistic work. Christians must win souls, but we also have other obligations. Young people in college must be diligent students to prepare for their life's work. If they want to have good families, they must be allowed to date so they can choose a life's mate wisely. And no religious leader—not the so-called "Reverend Moon" or David Moses Berg or anyone else—has a right to be a dictator. We must encourage young people to be balanced in an unbalanced world, and that includes being balanced in their service in the kingdom of God.

WHEN PRAYER IS NOT ENOUGH

The words "pray" and "prayer" appear hundreds of times in the Bible. Prayer occupied a prominent place in the lives of the early Christians. Shortly after their conversion to Christ, the Jews "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). When the Jews in Jerusalem had imprisoned the apostle Peter, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). The reading of Paul's epistles helps us to understand this great apostles' devotion to prayer. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Paul commanded the Thessalonians: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

Praying for the hungry, the poor and disenfranchised is not enough, although they are included in the term, "all men." But if we pray for them and fail to provide the help they need, we are like the people James had mind. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not

those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit" (Jas. 2:15-16)? Hungry bellies are not filled by prayer alone. As one of our old hymns says, "We must work and pray."

LOVE OF GOD AND WRATH OF GOD

There is no way to preach the whole counsel of God without discussing the love of God. His love can be gleaned from the fact that he created man in his own image and prepared a paradise for man's enjoyment. Even after Adam and Eve sinned, God's love did not diminish. He announced a plan by which fallen men could be redeemed (Gen. 3:15). He then chose a man through whom the whole world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). The scheme of redemption God had in his mind, from eternity past (Eph. 3:10-11), culminated in God's sending his son Jesus Christ into the world to save us from our sins and give us the hope of eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

The apostle John declares: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). John further insists: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath toward us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). The King James Version reads: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Most other versions render the Greek: "We love because he first loved us." Our love for God and for one another is possible because God first loved us.

Is there not a conflict between the love of God and the wrath of God? Do most modern television evangelists, such as Joel Osteen and Robert Schuler, ever mention the wrath of God? When we fail to preach on God's wrath, we are neglecting a major biblical theme. Hebrew words rendered "wrath" appear hundreds of times in the Old Testament. The Psalmist pictures God sitting in

his heavens and laughing at his enemies. "The Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (Ps. 2:4-5).

The Greek *orge* (always translated either wrath, anger, indignation or vengeance, w. c.) appears thirty-six times in the New Testament. John the Baptist asked some of the Pharisees and Sadducees: "O generation of vipers, who hath warmed you to flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7)? The apostle Paul uses the Greek word twelve times in the book of Romans alone. Paul told the Roman Christians: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (literally, suppress, w. c.) the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Can God be a God of holiness and not punish those who rebel against his will?

Two Quaker preachers, Philip Gulley and James Muholland, specifically deny the wrath of God. They quote these words from the Hosea 11:9: "I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not come in wrath" (Gulley and Mulholland, 203). Some versions translate the Hebrew: "I will not come to destroy." It ought to be obvious from the context that God would not completely destroy the nation. To deny that he would come in wrath is to ignore much of the Bible. If Gulley and Mulholland had bothered to read the whole book of Hosea, they would not have made such a foolish blunder. Please listen to two other passages from Hosea. "The princes of Judah were like them who remove bound (or landmark, w. c): therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water" (Hos. 5:10). "I gave them a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath" (Hos. 13:11).

FIRST PRINCIPLES AND STRONG MEAT

When I was a child growing up in Middle Tennessee, many of the preachers who came to the congregation where my family worshipped almost always preached first principles. No true Bible believer can deny the absolute necessity of preaching first principles. The author of Hebrews lists some of those first

principles: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (Heb. 6:1-2). Those who do not know these great truths and believe them have a very weak foundation for their Christian lives. We preachers may be tempted to think that everyone knows these great principles and there is no value in preaching on them. If that is the case, it is a serious misunderstanding of the modern situation.

There are preachers who almost never discuss these first principles. In fact, some preachers seem not to know what the first principles are. But we must not rest on the foundation. We must preach "strong meat." The author of Hebrews charged his readers: "Let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1). The word "perfection" is the same Greek word translated "of full age" (Heb. 5:14). Balance in preaching and in Christian living demands both the milk (1 Pet. 2:2) and the meat of the word.

CONCLUSION

There is no place for hobby-riding either in the pulpit or in the pew. Many of the problems that have arisen in the church during my lifetime have generally come from hobby-riders. For example, one preacher in Middle Tennessee announced to his radio audience: "We are devoting our program to errors of the churches of Christ." That preacher lost his wife and his children because of his hobby-riding.

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BALANCE IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE BIBLE

TOM HOLLAND

In Paul's concluding epistle, the aged apostle urged Timothy to "handle aright," or "rightly handle," God's word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). The words "handle aright" translate a word which literally means to "cut a straight line" with God's word. Vine said, "the Word of God is to be handled strictly along the lines of its teaching."¹

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God's word can be mishandled, abused, and incorrectly interpreted. In considering the subject of the need of balance in handling the Bible, we need, by way of introduction, to examine an implication; namely, the Bible is important. The Bible is important even to those who attack it because they, like the devil, know the ability of God's word to produce faith (Luke 8:12).

The Bible is certainly vital to one's salvation from sin and for heaven and necessary for the Christian life. The focus of the Bible's longest chapter is on God's word. Power to cleanse or purge one's heart and life is revealed in God's word (Ps. 119:9). There is spiritual protection potential in the Bible (Ps. 119:9). There is also the provision for life, showing us how to live and the way in which to walk (Ps. 119:105). The Bible is important to our salvation (Jas. 1:21), and to our edification (Acts 20:32).

A study of balance in handling the Bible will involve an examination of extremes. Because of extremes, balance is needed.

THE EXTREMES OF REJECTION AND DOUBT

One extreme comes from those who view the Bible as a collection of stories, folklore, and myths. A university professor said, "Once you are educated you can cast off faith in the Bible and other superstitions." Atheists try to destroy faith in the inspiration of the Bible with assertions of contradictions therein. Although the alleged contradictions have been explained and answered, unbelievers still keep harping on them.

Sam Harris, an avowed atheist, correctly said, "Either the Bible is just an ordinary book, written by mortals, or it isn't.... If the Bible is an ordinary book, and Christ an ordinary man, the basic doctrine of Christianity is false."²

Harris asserted that the "laws of psychology" give humanity a universal moral code. He also contended that religion has done great harm to humanity. However, atheism in the form of communism and the horror of the Nazis killed more people in the twentieth century than had been killed in wars since the dawn of time.

A second extreme comes from theologians who attempt to reduce the Bible to a purely human book by establishing a form for criticism, "analyzing" the Bible according to that form, and then rejecting the original author if a portion does not fit their form. For example, the Pentateuch was supposedly written by several writers sometimes identified as JEDP. Therefore, the authorship of Moses is rejected. However, as the noted scholar Edward J. Young observed: "More than two hundred years of exhaustive study have been unable to produce a satisfactory substitute for the time-honored Biblical view that Moses himself was the human author of the Law."³

New Testament scripture has been analyzed, criticized, theorized, and questioned as being a revelation from God's Holy Spirit through Spirit-guided men.

Some who claim to be scholars have asserted that of the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Mark was the oldest and the source from which Matthew and Luke obtained their information. However, there are 250 verses in Matthew and Luke that do not appear in Mark.⁴

An analysis of Scripture in the so-called Synoptic problem is an effort to remove the supernatural from the writing of the New Testament.

A third extreme comes from those who try to make room for some kind of additional "revelation" of truth and, therefore, an additional religious authority.

According to Roman Catholicism, "The interpretation of the Bible is not left free in the Catholic church, as it is theoretically, in Protestant sects. The church tells us that the Bible is infallible.... The church is infallible; consequently any interpretation which would contradict the church's teaching would be a wrong interpretation."⁵

The church becomes the "official" interpreter of Scripture and, therefore, the final authority.

Mormonism claims to believe the Bible as long as it is correctly translated. However, while paying lip service to the Bible, questions about "lost books of the Bible" are raised. Furthermore, those who maintain that the complete revelation of God is given in the Bible are subject to ridicule. "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have you obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?" (2 Nephi 29:6).⁶ Then emphatically the assertion is made: "Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written" (2 Nephi 29:10).⁷

A fourth, and presently popular, extreme view of the Bible comes from postmodernism. Postmodernism rejects absolute truth, reduces religion to an exclusive personal experience, believes that morals and ethics are social constructs subject to change if a society decides to change the ethics, and also denies the objective nature of language; in other words, language means what one wants it to mean. Consequently, the biblical declarations about absolute, knowable truth are rejected; the morals and ethics of the Bible are outdated for a modern world; and language is too relative to provide definite meanings.

THE EXTREME OF RIGID RESPONSE

Someone contends, "You do not interpret the Bible; it means what it says." In classes where verse-by-verse studies are done, a brother will read a verse and the teacher will ask him to explain it. It is not unusual for the reader to say, "It just means what it says." That response is no response. What does the passage say? What does it say in the general biblical context, the Bible book wherein it is found, the immediate context of the verse, and then the meaning of specific words of the verse?

Someone argues, "The Bible does not need to be interpreted. It just needs to be read." However, the reading implies interpretation.

Interpretation is making sense of what is read. All communication is done on the assumption that a reader or a hearer will interpret, or make sense of, what is read or heard. Even the writer of a newspaper article assumes that the reader will interpret, or make sense out of, that being read.

Another example of a rigid approach is the notion that the Bible can be read and understood as one might casually read a novel. The Bible is a revelation of the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:9-14). While the possibility of "thinking God's thoughts after Him" is most exciting, the effort to understand the revelation of God's thoughts in words is most demanding (2 Tim. 2:15).

While an understanding of obedience to God's word brings salvation, an abundant life, and the hope of eternal life, the necessary mental effort to understand God's will must be expended (Eph. 5:17).

There is also what might be identified as an immature view of translation. The translation of words from one language into another is very demanding.

Translation requires the knowledge of two languages. The nature of language becomes involved. In a language like English, which is a "living language," word meanings change. Furthermore, new words are coined.

Translators of the Bible may be classified as "thought translators" or "word-for-word translators." Thought translators use their own words to convey the thought of scripture. There is a third type of "translation," the so-called "paraphrase." "A paraphrase...aims at restating in simplified but related ways the ideas conveyed in the original language."⁸

When one undertakes the reading of scripture, he would be advised to read the preface or the introduction to see what approach the translators are taking. Lewis observed: "A translation aims at making the same impression upon the reader of the new language that the original made upon the readers in the original language by reproducing in the second language the nearest equivalent to the author's words."⁹

BALANCE

One should understand the liabilities of a translation and therefore read with caution. However, a good word-for-word translation can be read and God's will can be understood (Eph. 3:1-6).

The apostle Paul received a revelation that he wrote in words that could be read and understood. But, the words written must be read. The word translated "read" comes from a

compound word in the original, “ana, again, ginōsko, to know “and means “to know certainly.”¹⁰

The reader can then *understand*, or know, what the apostle knew by revelation. The “mystery,” that which people cannot know without God’s revelation, can now be understood. God had a plan to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body (Eph. 3:6) where they would partake of “God’s promise” to bless humanity by Christ Jesus.

The inspired instruction to “understand God’s will” implies the possibility of understanding that will. The reading of the revelation insures the understanding of God’s will (Eph. 5:17; 3:1-6).

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UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

CLARENCE DELOACH

Islam has rapidly grown to become the second largest religion in the world with 1.3 billion adherents. That is one in every five persons on earth. Presently there are more Muslims in the United States than Methodists.¹ More than seven million Muslims live in the United States. The number of mosques in the United States has increased by 25% in the past five years. In terms of impacting the world, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington has compared the "Islamic Resurgence" in the late twentieth century to that of the Protestant Reformation in the late sixteenth century. In Africa there are 307 million Muslims, with majorities in forty-five African and Asian countries. The United Nations reports that the global birthrate after the year 2055 will be at least 50% Muslim.²

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We will never forget that fateful day, September 11, 2001, that changed our world forever. The devastation, loss of life, and wrecked families changed our lives forever. Before 9/11 our interest in Islam was very casual, but not now. Since that time we have had many questions on our minds.

1. What is Islam?
2. How did it begin?
3. Where did it begin?
4. Who are Muslims?
5. Who is Allah?

6. Is Allah of the Quran the same as the God of the Bible?
7. Who is Allah's prophet?

Why is there such fascination with Islam today, especially on university campuses? The rush to embrace Islam academically increased significantly after 9/11. Before 9/11, a survey of some nine hundred university religion and theology departments by the Lilly Foundation showed that a third of them offered no courses on Islam. Now universities are in a bidding war for Islamic experts, and scheduled courses on Islam are filled. How are we to understand this seeming love affair with Islam on the part of scholars, students, and Americans in general?

Since this lectureship is pursuing the theme of balance in an unbalanced world, how are we, as Christians, to view Islam? What should be our attitude toward Muslims? Should we ignore them or seek dialogue with them? Should we seek opportunities to evangelize Muslim communities? How shall we approach them? And how does one-fifth of the earth's population relate to "the world" that God loves and the "all nations" to which the gospel is to be taken?

The fact is, so-called Christendom, which is still the largest religious tradition in the world, has become weak, insipid, and anemic. It is so fragmented and divided that it has no power and very little influence. Sadly, many who call themselves "Christian" have embraced cultural myths and views totally in opposition to what the Bible teaches. Many have espoused a position of tolerance and accommodation, which has no resemblance to biblical Christianity. So the question is, how are those dedicated to Christ and New Testament Christianity to view Islam in general and Muslims in particular?

Our response must begin by learning all we can about Islam. A balanced response can never come by ignorance and hate. Understanding begins with knowledge.

As with many subjects, we need to know where we have been before we can know where we are going. A look at history will help us get the bigger picture today.

From the land of Chaldea and the city of Ur there lived a man called Abram. God called him to leave his ancestors and land and go to the land God would show him. He and his wife Sarai obeyed God and eventually arrived in the land of Canaan. In that land they fought battles, increased their wealth, and even rescued their nephew Lot from the kings who raided his city.

God promised to make of his seed a great nation and descendants as the stars in number (Gen. 12:2; 15:5).³ God promised an heir, a son. Twenty-five years passed, and Abraham and Sarah were old. Sarah was barren. In an effort to hurry up the process, Sarah gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham. She conceived and Ishmael was born.

Abraham loved Ishmael and pleaded with God to accept Ishmael as the promised heir. "And Abraham said to God, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!' Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him'" (Gen. 17:18-19).

God blessed Ishmael with the promise of making of him a great nation. The biblical story of Abraham's descendants is the focal point of the conflict that has raged through history. In fact, Genesis records a prophecy regarding Ishmael. "He will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him" (Gen. 16:12). The Arab nations perceive themselves as descendants of Ishmael's descendants. Ishmael's descendants settled in North Arabia, and today 300 million of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are Arabs.

The conflict between the descendants of these brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, is clearly documented in the Bible. Ishmael was a warrior, a skilled archer (Gen. 21:20). He was described as a "wild man" (Gen. 16:12). His descendants would be so numerous they could not be counted (Gen. 16:10). He would settle east of Egypt in defiance of his relatives and would "live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Gen. 16:12).

The rest of the Old Testament developed the promise of making Abraham's posterity "a great nation." Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the judges, and the kings were the major characters in what God did with His covenant people. In 900 BC Israel divided into the northern and southern kingdoms. Israel had nineteen wicked kings until about 700 BC when Assyria conquered them into oblivion. The southern kingdom of Judah remained another hundred years with twenty kings, eight of whom had integrity at least at the beginning of their reign. In 600 BC Babylon, present-day Iraq, conquered and exiled its inhabitants and destroyed Jerusalem. For seventy years God chastised them in captivity. The integrity of God's promise was at stake, so in 540 BC they began to make their way back to Judah. Three groups came. The walls were rebuilt, the temple was reconstructed, and the city was rebuilt. The law, the feasts, and the offerings at the temple were restored.

Very little history is given or reference made to the descendants of Ishmael during this time. However, some statements give us a clue of the ongoing hostility. When Nehemiah led his efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the leaders of the opposition were Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the Arab (Neh. 6:1).

Historically, Babylon was overpowered by the Persians, who were soon conquered by the Greeks in approximately 400 BC. Then, in 100 BC, Rome conquered the world with a 500-year reign. Jesus was born in the days of the Roman kings, and His spiritual kingdom, the church, was established in the city of Jerusalem. Christianity, though persecuted, flourished. Missionaries, preachers, and Roman soldiers carried the message. Even the slave population in Rome and throughout the Empire was receptive to the gospel.

In 610 AD, it is claimed the angel Gabriel appeared to a man named Mohammed in the city of Mecca in present day Saudi Arabia. Mohammed claimed that he began to receive revelations from Allah designed for the tribes around Mecca. These visions continued for another twelve years. Gabriel told Mohammed that Allah had commissioned him to be his last prophet.

Mohammed called the new faith ISLAM, meaning submission. He claimed to be Allah's messenger to warn the people. His basic message was belief in one sovereign God (Allah), belief in the resurrection, and the last judgment. In terms of practice he emphasized charity to the poor and destitute.

Gradually he attracted small groups, mainly the young and poor, but the influential citizens of Mecca rejected the prophet. Tensions increased, and it became obvious that a new base of operations was needed. Due to persecution and a plot to kill him, Mohammed escaped with his close companion, AbuBakr, to Medina, about 200 miles to the north. It was at Medina that he was well-received, and the movement really began to take shape. Tribal feuds and instability enabled Mohammed to emerge as an able diplomat and politician. He learned that he could exhort the people and with sufficient power could enforce his beliefs.

At first he saw himself as a restorer of the religion of Abraham and held a close affinity with the Jewish clans in the area. He was able to unite various Arab clans but was not as successful with the Jews. In time he changed his attitude toward the Jews, and Islamic theology moved more toward an Arabian character.

Another significant thing occurred when the Jewish clans rejected Mohammed's theology; he began to use the sword. He led several raids upon Meccan caravans. The Quran endorsed his new policy with revelations permitting the use of the sword. In Surah 2:244, the revelation commanded, "Then fight in the cause of Allah and know that Allah heareth and knoweth all things." At this stage in Quranic revelations, new incentives were given to those willing to fight, with special rewards and a promise of entrance into Paradise (See 4:95-97; 3:194, 195).

Mohammed's siege of Medina over the 10,000 Arabs living there greatly strengthened the cause. The Jewish tribes were crushed, with the men mercilessly put to death and the women and children sold into slavery. In January 630 AD, Mohammed and 10,000 soldiers took Mecca with little resistance. He

conquered and gained the respect of his long-time enemies. In 632 AD, Mohammed personally led the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and delivered his farewell to tens of thousands of his followers. Three months later, in June 632, he died at the age of sixty-three.

Within six years Mohammed's successors took over the entire eastern end of the Mediterranean world. They controlled great centers that were once Christian strongholds – Antioch, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. By this time, so-called Christianity had become divided, weak, and apostate. Many converted to Islam. Muslims interpreted such to mean that Islam was the will of Allah and that Christianity was inferior.

Muslims still honor Mohammed, but they deny that he was divine. They disdain being called Mohammedans. They consider him to be a human being whom God chose as His messenger to all mankind and who was the greatest model of piety, virtue, and excellence.

The greatest emphasis in Islam is not upon rituals or ethics, but upon the unity and sovereignty of God. The basic creed is short and simple: "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is Allah's prophet." That creed is fundamental to all Islamic life – in family life, in welcoming a new believer – and is whispered in death. This is called the shahada.

Islam claims certain pillars of faith. Generally, Islam teaches the oneness of Allah. It rejects the Christian concept of one God manifested in three persons. Consequently, the divinity of Christ is rejected.

There is a strong belief in angels, very similar to what is believed among Jews and Christians. Muslims believe in God's revelations and in God's messengers. Foremost is faith in the Quran, but also in the books of law, the Psalms, and the gospel of Jesus. In Islam, God is most fully manifested in His word, the Quran, and his greatest messenger is Mohammed, the prophet.

Faith in the last judgment, the resurrection, heaven, and hell are also vital beliefs in Islamic theology.⁴

It is essential for a Muslim to practice these pillars of faith. The shahada is recited daily. Prayers are offered five times a day: at the rising of the sun, at noon, at mid-afternoon, at sunset, and before going to bed. Public prayer services, primarily of men, are offered on Fridays. The fast of Ramadan, in which the faithful fast during the daylight hours, is the most important fast of the year. Muslims are expected to give 2.5% or about one-fortieth of their wealth. This is primarily for the poor. A pilgrimage to Mecca is required in a lifetime unless prohibited by health.

An unofficial sixth pillar of Islam, especially among fundamental Muslims, is jihad. This means "struggle" and could be used to refer to one's struggle to obey God or something as violent as killing those who will not accept Islam. Jihad, of the sword-defending Islam, as many have experienced in Muslim countries, includes attacks in the name of Allah with kidnappings, bombings, and murder.

Summing up the religious duties and obligations of every good Muslim are the five pillars of faith:

1. Creedal Restitution. The creed is called the shahada—"There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah." The recitation must be characterized by understanding, believed in the heart, recited correctly and aloud, and professed without hesitation.
2. Prayers called salat are offered five times a day, being compulsory to all over the age of ten. These prayers involve specific words, postures (standing, kneeling, hands and face on the ground) while the believer faces Mecca. When time for prayers comes, a strong-voiced man called a muezzim will climb atop a tower and cry out the time for prayer. Muslims will pause from whatever they are doing and engage in the appropriate prayers. When possible, Muslims are required to wash themselves before prayer.
3. Alms giving, amounting to 2.5% of their income, benefits widows, orphans, and the sick and is a means of furthering Islam. Muslim communities may differ in the manner of

handling charity. Some may give it to a local mosque or a respected Islamic leader. In some communities that are Muslim, alms are collected as a government tax and then used to build schools or some other social benefit.

4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan occurs the ninth month of the Muslim lunar year. Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sex during the daylight hours. The fast is designed to purify both body and soul and to enhance one's self-awareness. Exceptions from fasting are permitted for the sick, small children, nursing mothers, and travelers. Most Muslim families will get up early to eat a substantial breakfast before the sun rises and then eat an elaborate meal after the sun has gone down. More food is sold in Muslim communities during Ramadan than any other month of the year.
5. The pilgrimage to Mecca. For faithful Muslims this pilgrimage is expected at least once in a lifetime. A woman can go only with her husband's permission. A sincere Muslim who has prayed toward Mecca his entire life will find this pilgrimage to be the highlight of his life. It is believed that one stands in the presence of God and that it leads to a complete absolution of sins.

If one is sick or does not have the financial ability to go, another person could go for him. Since the trip is so expensive, sincere Muslims will save money for years to make it a reality. As pilgrims approach Mecca, they go through check points beyond which non-Muslims are not permitted. Once there, pilgrims go through the same basic rituals, starting at the Black Stone embedded in the southeast corner of the Kaaba (religious shrine). They run around the building seven times, three times fast and four times slow, in a counterclockwise direction. According to Muslim tradition both Abraham and Ishmael circled the Kaaba this way, as did Mohammed. Muslims believe that the Black Stone fell from heaven in the days of Adam and was the site of God's covenant with Abraham and Ishmael, so touching or kissing it brings blessings from heaven.

You can imagine the organization and preparation it takes on the part of the Saudi Arabian government to accommodate

over two million pilgrims over the space of a few days. They come from all over the world by car, bus, train, ship, and plane.⁵

Muslims around the world look upon the Quran with profound admiration. It is considered the expression of the will of God to mankind. It is believed to be the final light and guidance given by Allah's angel to his prophet Mohammed and is believed to be superior to all other holy books. One is not to touch it unless they are first washed and purified. It is never to be held below the waist. It is to occupy the highest shelf in their houses. Great honor is given the individual who makes an art form of recitation with inflections that ring out like a musical line. It is considered to be the greatest wonder among all the wonders of the world. It is highly respected and is never to contact the ground or any unclean thing. In Islamic lands, bookstores generally have no price tag for the Quran. A customer will often ask what a suitable gift for the priceless book would be.

Muslims believe that the Quran is eternal. Though some parts of the Bible are considered to be of God, it is thought that the Bible has been corrupted by translations of men and therefore is not the same as originally given. Many Muslim scholars refuse to allow it to be translated from the original Arabic.

The Quran is composed of 114 suras (chapters). It is not chronological in structure, but is arranged with the longer suras first and the shorter ones last. It contains 6,247 verses and is about four-fifths the size of the New Testament. Interestingly, the earliest written Mecca-based passages which were written about 612-622 and were friendly to Christians and Jews, are interspersed with the later Medina-based writings of about 622-632, which were at times violent towards Christians, Jews, and others.⁶

After Mohammed's death in 632, there was no complete manuscript of the Quran, so it was needful to collect the fragments. Bits of Mohammed's revelations had been recorded on whatever materials his followers could find. Some were written on parchment, leaves, flat stones, and even bones. Some followers had memorized his sayings. The task was difficult. Umar, who

would become the second caliph, ordered a collection of the Quran; and Zaid, a trusted secretary to Mohammed, was appointed to the task. Ultimately a definitive and final authorized version of the Quran would become the standard for Muslims everywhere. When the authorized version was completed, it was distributed to the major centers of Islamic population. All other copies were burned so there could be no challenge to the authorized text.

As Islam spread, there were many situations that arose among Muslims for which no particular instructions were found in the Quran. Muslims believed that God directed Mohammed in what he said and did, so they began to depend upon traditions surrounding his life in personal, social, political, and religious areas. The traditions were called the Hadith and were compiled over a period of years.

Though the Quran often cites biblical names and stories, it often confuses biblical facts and history. The question has often been asked, "Why did so many errors make their way into the Quran?" It will help to remember that Mohammed did not have a Bible, since an Arabic translation did not exist at that time. He would have learned what he knew from stories he heard while young or from the Jewish and Christian traders who often traveled through Mecca. Many of the stories were jumbled in content and chronology. How do Muslims deal with this? According to Islam, it is the Bible that is corrupted. When the Bible agrees with the Quran, it is correct, but if the Bible and the Quran disagree, then it is the Bible that is wrong.

Many Christians have wondered, since the Quran is not divinely inspired as the Bible is, where did it come from? What are its sources? Mohammed borrowed Arabian stories and Jewish stories from the Talmud, Midrash, and apocryphal writings. Some of the stories in the Quran about Jesus are related in some of the Gnostic gospels that appeared in the third century and were widely circulated into the fourth through seventh centuries.⁷

The idea of abrogation is that God revealed some verses of the Quran that he later revoked. In Sura 2:100 the Quran reads,

“And for whatever verse we abrogate or cast into oblivion, we bring a better or the like of it; knowest thou not that God is powerful over everything.”⁸

This verse serves the Muslim as a basis for contradictions between the Quran and the Bible and even within the Quran itself. Three verses in the Quran (Suras 2:106; 22:52; 16:106) are used to vindicate the concept of abrogation. Sura 22:52 became the basis of The Satanic Verses, the controversial novel by British author Salman Rushdie. It is claimed that God later annulled that revelation.⁹

According to the Quran, Jesus is one of twenty-five prophets, with Mohammed as the last. Jesus is mentioned ninety-seven times in ninety-three verses in the Quran. He is even listed among the six most significant prophets. However, the contradictions between the Bible and the Quran regarding Jesus abound. The Bible teaches that Jesus died a sacrificial death, thus defeating sin, the grave, and death. Muslims, on the other hand, think it offensive that God would come in the form of a man and even more offensive that He would die on a cross. There is no sacrificial cross in Islam, nor atonement and forgiveness, and no free gift of salvation. Islam is a total legalistic system of works with no room for grace.¹⁰

Since this lectureship is exploring the theme of balance in an unbalanced world, it is appropriate to conclude this study on Islam with a look at the Christian's response to Muslims. Many have almost written off Muslims as far as evangelism is concerned. Admittedly, reaching out to Muslims is a real challenge.

Islam, based upon the life of its founder, fourteen hundred years of history, the laws and governments it produces, and its holy writings, is not a religion of peace. The Quran, in its later Medina-based texts, became even more violent. The majority of the world's wars today are Islamic-driven conflicts. Twenty-eight of the thirty plus wars today are Muslim related. In the Sudan, more than two million believers in Christ have been killed by Muslims in the last twenty years.¹¹ Some of the current hot-spots are Algeria,

Nigeria, Indonesia, and India where the Muslim population has reached more than two hundred million.

How can Christians reach out to Muslims here and around the world? The answer is not hate and retaliation. The best approach is love, acts of kindness, and compassion. Satan blinds the minds of those diluted with error and deception. Not every Muslim is violent.

We need to be informed about Islam, its beliefs, practice, and history. Even in America the time has come when your neighbor, your classmate, and your co-worker could be a Muslim. Prayerfully reach out to them and seek quality relationships with them. They are souls made in the image of God for whom Jesus died. Muslim-bashing is out of place, yet at the same time we must not succumb to indifference or mushy sentimentality. The time has come for dialogue, even to debate your cause with your neighbor. I would hope that in the climate of American freedom, we could have serious debates in the large population areas of Muslim influence.

When Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations," that included Muslims. Dr. Ron Rhodes suggests the following when speaking with Muslims.

1. Always prepare by prayer.
2. Develop personal relationships.
3. Meet only with individual Muslims.
4. Realize that Islam is a way of life.
5. Beware of stereotypes.
6. Be kind but firm.
7. Do not assume that all Muslims believe the same thing.
8. Do not assume that all Muslims are militant.
9. Define your terms.
10. Ask leading questions.
11. Beware that conflict may develop.
12. Know that mission work in Arab lands is considered a crime and could lead to prison or worse.¹²

Muslims are here! Islam is not something confined to the deserts and mountains. It is global. Muslims are on your streets, in your schools and universities, and next door to you. Christians must pray, demonstrate the love of Christ, and apply the teaching of the Bible to their questions.

As Christians, we are citizens of the heavenly, spiritual Jerusalem, but we are living in Babylon, i.e., a culture that is antagonistic to Christian values. Sadly, many who call themselves “Christian” in America have embraced cultural myths without even realizing they are anti-biblical. On the part of so-called believers, there is so much biblical ignorance.

When one objectively studies the religion of Islam, it makes Jesus and New Testament Christianity even more attractive. As Christians, let us be “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth.”

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DEVELOPING BALANCED LEADERS

MARLIN CONNELLY

In 1991 the Vanderbilt University Medical Center installed a new machine to make possible more accurate evaluation and treatment of those suffering from disabling balance disorders. Called the "Balance Master," the device tests three types of balance – *static*, *dynamic*, and *sensory*. Static balance refers to how well one supports his center of gravity, dynamic balance deals with the shifting of weight forward or backward and from side to side, and sensory balance tests how well one keeps his balance on a moving tread.

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Beyond physical balance problems due to aging, injury, or recurring inner-ear conditions, each of us can suffer from *spiritual* imbalance in varied forms. Some Pharisees, for example, were careful to tithe even the spices of their gardens, while neglecting to treat others with justice, mercy, and fidelity (Matt. 23:23). One might lean heavily toward calling Jesus "Lord," while showing little concern for doing His will (Matt. 7:21-23). John the apostle warned some to avoid merely *talking* love without showing it in benevolence (1 John 3:16-18). On the other hand, he found the church at Thyatira full of deeds of loving service but guilty of tolerating immorality in the congregation (Rev. 2:18-20). Real religion keeps a balanced conscience void of offense toward God and man, looking after the distressed, yet remaining unspotted from the world (Acts 24:16; Jas. 1:27). Balanced leaders can better maintain balanced brethren.

Before placing that next log onto a winter fire, use it to teach a child or grandchild about one function of each elder in a congregation. In a cross-section of a trunk we can identify tree-rings and the function of each. The tough outer layer of bark protects a softer one of inner bark through which run the pipelines to carry food to the leaves. (Farther within the tree is a second set of lines to carry water from roots to leaves.) The growing part of the tree, just beyond the inner bark, is the *cambium* layer in which new wood and new bark develop. Beyond that is a soft, moist, light-colored area called *sapwood*. Here new pipelines are built each year. As the older pipelines dry and harden, they become part of the center of the trunk, the *heartwood*. This solid inner wood provides the tree's strong spine that stands against the storms. The elders of a congregation are its strong heartwood. They hold firmly to the word as it was revealed by the apostles, encouraging others by that healthy teaching and refuting those who oppose it (Tit. 1:9).

MAINTAINING THE MANDATE

In every election a winning candidate must receive enough votes to claim he has a *mandate* from the people. The term comes from *manus*, the Latin word for hand. If one has a mandate, something has been put into his hands. From the same Latin word come our words *manage* (to handle), *manifest* (something which can be seized by the hand), and *manipulate* (to handle artfully). In the scriptures God handed down a mandate to the elders of each congregation: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the holy Spirit has made you overseers..." (Acts 20:28). As an overseer, each elder must "hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching," and he must be able to exhort others with "sound doctrine" (i.e., healthy teaching) and refute those who speak against that doctrine (Tit. 1:9).

Notice that it is the "faithful word" to which an elder must go for direction. In thick clouds, turbulent storms, or dark night, only the instruments can tell a pilot whether he is level or turning, diving or climbing, right-side-up or inverted. He must suppress the natural instinct to trust the body's sense of vertical and lateral movement, of inertia and balance. Herein lies a parable about

basic faith in Christ. Faith is not trusting ones feelings. It is trust in the instrument, the living word of God in sacred scripture, which thoroughly equips one for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

In late November of 1979, Egypt and Israel began peace negotiations that ultimately would restore to Egypt much of the Sinai area, which had been captured by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 and which had remained in Israel's hands after the Yom Kippur War of late 1973 and early 1974. During the negotiation time, Bedouins from Sinai stole several Mercedes taxis in Tel Aviv and buried them in the Sinai sands under tarps. Instead of immediately trying to slip them over the border into Egypt, they merely waited until the peace negotiations moved the border. The vagaries of today's calls for doctrinal shifting remind me of that Bedouin strategy. Always there will be "theologians" who declare doctrinal borders should be moved to fit a "more progressive time." To avoid being "carried away by various and strange doctrines," elders must remember that our Lord is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8-9). The borders will not be moved.

Of course there are areas in which God's word has no specific legislation. We often term these "*matters of opinion*." In such situations, elders must handle each specific matter in light of general biblical principles applicable to conduct in any occasion (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Phil. 4:5; Col. 3:17). When a fighter plane approaches its aircraft carrier for a landing, the tension on the arresting wire is set to match that airplane. If the cable is too tight as the aircraft slams into a hook-on, the cable could snap. If the tension is too slack, the plane could slide into the ocean. Just as the weight of the approaching planes varies according to the type of plane and the amount of fuel remaining, so those who approach elders with a problem come with varied personalities and cultural backgrounds. And just as the tension on the arresting wire must be adjusted to the individuality of each incoming airplane, so must the response be fitted to one needing guidance from overseers. Paul applied this principle, adjusting to Jew-Gentile differences as he made converts (1 Cor. 9:20-22). Yet while adapting himself to their differences, he did not presume to adapt the gospel, for he was "not without the law of God, but under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). Though prospective converts will vary, the laws of spiritual

“aerodynamics” must prevail. Each convert must land on the carrier in the same basic way.

In 1940 the 2,800-foot Tacoma Narrows Bridge was built to span Puget Sound in the State of Washington. The engineers who planned it failed to consider possible aerodynamic effects. They designed a bridge so flexible that even moderate winds caused it to writhe. Only four months after its completion, the structure was destroyed when a 42 mph wind set up run-away vibrations. Certainly there is always a danger that elders will be too rigid—making laws that God has not made. Yet after fifty-five years of preaching, I am convinced that our greatest danger, now and in the next decades, will be in becoming too flexible with things God has tied down in the scriptures. The apostles of the Lord had some very definite things to say about the necessity of baptism, the leadership of elders, worship in song, permanency of marriage, and etcetera. Note the limits to flexibility in Paul’s charges to Timothy. The *same* things Timothy had heard from Paul were to be delivered to faithful men who would teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). Timothy was to preach the word even when it was “*out of season*” with the desires of others (2 Tim. 4:2). An “*I-could-not-care-any-less*” flexibility in the name of love and grace is not biblical.

REALIZING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In the natural world, abilities and responsibilities change with age. In the honeybee hive, for example, upon emerging from the comb, the young bee becomes a feeder of the larvae. Then, after several days, it gives up its nursing duties for pantry work, as it receives and stores nectar brought in by foragers. At about fifteen days the same bee becomes a wax-maker, on the eighteenth day it begins guard-duty, and on the twenty-first day it graduates to the role of forager.

The working principles of the beehive are mirrored in the congregation. In the early church, differing abilities meant different roles (Rom. 12:6-8). Some engaged in Spirit-inspired utterance, others in sympathetic service to others. All the roles were necessary, each complementing the others to make a functioning fellowship (1 Cor. 12:14-27). Often, as in the hive, one role was a

stage of preparation for the next. The scripture seems to imply that the role of a deacon can lead into the later role of overseer (1 Tim. 3:13). Paul made this point using an analogy between the interdependent parts of the human body and the members of the body of Christ, each of whom has his own individual role (Rom. 12:4).

PROBING FOR POTENTIAL

As you swallow your next meal, remember that the food is not falling down the esophagus. It is, instead, being pushed along to the stomach by circular muscles. As each contracts behind a bit of food or liquid, it tightly closes off the channel behind the food, as if a piece of string were tied behind it. While this is happening, the next muscle begins its contraction. The tasks of converting and edifying others are both like swallowing. Each requires the cooperation of synergistic “muscles” in the body of Christ. Note, for example, the combination of roles leading to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus: the dying Stephen prayed for him (Acts 7:58-60), the obedient Ananias instructed and baptized him (Acts 9:17-18; 22:12-16), un-named Damascus disciples assisted him (Acts 9:23-25), and Barnabas spoke up for him (Acts 9:26-27). Never underestimate the potential contribution of each person in the congregation. Balanced leaders probe for this potential in each Christian under their care.

TEACHING TEAMWORK

In the 1880s, 20-mule-team wagons carried borax from California’s Death Valley to the railroad, which was 165 miles away. Each huge wagon weighed over 7,000 pounds and carried over 20,000 pounds of borax. In unique teamwork, each pair of mules had its own job. The lead mule on the left was controlled by a long “jerk-line.” When that mule began the turn, the team nearest the wagon had its special task. Whereas the other teams were hitched to a long chain running from the wagon tongue, the last pair—called “wheelers”—was hitched to the tongue. At the driver’s signal, they turned the resisting tongue right or left. The team ahead of the “wheelers” had to be trained to jump the center chain as a turn was made.

As a congregation pulls its loads, each member has teamwork responsibilities. This cooperation between a congregation and its overseers is made clear in 1 Peter 5:1-5.

Elders are to shepherd the flock, serving as overseers eagerly, but not for gain (vv. 1-2). They must not, however, appear to be as "lording it over" those allotted to their charge, but should be "examples to the flock" (v. 3). Younger men are to be subject to their elders and humble toward one another, because "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (v. 5).

SPREADING THE SERVICE

The presidential campaign of 1896 was most unusual, in that one of the candidates stayed at home. While William Jennings Bryan was stumping the country, William McKinley had the country come to him in what was termed his "front-porch campaign." For eight weeks, every day but Sunday was like a circus day in Canton, Ohio. Decked in campaign badges, carrying flags and banners, delegations from all parts of the country tumbled off the trains. Greeted by a welcoming committee and led by a uniformed troop of clattering horsemen, they would wind in parade through the decorated streets of Canton to McKinley's house. With his lawn black with crowds, the candidate would appear on his porch, and mounting a chair, would say a few words on some campaign issue. As he closed, he would express the desire to shake the hand of each visitor and would hold an informal reception on the porch steps. The excursionists carried the word home. They had been close enough to shake hands, and they had seen his dear old mother. The front porch campaign had done its work.

In no way is the gospel to be held back for only a "front porch campaign." The book of Acts gives us glimpses of two congregations whose sense of mission spread beyond their city limits. When the catalyst of persecution scattered the Jerusalem church, that calamity dispersed the gospel seed as well (Acts 8:1-5). Some went as far as three hundred miles north to Antioch of Syria, with some even teaching Gentiles (11:19-20). When the news of conversions reached the remainder of the Jerusalem church, they again showed a sense of mission by sending

Barnabas to strengthen the young Antioch church. Some in that new congregation could have argued that their city was work enough for any church. Antioch was a pagan city, a site of pilgrimages to a "sacred" grove and temple of Apollo and the vice surrounding it. Yet, at God's direction, the Antioch church also looked beyond its locality, sending Paul and Barnabas on their first mission trip to Cyprus and into what is now central Turkey (13:1-3).

When the forces of Ben-hadad lost a battle to Israel's King Ahab, they excused the defeat by arguing that Israel's gods were "gods of the mountains." "Let us fight them in the plain," they reasoned, "and surely we shall be stronger than they" (1 Kings 20:23). With like loose logic, some would limit the Lord today. The fallacy takes many forms: God is the God of the church assembly, but not of Bible classes; the God of burial in baptism, but not of a death to a former way of life; the God of reliance on grace, but not of the attempt to obey; the God of sincerity, but not of scripture; the God of the Lord's supper, but not of sacrificial giving; the God of prayers, but not of personal evangelism; the God of fellowship in meals, but not in missions. Balanced leaders spread the church's service. The Lord of "over here" is also the Lord of "over there."

OUR RESPECTFUL RESPONSE

Maintaining a supply of balanced leaders will never be possible where a church fails to show its appreciation for good men who have devoted uncounted hours in God's service as elders. Recently I read in one of the nation's larger newspapers an intriguing article about smokejumpers, those elite firefighters who parachute into a remote mountainous area to battle an inferno. They work in fierce heat, often for two days at a stretch. Felling trees and grubbing out underbrush, they starve the fire by removing its fuel. When the flames are out, the hot coals crushed, and the smoldering logs buried, they back-pack their way out of the wilderness.

Good elders are God's "smokejumpers." Charged with the care of the fellowship God is growing, they sacrificially place themselves into the heat of a people's problems.

Risking displeasure, they work to prevent disaster. It is no wonder, therefore, that the scripture urges us: "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

Elders cannot foresee every fuss, be present in every problem, solve every situation, or calm every complainer, but most try. Be grateful for God's balanced "smokejumpers."

BALANCE IN WORSHIP

WILLIAM WOODSON

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

In every congregation one will find great variety in those attending: among the members and non-members there will be differences of age, maturity level, Bible knowledge, interests, likes and dislikes, educational levels, family life styles, local people as contrasted with those from other states, countries, races, etc.

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These differences have both wholesome and potentially not-so-wholesome aspects. A wholesome aspect is that presented by Proverbs 27:17: "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." One writer has explained this verse as follows: "...people must not shy away from interaction with their peers since it is an education in itself. The 'sharpening' can occur in any area in which people are engaged, be it business, intellectual, or physical competition." All of us can recall this wholesome effect when teachers and students discussed difficult

portions of Scripture, those less learned in singing learned from those with more talent or better training, etc. We should welcome these benefits of our different abilities and opportunities.

At the same time, however, differences of various kinds can bring about some not-so-wholesome events and situations. For example, those with more knowledge of Scripture may become wearied with those who are beginning such understanding [in school this may be called “dumbing down” the class], those with more musical training and ability may be “bothered” by those who can barely sing the words and melody of a well loved tune, or there may be those with a fondness for a certain “kind” of hymn [old, new, slow, fast, simple, complex verses, etc.] Whatever adjustment is made, if any, there is still in such differences the seed of problems to come, whether sooner or later, if these differences get out of balance.

Perhaps, at first, there may be patience and understanding as the more experienced wait for and assist those who must “catch up.” But, over time, patience with those of more limited talent, ability, progress, or preferences may well wear thin. If this continues too long, or if those in leadership positions in the particular areas do not recognize the need to make improvement of one kind or another, what began with some irritation may become very troubling to all concerned. Out of such possible developments, fortunate and not-so-fortunate, the present study develops.

UNDERSTANDING BALANCE (NOUN AND VERB)

From Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language (1958) one reads that “balance” or “to balance” is “to make or to be proportionate to; be equal to in weight, force, etc.” In matters of diet and food, to “balance” is to have “the right amount, proportion, and variety of the foods needed for health.” From Roget’s 21ST Century Thesaurus (1992) one reads: the verb “balance” means “to make equal, cause to have equilibrium, accord, adjust, come out even, equalize, harmonize”, etc.

Some Bible verses address this thought. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed [some lexicons say to have an appointment; to do so there must be unity of mind as to meeting, time, place; without such, a journey is not really possible. It is tragic indeed when brethren are unable to balance their interests, differences, and hindrances so that proper service and true worship can take place.]" (Amos 3:3); "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1); "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence [occasion of stumbling, or experiencing difficulties that cause harm to one's spiritual growth], neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:31-32); "Let all things be done decently [in the right way] and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40); "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not [to be beneficial, to function in living responsibly and effectively; how could such occur with clashing of interests and desires in tension, if not conflict, although held in check with great difficulty?]" (1 Cor. 10:23); "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded [be in agreement, living in harmony] one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind [used of an action agreed on, with consent, harmoniously] *and* one mouth [to speak in unity, to have no concealed, festering tensions preventing harmony] glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).

It is quickly evident from these selected verses, and others, that differences within a congregation as to age, biblical maturity, preferences, likes and dislikes, backgrounds of origin, or race, or economic or educational levels, and all related matters are to be brought under the rule of God for his glory and the peace and harmony of the church. This is the "balance" of which we speak.

**AUTHORIZED INSTRUCTIONS AND PRACTICES ARE NOT TO
BE CHANGED FOR "BALANCE"**

While the thought of "balance" in various ways is to be sought and preserved, matters of faith and practice enjoined of

God are not to be changed or sacrificed to obtain a kind of “balance” that requires the violation of biblical instruction.

The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is a burial and is to be received by those who believe, repent of sins, confess their faith, and are doing so [being buried in and raised from water] for the remission of sins (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; Acts 2:38). Suppose there is a group of members who have, for whatever reasons, decided that they do not believe baptism is a burial, that it is not for the remission of sins, and that it is acceptable to “baptize” babies. They become disturbed that various class studies and sermons focus on each of these topics and uphold them as the true stance to be taken by the church. They further claim that such focus troubles them and they are not pleased that this continues to be done. Consequently, they ask the elders to permit one or more of the men in their group to present several lessons denying the faith and practice of the rest of the members and do so in the name of having a “balance” between both views so that the teaching will not reflect the view and wishes of one group over and against the views and wishes of the other. Peace, they maintain, can and will be present with this “balance” of both views, and neither will prevail as the accepted view of the church.

What should be done in such a case? Will the proposed “balance” be accepted and maintained by the church, or will it be refused? One would like to believe it would be refused in most, if not virtually every faithful church of Christ. Why? Because these matters of the action of baptism, the purpose of baptism, and the persons to be baptized are taught and made obligatory in the Bible! What is taught in the Bible as obligatory is not to be “balanced” between those who accept and those who reject such understanding. The authority of the Bible on these and all other obligatory teachings and practices must prevail, even if the ones refusing such faith and practice are unhappy. This teaching must not be “balanced” away to please anyone.

This same reasoning is to be maintained and to prevail in those obligatory teachings and practices revealed for the church to uphold and follow: the same would be true as to observing the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week; not using instrumental

music in worship; having men, rather than women, who are qualified serving as elders; having men lead prayers in mixed audiences rather than allowing women to hold leadership roles in public worship services; and so on with other matters of discussion of similar activities in current thought and practice.

The distinction between matters that can be "balanced" and those that cannot be "balanced," as discussed, entails the compliance with those matters of Bible teaching and practice that are obligatory and observed as contrasted to those which are matters of expediency and judgment! Areas of expediency and judgment properly lie under the decision making responsibility of the eldership of the particular church. Will we meet for Bible study at 9:00 a.m. or 9:30 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. on Sunday morning? The elders no doubt will learn the situation and preference of as many members as possible on the options proposed and make their decision accordingly. If, however, a good case is later made for changing this time of meeting, the time can be adjusted, "balanced" if one will, according to the information brought forth and applied in good faith and good will.

A current topic of growing importance in some congregations has to do with the type of songs that are regularly sung in worship services. Extremes may exist where on one hand, songs are limited to a few old and familiar hymns, led by a brother who has only a few songs he can lead and does so time and again; and, on the other hand, a song leader insists on leading only the newest songs, known and familiar to only a few members but cherished by the leader. Surely these extremes seldom are so glaringly present, but somewhat of this situation may often be seen and without care and attention can result in serious difficulty.

A wise and attentive eldership, along with members who are open to trying new songs but not willing to have one type all the time, can work together with the song leaders to give thought to the "balance" between the old and the new, the slow as well as the quick and lively, and the well known and beloved with those newer songs which require some technical competence to sing. A steady but gradual introduction and instruction in improving worship and edification in singing would seem a good approach to

follow. There are many time honored and beloved hymns that will regularly be sung as well as many newer or even newest hymns that honor God and edify brethren, as they are carefully added to the repertoire of the congregation, as training in singing both can be provided with skill, patience, and dignity.

Such “balance” is achieved best when there is an insightful eldership that can rise above personal or group preferences and encourage the blending of various types of scriptural hymns before a potential problem emerges. When such “nudging” occurs in a loving, caring, and thoughtful congregation, with thoughtful regard of all for each other, unity and growth in understanding and improvement with new abilities can be achieved.

One additional thought: new preachers often have a different way of presenting biblical sermons, and this may require “balance” between his preferences of sermon preparation and delivery style [not biblical content verses non-biblical content] as compared with the preferences of a preceding preacher who was well beloved and respected. This may become a sticking point that hinders the best of both the preacher and the audience. Different preachers have different abilities; different audiences have become acquainted with different ways of preparing and presenting sound gospel sermons. Care and communication, as well as due consideration on the part of both the audience and preacher, can result in more flexible ways of preparation and increasing edification by the audience.

There is no magic formula for making decisions in these matters wherein “balance” in the areas noted, and those of a similar nature, is discussed. Each congregation is autonomous and may do as is judged best by the local elders with members. What is edifying in one church may not be so in another. Mutual love and respect, with provision for improvement and change effected in a gradual but steady way, will usually bring better unity and edification to the brethren.

In these areas of legitimate “balance,” not in matters of Bible authorized service, the resolve must be to proceed “With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one

another in love; [we are to resolve to do what is needed] endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3).

BALANCE IN SOUND DOCTRINE

TOM HOLLAND

A discussion of balance in sound doctrine implies that doctrine is important. In fact, doctrine is so important in becoming and being a Christian that doctrine needs to be kept in balance.

An emphasis on balance in doctrine also implies the possibility of getting doctrine out of balance. This presentation on balance in doctrine will focus on the importance of doctrine, some ways doctrine may lack balance, and ways to keep the balance in doctrine.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCTRINE

The inspired apostle Paul charged Titus to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1). The word translated “sound” means “to be healthy.” Titus was to speak words that would enhance spiritual health for aged men, women, and young men (Tit. 2:2-7).

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In contrast to “healthy” doctrine one sees the danger of false teaching. Timothy was instructed to “rightly divide” God’s word of truth because men like Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching false doctrine about the resurrection, and their message

was spreading “like cancer.” Consequently, the faith of some was being “overthrown” (2 Tim. 2:15-18).

Healthy doctrine builds up. False doctrine tears down. Healthy doctrine promotes the good. False doctrine fosters the bad. Healthy doctrine unites. False doctrine divides. The apostle John emphasized the importance of doctrine. One cannot have the right relationship with God unless he “abides in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). There has been a controversy as to the meaning of “the doctrine of Christ.” Does this expression mean the doctrine about Christ, or does the “doctrine of Christ” mean His teaching? Stott has an informative explanation:

The Christian seeks to abide not only in “Christ but in the doctrine of Christ.” At first sight this phrase, literally “the doctrine of the Christ” (NEB) might be taken as meaning; “the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ” (Smith), and this would suit the context well. But the “usage of the N. T.” (Westcott, Brooke) requires that the genitive be interpreted not as objective, “the teaching about Christ,” but as subjective, “Christ’s teaching.” This no doubt includes what Christ continued to teach through the apostles (cf. Acts 1:1; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:3).¹

This identification of the “doctrine of Christ” as being His doctrine or teaching is certainly emphasized in 2 John 6, “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.” John had earlier written, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

The importance of doctrine is also emphasized in Paul’s affirmation about the inspiration of Scripture. The “God-breathed Scripture” is “profitable for doctrine” (2 Tim. 3:16).

The “doctrine of God our Savior” is so important that Paul instructed Titus to “exhort servants” to “adorn the doctrine.” The word translated “adorn” is the same word from which we get the English word “cosmetic.”² Servants could beautify the doctrine by faithful, honest, and respectful service (Tit. 2:9-10).

There are other passages that show the importance of doctrine, but the ones just examined surely reveal that the doctrine of Christ, of the inspired Scripture, is vital to salvation and the Christian life. However, sound doctrine must be kept in balance, not distorted.

WAYS DOCTRINE MAY LACK BALANCE

Jesus had problems with religious leaders who lacked balance in their teaching and practice. The Lord declared, "For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone" (Matt. 23:23).

There needs to be balance in the doctrine of first principles and the teaching concerning the nature of the Christian life.

First principles are the foundation, and the foundation is necessary. However, one should know that first principles are the foundation upon which one is to build the life of a mature Christian (Heb. 5:12-6:3).

The biblical doctrine of baptism is important because it is a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16), but baptism should not be preached or taught to the neglect of the life that follows baptism (Titus 2:11-14). On the other hand, neglecting first principles may result in people accepting the denominational doctrine of unconditional grace and/or the doctrine of salvation by faith only.

The first principles relative to worship must be preached, including the fact that using mechanical instruments of music in worship is a violation, a transgression, of God's specific directive to sing. However, emphasis also needs to be given to the necessity of singing "with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

It is also important to maintain balance in specific and generic commands. When one tries to impose a specific on a

general command, the doctrine is as much out of balance as it would be with the imposition of a general on a specific command.

Informed people understand that a general command gives the right for expedients, or means to fulfill the general command. If the Lord directs the *what*, but does not specify the *how*, His people should be careful and refrain from providing binding specifics for the Lord. The audacity to “make laws” for the Lord is just as serious as breaking the laws that the Lord has given (1 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

It is in this area that God’s people have had much difficulty. The specific command to sing and the specific directive to accompany the singing with the human heart (Eph. 5:19), when treated as a general command permitting any type of mechanical instrument of music, have resulted in division in the church.

The general command to “visit,” that is “to visit with help,”³ the orphans and widows (Jas. 1:27), when handled as a specific, has resulted in much confusion and even division in the body of Christ.

Another problem relative to sound doctrine and balance comes from an over-emphasis of a particular biblical doctrine to the neglect of equally important Bible truth.

There are “you shall nots” in the doctrine of Christ (Rom. 13:9: note five “You shall nots”), but one should be careful to keep balance in the negative and the positive. In this verse of “You shall not,” Paul emphasized a positive, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom. 13:9).

Some preaching seems to be mostly negative. This kind of preaching can cause discouragement and even promote radicalism in the church. Years ago, a Christian college president, now deceased, said to me, “You cannot build on what you are against.”

Paul urged Timothy to preach the word with balance, “reprove, rebuke,” certainly, but “exhort” also (2 Tim. 4:1-4,

especially verse 2). God's people need exhortation. The book of Hebrews is an excellent example of balancing the negative, such as do not neglect your salvation, do not depart from God, do not crucify God's Son again, and do not stay in spiritual immaturity, with positive exhortations (Heb. 6:1-9). Consider the three "let us" exhortations of Hebrews 10:19-24).

Another way to get things out of balance is by emphasizing externals and minimizing the lesson involving a spiritual dimension. For example, how many times has the so-called *hat* question of 1 Corinthians eleven been discussed to the minimizing or even the neglect of the basic doctrine of headship relationships? Paul wrote, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3).

Let us consider the Lord's Supper and the biblical instruction to partake of this memorial every first day of the week. The time for observing the Lord's Supper may be emphasized to the inadvertent neglect of the way to keep the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11: 24-26).

Let us also consider the subject of baptism, which is a New Testament subject. One could emphasize the action of baptism, a burial (Col. 2:12), and neglect the attitude that is necessary for biblical baptism (Rom. 6:1-6, 17-18). Paul connected faith and baptism (Col. 2:12).

The Lord's second coming is an important subject. Much attention is given in the New Testament to the Lord's coming again. However, placing emphasis on the time when He will return (Matt. 24:36) and on what He will do when He returns gets the truth out of balance. The results are the many forms of premillennialism. Our Savior put the emphasis of His second coming on preparation, desiring that we be ready whenever He comes (Matt. 24:44; 25:13).

Sound doctrine is vital to salvation and serving the Lord faithfully, post-modernism notwithstanding, but the doctrine must be kept in balance. Doctrine of first principles must be balanced

with the doctrine of the Christian life. The negatives must be balanced with the positives of Christian living.

HOW TO KEEP BALANCE

There is a way to avoid extremism, which is the failure to balance doctrine. Paul emphasized the way to keep balance in doctrine in his preaching and practice. In reminding the elders of the Ephesian church about his work in Ephesus, he said, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

God's counsel is His will, His grand design for mankind.

What is God's counsel relative to the way of salvation? The jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), is a good example of the two general components of salvation, namely, God's part and man's response. "To be saved" is God's part in a person's salvation. What has God done to save us, and why did He provide for our salvation? Involved in this provision is God's love, mercy, grace, the gift of His Son's death on the cross for our sins, and the revelation of His means of saving us, the gospel revelation (Rom. 1:16-17).

God has done His part, now "what must I do" in order to receive salvation from "God, our Savior," as Paul identified Him (1 Tim. 2:3)? What one must do to be saved is summarized by the active word "believe" in Acts 16:31. What is involved in faith? Is the matter of having faith in faith, or must we "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31? What does faith in Christ involve? Is repentance necessary? Luke 13:3 says, "unless you repent you will...perish." Is confession of Christ important? Matthew 10:32-33 and Romans 10:9-10 say that it is. Is baptism essential? Mark 16:16 says "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the who does not believe will be condemned."

What about the eternal dimension of salvation (1 Pet. 1:5)? Is eternal salvation conditional? (Phil. 2:12-13).

The book of Colossians provides an excellent study in doctrinal balance. The negatives of chapter two, the efforts to reject the Lord's preeminence, follow the affirmation of Christ's preeminence in chapter one. Then chapter three presents an excellent discussion of the negatives and the positives of the Christian life.

As surely as the doctrine of Christ is vital to our having the right relationship with Christ, a balance in the doctrine is necessary for maintaining sound or healthy doctrine.

ENDNOTES

1. J. R. W. Stott, The Epistles of John (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968) 212.
2. W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, vol. I (Westwood, N J: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966) 32.
3. W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, vol. IV (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966) 190.

BALANCE IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE

DAVID R. PHARR

Several years ago I taught a class on church discipline during the lectures at a Christian college. Another speaker was assigned to teach on the specifics of withdrawing fellowship, but my assignment was regarding the more general aspects of discipline. Accordingly, I emphasized that discipline is a constant responsibility toward all the members. It means training members in righteous living through instruction, admonition, and encouragement. Our definition of discipline should not be limited to withdrawal action. In view of this broader and more fundamental kind of discipline I made this statement: "A congregation that always practices this kind of discipline may never need to withdraw from anyone," meaning that if all the members are trained and encouraged in this positive discipline we could hope that they will all stay faithful. Afterwards an irate brother came up to complain that I had not taught the truth because the church is commanded to withdraw. My explanations may not have been adequate, but he seemed so obsessed about that aspect of discipline that he was offended by my suggestion that withdrawing is not the first priority in discipline and usually is not the most effective.

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This illustrates the need for considering "Balance in Church Discipline." Things may come to the place where people must be put out of the fellowship of the church, but in too many cases there has been too little prior attention to how those persons might have

been kept in the right path by careful teaching, patient counseling, and loving friendship. Is it possible that we may put more emphasis on withdrawing fellowship from an erring brother than on extending meaningful fellowship to a weak brother?

FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship ought to be understood as more than whether one is on a membership list. Fellowship includes sharing in joy and sorrow (Rom. 12:15), consideration of the varying needs of individuals (1 Thess. 5:14), exhorting one another (Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25), meek instruction to those who are going in the wrong direction (2 Tim. 2:25-26), working to restore those who are overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20), and bearing others' burdens (Gal. 6:2).

Nevertheless, impenitent activity by a member may require corrective discipline. Corrective discipline is the terminology by which we refer to the steps or the process that leads to one either being restored or being put out of the church.

MATTHEW 18:15-17

Jesus gave a four-step procedure for how to deal with a brother who has caused harm to another (Matt. 18:15-17). It is about personal grievances between individuals, grievances which obviously are of such seriousness that they may potentially require radical action. There is no example in the New Testament church of these steps being precisely followed. Its value in this study is to show a reasonable agenda for dealing with *some* cases. In other cases, such as when Simon made his covetous proposal in Acts 8:18, Peter could immediately declare judgment against him. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:21).¹

The aim in every case is, of course, to bring about restoration (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). Public censure follows when those efforts have been exhausted. Particular note should be made of the severity of

the spiritual consequences for one who will not heed the church's pleas for repentance. He should be regarded as "an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17). It might not seem politically correct to classify such a brother "an heathen," but it is said of another guilty person that "he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8).

1 CORINTHIANS 5

We do not know what prior efforts, if any, had been made to restore the fornicator at Corinth, but things had deteriorated to the point that it was time for the church to "put away from among [themselves]...that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Simply stated, he was to be put out of the church, which would mean that the church would "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (v. 5). When we became Christians the Lord "delivered us from the power of darkness, and ... translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:13). To deliver him to Satan means to put him out of the church and to put him back where he had previously been—in the kingdom of Satan. The destruction of the flesh refers to overcoming those fleshly desires and activities which must be "put to death" (Col. 3:5f). In another case Paul said that Hymenaeus and Alexander were "delivered unto Satan, that they [might]... learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim 1:20).

We freely refer to withdrawing fellowship, but what does that actually mean? The expression "put away from yourselves" is instructive. The action commanded means in actuality to put one out of the church. Yes, he is still a baptized believer who was once added to the church, and he can repent and be restored, but when "put away" he no longer enjoys the benefits of being in the family. The duty of the congregation is to make this known to him and to the rest and to so limit association with him as to make it obvious that he no longer belongs.

The goal of corrective discipline is that the sinning brother might repent and be saved—"that the spirit may be saved in the

day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). At the same time the action provides for a "quarantine" for the protection and welfare of the church. It is significant that these instructions are not addressed to the sinning brother but to the rest. The metaphor of leaven is used to warn that toleration of overt wickedness can influence others to fall into sin. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (v. 6). Sin can spread like yeast in bread or like a plague in a community. Sin needs to be rebuked, not only to correct the sinner, but "that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

Here the text of 1 Corinthians chapter five advances from the immediate situation to general instructions regarding social affiliations. In an earlier letter, not preserved for us, Paul had told them not to keep company with immoral people. He acknowledged that we cannot completely separate ourselves from this sinful world, but then he demanded that a more strict quarantine be applied to any members who were living in overt and deliberate sin. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (v. 11).

It should be observed that the lifestyles named are blatant examples of iniquity. Similar instruction in Ephesians 5:11 says, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." There the context lists: fornication, all uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting, being a whoremonger, an unclean person, a covetous man, and other wickedness that Paul said was too shameful to describe (vv. 3-12). A similar list is given in 2 Timothy 3, where we are told, "from such turn away." These withdrawal passages are not concerned with trivial issues, personal disagreements, or even spiritual weaknesses, but with overtly sinful conduct—sins of commission, not sins of omission.

2 JOHN 9-11 AND 1 TIMOTHY 6:3-5

Withholding fellowship was certainly in view when John wrote of those whose teaching was not according to the truth. "If

there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 Jn. 10-11). This parallels instructions to Timothy: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness ... from such withdraw thyself" (1 Tim. 6:3-5). This is expressed another way in Romans 16:17, which states that divisive teachers of false doctrine are to be marked and avoided. Other translations show the force of "avoid them" – "turn away from them" (ASV); "keep away from them" (NIV). The same applies to a heretic, or divisive person, who ought to be rejected after the first and second admonition (Tit. 3:10).

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6, 14-15

One of Paul's concerns with Thessalonica was that some were not working to provide for themselves and were busybodies. His remedy was blunt: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). He insisted that such instructions were to be enforced. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6). In 2:15 he spoke of holding to apostolic "traditions." We are inclined toward the same thing in 3:6, where it is singular: "tradition." However, the immediate context seems to indicate the tradition set by Paul in respect to working for his livelihood (v. 7ff). We have already noticed that failure to provide for one's family is an especially detestable sin (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul was particularly concerned with this immediate problem and expected his instructions to be followed, so he said, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thess. 3:14-15).

A caution is needed, however, about pressing the implications of a text too far. While the principle may be applied

generally, it may be dangerously convenient to use “walketh disorderly” as a catch all for more than the apostle intended. Any refusal to obey apostolic teaching would be to walk disorderly, but it is evident that Paul was more inclined toward patient instruction than haste in withdrawing. These instructions must be balanced with the approach he gave in I Thessalonians 5:14. “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.”

Various biblical examples can be cited to show numerous failings among New Testament Christians. Consider the number of things that were out of order in the Corinthian church, but in regard to most of them, nothing was said about withdrawing. The epistle to the Hebrews rebuked lack of spiritual growth and even neglect of attendance being the “manner of some,” but nothing was said about withdrawing. These are sins of omission. It is in order to ask, “At what degree of omission is withdrawal warranted?” We tend to measure faithfulness by attendance. I have noticed that corrective discipline seems to be applied more in regard to absenteeism than for almost anything else—certainly more than for failure to give liberally, for murmuring, or for gossip. How much must one neglect the assembly before corrective discipline must be applied? Someone wrote about a preacher who was insisting that men would need to be withdrawn from if they did not attend business meetings. That is extreme, but what about it? Is it Sunday morning only? at least twice a month? We assume the time might come when impenitence would call for it, but who decides when? The late Roy Lanier, Sr. commented on the matter this way:

Since the Bible does not tell us how long to follow this course of admonishing the disorderly, none of us dare set a time limit. Each group of elders will make its own decision. This may or may not please the preacher, but if he raises a fuss about it, he will be liable to the charge of being disorderly by trying to usurp the powers of the elders.²

WITHDRAWING FROM CONGREGATIONS?

With a subject like this it is to be expected that various “What if ...” questions will arise. It is also the kind of thing wherein there are extreme notions and abuses. Congregations and individuals are not given the option to ignore the duty of discipline, but there are always issues of judgment as to how best to proceed in various cases. Among abuses is being “a busybody in other men’s [read churches’] matters.”

Can one congregation withdraw from another? For the most part brethren recognize congregational autonomy, but does the necessity of discipline supersede autonomy?

In the absence of any biblical procedure for one church to withdraw from another, it has been said, “Well, we could withdraw from all the members individually.” This is a distinction without a difference. It also ignores the fact that some of those members may not be involved in the error. Take note of the church at Sardis, which in spite of being a church that needed to repent, yet had “a few names ... which [had]... not defiled their garments” (Rev. 3:1-4). Glib judgment might say these ought to move to Philadelphia, a better congregation, but that advice was not in the Lord’s letter!

On the other hand, it is reasonable and necessary to withhold fellowship, to refuse to participate with, or to refuse to endorse a group that blatantly teaches or practices something that is wrong. Certainly it is in order for these concerns to be shared with our members. John’s instruction not to receive false teachers certainly also means not to put ourselves under their influence or to participate in their error. It goes beyond reason, however, for preachers, editors, or even an eldership to set themselves up to decide for others who, outside their own autonomy, cannot be in fellowship. Not only is there a papal-like presumption in this, but their pronouncements may be built on rumors or misrepresentations. Romans 16:17 is cited as authority for “marking” brethren. “Mark” is interpreted to mean branding them, with the expectation that, once they have been so identified, no

faithful person can associate with them. The meaning of “mark them” is simply to be watchful, alert. This is similar to Jesus’ caution to “beware” (Matt. 7:15).

This leads to another question, “Must one congregation honor the withdrawal action of another?” The answer is “yes,” provided it was a legitimate withdrawal, but “no” if we mean one congregation making decisions for another. It is not so much that the one congregation is honoring the withdrawal action of the other as it is that they see that the withdrawn from brother’s unrepentant conduct requires the same position by the other.

Sometimes letters are sent to other congregations advising of a withdrawal. This is thought to be in order as the means of “marking.” What is the duty of the congregations that receive such a letter? Obviously they should be alerted by it. Should they be expected to endorse and comply with the action without investigation? Some go so far as to say that any who do not honor their action must themselves be “marked.” We do have a New Testament case that shows the danger of acceptance without investigation. A church dictator by the name of Diotrephes withheld fellowship from good men, including the apostle John. He even sent out warnings that any who ignored his “marking” would themselves be excommunicated (3 John 9-10).

WITHDRAWING MEMBERSHIP?

Another question arises over those who by their own choice and determination quit the church. This has been highlighted in view of certain lawsuits. Those who obey the gospel are added to the church by the Lord, but their obedience is by their own personal choice. While people do not “join” in the typical denominational sense, they obviously enter the church voluntarily. Is it not also possible for them to quit voluntarily? In a case not so long ago a woman notified the elders that she no longer wanted to be a member and that she intended to go to the Baptists “because they were more accepting of divorced people.” Regardless of her thoughts on the divorce issue, does the church have any power to prevent her leaving? The question then is what action is required

of the church. Assuming efforts have been made to discourage her departure, what else can be done beyond publicly acknowledging her decision and praying for her repentance?

There are also situations in which it has been years since a one time member was associated with the congregation. That person simply dropped out of sight. Nothing was done about it at the time. Now, when many current members may not even know the person, the question comes up as to whether something needs to be done. It is always right to make efforts to bring a lost sheep home. However, if those efforts fail, what kind of public action is needed within the congregation?

STAYING BALANCED

Some seem to have made a hobby out of corrective discipline. It seems to be the solution for every problem and every failure within the membership. Again it must be emphasized that the primary emphasis in discipline must be in patient teaching, positive examples, and brotherly companionship. Our efforts should be to encourage growth, not to force compliance. Withdrawing fellowship ought not to be our means of venting frustrations. Preachers and faithful leaders may be discouraged over poor attendance and other lack of participation. The time may come when public action is necessary, but we must be honest as to whether actions are vindictive or whether they are compassionate and will serve the right purpose.

In speaking on balance in church discipline, it is necessary to call attention to possible misinterpretations and abuses. This should not be construed to mean, however, that the duties of church discipline are to be ignored. No doubt this is an area in which today's churches often fail. About the only thing which modern society is willing to "judge" is judging itself. Immoral conduct is accepted and glorified. Condemnation of sin and efforts to correct are labeled "unloving" and "nobody's business." When toleration is the order of the day, biblical mandates about church discipline will seem archaic and repugnant. Yet discipline is

essential, even to the point, when necessary, of removing one from the fellowship of the church.

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture references are from the King James Version except where indicated otherwise.
2. Roy H. Lanier, Sr., 20 Years of the Problem Page, Vol. 1 (Abilene: Quality Pub., 1984) 128.

KEEPING BALANCE IN CHURCH GROWTH LESSON 3

TOM HOLLAND

Why is a study of church growth important? One reason is the importance of maintaining the identity of the church of Christ. A desire for numerical growth could result in a compromise with the world, especially the denominational world. The doctrine of Christ may be compromised. The false values of the world may be embraced.

Another reason church growth is important is because evangelism is a vital dimension of New Testament Christianity (Matt. 28:18-20), and church growth is one indication that evangelism is active (Acts 4:4).

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A third reason to emphasize church growth is that the church may become "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:14-19). The Lord's church needs to be active, energetic, and involved in doing good. Church growth is an evidence of active involvement in good works (Eph. 2:10).

Fourth, church growth is important as a means of both promoting and keeping peace in a congregation. People involved in church growth are less likely to be grumblers, complainers, and discontented members (Eph. 4:1-6; Matt. 5:9).

Finally, church growth is important in establishing the personal worth of each member of the church. The ideal of personal value is declared in passages such as Ephesians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

This study of church growth will examine the meaning of church growth, the means of church growth, and the importance of keeping balance in church growth.

THE MEANING OF CHURCH GROWTH

Several books have been written on the subject of church growth. A careful reading of these books reveals the secrets to church growth, numerically. This is not to minimize numerical growth as one indication of church growth. However, several factors may influence church growth numerically. Economics may have a significant part. If an area is booming economically, that area will attract people looking for good jobs. Among these people may be those who are already members of the church and others who can be converted. While some congregations in financially depressed areas and in rural areas may be declining in numbers, their former members may be increasing the membership of other congregations, and people may confuse church swelling with church growth.

Another thing that may contribute to the numerical growth of a congregation is trouble and discord in other congregations. It is not unusual for people to get upset about something such as dislike for a preacher, lack of confidence in the leadership, or someone teaching denominational doctrine, and so people leave one congregation and go to another one. Church swapping is not church growth.

There is an excellent explanation of church growth given by the Holy Spirit through Luke's inspired pen in the following words: "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Luke also recorded the fact that "the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples

multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 5:14; 6:7).¹

Following are some pertinent observations. Both of these passages reveal a church that was growing despite having experienced problems. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira preceded the first inspired explanation of church growth. Complaints from the Hellenists about their widows being “neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1) preceded the second.

Problems that are ignored will not resolve themselves, so there is need for action. God took action to resolve the first problem, and the apostles resolved the other problem. The church grew although it had faced internal problems.

Some problems come with church growth, such as how to assimilate new members and effectively utilize their talents. A growing congregation may need more room for classes and additional seating for worship assemblies.

Regardless of problems both external and internal, the Lord’s church grew in Jerusalem. What did church growth mean? “Believers were added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14). These people were not just added to a membership list or a church directory, they had a vital, living relationship with the Lord. The title “Lord” means “having power or authority.”² These believers respected the authority of the Lord Jesus in the requirement to be saved, namely, obedience to Christ. If they acknowledged Him as Lord, then they would worship as He, through the word of the apostles, directed. Furthermore, they would live according to the directives in a new covenant and not by the laws of the old covenant.

In being “added to the Lord,” they experienced a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus that is often described in the New Testament as being “in Christ” or “in Him” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:13). Furthermore, they knew that being “added to the Lord” meant that they were added to “His body,” the church (Acts 2:47; Eph. 2:16).

Church growth meant that many people were “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). These were not faith only people. They were

people who were obedient to the revealed faith, that is, the word of God to be believed and obeyed (Jude 3; Acts 6:7).

MEANS OF CHURCH GROWTH

There was an obvious numerical growth (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). What produced this numerical growth? As surely as "believers were added to the Lord," someone was spreading the word of the Lord (Acts 6:7), because faith comes from exposure to God's word (Acts 4:4; Rom. 10:17).

God's word was being persistently and faithfully declared and taught (Acts 5:42). The Lord's word was also being practiced. The church demonstrated by a daily distribution the loving care of the members.

There was joy and excitement in the church (Acts 2:46). In a world of hopeless gloom and doom, the Lord's people radiated the joy of fellowship with each other and the peace of hope that they enjoyed in Christ Jesus.

The Lord's people had strength not only to ford the streams of suffering, but also to climb the mountain of joy. They could be threatened, but not intimidated (Acts 4); they could be physically abused, but not deterred from spreading the word of God (Acts 5:29; 5:41; 6:7).

A study of church growth in Acts reveals two necessary aspects of growth, internal and external. The internal precedes the external.

Church growth comes from a zeal to "rescue the perishing" with the Lord's word and to demonstrate the positive power of the Christ-like life.

KEEPING THE BALANCE

Church growth comes from keeping the balance in externals and internals. When the hearts of members are right in God's sight and are involved in worship and work for the Lord,

then the singing will have meaning, personal evangelism efforts will be properly motivated, pulpit preaching will ring with conviction, and there will be a faithful proclamation of the word.

Worship will not consist of rituals and forms. The acts or avenues of worship will focus on the true audience of worship; namely, God (John 4:24), and every act of worship will come forth from the hearts of the worshippers (Col. 3:16).

If worship degenerates into appeals to the fleshly desires of people for entertainment, and if emotional experience is confused with profound respect for God's ways of worship, the internal and external are out of balance.

There needs to be a balance in pulpit preaching and personal evangelism. These outreach efforts are not in competition; they compliment each other (Acts 5:42).

If the responsibility of reaching the lost is limited to pulpit preaching, many people will not be reached with the saving power in the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

Personal evangelism offers opportunity for all of God's people to get involved in spreading the word by teaching in home Bible studies, writing letters, sending or giving tracts, using the telephone or e-mail, or other means of teaching the lost.

There is still potential power in the pulpit to proclaim the message of salvation (1 Cor. 1:18-25); to motivate people to become "soul-winners;" to urge true, faithful worship; to inspire people to give to the Lord; to urge Christ-like living; and to promote unity, joy, peace, and hope.

The effectiveness of the pulpit is over only for those who have lost confidence in the power of God's word to impact the minds and lives of people for good.

Balance must be maintained in the worship and work of the church. The worship in the church is essential in God's honor and

praise (John 4:24). Worship is also vital to maintaining zeal for the Lord's work (Heb. 10:24-25).

However, the purpose of the church is not fulfilled by worship assemblies. Signs seen in the foyers of some church auditoriums give the true emphasis: "Enter to Worship, Leave to Serve."

The church is more than a worshipping assembly. It is also a living, dynamic spiritual organism that is actively involved in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

Balance must also be maintained in community service (Gal. 6:10) and serving the spiritual needs of the people (Matt. 4:4).

Serving the needs of people in distress may indeed open hearts so that the Lord's word can be taught and people converted to Christ, but the word must be taught if the souls of people are to be saved (Jas. 1:21). The latter effort may meet resistance, even rejection (Acts 13:46). If one is providing for the physical needs of people – food, water, clothing, housing – very little if any resentment will be encountered. But provision for the physical needs should be a means of providing opportunities for proclaiming or teaching God's word to meet the spiritual needs of people.

Living things grow. Dead things do not grow. It is important to understand what church growth means. It is also necessary to become personally involved in church growth. The Lord's church in Philadelphia, Asia, had before it "an open door" (Rev. 3:8).

The Lord's church today has before her an "open door" to evangelizing over six billion people. God forbid that our involvement with the present, temporal aspect of life, or indifference to the Lord's work, keep us from going through the door of opportunity to do good, enjoy the Christian life, help people be saved, and bring glory and honor to God.

ENDNOTES

1. All scripture quotations are from the New King James version.
2. W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. III (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966) 16.

BALANCE IN THE BODY

EDWIN S. JONES

The church, the body of Christ, just like our physical bodies, requires a balancing of varied components if it is to function properly. Individuals must be balanced in their personal Christ-likeness (Eph. 4:15). Priorities and values must be given the different weights they require (Matt. 23:23-24). The diversity in the makeup of those within a given congregation demands a blending of talents and personalities (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Understanding the differences between God's scale of values and those of the world, since we have kingdom citizenship (Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13), also need to be calculated and applied to life (Luke 16:1-13).

RECIPE ILLUSTRATION

To illustrate the importance of completeness in our understanding of balance, let me try to wrap the idea up in an illustration. We will call this the "Recipe Illustration."

A recipe is a somewhat complicated thing. It has directions that define its purpose, but the directions involve a number of factors. To produce successfully the desired creation, both linear and spatial thinking are required. We generally do fairly well with the linear thinking, the kind that goes in a straight line from point A to point B. A good recipe, however, has some side roads to take along the way. It is this spatial kind of thinking, the type that sees the whole "space" of a thing, which becomes invaluable.

The "space" of a recipe involves temperature (often different levels at different times and for different parts of the mix), ingredients, proportions, various sequences of making and

adding, and certain “intangibles” that one acquires through practice (cf. Heb. 5:14). This does not all follow a straight line; things happen at different times and in different ways.

In seeking to avoid extremes and achieve a biblical balance in the body, there are also a number of “spatial” considerations. Biblical things have differing weights (Matt. 23:23; I Cor. 13:13). Some things require more time to master, and some things are more fundamentally significant to the success of the whole.

For instance, Matthew 22:40 lets us know that all of God’s commandments “hang” on the two great commandments. A similar notation is found in Matthew 7:12, where the “Golden Rule” is given as the summation of the Law and the Prophets. Overarching principles govern the application of specific commands as they prove suitable for different occasions. We are not to major in minors. A cake with more salt than flour would be a very bitter thing to consume.

Sequence is also of considerable importance in getting the mix right. Belief, for instance, must precede repentance, and repentance must come before baptism (Acts 2:36-38). In other words, certain prerequisites exist.

As a further example, the frequently heard dodge involving Mark 16:16 is readily defused when we understand that belief must precede baptism. There is no need for Mark to read “He who disbelieves and is not baptized shall be condemned.” Baptism is not up for consideration when belief is not present.

Additionally, timing can make or break a proper biblical action. In Corinth, a particularly sinful situation needed immediate, public action (1 Cor. 5:1-8). A man living with his father’s wife is not a situation requiring patient deliberation and measured responses.

Usually, however, dealing with sin requires that certain things transpire before “going public.” Normally, steps are to be taken, privacy is to be preserved as long as possible, and

termination of fellowship is to be the last, not the first, resort. (Matt. 18:15-17).

Other things rely on proper timing, such as when and how to speak in a given circumstance (Col. 4:5-6; Prov. 25:11). Words have an appropriateness tied to them when we consider what to speak. Well-spoken, timely words are of great value (Prov. 25:11).

In addition, the severity or deliberate nature of an action can make all the difference. For a false teacher who has an agenda, the needed response is swift and hard (2 John 9-10); but for someone who is teachable, patience and gentleness are demanded (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Apollos was easily called aside and corrected (Acts 18:24-28); Simon the Sorcerer needed a less sympathetic encounter (Acts 8:18-22).

Learning how to use the truth while avoiding extremes requires practice in order to train ourselves to accurately handle the word (Heb. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:15). Such abilities require us to be able to see the whole space of a given circumstance before we can take the steps required to use the pertinent principles.

There are linear needs in daily applications to be sure, but there are spatial considerations required before the will of God can be fully appreciated. Sometimes things are largely straightforward, but we all know that life can get very complicated.

The Sermon on the Mount is a classic example of Jesus addressing the limited, pharisaic interpretations of the Law of Moses and providing a full, rich correction. What the Pharisees said about the Law did not commonly take into account all the necessary factors. Jesus was, therefore, intent on filling the Law and the Prophets to their intended fullness (Matt. 5:17-20).

By selecting somewhat different angles when we consider balance, we can get a better feel for what is required for biblical success. We must, therefore, view balance as a holistic discipline. Even as God's multifaceted nature works in complete harmony, so we must allow the full expression of His revealed will to work together in the search for well-rounded truth. The word of God is

living and active (Heb. 4:12). We cannot allow the Bible's richness to be compromised by extremes distorting its character by dealing with only a part of the whole picture. Balance is needed as the body of Christ takes truth into the marketplace.

A BALANCED CONGREGATION

With the "Recipe Principle" understood, let us look at some additional ingredients involved in a balanced congregation. Leadership is a good starting point, as a congregation will be hard pressed to rise above its leadership.

Matthew 20:20-28 sets the tone. Servant leadership is demanded in the Lord's church because the Lord Himself was a servant leader. A point of balance comes from Hebrews 13:17. Leadership, even servant leadership, must be obeyed. In obedience, however, we must not forget that God only gives authority in matters where His will is obeyed (Mark 12:17). Nevertheless, service is the overriding characteristic of church leadership that must be present if the body is to function as intended. Leaders should smell like sheep.

The family nature of Christ's body is another vital part of the balance mixture (Matt.12:46-50). Unless a congregation relates to itself as a family, it is out of balance. Its subsequent activities will look more like worldly groups than the Lord's church. Yet how often is this mark of identity given its due (John 13:34-35; 17:21-23)? A primary fact of balance in family is that family love and unity must be based on God's word (John 17:17). There is, unfortunately, much about family love that comes from misguided human intuitions rather than from the truth of Scripture.

The balance between evangelism and edification is also a very important component in the well-adjusted work of any congregation. The implication of 1 Peter 3:15 is that edification suits a person for evangelism. In this combination, there is considerable insight into the core nature of the church. Relative to this, there exists a noticeable omission in the New Testament, quite curious in its absence—there are very few verses encouraging evangelistic activity! What accounts for this?

The wisdom of God reveals to us how Christ-likeness (edification) must precede outreach. The reason should be fairly obvious; people who are Christ-shaped are qualified to do outreach as Christ would do it—others are not. God is wise!

When we go to encourage evangelism, we must be careful not to substitute passing human fads for the rock solid principles of the Bible. An immature church relying on one-size-fits-all methods that commonly distort biblical proportions is not an evangelistic church.

Another obvious area where balance is indispensable addresses the many differences in the makeup of a congregation. Here, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is most instructive. The unifying factor in the diversity of a congregation is Jesus. In Him, and only in Him, diversity is a plus. To use a play on words, it is not unity in diversity, but diversity in unity.

Each individual in a local church is unique. Each offers an array of talents as well as a collection of weaknesses and needs. Finding a way to join appropriate help and encouragement to real needs is critical. Similarly, forming teams where talents merge to bring success for the cause of Christ is equally vital. People are, after all, at the heart of what defines the church (1 Pet. 2:5).

Think about how body balance is addressed in Titus 2:1-10. Here different age groups are singled out, as well as differences in gender. The singling out, however, is for the good of the whole. Each category of difference in the church of Christ is not an independent grouping; it is in union and through harmonious function that the church functions well.

In addition to noticing the gender and age breakdown in Titus 2:1-10, note also the types of things addressed as "sound doctrine." We have grown accustomed to segregating an aspect of sound doctrine and letting that particular part come to represent the whole. This throws the work of the church out of balance.

What I mean is this: “sound doctrine” is often narrowly applied only to such things as becoming a Christian, organizing the church, and the worship of the church. While such structural patterns are certainly part of “sound doctrine,” they are far from being the whole of the thing. In Titus, the doctrinal things mentioned have to do with how we behave as Christians. The concern is with matters of Christian character and interpersonal relationships. These too are very much matters of “sound doctrine.” Without them, the church becomes cold and lifeless, and harshness and pride rise to the top.

The Scriptures allow us to deduce logically the patterns of structure God has given the church, however, such structures are not at the heart of what we are to be about. As indispensable as institutional, structural type patterns are, they are not the “drives” in what we do. At the heart of this thing known as Christianity is the Christ—imagine that!

CONCLUSION

The most compelling view of God we have in the church is seen in Jesus (John 1:1, 14, 18; 14:7-8). A Christianity that is not Jesus-centered is not Christianity at all! It is therefore no wonder that Romans 8:29 gives God’s eternal, overarching purpose for the church as conformity to Jesus. If we are ever to be balanced as the body of Christ, we must find that balance in Him!

INDEPENDENCE AND SUBMISSION

ROD RUTHERFORD

Balance is "a state of equilibrium or equipoise; equality in amount, weight, value, or importance, as between two things, or the parts of a thing."¹ Balance is important in every area of life. Scales must be balanced in order to maintain accuracy. Accounts must be balanced in order to maintain solvency. Tires must be balanced in order to maintain a smooth, safe ride and less wear and tear. One must maintain balance in his life in order to be happy and healthy.

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Independence is "freedom from the influence, control or determination of another or others."² God has created us as individuals. We are autonomous persons. Each one has been endowed by his Creator with free will. We have the ability to make choices (Josh. 24:15). We must, however, accept the consequences of our choices (Deut. 30:15-20).

Submission is "the act of submitting, yielding, or surrendering; the quality or condition of being submissive;

resignation; obedience; meekness."³ Although we are independent individuals with free will, we must, at times, submit to the control or authority of others. The child of God must strive for a healthy balance between maintaining his independence on the one hand and submitting to authority on the other. It is our purpose to explore key areas in which one is called upon to balance submission with independence.

SUBMISSION TO GOD

James, the Lord's brother, admonished us to "submit to God" (Jas. 4:7). God is the Supreme Being (Exod. 20:2-3; Isa. 45:18). He made the earth and all things in it. He will judge the world through His only begotten Son (Gen. 18:25; Acts 17:30-31; John 5:22). There is no exception! One must obey God in all things (Deut. 27:10; Heb. 5:8-9)! If one rejects God and chooses not to obey Him, he will suffer eternally the consequences of his disobedience (2 Thess.1:8-10).

SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT

Paul wrote: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God ..." (Rom. 13:1-2). The institution of government exists by the will of God. It is necessary for the happiness, security, and well being of mankind. God did not ordain any particular form of government, nor does He approve of every form of government. All government, however, is subject to His control. Daniel taught "that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men" (Dan. 4:17b). When Paul penned the above admonition to the saints at Rome, the nefarious Nero was on the throne. If the historical tradition which has come down to us is correct, this same ruler had Paul executed a few years later.⁴ Yet, Paul commanded obedience to him.

What happens when the governing authorities command Christians to do that which is contrary to the will of God? We have an example of this very situation in Luke's inspired history of the

early church. Peter and John had healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (Acts 3:1-10). As they preached to the multitude that had witnessed the miracle, "the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody..." (Acts 4:1-3). The following day, Peter and John were brought before the council, who "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"" (Acts 4:18-20).

The apostles continued to preach the Gospel. When they were arrested again and brought before the council, the high priest asked, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine...!" (Acts 5:28). To this the apostles boldly replied, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). There must be balance. Christians are required to submit to the law of the land, but if the law of the land conflicts with the law of God, the law of God must take precedence always!

SUBMISSION TO ELDERS

There are those in the church today who deny that elders have any actual authority over the church. It is their contention that elders lead only by example.⁵ However, they are flying in the face of the Greek scholars who translated all the leading English versions of the New Testament.⁶ The New King James Version renders Hebrews 13:17 as follows: "Obey those who have the rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." The revision of the New International Version is even stronger in its emphasis on the authority of the leaders of the church: "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their

work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you."

Submission to elders is required, but what if the elders of the church depart from the teaching of God's word? What if the shepherds of the flock require of those entrusted to their care that which is contrary to Scripture? An example of this very thing has recently happened in the largest congregation in our brotherhood. In an article entitled "Nation's Largest Church of Christ Adding Instrumental Service," the website of The Christian Chronicle announced that the elders of the Richland Hills congregation in Forth Worth, Texas, have added a Saturday night assembly in which the Lord's Supper is served. This is a clear violation of the apostolic example of Acts 20:7, which specifies that the Lord's Supper is to be eaten on the first day of the week. Not only this, but instrumental music is used in the same service to accompany the singing of praises to God.⁷ This is also a blatant and unauthorized addition to the pattern God has given for the worship of His church (John 4:24; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19). One can be sure other churches will soon follow Richland Hill's example.

What if the elders of the church in which a Christian holds membership decides to bring the instrument into the worship? Or change the day of the week for communion? Or use women in leadership roles? Or trade pulpits with the preachers of the denominational churches in the area? Or accept members who are in adulterous marriages? Instances of all of these can be easily documented. What is a member to do in such a case? Must he submit to those elders? The answer is obviously an emphatic "no!" One "must obey God rather than men." A balance must be struck. One must submit to the elders; however, if the elders lead contrary to God's word, then one must act independently of those elders in order to maintain loyalty to the Lord.

SUBMISSION OF WIVES TO THEIR HUSBANDS

The New Testament teaches: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18). Wives are also commanded, "submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph.

5:22-33). The leadership of the husband in the home rests upon the same foundation as male leadership in the church. Paul told Timothy, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, and then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:12-14). God created the woman for the man because "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18-25). After the woman led in the fall in Eden, God said to her: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16b).

A Christian wife must submit willingly to her husband and acknowledge his leadership in the home. However, if a husband requires of his wife that which is contrary to the will of God, the wife has no choice but to disobey her husband in order to obey God. A balance must be struck between submission to her husband and independence to do the will of God. In all things, God takes priority.

SUBMISSION OF CHILDREN TO THEIR PARENTS

Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). It is right for children to obey their parents due to the nature of the relationship. Parents are older and wiser and therefore know better than their children what is good for them. Parents are responsible for bringing their children into the world. The natural bond of love between parents and their children ensures that the parents desire that which is best for them. Because of this natural affection, parents will work and sacrifice and put themselves at risk in order to supply the needs of their offspring and to protect them from harm. Therefore, children are commanded to be in subjection to their parents for their own good (Eph. 6:2-3).

While children are to submit to their parents under normal circumstances, what if parents attempt to keep their accountable children from obeying the Gospel? I have known of several cases where this happened. In such a case as this, a balance must be struck. Normally, the child must obey his parents in all things. In

this instance, however, his responsibility to God comes first. Therefore, he must assert his independence and obey the Gospel.

SUBMISSION OF EMPLOYEES TO EMPLOYERS

Slavery was very common in the Roman Empire of the first century. David Lipscomb wrote:

The apostle recognized the slavery of human beings in both master and slave. Slavery is a political relation, established by political governments. The Lord did not violently interfere with political relations. It was not an indissoluble relationship like husband and wife, parent and child. Slavery was in force in all the countries to which letters were addressed. Indeed, it was in force in all countries at that time.... He recognized the relationship, regulated it, and put in operation principles that in their workings would so mold public sentiment as to break down all evil relations and sinful institutions. Slavery was so treated.⁸

There is no doubt that there were slaves in the early church. The little book of Philemon is a letter that Paul wrote to Philemon, a Christian, whose slave, Onesimus, had run away. Somehow he had come into contact with Paul, who had taught him the Gospel. Onesimus was now returning to his Christian master as a brother in the Lord (Philem. 8-16).

In Ephesians 6:5-8, Paul gave instructions to those Christians who were slaves. We do not have slavery today in the United States of America, or in any of the other nations of the world where Christianity has had a strong influence. The application of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount eventually resulted in ending the practice in these lands. However, in principle, the responsibilities of slaves to their masters are parallel to the responsibilities employees have toward their employers. Slaves were admonished:

...be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ: not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he be a slave or free. (Eph. 6:5-8)

If one substitutes the word "employee" for "bondservant" and "employer" for "master," he will have exactly the responsibility an employee has to his employer.

What happens if a Christian who is a diligent worker for his employer is told to do something that is dishonest? I knew of a young woman who was working as an accountant in Memphis to support herself and her husband while he trained to preach the Gospel. In doing the books for her company, this young lady discovered that the company had overbilled one of its clients by \$4,000 and that the client had paid this amount thinking it was what he owed. She pointed out the mistake to her supervisor and suggested she would prepare a check to reimburse the client. The supervisor, on behalf of the company, refused to let the money be returned to its rightful owner since he was not aware of the mistake. The accountant was told that she must accept this or find another job. In order to be true to the Lord, the young lady had no choice but to give up her job and seek employment elsewhere.

Again, a balance must be struck. One must submit to his employer except in an instance in which doing so would require him to disobey God. In such a case, one must assert his independence and obey God rather than man.

CONCLUSION

The Christian life is one of balance. Christians will seek always to stand on the solid ground of truth without moving aside either "to the right hand or to the left" (Josh. 1:7). As God's creatures, we are independent individuals with free will. However,

in many of the relationships of life, we must submit to others. Citizens must submit to governing authorities. Members must submit to the elders of the church in areas of expediency where elders are given the rule. Wives must submit to their own husbands. Children must submit to their parents for this is right. Employees must submit to their employers. However, there is one exception in which one must not submit. If one's submission to an earthly authority puts him in conflict with the law of God, then he must maintain his independence and refuse to submit. Our obligation to submit to God has no exceptions. It takes priority over everything else (Matt. 6:33).

ENDNOTES

1. Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language: Second College Edition, ed. David B. Guralink, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 105.
2. Webster's 714.
3. Webster's 1418.
4. James North, A History of the Church from Pentecost to Present (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1983) 35-36.
5. Dave Miller, Piloting the Strait (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996) 332-337.
6. The following versions, each of which was made by a committee of scholars representing many religious backgrounds, all include the idea of authority for the leaders of the church in their translation of Hebrews 13:17: The King James Version, The New King James Version, The American Standard Version, The New American Standard Version, The English Standard Version, The New Revised Standard Version, and The New International Version.
7. Bobby Ross, "Nation's Largest Church of Christ Adding Instrumental Service," The Christian Chronicle, 2 Oct. 1007 <www.christianchronicle.org.>
8. David Lipscomb and J. W. Shepherd, A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, vol. IV (Nashville, TN: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1989) 121.

A BALANCED VIEW OF GRACE

THOMAS C. MILLER

The Old Testament prophet Amos described a person who ran from a lion only to be met by a bear (Amos 5:19). In my mind, that is a very vivid picture. Amos used it to illustrate that the people would be unable to escape God's wrath. They would not be able to run or hide from Him.

To use the illustration in another way, however, I believe we spend a lot of time trying to flee from one extreme position only to be caught up in another extreme position. Extremism begets more extremism. I often refer to this as "the pendulum principle." The further a pendulum swings in one direction, the further it swings in the opposite direction.

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We seem to have a hard time finding the middle. In fact, some deride the middle of the road position, as if there is something wrong with avoiding extremes. They say, "You are just a middle-of-the-roader." I say, "Thank you for that compliment." I would much rather be in the middle of the road than in the ditch on either side.

The topic that has been assigned to me has to do with a balanced view of grace. This is certainly a topic where extremism has been very evident. Some have taken the extreme position that grace alone saves us and that God's grace will cover any

deficiency in our lives. Others have swung to the other extreme and contend that grace has little—if anything—to do with salvation. They believe, though they may never articulate it, that man can somehow earn his salvation.

In this lecture, first I want to look at the obvious teaching of Scripture that we are saved by grace. Second, I want to examine two extreme positions regarding grace and show why both of them are wrong. Third, I want to look at the balanced, biblical view of grace or what I call “responsible grace.” Finally, I want to give some very practical applications based upon this study.

SALVATION BY GRACE

As a starting point for our discussion, we must acknowledge that grace and salvation are inseparably linked together in the Bible. The word “grace” is found 38 times in the Old Testament and 128 times in the New Testament. The frequency of the word should give us a clue that we are dealing with a great Bible doctrine. In fact, grace is one of the greatest and most comforting doctrines in the entire Bible.

In Ephesians 2:8, Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”¹ From reading this verse, it would be impossible to contend that grace has no part to play in salvation. In verse 5 of the same chapter, Paul said plainly, “by grace you have been saved.”

Not only does Ephesians 2:8 connect grace and salvation, but it also gives us a clear indication of what grace is. Paul declared it to be “the gift of God.” It is impossible to think about grace without considering the idea of a gift. In fact, the Greek word for grace (*charis*) is sometimes translated by the word “gift,” as in Romans 6:23.

In this passage, it is interesting to note the difference between wages and a gift. Sin pays wages, i.e., we get what we deserve when we live a life of sin. By contrast, God gives us a free gift, i.e., we get what we do not deserve when we obey the Lord. Ralph Earle observed, “The closing verse of this chapter states

graphically the contrasting rewards for serving sin and serving God...All that sin can offer is eternal death...In contrast is 'the free gift of God,' eternal life."²

In addition to what the book of Ephesians teaches about grace, Titus 2:11 declares, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." God is the source of grace. Salvation is the goal of grace. All men are the recipients of grace. Again, we are impressed with the fact that grace and salvation are linked together. To study about salvation one must study about grace and vice versa.

The problem today, however, is that many people have an unbalanced view of this important doctrine. It is that "pendulum principle" at work—from one extreme to the other.

LIBERALISM'S VIEW OF GRACE

One extreme is what we will call liberalism's view of grace. In this extreme, grace is viewed as license. It says, "Do what you will, and throw yourself on God's grace." This view cheapens grace.

In the book of Jude, the writer spoke of some false teachers who had perverted grace and were using it as an excuse to live sinful lives. He called them "ungodly men" and said that they "turn[ed] the grace of our God into lewdness" (Jude 4).

Grace, however, was never intended to be a cover-all for man's sinfulness. To the contrary, grace demands that, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age" (Tit. 2:12).

This view of grace completely ignores the nature of God. He is holy, and He wants His people to be holy (1 Pet. 1:16). He hates sin and cannot ignore it (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The question is this: how can a holy God who hates sin and cannot ignore it simply wave grace over man's sinfulness and act as if nothing had happened? He cannot!

Anticipating that someone might carry the subject of grace to this extreme, Paul wrote: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Regarding this passage, Richard A. Batey has written:

These critics...were accusing Paul of teaching ethical irresponsibility....Why not exploit the goodness of God for self-indulgence?...Then with a strong negation he rejects the idea that God's grace should lead to un-restricted sinful acts.³

An understanding of salvation by grace must never be allowed to lead to selfish indulgences. Rather, it must lead to responsible action before both God and man.

This view of grace is implied by those who believe that a person is saved by grace only. If a person is saved by grace only—or anything "only," for that matter—then nothing else can be taken into consideration. What a person does or does not do is of no consequence for those who claim salvation by grace only. This means that the so-called "Sinner's Prayer" would not be necessary, but even those who profess to believe in grace only do not carry it to that extreme.

This view would also reject the idea of any law keeping on the part of man. If man is saved by grace alone, there is no law to which he is amenable. This view is called anti-nomianism. On this point, Batey wrote: "The ideal of pure freedom totally uncommitted to any values or demands soon leaves one the victim of arbitrary choices made without consideration for life's ultimate meaning."⁴

Of course, we do not live under the Law of Moses. It has been abrogated and nailed to the cross (Gal. 3:23-25). But, there is always that "pendulum principle." Since we are not under the Law of Moses, some have reached the extreme position that we are under no law. Romans 6:14 is often quoted to support this view: "...for you are not under law but under grace."

The Bible, however, does not allow this conclusion. James spoke of “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25) and “the royal law” (Jas. 2:8). Furthermore, Paul spoke of “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2) and being “under law toward Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

We must not conclude that law is law is law is law. We are not under the Law of Moses, but we are under the law of Christ. Saying that we are saved by grace only, however, would argue against that. If we are saved by grace only, there is nothing else to do to be saved and no law to keep.

LEGALISM'S VIEW OF GRACE

At the other end of the continuum is legalism's view of grace. Just as the liberal view of grace says that man is saved by grace only, legalism's view of grace says that grace has nothing—or at least very little—to do with salvation.

It is important at the beginning of this part of our study to make sure our terms are understood properly. A legalist is not someone who says, “I want to do what God has asked me to do.” All of us, in fact, should seek to do His will and to please Him. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrews' writer said, “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

A legalist is not a law keeper. A legalist is a law truster. He says, “I will do what God has asked me to do, and I will trust that to save me.”

This person, though at times giving lip service to grace, shows no real understanding of his need for grace. He believes that he has earned his salvation and that God is somehow obligated to save him. This is in spite of the clear biblical teaching that we are not saved by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16, 21) or by works of human merit, which would give us the right to boast (Eph. 2:9).

You might be thinking, "I have really never heard anyone say that we are saved by works of human merit." Maybe not, but I have heard many people intimate it. For example, what about the person who responds to the invitation and says, "Please pray for me; I just don't feel like I do enough"?

Here is what I say to those people: "You are exactly right. You don't, and you can't." In this regard, Jesus said, "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10).

I honestly believe there are some people who picture God as the Great Cosmic Bookkeeper. When we obey Him, He gives us a plus mark. When we fail to obey Him, He gives us a minus mark. We just hope that in the final analysis we have more pluses than minuses. Brethren, that is a false view through and through. It makes salvation a matter of human merit, and it negates any need for grace.

In his inimitable way, Charles Hodge spoke to this point:

Christianity is Christ! It must not be reduced to "Try harder, more, more, more." We are saved—not because we are good—but because God is! We are saved by grace; don't ever forget it.⁵

Earlier we spoke of liberalism ignoring the nature of God. He is Holy, and He cannot tolerate sin. We cannot live as we like and then throw ourselves on His grace. Legalism, by contrast, ignores the nature of man. This is just as dangerous a position as ignoring the nature of God.

The only way to be saved by the Law of Moses, or by any law system, would be to keep it perfectly. See the problem? I cannot do that. Neither can you. Though we may try our best, we all stumble and fall. We never completely measure up to the standard.

This is why James said, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). This does not mean that breaking one law means we have broken every law. It does mean that breaking one law makes us a law breaker, and that is all it takes to condemn us before God when we seek justification by law keeping.

J.W. Roberts observed, "This verse is difficult, but it is usually interpreted as follows...The keeping of the whole law is useless as a matter of justification unless it is kept perfectly."⁶

Our own laws illustrate this principle. On a long trip, I may observe every traffic law with the exception of that one time I exceeded the speed limit. At that point, I became a lawbreaker. If pulled over by a law enforcement officer, I could not plead that I kept the law 99% of the time. He would want to know about that 1% when I broke the law. Furthermore, he would judge me guilty on that 1%.

How would you like to have that same arrangement with God? I am not suggesting that God grades on the curve or that he weighs our obedience against our disobedience. However, I am saying that to ignore grace and trust law keeping to save us is a sure recipe for frustration and ultimate disaster.

About this time, someone usually objects: "If you say that, you will never convince people that they should do works of obedience." I disagree. In fact, I would argue that the opposite is true.

Ephesians 2:9 says that we are not saved by works "lest anyone should boast." That last phrase defines the kind of works Paul had in mind. He was talking about works of human merit that would lead to boasting. Yet in the very next verse he says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Though works can never save us, we are saved to work. Good works become our goal rather than a condition of salvation.

Out of a sense of thankfulness, duties become desires. With Paul we say, "For the love of Christ compels us ..." (2 Cor. 5:14). Not only do we do good works, but we walk in them. They become a way of life for us. We seek ways to serve the One who saved us by His grace.

THE BALANCED VIEW OF GRACE

Thus far, we have looked at two extreme views of grace. The first view is a liberal view of grace, and it says that salvation is by grace alone. The second view is a legalistic view of grace, and it says that salvation is a matter of works. The first view ignores the nature of God, and the second view ignores the nature of man.

What about a balanced view of grace? What about stopping in the middle and avoiding the extremes? The balanced view of grace explains the bringing together of God's nature and man's nature—without ignoring either.

God's plan for man's salvation involved sending His Son to die at Calvary in our stead. Speaking of Jesus, Peter wrote, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

At Calvary, the perfect sacrifice for sin was offered. Again quoting the inspired words of Peter:

knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your father, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Through Christ's death, God was "reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them ..." (2 Cor. 5:19). The perfection of that sacrifice allowed God to be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

As the song suggests:

I owed a debt I could not pay,
He paid a debt He did not owe,
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
So now I sing a brand-new song—
“Amazing Grace” all day long,
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.

The truth about grace, like so many other things, is between the extremes to which it has been miscarried. It is a bringing together of God’s holy nature and man’s propensity to sin. It is neither license nor legalism. In acrostic form, it is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. It is God giving us what we do not deserve but what we need so desperately.

Growing out of this balanced view of grace, there are some practical applications to be made.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

First, we must accept grace for it to be of any benefit to us. Remember that the word for grace in the New Testament (*charis*) is sometimes translated by the word “gift.” That is no mistake. We cannot think of grace without thinking of the nature of a gift. A gift can be accepted or rejected, and so can grace.

God’s grace is accepted through our response of faith. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith...” Grace is God’s part, but faith is man’s part. Unless we reach out in faith, all that Jesus did at Calvary will be of no benefit to us.

This faith—true faith—is always active. In fact, in defining the term, Thayer says faith is “a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ.”⁷ I draw your attention to that last phrase which says that faith is conviction “conjoined with obedience.”

True faith always seeks to please God by obeying Him. Paul wrote, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Paul said this to people who trusted in law keeping—especially circumcision—to save them. He said it would not. Rather, they would be saved by a working faith.

This working faith involves repentance (Luke 13:3, 5), confession (Rom. 10:9-10), baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21), and righteous living (Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:7, 17). These things are not separate from faith; they are actions of true faith.

In Galatians 2:21, Paul said, “I did not set aside the grace of God....” To refuse to accept God’s grace through faith is to set it aside.

Second, we must continue to preach and teach grace without apology. In my autographed copy of Hodge’s little book, he wrote: “Tom, preach amazing grace,” and I want to do exactly that—not because Hodge told me to, but because God wants me to. I know, however, that I have to avoid the extremes to do so.

I am saddened to think that whenever a preacher preaches a thirty-minute sermon on grace, he must take twenty-five of those minutes to explain what he is not saying. Why is it that we are so afraid to simply state what the Bible says on the subject? The Bible says we are saved by grace, and we must let people know that. Of course, we must point out the extremes—even as I have tried to do in this lecture—but when we present a balanced view of grace all else is shown to be extreme and false.

So, preachers, preach on grace. Teachers, teach about grace. Song leaders, lead songs about grace. Let people know everywhere that God has done a marvelous thing for us. He, as a result of His grace, has made salvation available to all men.

Third, we must refuse to revert to any kind of a law system. Yes, there are laws for the Christian to obey—as we have already noted in this lesson. However, we are not under a

law system, and I am glad of it. To be saved by a law system, one must keep the law perfectly, and you and I both know that we cannot do that.

John declared, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The law was God's gift to Israel, and Moses was the mediator of it. The gospel is God's gift to the whole world, and Jesus Christ is the Mediator of it. Grace superceded the law, and in grace we see God's great love for all men.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul pled with the people to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and ... not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." A law system is a "yoke of bondage." Under it, we do what we must because we are afraid to do otherwise. We feel the proverbial gun to our head. We perform, but we find no joy in it.

On the other hand, when a person is saved by grace through faith, duties become desires. We serve out of a sense of joy and thankfulness. We no longer say, "I have to," but we say, "I am privileged to." We keep externals, but we focus on internals.

Let us be sure not to abandon grace and freedom in Christ for any kind of a yoke of bondage.

Fourth, we must be gracious. Those of us who have been recipients of grace must be gracious to others.

Jesus told a wonderful story to illustrate this in Matthew 18. He talked about a servant who owed a tremendous debt to his master. The Bible says it was a debt of "ten thousand talents" (Matt. 18:24). That terminology does not register well with us, but it was a tremendous amount. Some have guessed it to be the equivalent of ten million dollars. As a contrast, Josephus recorded that the total taxes for Judea, Idumea, and Samaria for one year were only six hundred talents, and those of Galilee and Perea were only two hundred talents.⁸

The servant could not pay that amount, and he pled for mercy. The master promptly forgave him. Did he deserve it? No! But the master was gracious and forgave him.

That same servant had a fellow servant who owed him “a hundred denarii” (Matt. 18:28). By contrast, this was a very small debt. It may have been the equivalent of about twenty dollars. Admittedly, it would have been a considerable sum at that time, but it was a trifling sum compared to the ten thousand talents.

Instead of being gracious to his fellow servant, the man “laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe’” (Matt. 18:28). When payment could not be made, he “threw him into prison till he should pay the debt” (Matt. 18:30).

When the master received word of this, he was angry. Listen to what he said to the first servant: “... You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” (Matt. 18:32-33). Because he was unwilling to extend grace—after he had received it—the master “delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him” (Matt. 18:34).

The point is clear. God has been gracious to us. He forgave a “ten million dollar debt.” Can we not find it within our hearts to forgive a paltry “twenty dollar debt?” To please God, grace must result in grace!

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we ask, “Is God’s grace alone sufficient?” If we are speaking of grace as the basis of salvation, the answer is “Yes!” Though we are not saved by grace only, we are saved only by grace. Had God not taken the initiative and offered salvation, we would all be hopelessly lost.

On the other hand, if we are talking about the process of salvation, the answer is “No!” God’s grace can be accepted or rejected. It is a gift after all. We accept His grace through faith,

and that faith produces a response that is in keeping with all that the New Testament instructs us to do to be saved.

Keep these words from Ephesians 2:8-10 in mind:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Since they are true, let us (1) accept God's grace, (2) preach and teach God's grace, (3) refuse to go back to a law system, and (4) extend grace to others.

ENDNOTES

1. All scripture citations are from the New King James Version.
2. Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Pub, 1986) 169.
3. Richard A. Batey, The Letter of Paul to the Romans: The Living Word Commentary Series (Austin, TX: R.B. Sweet Co., 1969) 76-77.
4. Batey 84.
5. Charles Hodge, Amazing Grace (Nashville, TN: 20th Century Christian, 1984) 85.
6. J.W. Roberts, The Letter of James: The Living Word Commentary (Austin, TX: R.B. Sweet Co., 1977) 79.
7. Joseph Henry Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Marshallton, DE: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1895) 511.
8. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews XVII,xi.4.

A BALANCED VIEW OF LOVE

JOHN M. BROWN

Several years ago, while attending a funeral in Ashland, Kentucky, I heard the preacher conducting the service say something that I have never forgotten. He stood before the gathered audience, looked at them with a compassionate expression, and said, "I want to tell you folks – I'm not here today to preach to you; I'm just here to love you." A sympathetic smile enveloped his countenance.

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Upon hearing that, I frankly thought it one of the most ridiculous sentiments ever expressed! The implication of his pronouncement was that if he preached to the people, he would not be loving them, and if he loved them, he would not preach to them. *What?* According to the Bible, preaching the truth of God is the very exemplification of love, for "love rejoiceth with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6), and we are admonished to be those "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). There is no greater expression of love toward an individual than to teach and preach to him the truth that will put him in fellowship with God and save his soul! The aforementioned man's remarks demonstrated a misunderstanding of both preaching and loving. His was anything but a balanced view of love.

In consideration of the subject "A Balanced View of Love," think about the following.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT LOVE?

There are many different kinds of love, expressed by several words used in the original languages of Scripture. There is romantic love, such as exists between husbands and wives (Eph. 5:25-28; Col. 3:19; Song of Sol. 8:7). There is family love (paternal and maternal), and the Bible is replete with examples of fathers and mothers loving their children and children loving and honoring their parents. There is brotherly love, as between good friends, and such as is to exist between members of God's family. There is the great love of God to man and man's love toward Him in return.

Jesus succinctly described the greatness of love when He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). Note that the Lord summarized all that was contained in the Law and written in the prophets: loving God and loving neighbor. In fact, all God has ever commanded falls into either the category of our obligation to God or of our obligation to our fellow man. Both requirements, according to Jesus, are motivated by love.

It is impossible to speak about the teaching of the Bible and disassociate it from love. Love is the one enduring, everlasting quality (1 Cor. 13:13). Love motivates all other actions. Love is the foundation upon which the Christian life is built. Love is the reason God gave His only begotten Son (Rom. 5:8). Love is as necessary to going to heaven as are faith, repentance, or baptism (1 John 4:7).

John 3:16, sometimes called "the golden text of the Bible," and surely the most cherished, familiar, and memorized single Bible verse, tells us so much about God's love. God loved, but He did not just love a little bit, He *so loved*. He did not just love a few,

He *so loved the world*. And He did not just love the world in deed, but in demonstration. *He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son* to die a horrible, cruel, malicious, and shameful death, all on our behalf. God did not sacrificially love us when we were worthy, deserving, upstanding, and meritorious; He so loved us when we were dirty, vile, rebellious, unclean sinners (see Isa. 53; Rom. 5:6-8). There, at Calvary, the great demonstration and verification of God's great love was manifested! Jesus gave His reputation to a demanding angry mob, His back to the crack of the lash, His head to the cutting of the crown of thorns, His side to the thrust of the spear, His hands and feet to the ring of the hammer and the imprint of the nails – all because God “so loved.”

The Bible describes the love of God for man, the love of man for God, the love of Jesus for us and our love for Him, and the love of man for his brother and his neighbor. How can one speak of Christianity separate and apart from love?

The very nature of God is love (1 John 4:16). Love is a fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22) and that in which we are to be rooted and grounded (Eph. 3:17). Without God's love toward us, we would have no mercy (Eph. 2:4) and could not become His children (1 John 3:1). Indeed, New Testament Christianity does not exist without love.

HOW IS LOVE UNBALANCED?

Love becomes unbalanced – out of place and out of sorts – in numerous ways.

LOVE IS UNBALANCED WHEN IT IS ABSENT. Without love there is no sacrifice of Christ, no redemption for man, no hope for eternity, and no deliverance from hell. All that God has done on man's behalf was motivated by love, and love is a necessary reaction by man toward God for His great love toward us. When love is missing, there is no “balanced love” at all. It is, more accurately, the individual who is unbalanced in attitude, perspective, and outlook who does not love. How sad it would be to live a “love-less” life, to refuse to offer or accept love.

LOVE IS UNBALANCED WHEN IT IS MISPLACED.

There are things the Bible warns us not to love, things upon which we must not place our affections or our aspirations. We are not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17), we are not to love self to the exclusion of God and others (2 Tim. 3:2), we are not to love the sensual pleasures characterizing the world (2 Tim. 3:4), and we are not to love money, which love is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). When man directs his love toward things such as these, his love has become misplaced and thereby unbalanced. Love is unbalanced when it is not directed toward God (Matt. 22:27-30; Deut. 10:12; Ps. 31:23) and all other things in their proper perspective (Matt. 6:33).

LOVE IS UNBALANCED WHEN IT IS WITHHELD.

Many years ago, in studying the five chapters of the book of 1 John, I came to the conclusion that there are two great, primary themes in this book that keep recurring: keeping God's commandments and loving one another. John repeatedly emphasized keeping God's commandments (1 John 2:3-5; 3:22-24; 5:2-3) and the significance of brotherly love (1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-11, 14-16, 4:7-8, 11-12, 20-21; 5:1). Interestingly, there are passages in which these two great themes overlap: keeping God's commandments means loving one another. One cannot speak of "keeping God's commandments" without "brotherly love," for that is a commandment of God! Thus, doing what God commands is inclusive of love: there is no love without obedience, and there is no motivation for obedience without love. The one who could love his brother and chooses to repress such is unbalanced in his practice of love.

LOVE IS UNBALANCED WHEN IT IS MINIMIZED.

Perhaps there is something inadequate in our language regarding this word "love," for we can use it far too casually, flippantly, and even inconsistently. One can say "I love my wife" and "I love fried potatoes," and obviously the kind, degree, and intensity of that love is not the same (or certainly should not be!). I once heard a brother criticize another preacher for "talking too much about love." Without personally knowing the preacher in question, or all the implications or possible reasons for the charge made against him, still one wonders, how can a preacher talk "too much" about

love? If one means the preacher talks about "love" to the exclusion of obedience or service to God, then that is not biblical love. But if one thinks that true biblical love is somehow overdone or overemphasized, it would seem the critic is the one who has an unbalanced view of love.

LOVE IS UNBALANCED IF IT IS NOT SINCERE. If love is pretended, feigned, or self-serving, it is not the unconditional love the Bible enjoins and is thus unbalanced. In 1 Peter 1:22, the Bible says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Notice that this passage speaks of "unfeigned love" (sincere love), loving one another with a "pure heart," and loving one another "fervently" (earnestly and ardently). Further, the Bible says, "Let love be without dissimulation" (Rom. 12:9). "Dissimulation" is hypocrisy; our love is to be genuine and real.

HOW IS LOVE BALANCED?

Love is balanced when it is properly understood and exercised. To recognize and appreciate the great place of love in God's plan is to be and stay balanced. Love is our motivator and our compulsion (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

LOVE IS BALANCED WHEN IT IS PRACTICED. The Bible says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Love must be demonstrated. Love is not just what we say, it must involve what we do; it is not seen in mere profession, but in consistent practice. Love must not only be spoken, it must also be shown.

We all appreciate a profession of love; the words "I love you" are precious indeed. However, if love is only vocalized and never practiced, it cannot be balanced love. Balanced love both speaks and acts.

LOVE IS BALANCED WHEN IT IS DIRECTED TOWARD GOD. Jesus said the first and great commandment is that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,

and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). To fail to love God, in return for His great love toward us (1 John 4:10), is to fail to even begin to comprehend true love. If man would seriously contemplate how much God has done for us, surely man would be motivated to love Him. God is certainly worthy of our love, adoration and affection. To do less than love God is the very epitome of ingratitude and thanklessness, and loving God includes loving His Word (Ps. 119:47-48, 97, 127, 163, 165).

LOVE IS BALANCED WHEN IT IS DEMONSTRATED BY OBEDIENCE. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments....If a man love me, he will keep my words....Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 14:15, 23; 15:14). If a man comes to truly love God, he will gladly do whatsoever God desires. Man’s love, devotion, affection, and reverence toward God compel him to obey God. When we know who our Heavenly Father is and what He has done on our behalf – the fact that He gave His Son, and that “in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28) – we rejoice in obeying the Word of our Father through obeying the words of His Son (Heb. 1:1-2; 5:8-9; Matt. 7:24-27).

LOVE IS BALANCED WHEN IT MANIFESTS THAT WE ARE CHRIST’S DISCIPLES. The mark – the badge – of being Jesus’ disciple is love! Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another (John 15:12) and stated that this love would show all men the connection Jesus’ disciples have to Him. Men know we belong to Jesus because we seek to love as He loved. This brotherly love is called “the bond of perfectness,” or completion (Col. 3:14). We love God and are loved of God, and thus we love others who are also loved of God and love God (1 John 4:11). Our fellowship in Christ is bound in our love for God and one another (1 John 1:7; 4:7).

LOVE IS BALANCED WHEN IT IS ABOUNDING. Paul’s desire for the brethren at Thessalonica was expressed this way: “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one

toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (1 Thess. 3:12). Paul and his company loved the Thessalonians; he urged them to love one another and all men.

Love is not a commodity that must be extended in small portions only, lest it run out. Love has an amazing capability to go on and on and on. With the birth of my first child, I loved with all the love I had. Then with the birth of twins, love spread to them without any loss of love for my daughter. Now down through six children, I can overflow with love for all of them fully and equally. Love does not run out, become in short supply, or have to be rationed unless one unfortunately chooses to do so.

LOVE IS BALANCED WHEN IT IS PREEMINENT. Paul discussed the great essentiality of love and love's wonderful characteristics in that great chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. Without love, Paul said, "I am nothing." He described love as patient; kind; not envious or arrogant; not behaving wrongly; not self-seeking or easily provoked; not thinking evil; not rejoicing in iniquity but rejoicing in truth; bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring all things; and never failing. "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13). None of us would ever underemphasize the importance of faith, without which one cannot please God (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24; 2 Cor. 5:7), or hope, which is the anticipation that consoles the heart of each Christian and is called "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6:19). And yet, Paul calls love "the greatest" of this trio. Why? Because, in heaven, faith will be accomplished in sight, and hope will be fulfilled in realization. We will not be walking by faith in heaven, for we shall be with God; and we will not be "hoping" for heaven, for we will be there. Yet, love will continue on! Love, which is the nature of God and the bond between believers, will not end in heaven but will endure eternally. Thus, it is "the greatest."

CONCLUSION

God's amazing love for us and our ability to love Him in return are the heart of Christianity. Let us love God with all our being. Let us always make sure we love others in return. Let us

keep love in balance. Other world religions, such as Islam or Buddhism or others, do not have a concept of a personal "Father" in the being of God. And love – from God and for God – is an unknown distinctive to many world religionists.

SECTION II
SPECIAL STUDIES

PURITY IN A SENSUAL WORLD

GARY C. HAMPTON

Some things have been removed from polite conversation in an apparent effort to get rid of any sense of guilt. It is deemed inappropriate to label anything except intolerance as sin. Killing an unborn child, for example, is described as a woman's right to choose. Uncontrolled lust, which used to be known as fornication or adultery, is now labeled as love. The sin of homosexuality has become an alternative lifestyle. Millions of pages of graphic images are posted on the Internet and defended as "freedom of speech." In the process, God's people struggle to remain pure.

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By the nature of the case, some of the materials covered in this lecture are, at best, uncomfortable to discuss. The images and language involved in the despoiling of our culture and God's people are raw in the most sinful sense. However, we cannot afford to avoid the discussion any longer, because the problems under discussion are a growing menace to the Lord's church.

INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

For years, it was adolescent and adult men who were drawn to pornography, mostly in the form of dirty magazines. Now, children and women have likewise been enticed. Ninety percent of children aged eight to sixteen have viewed pornography on line, most while doing homework, according to statistics for 2006. The

average age for a first exposure to pornography on the Internet is eleven. It is little wonder, since there are some 420 million pages of pornography appearing on 4.2 million websites.¹ There are numbers of people who have become addicted to Internet porn. "One out of every six women, including Christians, struggles with an addiction to pornography. That's 17 percent of the population, which, according to a survey by research organization Zogby International, is the number of women who truly believe they can find sexual fulfillment on the Internet."²

"According to Marnie Ferree, a licensed marriage and family therapist and clinician...the draw of pornography can be as complicated as childhood sexual abuse—or as simple as unresolved loneliness."³ The combination of accessibility, anonymity, and affordability "makes becoming an addict incredibly easy," as is reflected in research by the Sexual Recovery Institute of Los Angeles.⁴ Unfortunately, "More than 80 percent of women who have this addiction take it offline," says Marnie Ferree. "Women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex, or affairs."⁵

TELEVISION

We have come a long way from the almost universal shock brought on by the use of one curse word in the movie Gone With the Wind. Now television pumps garbage into millions of living rooms nightly over the major networks during times supposedly reserved for the family to watch together. Yet those displays pale in comparison to the fare being offered by cable networks like MTV. The average Christian adult may only have brushed by such channels in a fit of channel surfing, but for our teens it is quite different. Brent Bozell reported on Townhall.com February 6, 2005, "MTV claims that 73 percent of boys and 78 percent of girls aged twelve to nineteen watch their programming."⁶ This amazing statistic has led some to call this the MTV Generation.

During the annual MTV Video Music Awards show of August 28, 2003, Madonna performed what was then her newest song, "Hollywood." During the performance, she kissed both Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, two former Mouseketeers.

“The choice of Madonna’s ‘Hollywood’ for the MTV lesbian tonguing couldn’t have been more appropriate. Here’s the song’s key lyric: ‘I’m bored with the concept of right and wrong.’”⁷

“But the oversexed worldview of MTV doesn’t stop at that channel—the same people control MTV 2, Comedy Central, TV Land, VH1, Spike TV, and Nickelodeon, among others.”⁸ Sitcoms on the major networks have joined in emphasizing an “anything goes” morality. Allusions to sexual activity are frequent, with no reference being made to consequences. Those who would oppose such activities are depicted as prudish. Those characters who might promote Biblical values are made to appear out of touch and dangerous to society’s well-being. This is all the more frightening because of the large number of latch key children in the United States whose only babysitter is the television.

MUSIC

It seems every generation adopts a new music style that the previous generation finds less than pleasant, so adults might tend to shrug when their children listen to rap and hip-hop. However, the message within the music cannot be ignored without the potential for dire consequences. “The gangsta culture embodied by rappers and their posses is not worthy of imitation or even exposure. It demeans women, degrades sex, and glorifies criminal behavior.”⁹ Yet the Recording Industry Association of America reported that hip-hop and R&B accounted for almost 25 percent of all sales in 2003, with hip-hop being the second biggest music genre.¹⁰ “The rap constituency crosses racial lines as well: Soundscan, a sales-tracking company, estimated that 70 percent of rap music consumers are white kids from the suburbs.”¹¹

RESPECT FOR GOD

While we could go on ad nauseam, it is clear that the Lord’s people must stress the need for purity, or holiness. Peter wrote, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).¹² Purity begins with respect for God. Joseph was in a land far away from home, possibly feeling abandoned. Modern

sages might have urged him to release his frustrations by accepting the advances of Mrs. Potiphar. Instead, this dedicated descendant of Abraham responded in a manner which all of us need to adopt as our own.

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:8-9).

His response seems to be a living demonstration of Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church. "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

Those called by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14) must be constantly on guard against the open display of lust and passion, which surrounds us. To Christians confronting similar circumstances, Paul wrote,

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 4:3-8).

Those who have been purified with the blood of Jesus need to remember they no longer belong to themselves. Paul

explained to the Corinthians, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Similarly, the apostle to the Gentiles told the Ephesian elders, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

RESPECT FOR SELF

Respect for God within an individual's life leads to a respect for self. If one respects himself, he will desire to remain pure. Failure to do so in sexual matters can result in contracting various sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Mental health is also impacted by impure acts, which can lead to mental anguish, guilt, anxiety, and depression. Obviously, maintaining purity is important to one's spiritual well being.

During the time when Job was defending his integrity, he told his friends, "My lips will not speak wickedness, Nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me That I should say you are right; Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast and will not let go; My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (Job 27:4-6). Everyone who would please God should readily echo his words. The wise man well said, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Prov. 22:1a).

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Each must likewise remain pure out of respect for others, since so many things that leave us impure require the willing or unwilling participation of others. The actions of individuals within a nation can exalt or bring reproach to the nation. As the wise man said, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Additionally, a Christian's life should serve as an example to those with whom he comes in contact. Jesus described his followers as salt and light, emphasizing the need for

his disciples to have lives filled with good deeds so men will glorify the Father (Matt. 5:13-16).

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). Paul's words to the church in Rome effectively serve as an "amen" to the Lord's words (Rom 13:8-10). There is, according to the apostle, only one debt the Christian should owe anyone, and that is love. True love for God will also motivate one to love his neighbor. In fact, even loving one's enemies is proclaimed by the Lord to be a sign of his being a son of God (Matt. 5:43-45).

CHOOSE GODLY FRIENDS

It is much easier to remain pure if one chooses godly friends. Paul knew the importance of choosing the right companions. He warned, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (1 Cor. 15:33). A perfect example of the impact of friends who do not know or follow the Lord's will was found in the very church to which he wrote. The Corinthian brethren had come to doubt the very resurrection because of false teachers!

Carefully choosing which activities to attend is a good way to help one find godly friends. Some wonder why they cannot find a godly man, or woman, when they spend all their time in bars and other similar places. The singer of Israel wrote, "I am a companion of all who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts" (Ps. 119:63). In fact, purity is much easier to maintain if one avoids tempting situations. Israel also sang, "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Ps. 1:1).

CULTIVATE GOOD COMMUNICATION

Whether married or single, a Christian needs to cultivate good communication skills to have relationships that will help him maintain his purity. First, learn to listen. James told his readers, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:19-20). It is good to restate in your own words what you heard another say and ask him if you have understood his meaning. Of course, this means one cannot be thinking about what he is going to say while the other person is talking.

Second, learn to think before speaking. "Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov. 29:20).

Third, when dealing with matters of opinion, place a numeric value on statements of feeling. For instance, going out to eat at restaurant A might be a 7 with you, while eating at restaurant B is a 6. If the person you are with has A as a 3 and B as an 8, your decision is obvious.

This leads to the fourth point concerning communications and relationships. Simply put, everyone has the right to disagree but not to be disagreeable. Strong relationships are built when both parties are willing to yield.

PUT PURE THINGS IN YOUR HEART

The best support for purity in life is purity in thought. After all, the wise man of old said, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, But his heart is not with you" (Prov. 23:7). To the Pharisees, who had accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, Jesus said, "Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Each must carefully watch what goes into his heart, realizing that life's critical issues flow from it (Prov. 4:23).

One who would keep his heart secure, then, must carefully monitor the television programs and movies he watches. He must guard against viewing Internet pornography, perhaps by placing the computer in a very open spot where anyone passing by could see what was on the screen. The songs one listens to should not promote spiritually corrupting ideas. The places he goes should help him develop in purity as well.

To avoid allowing one's mind to be conformed to the world's thinking, it must be constantly renewed (Rom. 12:2). The best source of renewal is Scripture, which is able to make one wise to salvation issues and completely furnish one to every possible type of good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17). God's law should be carefully studied so one can be a workman approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15). Also, the God-breathed words of the Bible should be a constant source of delight upon which the man of God meditates continually (Ps. 1:2).

In truth, spending time with the Bible is the best possible way to concentrate one's thinking in the right direction and fulfill Paul's instruction to the Philippian church. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED

Self-sufficiency is highly prized, almost idolized, in twenty-first century United States of America. However, faithful students of the Bible know the value of good counsel. The wise man told his son, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). He also said, "Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Prov. 15:22).

Christians must recognize the importance of taking life's most important challenges, especially the challenge to remain pure, to God in prayer. Paul saw such as the ultimate source of

anxiety relief. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

CONCLUSION

Many today seem to have the spirit which characterized man in the day of Noah, "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Christians must guard against viewing and becoming addicted to Internet pornography. They likewise must learn to change the channel or turn off the television rather than be exposed to filthy language and actions. Each should listen only to music suited to promoting good thoughts consistent with the Father's will.

Disciples of Jesus need to make respect for God, self, and others the cornerstone on which all decisions are made. Godly friends, good relationships, and putting pure things into one's heart likewise will help us be the holy people God desires. Above all, be sure to seek the Father's help through prayer, as well as the good counsel of trusted saints.

ENDNOTES

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IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD **JOHN 15:18-25; 17:14-17**

STEVEN K. GUY

Christians, by virtue of being Christ's examples to the world, cannot withdraw completely from it, but must live in an evil and fallen world. However, while being in the world, we are not to be like the world. How do we do that?

In John 15:18, Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." He intimated that there is a natural hatred from the world. How do you feel when someone hates you? Do you want to be around them? The natural reaction is to withdraw. It is also natural to feel ill toward them. In addition, their hatred will naturally cause them to avoid being around you, except to taunt, persecute, and put you down for your faith.

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The great temptation is to withdraw from the world. Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). The Lord suggested that we all like to be liked. The world's philosophy is, "You have to go along in order to get along." So the temptation is to be "of the world" and not to be different. However, Jesus presented a supernatural response in verses 19-25:

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, "They hated me without a cause."

Jesus wants us to know that the persecution the world is giving you in the name of Christ is caused by the fact that you *are* like Christ. You made a choice, and by your choice, you became one of the chosen—a people chosen to be in the world, but not of the world (John 15:19). The way the world will treat you will be no different from the way they treated our Master (John 15:20). The Pharisees and the mob wanted to crucify Him, and they did (Luke 23:21, 33). Others asserted, "Never man spake like this man," and many followed Him (John 7:46; Matt. 4:25). Christ reminded us that we will be persecuted (John 15:20; Matt. 5:10-12). The good news is that some will listen and follow us as we follow the Christ (1 Cor.11:1). We are different—not just for difference' sake—but to make a difference for His name's sake (John 15:21).

Remember, the world does not know or understand God (John 8:19), so they will not understand Jesus (John 10:30; 12:44; 14:7-11). In turn, they will not understand us. To them, we speak a foreign language: "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.

Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:5-6). Some things never change. "But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted" (Ezek. 3:7).

The difference between the Christian and the man of the world is the difference between day and night, between light and darkness. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Because Jesus came into the world, the world has no excuse (John 15:22, 24). The natural response by the world is hatred. What the world does not understand, they want to destroy. Jesus said that they hate God (John 15:23) without a cause (v. 25; Ps. 69:4). God's nature is to respond in love (Matt. 5:43-48). Who in the world does that? (Matt. 5:40).

The difference is that the Christian follows the Word, and the man of the world follows the world. By following the Word, the Christian has a different walk, which is called "The Way" (Acts 24:14; John 14:6; Ps. 1; 119). The Christian marches to the tune of a different drummer. We do not walk, talk, think, or react like the world. Jesus said, "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). The Christian in the world is reminiscent of Daniel in the lion's den, surrounded by the enemy but protected by God. Jesus prayed, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15).

The Christian must be aware that there are exceptions to the rule and that sometimes the rule is to withstand the persecution. In Hebrews 11:38, the writer said that the world is not worthy of those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake. Again, Jesus promised, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12). When we walk with Jesus, we are Jesus people. The world is not like us, so they do not like us (1 John 3:13). Frank Pack, in his commentary on John, stated,

"The world does not like those who reject it. It [the world] demands conformity and obedience, and regards all who do not follow its ways as rebels."¹

How many worldly counselors have told precious Christians that Christianity is their problem? How many were advised that their religion is causing them to be unhappy? Satan and his cohorts are so subtle. The advice from the world is to reject God's word and to be wholly like the world. The world's philosophy is that all we have to do is compromise, and we will have the balance. This is not what the Bible teaches. Compromising will keep the persecution from happening, but it will also destroy our Christian example. As Pack observed, "Hostility is mitigated only when he compromises the way of the Lord with the way of the world."²

James warned that this is not the way of a Christian: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). John added this exhortation, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16).

The Christian is not like the world, nor will he ever be, because "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). We are in the world by creation and nature, but we become aliens by a new creation and nature. John 8:23 tells us, "And he said unto them, 'Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.'" Paul made the following analogy,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the

dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk *in newness of life* (emphasis added) (Rom. 6:1-4).

Paul continued, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Our whole way of life is directed by the Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

The Christian's affections must not be on the earth, but above. As Colossians 3:1-3 urges, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." The wicked world does not want us here. They do not understand, but they will be held accountable for their rejecting and persecuting ways. Raymond Brown, in his commentary on John, explained, "The reference to not knowing in John 15:21 leads into the theme of guilt....There is no suggestion that such ignorance lessens culpability. Rather the ignorance itself is culpable."³

Our natural inclination would be to find solace in God's justice. However, like Jesus and Stephen, our supernatural love for our persecutors does not allow us to want them to be lost (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). Peter presented this as a godly attitude, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Therefore, we go (Mark 16:15-16).

The apostles who were set apart for a special service went out. The inspired apostle John, the apostle of love, penned the words of our texts (John 15:18-25 and 17:14-17) and warned that we would be hated without a cause, persecuted like our Lord, and protected from the evil one. When we pray, we are to pray for such protection, but not to pray for isolation (Matt. 6:13). We, too, are set apart (sanctified) for a purpose (John 17:17). We are not to be isolated from the world, but to be insulated in the Word. We are

to be an influence, without being influenced, by the world. How do we do that? Can it even be done?

Of course, God would not ask us to do what is impossible. Mankind has even documented such accomplishments. *The Letter to Diognetus* vi 3, from the late second century, states, "Christians dwell in the world, but do not belong to the world."⁴ How did they do it? How can we do it? How do you balance being in the world with not being of the world?

1. We must, at all cost, keep the Word and keep in prayer. The church at Philadelphia was complimented and encouraged to keep the Word and told that, by doing so, the Lord would keep them (Rev. 3:10). Do we believe His word? John told those of his readers who were considered young men in the faith that they had overcome the wicked one because they had the Word of God in them (1 John 2:13-14). Do we meditate on God's word (Ps. 1:2), hold it in our hearts (Ps. 119:11), and stand ready to defend our hope to our fellow man? Peter encouraged, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Jesus was able to ward off Satan's temptations by quoting the Word of God ("It is written," Matt. 4:1-11). When Paul was teaching the church at Ephesus and others how to deal with the world's temptations, he likened the effort to a war in which the Christian is to put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-13). The different pieces of armor illustrate that the Christian must be fortified with the truth and righteous living, spread the gospel of peace with a strong faith to shield from the devil's fiery darts, have reassurance of salvation surrounding his mind like a helmet, and be armed with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:14-17).

Paul also mentioned that the foundation for such a Christian existence in an unchristian world is the power of prayer (Eph. 6:18-20). The power of the universe is between our two hands. Prayer fortifies and brings solace to the Christian (Matt.

7:7-11; 1 John 5:14). One of the greatest privileges mankind has been given by God is the opportunity to pray.

L. L. D. Bevan suggested that "Prayer is the highest exercise of man's spiritual nature."⁵ L. O. Richards commented, "Both Old Testament and New Testament show that prayer grows out of one's personal relationship with God, who is able and willing to help."⁶ James Thompson contends that every great event in Jesus' life involved prayer: his baptism (Luke 3:21), the choosing of the twelve (Luke 6:12-16), the confession of his messiahship (Luke 9:18-21), the transfiguration (Luke 9:29), Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46), and the cross (Luke 23:46).⁷ Jesus was the man of prayer.

A man's spiritual life cannot rise above his prayer life. Blackwood said, "Someone may ask: 'How can I get an hour for devotions every day in the week?' The answer is simple: 'Take it!'"⁸ Jesus prayed all night (Luke 6:12). He arose early in the morning for prayer (Mark 1:35). He took periods throughout the day for refreshment of prayer (Luke 5:16). A person must develop himself in prayer in order to make a difference.

2. We must, at all cost, influence the world for Christ (Matt. 5:13-16). Jesus wants us to be the salt of the world. We must come out of the saltshaker in order to give taste and preservation to a rotten world. Building church buildings was not Christ's idea of making a difference in the community. The Lord did not say, "Build it and they will come," but rather, "Go" (Matt. 28:18-20). He said that the Christian is to be like a light set on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matt. 5:14). We are not to put our light under a bushel, but on a candlestick so that all can see (Matt. 5:15).

The Lord never intended for the Christian to withdraw from the world as the Essenes at Qumran, the monks of the Catholic religion, the Amish, Mennonites, or modern day cults and communes. The Christian's influence begins at home (Eph. 6:4; 1 Pet. 3:1-2; Josh. 24:15; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). The Christian home is a light to the whole neighborhood and the foundation of a Christian nation. The Christian's influence continues at the work place. An elder I knew who was a successful executive shared that, one

day, his secretary asked him what he had that allowed him to have such a wonderful family. He was able to share the gospel with her. I knew of another brother who took his vacation time in order to worship regularly with the saints. Such examples speak volumes.

The Christian's influence must be felt. At school, our children need to be encouraged to seek out friends whom they can influence for Christ. One by one they can influence their school for Christ. When there are temptations in the school room, corridors, or outside its grounds, the Christian young person can be a voice of reason. The Christian's influence must be felt in the public arena. Romans 13 explains that the public officials are ministers of God. We need to elect godly men and women to such roles. We must be a part of public debate in the different issues that affect our moral life as Americans. It has been said that the only way for evil to exist is for good people to say nothing.

The Christian's influence must also be felt in the church. Paul told young Timothy that though he was young, he was to be an example of a believer: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Paul told the Philippians that though he desired to be with Christ, it was more needful to be with them (Phi. 1:23-24). The Hebrew writer urged us to provoke one another to love and good works, and to encourage one another as we assemble, looking for Christ's second coming (Heb. 10:24-25).

By being in the world, we can influence people not to be of the world, just as we continue not to be of the world. Such an existence is a love-hate relationship. We will love the sinner, but hate the sin. As we try to preach with our lips and lives, many times the world will be hardened (Isa. 6:10; John 12:40; Matt. 12:13). Enduring hostility, hatred, and persecution may be our lot, but what is even more frustrating is the response of apathy (Acts 17:32). Jeremiah the prophet warned, "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). Those

who love the truth share a like precious faith (2 Pet 1:1). Those in the world hate the truth and those who proclaim it. They love to put it down. Those who love the Lord and His word love those who sin against them, and strive to be the light in a dark world.

The story is told about Jesus returning to heaven and an angel quizzing Him on how the world will learn about Him. He responded, "My followers will tell them." The angel asked, "What if they don't?" The Lord replied, "There is no plan B."

We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are the world's last and best hope. We cannot afford not to be in the world. We cannot afford to be like the world. The world is lost in darkness and in death. The Word of God is the way to light and life. The Christian must bear his cross in order to wear his crown (Heb. 12:1-2). The way of the cross leads home.

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A BALANCED VIEW OF SELF

LONNIE SMITH

Turn on the television, and you will note that many talk shows and special events center around self. Mankind is intrigued with himself. We are made up of the emotional, physical, and spiritual. How do we balance these particular areas in our lives? God did not create man with the emotional, spiritual, and physical self and then leave man alone. Just as creation had order, mankind has order, which includes a balance of who we are. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 refers to being complete with God at the coming of our Lord Jesus, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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When it is all said and done, when I have lived my life in this world and am presented before Christ, I want to be seen as complete, blameless. One of man's greatest challenges is to understand self. Through a study of God's word and what He communicates to us, we see His will; He reveals His character, and we are restored to the very image of God. God intended that mankind would become like Him in character, and He created man in His image. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed

to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

When man sins against God, the character is distorted. It is through God's will, His words, His commandments, and ultimately through the very person of Jesus that we become the self that God intended. What is the purpose of life, or what is the purpose of self? It is to glorify God and be changed in His image. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). We are to fear God and keep his commandments because this is what makes mankind complete. As Solomon said, let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

In this manuscript, we will look at three areas of a balanced view of self: (1) the psychological self; (2) the physical self, and finally (3) the spiritual self.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF

The psychological self can be viewed as self-concept. The humanistic way of looking at the psychological self or self concept is through the human eyes, a view that is all about self. This usually leads to self-righteousness, being conceited, prideful, arrogant, and selfish. Self worth comes from God. God has already given us the things we need to understand our inward self, how worthy we are. He created us, he sustains us, he has redeemed us, and through Christ he has given us all things that we need.

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? (Psa. 8:1-4).

God still remembers man. He takes care of man and has allowed man to have dominion over the things of the earth. David, in Psalm 139:14, states "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." What a great self-concept of what God has given us David had. God has redeemed us through Christ. He has provided for us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

SELF-IMAGE

Self-image is how we look at ourselves or see ourselves. How we see ourselves is how others see us also. We should see ourselves only through the eyes of God. The Israelites give us a good example of how one sees himself.

And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight (Num. 13:32-33).

The average person usually looks at it himself through the humanistic view. People see themselves through their jobs, relationships, education, wealth, and power. The true biblical concept of self should be that we see ourselves through the eyes of God. We are the children of God, we are a chosen generation. We are a royal priesthood. We are an holy nation, a peculiar people. We are Christians. We are the servant of the Lord. So the self-image should be not to see myself through my eyes but through God's eyes. Three things that men glory over about themselves are wisdom, power, and riches.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his

might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jer. 9:23-24).

SELF ESTEEM

How do I feel about me? In spite of all that goes on in the world, how people treat me, or what I am going through, I am renewed because of God and who He is and what He has done for me. Paul said, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Paul had a good view of himself, and he felt good about who he was. Jesus was able to wash his disciples' feet because he was not hung up on self. He was not arrogant, vain, or empty.

BALANCE OF PHYSICAL SELF

When we look at the physical self, we must include an overall balance of one's basic human needs. A well-known pioneer of psychology, Abraham Maslow, came up with the higher self, or actualization needs and lower deprivation needs:

1. When a person gets to his highest potential
2. Self esteem
3. Belongingness and love
4. Safety
5. Physiological

These are the basic human needs required to function. Is there a balance to physical needs? Yes, there is. If you recall in Matthew 4:4, "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," Jesus did not deny that man needs bread. He needs these physical things to live, but he also needs the word of God to live in a spiritual sense. This is a perfect example of balance.

Off balance would be to only look after the physical needs and not the spiritual needs. Jesus told his disciples when he was at the well with the woman, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus realized what was most important to him was doing God's will. Man's physical needs should never outweigh his spiritual needs. The children of Israel grumbled and murmured in the wilderness because they felt that Moses led them in the wilderness without meeting their physical needs. God tested them to see where their trust was. Their trust was not in God, their trust was in their stomach. Because of that, they were punished. We can look at example after example in the Bible where the physical became higher priority than the spiritual. Matthew 6:33 should be the top priority: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." It should be before self-actualization, self esteem, belonging and love, safety and physiological. When one seeks the kingdom of God first, all these other things fall into place in the right way. When it comes to human needs, we get all jumbled up: we put our other needs first and leave God behind, and our lives become a mess.

David said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psa. 37:25). God takes care of his people. He has promised that in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." We should not have to worry. Paul said, "I have learned that whatever state I am in to be content" (Phil. 4:11b). Paul was self-sufficient because he realized where his source of needs came from, it did not come from himself.

Too often, we rely on ourselves and not God. We have so much security in our society today with our car alarms, house security, all types of weapons, but what about our security when it comes to our souls? Jesus told his disciples in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." The peace and security that we have from God is peace of

mind. It is all right to have a car alarm and to lock doors, but recall the trials of Judah. The false teachers said, "Peace, peace, the temple of the lord." Their security was in the temple, but they did not realize that their safety and security was actually in God. They trusted more in the temple than in God, so God allowed the Babylonians to destroy the temple, and they had nothing to rely on. They could not rely on their armies. The children of Israel wanted armies, but God did not intend for them to have such an honor because he wanted them to trust in His security and safety.

In belongingness and love, God intended for us to belong to someone and to love one another. We love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Belonging is a part of life: everyone needs somebody. Where is the balance? "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" (Luke 14:25-26).

The highest level of basic human need is self-actualization, or reaching one's goals. People try to reach their goals by getting the job they want, the education they want, and the power they want. God's goal for mankind is what we should be striving for: to be conformed to the very image of Christ. Romans 8:29 expresses God's eternal purpose for the church and all of mankind: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Throughout Paul's epistles, his main goal was for the church to be conformed in the image of Christ. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Paul says we all should grow up in the stature of Christ. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). The top level of human need is not about what we achieve externally but what we achieve spiritually, doing the things of God, doing His will, and conforming to the image of Christ.

A BALANCED VIEW OF THE SPIRITUAL SELF

The Bible gives us universal and particular concepts. It allows us to focus on the major things and still be able to do the minor things. When we put those things together it makes sense, but if you do one without the other, one is not complete when it comes to the spiritual aspect. The children of Israel lost the sense of the universal and the particulars when they only focused on the ceremonial things such as sacrifice and did not live their lives according to God's will on a daily basis.

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah (Isa. 1:1-10).

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hosea 4:6).

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Micah 4:1-4).

Jesus speaks to the Pharisees and the scribes and calls them hypocrites because they were majoring in the minors and minoring in the majors. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23). It is possible for Christians to be off balance and major in minors and minor in majors. We can go to church every Sunday and every time the church meets and not have the heart of God, the love of God. The Good Samaritan is a good example. The priest and the Levite saw this man in need and passed by on the other side. They were probably men who were very faithful in their worship and sacrifice, but when it came

to helping someone in need, they could not do it. Throughout Jesus' ministry, we read about how the Sadducees accused him of not observing the Sabbath day because he performed miracles and helped others. The law never said they should not help or do good on the Sabbath day. The example that Jesus gave was of David in Matthew 12 when David went through the field and took up the grains. He did it in view of the fact that he was doing good. Jesus did the same thing on the Sabbath day.

There are several examples in the Bible of spiritual balance. Our worship service is a spiritual balance. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Not all spirit means a connection with God. Not having the right attitude, sincerity, humility, love, reverence all represent the spirit. We also need the standard: the truth. If we do one without the other, our worship is not acceptable to God. For the balanced view of spiritual, we must have both. Paul, in writing to his own people, in Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

One can have a knowledge of God yet not have a zeal for God. One can be doing many good things but not keeping oneself unspotted from the world. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

CONCLUSION

Paul prayed, "And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess.5:13) and "that our whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless before the coming of the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:23). We should live our lives in balance and not become hypocrites in our walk that we will neither go to the right nor to the left, but straight down the middle as Jesus did. We must continue to work on our balanced view of self because this is what God would have us to do.

BALANCE IN UNDERSTANDING AND COUNSELING THE HOMOSEXUAL

JAMES MEADOWS

INTRODUCTION

This is a grave time in the history of our nation. “Changes are taking place in our way of life, and in our national character which have lowered, and will continue to lower, the vitality of our people, the quality of our institutions, and our basic values.”¹ The inevitable result is that we will undergo a progressive disintegration and possibly the eventual collapse of our democracy.

This appears to be an age where many have decided that the best way to avoid guilt is to change the rules. Some aspects of psychology have contributed to this in sexual and social areas, but the tendency is as old as humanity. It inevitably lies behind idolatry, for in idolatry man makes the rules. For example, recall the antics of the Greek gods who warred, raped, and stole, or the religious activities of the Canaanites, whose worship forms included gluttony, drunkenness, and cult prostitution.

The “Gay Liberation Movement” is upon us and one called it the “most potentially devastating movement working in today’s society.”² Just how large is this movement? What is homosexuality, and how can we deal with it? What should be the Christian’s attitude toward the homosexual?

In this present lesson, we purpose to observe (1) the problem and the present attitude toward it; (2) the meaning of

homosexuality; (3) what does the word of God say about homosexuality; (4) what are some possible causes of homosexuality; (5) what are some principles involved in understanding and counseling the homosexual and our attitude toward them; (6) Conclusion.

THE GROWING PROBLEM AND TOLERANT ATTITUDE TOWARD IT

A rapidly growing problem in our society is sexual perversion due to the present confusion in sex roles and the deterioration of our stability. It is estimated that there are now between fifteen and thirty million homosexuals in America. In 1964, it was established that there were over four thousand homosexuals in Washington, D.C. and over a five-year period, more than four hundred were dismissed from the U.S. State Department alone. San Francisco now has the dubious honor of being the "gay capitol" of our land with over one hundred thirty thousand known homosexuals. Jess Stern in his book, *"The Sixth Man,"* boasted, "Someday we will outnumber you, and you will be the abnormal ones and we will be the normal."³

Many churches have jumped on the aberrant bandwagon by endorsing the homosexual's "variant lifestyle," ordaining them as "clergy," and vowing to fight for their rights in all areas of life. **The Anglican Church of Canada's decision to ordain non-practicing homosexuals was defended by the archbishop on February 27, 1979, and he refused to label homosexual's relations as sinful by saying: "It is not my job or the job of the church to be always defining and judging things."**⁴ A Catholic theological study concluded that "such acts as premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, as well as homosexual behavior, are not to be judged by **fixed rules**, but by higher ethical standards within the context of a particular situation."⁵ The Knoxville (Tenn.) *News Sentinel*, Friday, June 16, 1978, reported that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States voted against a **motion calling homosexuality sin.**

Society as a whole is approving homosexual behavior and laws are being minimized and, in many cases, eliminated. England legalized homosexuality in 1967, Denmark (1930), and Sweden (1944). "Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Oregon, and Hawaii allow acts of homosexuality between consenting adults."⁶

THE MEANING OF HOMOSEXUALITY

A definition of several terms associated with sexual perversion, especially homosexuality, will help our study. **Homosexual** means "relating to, or being of the same sex." John White writes that "a homosexual act is one designed to produce sexual orgasm between members of the same sex. A homosexual is a man or woman who engages in homosexual acts."⁷ **Homosexuality** is:

A typical sexuality characterized for manifestation of sexual desire toward a member of one's own sex; erotic activity with a member of one's own sex...the want or lack of sexual sensibility for the opposite sex, even to the extent of horror, while sexual inclination and impulse toward the same sex are present.⁸

Lesbian is a "female homosexual; called from the reputed sensuality of the Lesbian people and literature; so called from the reputed homosexual band associated with Appo-Greek poet or Lesbos; or of relating to homosexual relations between females." Gay women are "comfortable with the label 'lesbian' and the most derogatory word is 'dyke.' The sexual aspect is not the primary element in a lesbian's self definition."⁹ **Sodomy** comes from the homosexual proclivities of the men of Sodom. "Carnal copulation with a member of the same sex, with an animal or unnatural copulation with a member of the same sex, the penetration of the male organ into the mouth or anus of another." **Sodomite** means **Kedhesh**, fem. – denotes properly a male temple prostitute; **Kedheshak** is tr. "prostitute" Gen. 38:21, 22; Hos. 4:14; in Deut. 23:17 translated 'whore' (KJV); margin (Sodomites).¹⁰ **Pederasty** means "anal intercourse especially with a boy as a passive partner." **Fellatio** is the practice of "obtaining sexual satisfaction

by oral stimulation of the penis.” **Cunnilingus** means “stimulation of the vulva or clitoris with the lips or tongue.” **Buggery** is “unnatural sexual intercourse.” **Bestiality** is “sexual intercourse between a human being and a lower animal.” **Gay** means “being free from shame, guilt, misgivings, or regret over being homosexual.”¹¹

WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD SAY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

Sexual perversity on the part of the men of Sodom led to that city’s destruction. Two angels came to Lot’s house and

Before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: and they called unto Lot, and said unto him, where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly (Gen. 19:4-7).

First, the terms “sodomite” and “homosexual” across the centuries have been synonymous. **Second**, the men of Sodom wanted Lot’s visitors brought out “that we may know them.” The word **know** (Heb. **Yada**: Grk. **Ginosho**) is sometimes used as a euphemism for “to have sexual relations with.” Genesis 4:1 says Adam “**knew** Eve his wife; and she conceived.” Joseph **knew** not Mary until after she had given birth to Jesus (Matt. 1:25). The men of Sodom clearly wanted to engage in homosexual activities. Lot knew their design and begged them to “do not so **wickedly**.” The Lord said their sin was “very grievous” (Gen. 18:20). **Third**, Isaiah denounced those who “declare their sin as Sodom, they hid it not” (Isa. 3:9). **Fourth**, Ezekial also alludes to the iniquity of Sodom (Ezek. 16:49). **Fifth**, Peter said God

Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live

ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation ("lascivious life" ASV) of the wicked. (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds) (2 Pet. 2:6-8).

Peter describes the homosexual activities (along with other sins) of Sodom and Gomorrah as "ungodly," "filthy conversation," "wicked," and "unlawful deeds." **Sixth**, Jude declares that "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). "Fornication here is the Greek word **ekporneuo**. The prefix **ek** strengthens **porneuo** and "implies excessive indulgence."¹² or "to commit much fornication."¹³ The word "strange" or "other" flesh here means "out of the order of nature,"¹⁴ "contrary to nature,"¹⁵ "that which was unnatural,"¹⁶ "a departure from the law of nature." The word "strange" in Leviticus 10:1 means "strange to the law" or that which God commanded. God has commanded and approved sexual relations between men and women in marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-5), but men seeking after men and women after women is "strange flesh," i.e., flesh which God has not commanded. It is contrary to "that appointed by God for the fulfillment of natural desire"¹⁷ (cf. Rom. 1:26, 27). This clearly reveals that **homosexuality is a form of fornication!** The men of Sodom were destroyed because they were guilty of homosexual activities. **Seventh**, a listing of all the terms used to describe the people of Sodom are (1) "wicked" (Gen. 13:13), (2) "sinners" (Gen. 13:13), (3) "sin is very grievous" (Gen. 18:20), (4) "wickedly" (Gen. 19:7), (5) "declare their sin" (Isa. 3:9), (6) "iniquity" (Ezek. 16:49), (7) "ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:6), (8) "filthy conversation" (2 Pet. 2:7), (9) "unlawful deeds" (2 Pet. 2:8), (10) "fornication" (Jude 7), (11) "strange flesh" (Jude 7).

Homosexuality was strongly condemned in the law of Moses. "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Lev. 18:22). "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death..." (Lev. 20:13). There was to be no "sodomite" or "dog" (euphemism for "a male prostitute") "of the

sons of Israel” (Deut. 23:17, 18). “And Judah did evil...And there were also sodomites in the land...” (1 Kings 14:22, 24). Asa and Jehoshaphat, both righteous kings removed the sodomites from the land (1 Kings 15:11, 12: 22-46). Josiah broke down “the houses of the sodomites” (2 Kings 23:7) during his reformation. During the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages, while God was revealing his law gradually and progressively, he tolerated certain human weaknesses (cf Acts 14:15, 17:30) but there was never a time in any age when he tolerated homosexuality.

Christ condemned homosexuality despite the claim of some to the contrary. “Jesus specifically stated that God created **male** (Hebrew, **zakar**) and **female** (Hebrew, **negevah**) (Matt. 19:4). We find no mention of a third or fourth type of human sexual being.”¹⁸ He condemned fornication (Matt. 19:9), and homosexuality is a form of fornication. “Every form of unchastity is included in the term fornication.” In antiquity, “fornication” (**porneio**) was used in a generic sense “of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”¹⁹ **Porneio** includes “any kind of extramarital sexual intercourse” and “all kinds of unnatural sexual intercourse.”²⁰

Paul describes homosexuality in Romans 1:26, 27:

“...their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”

Sodomy

is characterized as: (a) the result of **vile** passions; passions of dishonor (ASV f); (b) a change from the natural to that which is against **nature** (note Jude’s reference to the Sodomites going after “strange flesh” vs. 7); (c) **lust** causing males to burn for

males and females for females; (d) **unseemliness**; and (e) **error** that was due recompensed.”²¹

Paul characterizes homosexuality as abandoning “natural relations,” that is “the normal and normative heterosexual responses and behavior. The phrase ‘natural relation’ (Greek, **fusike ckresis**) refers directly to God’s creation order, nature (Greek, **fusis**), here meaning the way he intends man and woman to relate sexually”²² “...Paul cites these sexual violations of nature as marking the depth of immorality to which godlessness descends, because sexual degradation always constitutes such a mark.” The moment God is taken out of the control in men’s life the stench of sex aberration is bound to arise. It is so the world over to this day. Without God, sex runs wild.”²³

Paul’s plain language to the church at Corinth shows that a **practicing** homosexual cannot enter heaven.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God...(1 Cor. 6:9-11).

“The word ‘effeminate’ found here is from the Greek **malokos**, which means ‘soft.’ The secondary meaning is: of persons, soft, effeminate, esp. of catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be used homosexually.”²⁴ The phrase in verse 9, ‘abusers of themselves with men’ is translated from the Greek word **arsanskoites**, which means: (a) ‘One who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite: (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10, 11)²⁵ (b) “A male homosexual, pederast, sodomite. (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10).²⁶

By way of summary, one notes that there are four passages in the Old Testament which deal explicitly with homosexual acts. In Genesis 19 and Judges 19, such acts are proposed but not carried out – first by the men of Sodom, and second by the men of Gibeah. There are two laws (Lev. 18:22;

20:13) explicitly prohibiting such acts, each of which calls such an abomination ...Homosexual acts judged from the Old Testament viewpoint violate the divine will and are described as an abomination.²⁷

The key New Testament passages on the topic of homosexuality are: Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-10, 2 Peter 2:6-10, and Jude 1:7. Calm reflection on these scriptures shows that the Maker views homosexuality as a violation of his holy will.²⁸

SOME ARGUMENTS OFFERED TO UPHOLD HOMOSEXUALITY

First, homosexuals agree that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 teach that homosexuality is abomination, but this was because God desired the children of Israel to increase in number and any sex that didn't reproduce was considered sin. First, the most obvious point they overlook is the very fact that the homosexual relationship cannot reproduce shows it is against nature. If such a homosexual relationship is "natural and good" why did not God bless such with the ability to produce children? **Second,** the further explanation, that due to our population problem, it is no longer a sin to enter such a relationship, would justify bestiality condemned in Leviticus 18:23. Furthermore, why did God condemn sex with other members of the family which would produce children?

Second, homosexuals are born that way – God created them to be "gay" and he chooses not to change them and they cannot change. Such a theory would make God the creator of that which he calls abomination (sin). Paul said some members of the church at Corinth **had been** homosexuals, but they had been washed, sanctified and justified (1 Cor. 6:9-11). It is true God created us with the ability to become homosexuals, liars, thieves, etc., but he also gave us the ability to become preachers, elders, and faithful Christians.

Third, "some people assert that what Paul castigates here is homosexual promiscuity, not homosexual activity per se, and that God can tolerate homosexual monogamy just as easily as he can commend heterosexual monogamy." First, Paul knew that in the Greco-Roman culture, certain types of homosexuality were approved, and he would have told the Romans "if any homosexual behavior was approved." "How would it be possible for Paul, who knew of the philosophically justified homosexual practice of the time, not to distinguish that from the 'unnatural relations' he speaks of in Romans 1:26 if he intended such a distinction?"²⁹ They overlook the fact that Paul condemned the homosexual "lust" that inflamed them to the homosexual act. **Second,** Paul would have overthrown the entire teaching of the Old Testament against all kinds of homosexuality if this argument be true.

Fourth, some gay-sympathizing religionists often contend that the sin of the Sodomites at Sodom was "inhospitality," not "homosexuality." In the face of accumulated evidence, previously presented, to prove homosexual conduct, such an interpretation is absurd. Furthermore, if what they did was only a breach of hospitality, one would be hard pressed to explain why Lot was willing to sacrifice his own daughters to prevent it.

Fifth, the contention is often made that sexual preference is strictly a private matter and the "homosexual's rights must be protected." First, they have not been content to keep their "sexual perversions" private but have declared "we are coming out of the closet." **Second,** one's rights end when and where they encroach upon the rights of others. **Third,** homosexuals believe in discriminating at some point. Some of them protest child pornography. They also exclude those anti-social to their conduct. How many of them will defend the "rights" of those who practice bestiality and incest? **Fourth,** one does not have the **right** to claim as a **right** that which God does not allow in the first place. Homosexuals do not have the **right** to continue in homosexual practices.

Sixth, but homosexuality is simply a variant of normal human sexuality and woven into the fabric of society. **First**, one does not have the right to engage in, or call normal, a lifestyle that God condemns. **Second**, if it is only a variant lifestyle, then other sinners can use the same logic to justify their sins. "Prostitutes, for example, can argue that their activities do not represent sickness or sin, but only a different lifestyle, and that they can't help the way their sexual instincts lead them."³⁰

Seventh, homosexuality would enable people to fulfill their love and sexual needs without contributing to the overpopulation problem. **First**, this argument admits that homosexuality cannot fulfill one of the God given purposes of marriage. **Second**, during the 4th century B.C. in Athens, "homosexual activities were promoted according to Aristotle to avoid overpopulation. Because of the lax morals of the age, public opinions tolerated these homosexual actions."³¹ So this argument is not new.

Eighth, homosexuals ought to be received into the church "and society generally on the same basis as everyone else. We are all sinful, and we are all equally redeemable." **First**, it is true that we are all sinful and redeemable, but redemption does not give one license to continue in sin. Paul's statement to the former homosexuals at Corinth, "and such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11), shows that they had quit the practice. **Second**, a homosexual can come to Christ and be forgiven, just like any other sinner; but cannot remain a practicing homosexual.

SOME PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER IN COUNSELING HOMOSEXUALS

"Ministry is shaped by a perception of the needs of the person to whom ministry is proposed. This is the key in considering ministry to homosexual persons."³² The next few pages propose to set forth some characteristics and attitudes that the counselor must have, as well as some steps to follow in counseling the homosexual.

First, it is my personal judgment that the counselor must strive to become as familiar as possible with some of the possible causes of homosexuality. What causes homosexuality is a question that psychiatrists, psychologists, medical directors, scientists, and theologians, and others have wrestled with for years. It is also one with which the counselor must wrestle, realizing that there is "no clearly identified single cause of homosexuality."³³

Clyde Narramore³⁴ suggests the following possible causes: lack of wholesome sex education, faulty childhood impressions about sex, unwholesome influence of society about sex, dominant mother, thoughtless mother, weak and cruel father, overindulgent mother, children seduced and molested find pleasure and follow in the path.

Morton Hunt³⁵ gives a list that is a little different: seduction, bad example, unattractiveness, sex segregation, heredity, congenial defect, hormone imbalance, wrong upbringing, running away from it all, emotional sickness, and natural impulse.

An increasing body of research would seem to support the idea that homosexuality is **not** inherited, or the result of physiological and biological abnormality...It has been found that while some homosexuals have hormone imbalances, many do not, and a similar hormone imbalance is found in heterosexuals."³⁶

Keysor wrote that "most experts now see little evidence that homosexuality is caused by either genetic factors or hormone imbalance."³⁷

Paul Chance said

There is no evidence that homosexuals have faulty hormone levels, or that their sexual orientation may be changed with hormone injections. Hormone shots may increase the level of

sexual desire, but they won't change where the desire is directed.³⁸

Dr. Ted R. Evans, psychology fellow at the Neuropsychiatric Institute of UCLA, cites research that "in his opinion shows no evidence whatever of any genetic or hormonal causes for homosexuality." Dr. Don Twedie, Professor of Psychology at Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, who also has a private practice in clinical psychology at Hacienda Heights, California, says "it appears not to be genetic or congenial and there is no correlation between body typology or endocrine development and homosexual behavior...One's biology does not cause the condition."³⁹ Dr. Charles Socorides, M.D., writing in *Journal of American Medicine*, says "that homosexuality is not innate or inborn but an acquired or learned process." Most evidence seems to indicate that "the central doctrine of the permissivist position, that homosexuality is inborn, has been virtually demolished."⁴⁰ Lake "claims that after the most exhaustive test no physiological basis for homosexuality can be found."⁴¹ Flatt⁴² reports that the findings have been too inconsistent and inconclusive for one to make a case about male hormones and female hormones causing behavior patterns. Even though the evidence is strongly against genetic and hormonal causes, there are some who still believe that

Some homosexuals are such because of an aberration in their inheritance; that is, physiologically they are born with mixed body characteristics and mixed hormones which drive them to an ambiguity of their own sexuality and consequently of their choice of a sexual partner. This is no fault of their own, they are born this way and cannot help it.⁴³

Most of the evidence seems to point to the fact that homosexuality is a learned process. "Learning is the main cause of homosexuality and unlearning should therefore be the main thrust in counseling the homosexual."⁴⁴ Collins wrote, "we are then left with the conclusion that homosexuality is

learned."⁴⁵ Daniel wrote that "a homosexual learns to be one and what he has learned he can 'unlearn' if he wants to badly enough."⁴⁶

Second, the counselor must examine his own attitude toward homosexuals. "If you retain a revulsion about homosexuals...if you are unfamiliar with the complexity of homosexuality and its causes, then you will be ineffective in helping."⁴⁷ He/she must deal with fear (in himself and others) the subject tends to generate – "What psychologist George Weinberg calls **homophobia**."⁴⁸ Homophobia may take many forms such as fear of "catching" homosexuality (as if it were a contagious disease), "fear of being thought homosexual by others, fear of possible homosexual response in oneself...and so on."⁴⁹ The prejudice and hatred "toward homosexuals on the part of Christians who have never harbored a homosexual impulse is appalling, existing even among some who teach that Spirit-controlled Christians must show love and compassion."⁵⁰

Third, the counselor must avoid stereotyping homosexual persons. It is inaccurate to lump all homosexuals into one category. They are different as all people are different. **Tim LaHaye suggests the following varieties, and that you will find each one is unique and should be treated differently.**

1. The unhappy Gay.
2. The Christian whose conscience constantly plagues him.
3. The Christian who fights homosexual temptations everyday of his life.
4. The deceived homosexual. Millions fall into this category, for they have been duped by society, education, and religion into thinking that homosexuality is acceptable, though they feel guilt, loneliness, depression, etc.
5. The former homosexual Christian who lets his guard down and falls into sin.
6. The defiant deviant.
7. The militant homosexual.⁵¹

Fourth, the counselor must realize, before counseling ever starts, that the homosexual's greatest need is love...or

lack of it. Anyone who works with homosexuals “had better face the fact that they have an enormous need to be loved. Their lifetime pattern of rejection will naturally make them suspicious...”⁵² Thus, opportunities must be provided for self-love, God’s love, and being loved by others. We must seek to extend “compassion” (biblical love) to them.

Fifth, the counselor must see the other person apart from his problem. One of the pillars in the foundation on which one “must stand to presume to minister to homosexual persons: acceptance of them as persons apart from their problem (and sexuality may not be their problem at all).”⁵³

“Sixth, the counselor must distinguish early those homosexuals who are genuinely concerned over their condition per se and those who wish to use the clergyman for their own purposes.”⁵⁴

The homosexual who seeks advice because he has gotten into the hands of the police is seldom looking for more than a temporary respite. This is also true of the homosexual who, although he seeks help, persistently continues to maintain his homosexual friendships and to perform sex acts. The best candidate for counseling and/or psychotherapy is the individual who is in conflict with his homosexuality and who has developed enough anxiety as a result of the conflict that he is likely to persist in his therapeutic efforts...The best test of sincerity is the willingness to forgo sexual activity.⁵⁵

Seventh, Bill Flatt⁵⁶ **suggests several steps that should be followed in helping the homosexual unlearn what he/she has learned.** In establishing with the client, the counselor must have a therapeutic attitude which would include acceptance, interest, empathy, understanding, love, genuineness, confidentiality, and strength. Try to learn as much history as possible through asking some important questions. Give the

person some insight that will enable him/her to relive some of the critical experiences. Personal discipline (self-control) must be encouraged.

For homosexuals who wish to change, two kinds of learning must take place: **unlearning and new learning**. Old habits, attitudes, and feelings about homosexuality should be unlearned; new habits, attitudes, and feelings need to be learned. Renounce the homosexual culture and become involved in a loving, alive Christian community.⁵⁷

Eighth, John Scott, who has successfully changed a number of homosexuals through counseling, believes that one ought to follow these basic beliefs about alcoholism. (John Scott substitutes the word homosexuality) suggested by Howard J. Clinebell.

1. Homosexuality is a sin and not a sickness from start to finish.
2. Homosexuality begins as a personal sin and ends as a sickness.
3. Homosexuality is a sickness which involves the sin of abuse.
4. Homosexuality is a sickness which is caused by a combination of factors involving both sin and sickness.
5. Homosexuality involves sin in the sense that it has destructive consequences.
6. Homosexuality is a social sin.⁵⁸

Ninth, the counselor must have compassion for the homosexual, but it must not be false compassion that confirms him in his wicked ways. It must be compassion that tells the practicing homosexual the truth of God's revelation, that points out the ultimate end of breaking of God's commandments, and the forgiveness that is possible if one repents and obeys the Lord.

Tenth, the homosexual must be forgiven when he/she becomes a Christian and changes his/her life. Paul told the Corinthians:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Some of the Corinthians **had been** practicing homosexuals before conversion, but they had repented, had become Christians, and had quit practicing such.

CONCLUSION

Our purpose as Christians should be to so live that our lives bring glory to God and helpful to other people. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom. 14:7). We must love and be concerned about all people, yes, even homosexuals. It is my judgment that some of the following factors are essential if I would be successful as a counselor.

I must realize that some of the most capable people (as far as ability to do things) have the problem of homosexuality. In other words, all homosexuals are not "gutter" people.

Regardless of how much I may love and care for one who is a homosexual, I must never lose sight of the fact that it is contrary to God's will in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The last thing an unrepentant homosexual needs is for me to endorse his deviant behavior.

I must develop the ability to accept them apart from their problems. If I am not open and honest about my own feelings, then I will fail both myself and the person I am trying to help.

I must feel that they are persons of sacred worth and that they need spiritual and emotional care. They may never be completely free of their plaguing problem, but I can help them overcome the temptations. I can strive to help the person to a heterosexual adjustment.

I must face the fact that a homosexual's greatest need is to be loved. My extending love and fellowship with a desire to help is not compromise. He/she is a sinner that desperately needs Jesus Christ, and I will never reach him/her without first showing my own love. I must help him/her to know that God loves them and desires that they be saved (John 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9).

I must be just as willing to forgive the homosexual as the heterosexual when sin occurs. I must be just as tolerant and compassionate toward the homosexual as the heterosexual.

I must realize that the homosexual's choice is his. I can teach him and try to lead him, but as Bill Flatt says, "I cannot and should not force homosexuals to change."⁵⁹

I need to help the church become better informed about the problem of homosexuality. There is a vast amount of misunderstanding, which has led to a hostile attitude and, in some cases, mistreatment of those who are homosexuals.

I must be regularly in prayer for God's help to always have the right attitude myself.

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SECTION III

ALUMNI

BALANCE IN SEEKING THE LOST

ZACK KRUG

INTRODUCTION

I work with a small congregation in South Mississippi, and the building we worship in is awkwardly shaped. It is more than twice as long as it is wide. It has three rows of pews with two aisles, so there is a center row of pews and two next to the walls. Where do you think the majority sit? They mostly form an upside-down "U" (as you look from the podium) beginning on the outside rows and joining in the back half of the middle row. When I first preached there, the seating took me by surprise. When I stood up to preach, I made a joke as if my voice was echoing. For a while, some of us tried different ways to get everyone to sit closer together and toward the front. As you can imagine, we have given up. The real focus is on filling those empty spaces with lost souls who have returned to the Lord.

Zack Krug left his job as a goldsmith in 2000 to attend ETSPM. He graduated in 2002 and went to work as a campus minister. He has since taken a job as a full-time preacher with the Rocky Creek church of Christ in Lucedale, Mississippi, where he remains. He is married to Laura and has four children: Shealyn, Kaylie, Evan, and Gabriel. He has served as a family and youth minister and has worked in such areas as jail ministry, Bible camps, and various meetings. Since the age of eighteen, Zack has preached for more than thirty congregations. He believes his success will be measured as a husband, father, and teacher of the word.

The Rocky Creek community is like many other small, country communities. You do not say anything ugly about anyone because you have no idea whether or not you are talking to their

family. We, like many other congregations in the church, need a lot of improvement on our purpose for existence. What I mean is that we need to reach out to the lost more than we do. I have told the congregation many times that if we could help bring back all the unfaithful who are related to our faithful brethren, the only begging we would be doing would concern a larger auditorium.

What I am learning as a young preacher is that I have to educate my brethren on what it means to look for and teach these people. Many of them do not realize that reaching the lost is so much more than just Bible studies. They also do not realize that everyone can and needs to be involved. Many are too concerned about their abilities or the lack thereof to just trust God to lead them. If we are not careful as we learn to carry on Jesus' mission, we may fall into some of the bad habits of the past. We want to make sure we are looking for the lost with the right motives so we do not lose our focus and end up driving people away.

With that illustration, you have seen where I am going in this discussion.

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building (1 Cor. 3:5-9).¹

LOOKING FOR THE LOST IS NOT FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE

I doubt anyone who knows the apostle Paul would refer to him as ordinary, but that is exactly how he referred to himself in the above text. He said there was nothing amazing about him or Apollos. There is a story behind these verses. Paul was writing to a congregation he had helped establish. During his eighteen months in Corinth, he met the faithful couple Aquila and Priscilla

and spent much of his time teaching in the synagogues and wrestling with those Jews who opposed him. As a result of his teaching, many Jews and Gentiles in the area heard the gospel. Those effects carried over when Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles and wound up teaching and worshipping in the house of a devout man named Justus. Before Paul moved on, he saw Crispus (the ruler of the synagogue next to Justus' house) and many other Corinthians obey the gospel (Acts 18:1-8).

Apollos served the Corinthian brethren in a different but complimentary way. The Bible does not say much about him, but before God closed the books He informed us that Apollos was a man well-learned in the Scriptures with a fire to preach and teach. After he was more thoroughly taught about Christianity, he traveled to Corinth, where he began making disciples and defending Jesus against the Jews publicly (Acts 18:24-28).

Paul, Apollas, and Cephas had done nothing more than serve in God-given opportunities. We should not be surprised that he felt this way. Look through the New Testament and see that Paul referred to himself as a servant and a prisoner of Christ. This faithful man appreciated his salvation against his former mistakes, and he became relentless in giving God all he had with the desire to live up to his calling. In this passion he identified with Apollos, who had the fire in his bones of which Jeremiah spoke (Jer. 20:9).

The Corinthians, on the other hand, were holding these and other disciples on high pedestals. Some of the brethren had been quarrelling and dividing themselves according to the man who had immersed them. Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul had asked them, "Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13). In our text Paul was reminding them that he and Apollos were merely servants who had planted and watered with the Word. He had already shown that he was one sent on a mission when he wrote, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17).

If we are not careful, we may be doing the same thing today. It can be easy to remove ourselves from examples like Paul and Apollos and see them as men from times and places foreign

to us. Some have attempted to excuse themselves from a like faith because they feel that men such as these enjoyed special privileges from God. That is not true. We could say that we are in a better situation because we have access to the completed Bible. It is also easy to view great examples of faith (such as Paul's) as unattainable because we hold them in such high esteem. But Paul was only human. He dealt with temptation and failed God at times. He made his mistakes and endured weaknesses. There is no reason you and I cannot be as effective as this man of God was. We have to see him as one no greater than a human servant obeying the Lord from a deep love and appreciation. That is the only requirement: an appreciation for who God is and what He has done that results in an active love. If these things become the foundation for our service, we too will work with the same zeal.

I am afraid we have made looking for and reaching the lost too difficult. Sid Smith, an elder at Rocky Creek once said, "God's word and instructions are simple; it is humans that complicate things." Consider the congregations searching for a full-time minister. Many of them are looking to hire men with lofty titles, resumes, and college degrees. Too many congregations have turned evangelism into a "ministers only" club, and they want an "expert" in this area to come in and revive the work. As a result, the members have distanced themselves from Jesus' life work, and they have come to believe there is no way to be successful without a hired man. Those problems lead us to our next observation.

LOOKING FOR THE LOST IS OUR PART

Someone once said, "What is everyone's job is no one's job." That is not true in the church. When Jesus last spoke to His disciples, He gave instructions for each of them to follow and teach (Matt. 28:18-20). Those instructions to look for and teach the lost have become personal to each obedient soldier of Christ. So, in the case of the church and the local congregation, what is everyone's job becomes the congregation's work. There is one Christ who began and handed down the mission (Luke 19:10). There is one mission we have to accomplish. There is one body to carry out this mission, and this one body, the church, is comprised

of many members. The mission becomes a uniting factor among God's children, and that is exactly the point Paul was making when he said, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one" (1 Cor. 3:8). The Corinthian brethren had divided themselves into cliques, but Paul showed that he and Apollos had been working together toward the same goal. They both wanted to help raise up a congregation of Christians who would in turn teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). If they had been established as the result of united effort, certainly they should continue together in that unity.

How do we translate that into our time and situations? Every Christian in the local congregation has a role in looking for the lost, and a congregation will only be successful when everyone is involved. You may hear many different answers when Christians are asked what determines the success of a congregation, but the Bible shows, in the story of Acts, that effort in reaching out to the lost determines validation in God's eyes. Wendell Winkler once demonstrated his growth in learning this truth. I was privileged to hear him at a leadership seminar in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. During one of his messages, he told us that he had at one time believed there were three functions in the local congregation: fellowship, benevolence, and evangelism. He then told us that he had grown to learn that fellowship and benevolence are important, but they are aids in reaching out to the lost. Fellowship strengthens the church for better work, and benevolence enables more effective teaching.

Concerning involvement, Paul used the human body as an illustration to show the Corinthians how important each member was in their collective group. First Corinthians chapter twelve was an extension of the following statement to the Romans:

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly (Rom. 12:4-6a).

What happens to the human body when we begin removing parts? It does not function properly. That was Paul's point in chapter twelve. He showed that no one body part is more important than any other just as no one member of the congregation is any more important or functional than any other. Each Christian matters and is necessary. If your entire body was an eye, how would you hear? If every member was a teacher, who would encourage? If all were elders, who would follow? Reaching out to the lost is not just for preachers, elders, or men with evangelism techniques. Everyone is needed, but looking for the lost has been misrepresented. Many brethren have limited evangelism to merely setting up and conducting Bible studies, but it is so much more, and we as preachers have to take responsibility in not feeding into this misconception. We cannot work as if evangelism is largely up to us. We must also broaden our teaching to show brethren the truth. Show them the lady in 2 John who was known for housing and feeding traveling teachers. Show them the Philippian congregation and their multi-faceted support for Paul (Phil. 1:5; 4:14-17). Show them why Barnabas became known as "the encourager" (Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27). The early Christians in Acts supported the apostles' work by selling their things and giving the money (Acts 4:34-35). We have to translate those examples into our society. Yes, men can become missionaries, preachers, and elders, but they can also work behind the scenes to organize out-reach efforts. Ken Upchurch is an elder and minister of missions at Kensington Woods church of Christ in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He spends his entire year raising funds and organizing them for the TZ2000 mission effort in Tanzania, Africa. Sure, he goes over about twice a year, but his greatest contributions come in his behind-the-scenes work. He spends a lot of time traveling to give reports, publishing a bulletin, and encouraging brethren. There are so many other ways members can be involved. Men and women can teach classes. They can encourage those who teach. Even the infant child of God can point others toward someone better equipped to teach or give the good old invitation to worship with the local congregation. There is plenty of work to be done, and there are plenty of ways to contribute. We all have a part!

There is one more point to be made in this section. Looking for and reaching out to the lost is our part, and the results belong to God. Let us leave His part to Him. Paul said that he and Apollos were only taking advantage of opportunities God had provided. (See Acts 8, and watch Philip allow God to direct his path.) Paul knew his place: he had planted, and Apollos had watered, but it was God who had caused the growth. Paul wrote to the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). The results of reaching out do not determine our success, but many seem to have lost sight of this fact. Looking for the lost is not a numbers game, but many religious organizations have fallen into this trap and have numbers as the primary goal behind their outreach. How many brethren have bought in? How many times have churches abandoned certain programs and methods because they were not as "successful" as they had hoped? (*Successful* should be translated "number of prospects who obeyed the gospel.") Consider how some congregations judge a preacher's effectiveness. They consider the number of people in attendance when he arrived contrasted with the number at the time he is being evaluated. I know we live in a society that equates success with quantity. Our society also demands instant results, but how little we know of the effects Bible teaching may have even years down the road. Our effectiveness has nothing to do with the timeliness or the quantity of souls who obey the gospel. This is proven in our main text when Paul said, "...each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8). That statement shows that we each have a part and that our reward is dependant only on our personal production, as opposed to the response of other people. Give God the glory for His part.

LOOKING FOR THE LOST IS A CAREFUL PROCESS

It is possible to be over-zealous when looking for the lost, and the evidence is in the negative views many have regarding the church of Christ. Many of our brethren have been so eager to reach out that they ended up coming across as judgmental, and their overly aggressive approaches wound up scaring people. There are evangelistic methods and programs produced with good intentions, but they have been misused and often misapplied as

sales pitches. For instance, more than one man has told me that when he used one of these methods he liked to get the “prospect” accustomed to saying yes by the time the “baptism question” came up. Door-knocking methods have been used to badger people. Clothing and food have been given away (so to speak) with stipulations such as a required agreement to attend worship or set up a Bible study. Some follow questions in these Bible study courses so closely that they all but refuse to answer any questions they see as unrelated. It is a terrible mistake to enter into a study or Bible conversation with a set, uncompromising agenda.

We must first be sure our concerns are correctly placed. It is absolutely useless to enter into a Bible study or do anything for another person without loving them (1 Cor. 13:1-3). If we see people the way God does – as precious souls – we will never lose our focus. If we remember to pray before we set out, God will guide our words and actions. That is the best plan.

Secondly, we must meet people where they are. I know a man who, during a recent study with a couple, spent an hour traversing through the Bible about a lecture on baptism. We almost lost that couple’s interest because this brother just assumed they had never obeyed the gospel before studying with them. It takes time and conversation to get to know people. We have to be willing to get to know them – what they are about, what they need, and what questions they may have. That knowledge will create opportunities to answer their questions and show them their true needs and the answers to both in Christ.

Finally, evangelism is not an excuse to be judgmental. Reaching the lost can be done without the “turn or burn” approach. There is no place for fear tactics when God wants obedience as the result of love and appreciation. Reproof, or connecting sin to the sinner, and rebuke, or urging the sinner to repent, can be effectively accomplished without these methods. When it comes to deciding who we will reach out to, the only requirement is a soul. Sin is sin, and we cannot play favorites when looking for the lost. Many people in search of the truth are society’s rejects. It makes no difference if the sin is repulsive, such as drug addiction or homosexuality; everyone needs God’s grace.

If we see all people as souls, it will not matter if they are in prison or a million-dollar home.

CONCLUSION

How do we make sure we remain balanced in looking for the lost? We remember that we are responsible as individuals and that we are responsible for reaching out. It is not a command reserved for special people with certain talents, but for everyone who has learned enough to be God's child already. We need to understand that our success and reward are not dependant on the number of people who obey the gospel but on our work in spreading the soul-saving message. God will see to the increase when we plant and water. Know also that "planting and watering" is a careful process. Each person is unique, with special needs and circumstances. If we will develop the love that sees souls rather than differences, if we will watch our Savior and the ways in which He dealt with people, and if we will seek God's guidance in our work, we will be well equipped to handle each situation. All that remains is the Nike slogan – "Just do it!"

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the New American Standard Bible.

SELF-DENIAL IN A “ME” GENERATION

SAMUEL G. JONES

INTRODUCTION

An infectious spirit has pervaded our land and hearts. It threatens the mission, progress, and success of the church and negatively affects society in general. It has been fostered by the message of our modern times.

This message is not difficult for one to pick up. Just listen to the radio on your morning drive; the message is clear. An afternoon drive down the highway reveals it. Billboards declare it. An evening of watching television tells the story. The message: **It's all about you. You deserve it! You can have it all, and you can have it now!**

Samuel G. Jones obeyed the gospel at the Sherman Street church of Christ in Grand Prairie, Texas, and continued there until graduation from high school. He entered the U.S. Air Force after graduation and served from 1978 to 1987. He met and married Joyce Capers while stationed in Sumter, South Carolina. Samuel graduated from ETSPM in 1989 and worked with several congregations in South Carolina. He now serves as the senior minister for the Dalworth Park (formerly Sherman Street) church of Christ.

We are bombarded with: No cash down! Take it home today! Easy payment terms! There is even one that says: “You know you want it, you know you deserve it, so get away!”

Our children! No longer do they wish for or even ask — they demand. A sense of entitlement has swept the land, and in its

wake are a self-centered, over-indulged people whose one goal is self-satisfaction and immediate gratification.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Generational changes have influenced the way we think and see ourselves as a part of society. From the thinking of the Greatest Generation to Generations X and Y (The ME Generation) there have been changes. New philosophies have changed the way parents rear children. Our increasingly transient society has produced changes that have affected families. Even the church has contributed to the situation by failing to teach.

The term "**Greatest Generation**" was coined by Tom Brokaw in his best-seller The Greatest Generation. The term identified "those American men and women who came of age in the Great Depression, served at home and abroad during World War II, and then built the nation we have today."¹

Letters from Brokaw's third book on the Greatest Generation, An Album of Memories: Personal Histories from the Greatest Generation, reveal their character. Robert Cromer wrote:

I grew up in what was considered a middle-class family — by today's standards we would be considered poor, but nobody came around to tell us so. Everyone was in the same boat, and extended families helped each other. I wore many clothes that had belonged to one of my cousins or my big brother. Getting some bit of clothing of your own that was new was a big event. There were many people who had much less than we did, but they never let on and we never knew. The community sort of stuck together and family was very important. Parents were role models. I remember getting into a lot of mischief when I was growing up but nothing really bad. In the back of my mind was always the thought, "Don't ever do anything to bring disgrace to your family." I never thought of "me first"

or “do your own thing,” and neither did anyone else.²

Steve A. Kish expressed his thoughts of the things that made him proud and happy: “If I could not help anyone, I would not harm them with words or deed. I am successful because I am going to leave it better than I got it.”³

Marie Pooler wrote of an experience she had while in France, in the town of Perigueux, near Bordeaux:

I was wandering in the weekly open-square vegetable market.... A very old man, leaning on a cane, stood near me, and he spoke to me in French ...I could understand only the words quoted here, and translated them as “I soldier ...the war...” He then said, with great emphasis on each word, “Merci. Merci beaucoup, America...” He had an overwhelming need to thank our generation for rescuing France from dictatorship.”⁴

Members of the Greatest Generation were willing to be more concerned about others than themselves. They were neighbors, caretakers of one another, and a community who saw beyond themselves.

Generation X consists of persons born between 1964 and 1979. The origin of the term and definition of the group are as follows:

Named “Generation X” by Charles Hamblett, a Hollywood correspondent. The term was used to describe early British punks (followers of a Punk Rock band featuring Billy Idol) more generally with their nihilism, rejection of earlier generation's values, and the feeling that they were a lost generation that meant nothing to society and vice versa.⁵

A study done by Jane Deverson of British teenagers revealed that they "sleep together before they are married, don't believe in God, dislike the Queen [symbols of authority], and don't respect parents."⁶

The admonition of biblical instructions about teaching the next generation contains great wisdom.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes⁷ (Deut. 6:6-8).

God instructed Joshua to build a memorial so that future generations so that would not forget their past and slip away aimlessly into their future.

And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever (Josh. 4:5-7).

The failure to heed has produced a generation that has drifted away from its moorings. The drifting does not stop with Generation X, however, for Generation Y has gone even further.

The term "**Generation Y (The ME Generation)**" first appeared in an Advertising Age article in August 1993 "to describe those children born between 1985–1995." Some non-flattering labels have been given to them, such as "rebellious and rude." Some trends among this group are: underage drinking; illicit drug use, *i.e.*, ecstasy, marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, and inhalants; childhood obesity; and being demanding, impatient, and bad at communicating.⁸ Such a generation sounds as if it leaped right out of the pages of inspiration as Paul spoke of the last days.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God (II Tim. 3:1-4).

It is noteworthy that several of these characteristics are in correlation to how Generation Y is described:

First are those who "love themselves." These are selfish individuals who only think of themselves to the exclusion or minimizing of others. Second are the "blasphemers." They are abusive which would definitely include poor communication and impatience. Third, the "unholy." They have no fellowship or regard for God. The fourth characteristic is that of "without natural affection." This is not the unnatural sexual affections of Romans chapter one, but of not having a love for family. The literal meaning is "without family affections." Fifth, we have the "incontinent." These are people who have no self-control. For them, whatever the flesh or appetite wants, it gets. The last of these are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." This describes those who put self in the place of God as the center of their affections.⁹

A new philosophy. Benjamin Spock has shaped the way many children have been reared since the publication of his best-seller, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care. Many believe that he unleashed the forces that have created the most selfish generation ever. Here are a few voices of alarm:

His ideas about childcare influenced several generations of parents to be more flexible and affectionate with their children, and to treat them as individuals, whereas the previous conventional wisdom had been that child rearing should focus on building discipline.¹⁰

Some have seen Spock as the leader in the move toward more permissive parenting in general, and have blamed him for what they saw as the negative results. Norman Vincent Peale claimed in the late 1960s that "the U.S. was paying the price of two generations that followed the Dr. Spock baby plan of instant gratification of needs."¹¹

Spock had many things to say, and it is easy to see why some feel that he has contributed to the demise of civility, self-denial, and self-control in present generations. One such comment draws the ire of traditional parents:

There are several reasons to try to avoid physical punishment. It teaches children that the larger, stronger person has the power to get his way, whether or not he is right. Spanked children feel justified in beating up on smaller ones. The American tradition of spanking may be one cause of the fact that there is much more violence in our country than in any other comparable nation—murder, armed robbery, wife abuse, child abuse.¹²

God ordained that parents should employ discipline in the lives of their children (Prov. 13:24). The scripture teaches that the rod of correction is able to drive out the foolishness that accompanies youthfulness (Prov. 22:15). The rod is not always

physical punishment, but it is as a tool to help parents shape the character of their children. We are told:

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. (Prov. 23:13-14) ...only strike if he has deserved it, thou needest not fear; the bitter medicine will be beneficial to him, not deadly.... Verse 14 means that he who administers corporal chastisement to the child, saves him spiritually.¹³

A transient society caused a shift in societal thinking. At one time families lived in the same town for generations. A sense of community was developed, and people felt an obligation to not tarnish or hurt their communities. Families moved away from their old communities due to the prosperity of the 1940s and 50s, and a connection with long standing roots, obligations, and a sense of community began to wane. The seed of selfishness is now planted.

A shift in the message of the pulpit occurred. The message became more about what we can get and less about what we can give. Some refer to this as the “gospel of health, wealth and fame.” It is also known as the message of prosperity, name it and claim it, or, as one preacher said, “blab it and grab it.” It is now commonplace to hear on any given Sunday that “God has something for you!” “He wants to bless you!” In time this became ingrained into the psyche of the members, and now selfishness has invaded the church.

Faithful preaching and teaching about the life of Christ are needed to regain lost ground and reshape our thinking. His life was not about selfishness or self-gratification, but rather about serving God and others.

The mind of Christ is urged upon believers, and the Apostle Paul explained what this mindset was.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:4-8).

Such teaching is contrary to the selfish spirit of our society. "The self-centeredness that considers only one's own rights, plans, and interests must be replaced by a broader outlook that includes the interests of one's fellows ...the interests of others must also be our concern."¹⁴

This mindset requires an attitude of humility. Jesus was an example by what he did. He willingly "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). The notion of thinking of others first and not self (Phil. 2:3) is at the very heart of the gospel (John 10:17-18).

Merrill C. Tenney, in his book John: The Gospel of Belief, made several observations about the love of Christ as demonstrated toward his disciples in John 13:1-11. First, it was a love that could not be quenched by evil; second, it was a love that was tendered by Jesus in full consciousness of His own exalted powers; third, the love of Christ transcended the barriers of social class; fourth, the love of Jesus was an active love; fifth, the love of Jesus cleanses; and sixth, the love of Jesus cleanses constantly.¹⁵

From this demonstration of love and service, it is clear that the heart of selflessness is love. No wonder Jesus responded to the question of what is the greatest commandment with, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37-39).

A proper love for God and man causes one to deny self. Jesus' love caused Him to deny Himself, overcome evil, humble Himself though He was greatest of all, serve others, and ultimately die for all humanity. The scene of the last supper was a picture of selfishness until Jesus stepped forth and served. The secret is revealed in John 13:3, "Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God." He knew who He was and was confident of His position, so serving, denying self, and humbling Himself were no problem at all.

Denying self causes a person to have a single focus in the direction of God and others. "No man can serve two masters . . ." (Matt. 6:24). "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above ...For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).

Self-denial is a continuous, daily process. Jesus instructed his disciples to take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23). We are described as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). Someone has said: "The problem with living sacrifices is that they keep getting up off of the altar." The apostle Paul cultivated a different attitude and spirit, for he was willing to spend and be spent, giving his all in sacrifice to God and man (II Cor. 12:14-15).

The spirit of self-denial affects many aspects of life, such as marriage (Eph. 5:22, 25-27, Tit. 2:4-5), work (Eph. 6:5-6, Col. 3:22-24), and morality (Tit. 2:11-12, I Pet. 2:11-12; Heb. 12:14).

The gospel of self-denial is indeed true, but what are the best ways to pass these truths on to establish a society that cares for and respects others and is willing to bow before a Holy God?

Lending a helping hand to the ME Generation involves compassion, empathy, and respect. The most common problem that exists in teaching the **ME Generation** is "the generation gap." To overcome this problem several steps must be taken.

They must know that someone cares. They need to hear the language of love and respect. There has to be an investment

of time. If we invest the time and effort we may learn of their concerns and find effective ways to address them. King Rehoboam made the dreadful mistake of dismissing the needs and requests of the people, and it resulted in great loss and the dividing of a nation (I Kings 12:3-16).

There has to be a belief in the good and potential of the younger generation. Everyone wants to be believed in. Maybe the nihilistic view of the British youth grew out of their perception that society had given up on them. They must be shown how certain values are beneficial to them. They will not buy it just because we are selling it; it has to mean something to them and have something in it for them.

The scriptures are our starting point to teach valuable and timeless truths. God commanded Joshua to build an altar (sign) so that all succeeding generations may be taught. "That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them ..." (Josh. 4:6-7).

CONCLUSION

Our society did not arrive at this point in one night, one year, or even one decade. The stakes are too high to be apathetic and idle. The success of the church and the viability of society are at stake. A selfish, self-absorbed church is of no value to the world. The first step is understanding the younger generation, learning to speak their language, and demonstrating love, compassion, and empathy. Teach them lovingly, yet firmly, of the selfless life of Christ, who is our example. Christ's words to the disciples have great meaning that the church must grasp. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15).

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A BALANCED VIEW OF GOD

KEVIN E. KEY

THE CHALLENGES BEFORE US

What is your view and understanding of God? At first glance, this question may seem like a simple or even unnecessary question to ask because the faithful child of God would quickly and correctly answer, "Preacher, my view of God is the biblical view of God!" While I would agree with this answer, I do not feel it warrants a dismissal of the question. This answer is vague and offered without any explanation. I consider the question to be relevant because of my discoveries over the past several years. In speaking with a good number of people, I have found there to be many differing views about God.

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The atheists and agnostics of this world refuse to believe in the existence of God, thus prompting them to develop and promote their many theories of evolution. There are others who believe in God yet hold to the tenets of deism; they believe in the creative work of God but deny God's present involvement in world events. I have also spoken with people who hold to polytheistic theories about God, asserting and arguing in favor of the existence of many gods. While at the same time, there are millions of us who hold to a monotheistic view of God, contending that there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6). Are you beginning to see the point in my question? You see, there are about as many views of God as

there are people in this world! Yet only one of them is correct – the latter!! Far too many people view God not as the God of revelation but as the God of their imagination.

While an exploration and comparison of each of these views to biblical doctrine would make for a good study, I want us to consider instead another facet of the question, “*what is your view of God?*” I want to present two major schools of thought that many hold and support regarding the nature and character of God. In addition, we will examine the Scriptures, as we are commanded to do (John. 5:39; Acts 17:11), to see what God has revealed about Himself. We will aim to reach a *biblical* and *balanced* view of the nature and character of God.

THE UNBALANCED POSITIONS

Amongst “Bible believers” there are two terrifying and very dangerous positions regarding the nature and character of our God. First, there are some who see God as extremely angry, mean, and hateful. On occasion, advocates of this view will challenge “Bible believers” regarding their faith and love for God, because their minds cannot comprehend why we would, or even could, love a God like this. As these people look at God, they fail to see and understand His love. As a result of this failure, their eyes and minds are limited, only seeing the “negative” attributes of God!

On the other end of the spectrum of the view of God, many see His nature and character as all loving. A majority of those who view God in this manner fully believe in their heart and affirm that the God of creation does not have the ability to be angry and wrathful, because Scripture identifies that “God is love” (1 John. 4:8). These positions present an unbalanced view of God.

THE DANGEROUS POSSIBILITIES

There are many problems and dangers associated with these unbalanced positions regarding the God of the Bible. What are some serious hazards associated with people embracing one of these two views? First, both of these views are unscriptural

positions when held solely independent of the other. The true Bible student knows that neither of these arrangements, independently, can be contextually supported in Scripture. Does the Bible speak concerning the wrath and love of God? Yes, extensively! But contextually, neither of these attributes can be taken alone to reveal the true nature and character of our God.

A second danger is that "a wrong concept of God produces a wrong way of living."¹ Too often, a person's feelings about God will govern what he will allow himself to do in life. For instance, a person who sees God as all loving might feel that this affords him the "right" to act or live however he chooses, without having to worry about any consequences for his behavior. On the other hand, the person who views God as terrible and wrathful may live in fear and withdraw himself from the pleasures and joy of life. He may serve God but walk on nails every day of his life! Good people, our God is not to be served out of fear but out of honor and love (John. 14:15).

THE SOURCES AND EFFECTS

Where do advocates of the wrathful God position get their belief? You may be surprised to hear that most establish this belief from the Bible. Those who buy into this theology are normally somewhat versed in Scripture. Therefore, they stand ready to present their case quite well.

They have read the passages of Scripture wherein God made threats regarding the Gentile nations, such as is found in God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you..." (Gen. 12:3). In their studies, they have seen the warnings God issued to the children of Israel in the Ten Commandments: "I the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exo. 20:5).

In their exploration of the Old Testament Scripture they have discovered God's faithfulness concerning these promises of vengeance. They have read concerning God's enactment of war upon the citizens in Egypt, Jericho, Ai, and other such places. In

their eyes they see these acts to be cruel and undeserved” acts of violence. Furthermore, they cannot believe what they read about God’s usage of evil and wicked nations, such as Assyria and Babylon, to punish and destroy His people – Israel.

And if that was not enough, they are bothered by what they have read in the New Testament. These people feel threatened and offended with the words of the apostle Paul as he spoke God’s Word to the saints in Rome, which assert: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). They are deeply troubled with the warnings and promises Paul made to those in Thessalonica, which depict Christ’s return “in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess.1:8). In frustration and perplexity, usually, they lash out with the cry, “How could a ‘loving God’ do these terrible things?”

Brethren, I want to caution us that “to see God only as a God of vengeance and wrath makes for bitterness of spirit and dread of His judgment.”² This is certainly the case with many. Many are confused and see God as a wild and loose God with a desire to send everyone to hell. Because of their acceptance of this misguided view, many have been disheartened. Worse yet, a good many have turned away from our God and His church.

Several years ago, a cousin of mine served our Lord as a faithful gospel preacher. One day I learned that he had quit preaching and that he had even left the church. When given an opportunity, I asked him why he had walked away from God and the church. His comments were shocking and very sad. He said, “In my studies I have come to see and to understand God much differently than I had imagined and seen Him in the past.” He called God “terrible!” He explained, “Your God claims to be a good and loving God but His actions tell another story.” He argued in defense of his actions, “If God is a loving and merciful God, why did He destroy all of those ‘innocent’ people in the days of old?” He ended our discussion with words that went something like this: “If that is the way ‘your’ God is, I do not want anything to do with Him.” You see, this man’s negative view of God has led to his demise. Unless he repents, in the Day of our Lord he will be

granted his wish not to be with God – throughout eternity (Heb. 9:27)!

What about those who follow the “God is all loving” theory; where do they find support for their doctrine? They too turn to the Scriptures! They seek to draw their defense with Biblical arguments conjoined with “logical” inferences based on that which they read and that to which they adhere.

From the time of creation throughout salvation history, these people see the love of God, and rightfully so! “God created man as the object of His love.”³ In His love for man, our God created mankind after His image (Gen.1:26, 27) and placed them (Adam and Eve) in an oasis, thus providing for all of their necessities in life (Gen. 2:1-16). After the fall (sin), God announced His “eternal plan” (Gen. 3:15; Tit.1:2) to send forth the Messiah into the world – Jesus (John 3:16). God’s love for mankind is seen in both the Old and New Testament Scripture (1 John 4:7; Heb. 13:8). In spiritual blindness, intentional or not, so many people fail to see God’s wrath. As supporters of this school of thought read the Bible, they choose to focus on the love, grace, and mercy of God, thus totally excluding His wrath and impending judgment.

As a result of this view, major problems have come about. To a fault, it seems that the majority of people have mistaken God’s love to mean freedom to live however they wish in life. The majority of the religious world contends that God’s love will not allow Him to send people to an eternal hell. Many seek to tell us, “If He does, His wrath will be reserved for the really evil and wicked people of this world,” meaning the murderers, rapists, child molesters, and such.

An adherence to this theology has opened the door for some very serious violations of Scripture. Amongst the religious world, it has led to the introduction and acceptance of unscriptural and vain worship (John 4:23, 24; Matt. 15:8, 9). Despite what Jesus and the apostles have said, it has caused many to conclude in their minds that “one church is as good as another,” thus calling for “unity amongst Bible believers,” which stands contrary to

Scripture (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2; Eph. 1:22, 23). Do you see what has happened? If people do not have to worry about the judgment and wrath of God, anything goes. This philosophy has permeated the world with ungodly behavior.

Having both of these views presented, depending on your situation in life, each may seem plausible. Truth be told, the combination and balance of the two views identify the truth about our God. But what is the balance and truth?

THE REVELATION REVEALED

Can we know the God of the Bible? Is it possible for us to come to know and understand His character and have a balanced view of who He is and why He is the way He is revealed? I assert that not only can we know God, but we must know God intimately and must understand the balance in His love and wrath as it relates to His justice in the Day of Judgment. If not, we will fail in our lifelong quest to be pleasing unto Him (Hos. 4:6). How must we accomplish this?

“Revelation, the Bible, reveals God as He is. To be ignorant of the Word is to be ignorant of God.”⁴ Through Scripture, God informs us that there are “secret” things we cannot know (Deut. 29:29). Therefore, it stands to reason that we cannot know all that there is to know about God, but we can know all that God wants us to know by what He has given us in His Word. In the gospel according to John, he affirms that Jesus came to reveal the Father (John 1:18). In Jesus’ discussion with Phillip, Jesus said, “He who has seen Me, has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Therefore, we may rightfully conclude that through the words and examples of the Christ we come to see and to understand not only the will, but also the nature and character of our God.

THE BALANCED EXPLANATION

What does the Bible reveal about the nature and character of the Creator of this world? As we have seen, it shows that God possesses both traits – love and wrath. Nehemiah reveals a God who is “ready to pardon” (Neh. 9:17). Who and what is it that He is

ready to pardon? God stands ready to pardon mankind from the consequences of sin. Sin is a terrible thing! It separates mankind from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). God is holy and pure in all of His ways (1 Pet. 1:16). He is without sin; therefore, He can have absolutely nothing to do with it (1 Pet. 1:21; Jas. 1:13).

According to the Word of God, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The "all" under consideration refers to "all" of mankind and "all" human existence. Beginning with Adam and Eve and onward, every person becomes guilty of committing sin in their life! What is sin? Sin is a transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:1-4). Sin breaks or violates the laws established and regulated by the Creator of this world. According to God's standards, the penalty of sin is "worthy" of death (Rom. 6:23). It is "worthy" of receiving a sentence of eternal separation from God's presence (2 Thess. 1:9).

But God, in His love, has provided a means for our salvation. God has stated His love: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16). God has demonstrated His love, in that "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6-9). At Calvary, Jesus Christ died a cruel and undeserving death; He died for our sins!! By shedding His blood at Calvary, Jesus provided an avenue by which we can be redeemed (Eph. 1:7). Jesus is the greatest manifestation of God's love and will for mankind.

God's plan is not exclusive! He "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4). To instruct man and make mankind "wise unto salvation," God has given them His Word (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Faith is a prerequisite to please God (Heb.11:6). This faith is not "faith only," but it is an obedient faith unto the will and commandments of our God (Rom.1:5; Acts 2:38). When man accepts Christ by confession of faith, submission in baptism, and a continued faithful walk in newness of life, eternal salvation in heaven will be the reward (Rom. 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:20, 21; Rev. 2:10).

Without question, God wants people saved. He has done His part to save man by providing a Savior, but now the responsibility rests upon man to respond in obedient faith. As

clear as the Scriptures are on obtaining one's salvation and the heavenly reward, it is equally clear regarding those who reject the Lord's constant calling. Abraham asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Without question God will always do right, because He "shows no partiality nor takes bribes" (Deut. 10:17).

Those who spurn the invitation are destined to an eternal hell, punishment, separation from the Almighty God! Is God just in executing such a severe punishment on these people? Absolutely; God is a just God! **In Christ, God's mercy and justice meet.** "Vengeance" belongs to God (Rom. 12:19). Whenever man in his ignorance or rebellion rejects the Son of God, God's righteousness demands that He condemn the sinner (Rom. 2:5). We can rest assured that there will be no innocent people in hell. "It is a simple equation: If we insult the gift and the giver of mercy, we receive what is just."⁵ "When men choose to live alienated from God, and cast their eternal welfare toward hell, he will honor their decision."⁶ There will be no right or reason to complain, for justice will be served (Lam. 3:39).

Yet, because of His love and will for mankind, our God is long-suffering (2 Pet. 3:9). However, man needs to understand that today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). We must always keep in mind that "life is like a vapor, it appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (Jas. 4:14). Someday our opportunities will run dry (Heb. 9:27).

Our response to God's invitation and will determines our eternal destination. To the saints in Rome, Paul explained it in these words: "Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity, but toward you, goodness..." (Rom. 11:22). Mankind has a choice to make. I pray that you have chosen the "goodness" of our God!

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BALANCING GREAT AND SMALL MATTERS

TOM HARRISON

Spiritual imbalance may be Satan's most successful tool in his fight against Christianity. Keeping the saints out of balance concerning the things of God impedes personal and collective growth. It creates a skewed perception that does not allow for a worthy walk (Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). Such sets one on a course that leads to extremes (cf. Deut. 5:32). The devil is very creative in veiling this move away from balance. It usually occurs gradually. Well intentioned Christians can be oblivious to it. They may not realize the impact it is having upon them. The consequences are devastating. Their condition makes everyone else appear imbalanced! This creates an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility. It prevents the unity Jesus prayed for and the effect it would have upon the world (John 17:20, 21).

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Satan used imbalance successfully against the children of Israel. It led to their rejection of the Lamb of God (John 1:11). It created contempt in their heart toward Him and His teaching (Luke 4:28-30). It prompted them to claim His mighty works were of the devil (Matt. 12:24). The lies they concocted at His trial were borne by their spiritual imbalance (Matt. 26:59-61). Even after His resurrection, they were so out of balance that they would not

accept the fact they had been wrong (Matt. 28:12-15)! It led to their destruction of which Jesus wept bitterly (Luke 19:41).

God had given the children of Israel a law that would have brought praise from the nations (Deut. 4:6) and would have brought God's blessings if they had kept it. He had given them the basis for being balanced (Deut. 5:32). Had they kept it in their hearts (Deut. 6:5), balance would have been achieved and maintained. If they had observed the law and appreciated the testimony of the prophets, they would have recognized the Lamb of God! The Old Testament is a case study of what happens when God's people get out of balance.

The conflict the Jews had with Jesus is understandable given their unbalanced nature. Matthew 23 is perhaps the most scathing rebuke from Jesus regarding this problem. While it is directed toward the Pharisees, the Sadducees were just as deserving (cf. Matt. 16:6ff; 22:23ff). These two groups were the most powerful and influential among the people. They appeared on the scene during the four hundred years known as the Inter-Testament Period (400 BC – 3 BC). God did not communicate with His people during this period. Malachi was the last of God's spokesmen until John the Baptizer commenced his ministry (cf. Mal. 3:5; Luke 1:17).

Significant historical events transpired during this time that had a great impact on Israel. While God may have been silent, He was providentially moving all things toward the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). The book of Daniel is an amazing prophetic picture of what would come about during this period (cf. Dan. 2:31-45; 7:1-28; 10:10-11:45). The influence of the nations involved (Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman) would be tremendous upon Israel. This is especially true of the Greek nation and its culture, which were the primary factors in the rise of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.¹

There were many Jews, both in and outside of Palestine, who embraced the Greek culture. The more conservative, primarily in Palestine, resisted all cultural influences upon their life and religion. This cultural conflict introduced the first sects. The

more conservative were the Hasidim (the pious or godly party). The more liberal were the Sophists (lovers of wisdom).² This division became the basis for the fragmented society we read about in the New Testament and the spiritual imbalance it promoted. The Pharisees grew out of the influence of the Hasidim, and the Sadducees were in more agreement with the earlier Sophists. There were smaller and less influential parties existing at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, but it was the imbalance of the Pharisees and the Sadducees that had the greatest impact upon the religion of the people.

These sects arose due to the people's inability to maintain balance in dealing with foreign peoples and their culture. It was a legitimate concern, and there was a way to handle it that would have prevented the problems that followed. This did not occur, so a little matter grew into a major problem. One group sought inclusion of foreign influences into their lives, and the other demanded exclusion. One group over-reacted, and the other under-reacted. The law provided balance in dealing with this issue, but they were both guilty of ignoring the law. It clearly involved certain restrictions regarding influences from outsiders (cf. Deut. 12:2). At the same time it allowed for accommodation for the stranger (Lev. 19:33; Deut. 10:19). Their move toward imbalance may have begun innocently enough. Both groups may have had good intentions in the way they sought to handle things. Yet the end result was disastrous. Sectarianism reigned supreme with little semblance to the practice of the Law of Moses as intended by God.

This explains the antagonism that existed between Jesus and the religious elite. His simple and balanced message revealed their glaring inconsistencies and hypocrisy. They were not able to answer any of His challenges, because it made them look foolish (cf. Matt. 21:23-27). The law, properly taught and applied, revealed their imbalance (cf. Matt. 5:1-7:27). It may have been a small thing at first, but it evolved into a big problem. Good intentions were now flagrant hypocrisy, so in Matthew 23 Jesus held nothing back in His denunciation of their hypocritical practices. The first twelve verses were directed to the "crowds and to His disciples" (23:1).³ The rest He addressed directly to the

scribes and Pharisees. He announced eight “woes” upon them (23:13-16, 23, 25, 27, 29). Seven times He called them “hypocrites” (23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29); twice He called them “blind guides” (23:16, 24); and twice more He referred to them as “fools and blind” (23:17, 19). The boldness with which He addressed them is obvious, and the force of His voice and the frustration associated with it must be appreciated. Jesus had contended with the Pharisees (and the Sadducees) for three years; now He unleashed His final summary on their warped theology and its dire consequences.

The entirety of their hypocritical religion was due to imbalance. They were out of balance when it came to saying and doing (23:3). They were out of balance in their expectations of others as compared to what they expected of themselves (23:4). They were out of balance as to the motive for works (23:5). They were out of balance regarding their public role (23:6-12). They failed to grasp the kingdom of heaven and prevented others from grasping it as well (23:13). They were out of balance in caring for the needs of others (23:14). Their motive for winning souls was not for God but for themselves (23:15). They created loopholes so as to escape responsibility, and they gave more attention to things and how to obtain those things than what those things represented (23:16-22). They supplanted inward purity for outward pretense, when in reality they were filled with “uncleanness...hypocrisy and lawlessness” (23:25-28). They were so out of balance in their religion that they could not see they were just like their fathers, who had killed the prophets they claimed to honor (23:29-39).

The consequence of their condition was indeed grave: “[T]he condemnation of hell” (23:33). It broke Jesus’ heart. He took no joy in revealing these things. There was no personal feeling of superiority in having “put them in their place.” To be sure no one praised Him for “letting them have it.” He knew their end, and it was a horrible end indeed! He lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you

were not willing" (23:37). Spiritual imbalance is a pitiful condition, and there is no joy to be had in revealing it or its consequences.

If one thing could be identified as to why they were so spiritually out of balance, it could well be due to what Jesus said in Matthew 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." They were utter failures at balancing great and small things. Paying a tenth of all property was commanded (cf. Num. 18:20-24). It should have been done. They were not condemned for paying the tithe but for making such a big deal out of it. These herbs were in abundance and very inexpensive. Justice, mercy, and faith had a greater place in the practice of the entire law than did the tithing of these common herbs that came out of everyone's garden. To put the giving of these, in order of importance, over that of the heartfelt practice of justice, mercy, and faith was to be guilty of majoring in the minors and minoring in the majors! It created an imbalance in life that led to all manner of hypocrisy. A life deemed righteous due to the practice of paying attention to every minute matter, but devoid of justice, mercy, and faith, is, as Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (to put it mildly).

Justice was one of the parts of the law that made Israel a distinctive nation. No nation had a law that was equal in the justice it provided for all within its borders. They were commanded, "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15). Righteousness and judgment go hand in hand (cf. John 7:24). It was expected that all who judged would do so in righteousness. Where righteousness is lacking there will be a lack of justice. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared, "[un]less your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5-20). He also declared that practicing injustice will come back on you (Matt. 7:1-5).

It is in the context of this commandment on justice that the second greatest command is given, “[you] shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:16; cf. Matt. 22:39). Leviticus 19:11-18 deals with such weighty matters as being a good neighbor, honesty, fair dealings with the weak, fairness in paying a man his wages, justice in the court, and loving your neighbor. Jesus clearly established who one’s neighbor is in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Both the occasion for stating the second greatest command and the parable of the Good Samaritan were tempting questions from lawyers, supposed experts in the law (cf. Matt. 22:35; Luke 10:25). Neither disagreed with Jesus’ conclusion, but it is obvious that neither was satisfied with His answer. How could anyone place more emphasis on the tithing of herbs than on the things listed in Leviticus 19? They knew the law and what it said about justice, but they had failed miserably at practicing it.

The second weightier matter they had neglected was mercy. The God they claimed to worship was merciful and had been merciful toward them time and time again. In his song of praise after the people passed safely through the Red Sea, Moses exclaimed, “You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation” (Exod. 15:13). The second of the Ten Commandments established His justice and mercy (Exod. 20:4-6). As a God of justice and mercy, He demanded mercy from those whom He had shown so much mercy. The word translated “mercy” from the Hebrew language under consideration is “hesed” and speaks of “loving-kindness” and “stead-fast love.” The comments in Vine’s on this word deserve mentioning:

In general, one may identify three basic meanings to the word, which always interact: “strength,” “steadfastness,” and “love.” An understanding of the word that fails to suggest all three inevitably loses some of its richness. “Love” by itself easily becomes sentimentalized or universalized apart from covenant. Yet “strength” or “steadfastness” suggests only the fulfillment of a legal or other obligation...⁴

Thus, there was an obligation to be appreciated, but the obligation could only be properly fulfilled in relationship with heartfelt devotion of love and kindness.

The children of Israel were constantly reminded of the importance of this weightier matter of the law. In Hosea 6:6 it is written, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Sacrifice and burnt offerings were commanded, but they could not properly be fulfilled without mercy and understanding of God. Without these, sacrifice and burnt offerings were meaningless. "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matt. 23:23)! Micah established the proper way to bring a gift to the altar for sacrifice:

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:6-8).

Is there anything that is weightier than "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God"? The tithing of the "mint, anise, and cummin" was just the handing over of a few cheap table condiments without justice, mercy, and faith. Such tithing was as worthwhile as throwing a penny down a wishing well! Without justice, mercy, and faith, there was no keeping covenant with God, and all the sacrifices and tithes performed were mere obligation, much like "getting up and going to church" can be if weightier matters are neglected. Mercy is to be monumental in our relationship with God and man if we are to obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7).

If there exists a difference in weight between the "weightier matters," the last of the three would have to be the weightiest of

all. Can a man practice justice and mercy (of the biblical kind) without faith? In the New Testament, it is clearly established that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). This is recorded in a chapter that highlights the faithful of the Old Testament. These notable ones were well known to the religious establishment of the Jews. They took great pride in their relationship with them, especially “father Abraham” and Moses, the lawgiver. They rejected John’s and Jesus’ teaching because they misunderstood their relationship with Abraham (Luke 3:8). Abraham rejoiced in Jesus’ day (John 8:56), and Moses would rise up in witness against them because of their lack of faith in what he had written (John 5:45-47).

Lack of faith (trust in God) was a constant problem. Despite evidence of His power in their deliverance and in His constant presence throughout their history, the Jews struggled with faith (cf. Num. 14:11). One of their prophets made it clear that “the just shall live by... faith” (Hab. 2:4). Had they sought to live by faith they would have had no difficulty in fulfilling the other weightier matters of the law. Yet, lack of faith turned the heartfelt religion that Moses had given them into a cold, formal, ritualistic surface religion. Their practice of the law had no depth of faith. The Jews were not prepared to repent and bring forth fruits of repentance, because that required faith, and they had none (Luke 3:8). They rejected Jesus and His teaching because the word of God and the faith it creates did not abide in them (John 5:38-40; cf. Rom. 10:17). They knew how to measure perfectly the tenth of all the herbs they grew in their gardens, but they were spiritually blind because they lacked faith (cf. John 9:39-41; 2 Cor. 5:7). They paid more attention to their garden than to their faith!

An imbalance between great and small things is inevitable when faith is not practiced. Imbalance of every sort will occur when faith is ignored. Had the Jews sought, by faith, the law’s instruction in dealing with the foreigners that came amongst them, it would not have led to the sectarian strife that evolved. Had they dealt justly with them (Lev. 19:34; 24:22), without compromising the law, they would have been successful in keeping balance and maintaining unity. They knew how to treat a stranger with kindness, and for good reason (Exod. 22:21; 23:9). Instead they

went to extremes in dealing with a little matter on which the law was very clear. The weightier matters of “justice, mercy, and faith” applied to the little matter of foreign influences would have resolved the matter completely.

Deception is Satan’s great tool. By making small matters appear great and great matters appear small, he guides us into a state of mind that creates confusion and heartache. In his work, The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis made this observation:

The Enemy [in the book, God is the “Enemy”] loves platitudes. Of a proposed course of action He wants men, so far as I can see, to ask simple questions: Is it righteous? Is it prudent? Is it possible? Now, if we can keep men asking: “Is it in accordance with the general movement of our time? Is it progressive or reactionary? Is this the way that History is going?” they will neglect the relevant questions. And the questions they do ask are, of course, unanswerable; for they do not know the future, and what the future will be depends very largely on just those choices which they now invoke the future to help them make. As a result, while their minds are buzzing in this vacuum, we have the better chance to slip in and bend them to the action we have decided on.⁵

This happens all too often. Our knowledge of this should enable us to be aware of the possibility (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11). By keeping our focus on Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2), and “as His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness...” (2 Pet. 1:3), we have the basis to make informed judgments about all things. Attention to the small things should not be left undone, but such attention comes from a heart that is filled with the weightier matters.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Between the Testaments (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971) 111.
2. Rex A. Turner, Syllabus, Inter-Testament Period, Unpublished, p. 88.
3. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James translation.
4. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 142.
5. C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters (New York: Collier Books, 1982) 118-119.

BALANCE IN OUTREACH

KEVIN L. MOORE

What do you get when you combine two uneducated fishermen and a crippled beggar? The answer is, very little of any consequence from the world's perspective. But when you add Jesus to the mix, you get a powerful force that significantly impacts the lives and destinies of multitudes.

It was early summer AD 30, about three o'clock in the afternoon, as a couple of unimposing Galileans headed toward the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Reaching the beautifully ornamented gate on the eastern side of the compound, they encountered a lame man requesting financial assistance. Beyond his physical disability and poor economic state, however, his greatest need concerned the spiritual condition of his immortal soul.

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Although nothing of any monetary value was available to share at the time, there was something worth so much more. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," the beggar was told, "rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6).¹ "Immediately," the record states, his feet and ankle bones were strengthened, and for the first time in over four decades he was able to stand on his own accord. Not only that, but he also began to walk and to leap in the air, entering the temple praising God (3:7-11). As a crowd soon gathered, the pair of evangelists recognized a golden opportunity to share good

news and spent the next several hours teaching these eager listeners about the crucified and risen Lord (3:12-26). By evening, before antagonists could interrupt the evangelistic campaign, multitudes had been won to Christ (4:1-4).

The two apostles were then taken into custody and the next day brought before the Sanhedrin – the Jewish High Court. Since Jesus had stood before these very same adjudicators just a few weeks earlier, and considering what eventually happened to him, John and Peter were almost certainly on trial for their lives. Yet, remarkably, they regarded this as another opportunity to proclaim the message of Christ, concluding their address with the challenging words: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (4:5-12).

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (4:13). The question is, how did these officials know that the two defendants had been with Jesus? Perhaps they were seen in the company of the Lord sometime during His earthly ministry. More likely it was because they were exhibiting the same confidence, conviction, and courage that Christ himself had recently demonstrated before this court. In other words, Jesus had made a lasting impression on these Galilean fishermen, and it showed!

Incidentally, it is important to note that Peter and John were not the only ones appearing before the Sanhedrin that day. The greatest testimony presented on this occasion of the validity, authority, and power of Jesus Christ was not anything spoken by either of these apostolic colleagues. “And seeing the man who had been healed *standing* with them,” the accusers “could say nothing against it” (4:14). Someone else who had been immeasurably impacted by the Lord was “standing up” for Jesus!

When demands were then made that there be no more teaching in Jesus’ name, the two apostles defiantly issued this response: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things

which we have seen and heard” (4:19-20). Apparently these ill-treated disciples were so committed to Christ and so convicted by His message that they simply could not be silent; they were deeply compelled to declare the words of salvation.

After being further threatened and then released, they rejoined their companions, and the first thing they all did together was pray. Surprisingly, they did not ask God to take away the hardships or to make their lives easier. Understanding that tribulation is an inevitable reality when living for Christ in an imperfect world, they dutifully prayed: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (4:29). Doing the Lord’s will, even in the face of adversity, was a priority for these godly servants. The Lord answered their appeal as they perseveringly “spoke the word of God with boldness” (4:31).

As our present topic is “Balance in Outreach,” what can we learn from the events recorded in Acts 3–4 to help us achieve and maintain balance in our evangelistic efforts? At least three central points are worthy of our consideration.

BE TRULY CONVERTED TO CHRIST

How seriously do I take my Christianity? Do the people in my life know me primarily as a member of the Lord’s church, or is it in other capacities that I am principally recognized? Is being a Christian something I profess but do not genuinely practice? Is it something I do only once, twice, or perhaps three times a week? Is my level of commitment and Bible knowledge any greater now than when I first obeyed the gospel, or am I slowly regressing toward spiritual stagnation?

To be truly converted to Christ means that one’s life has been significantly and observably transformed. It was obvious that Jesus had made a considerable impact on Peter and John, rendering them incapable of keeping quiet about the gospel message (Acts 4:13, 20). These inspired men expected the same response from other converts (cf. 1 Peter 1:13-25; 2:1-25; 3:13-17; 4:1-19; 1 John 1:3; 2:6; 3:1, 10, 18-24). The question is, what

difference has Jesus made in *my* life? If observers see little or no difference in the attitudes and behaviors of one who has been baptized into the body of Christ, something is terribly wrong.

Years ago as I was preparing to move overseas as a first-time missionary, a lady from my home congregation tried to dissuade me, saying, "But we need you here." I replied: "You and many other Christians are already here to do the Lord's work; if I don't take the gospel overseas, who will?" The excuses that followed made it apparent that this professing Christian was satisfied with someone else doing the Lord's work where *she* lived, while countless souls around the world remained in spiritual darkness.

The Bible says concerning the Lord's people that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17). Since Jesus brings with Him the burden of a lost and dying world (Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15), He simply cannot reside within us if there is no room in our hearts for that burden. For the congregation comprised of members who possess the mind of Christ, evangelism is a top priority, and there are no debates about whether or not outreach programs are to be included in the budget or if the focus of our soul winning is to be local or abroad.

PRAY SELFLESS, EVANGELISTIC PRAYERS

When Peter and John returned to their comrades, they promptly all gathered to pray (Acts 4:23-30). Unlike some of the prayers that we tend to offer where we burst into heaven with a long list of petitions and self-concerns, the apostles first took the time to praise and acknowledge God for who He is and for all that He has done (v. 24). Though they were facing severe maltreatment, their chief concern was for the success of the Lord's cause as they asked for boldness to continue spreading His word (v. 29).

While our heavenly Father most certainly wants our requests to be made known to Him (Phil. 4:6), these must surely include the accomplishing of His will. We ought to pray regularly for the lost souls in our lives, including family, friends, coworkers,

schoolmates, and neighbors. We should also entreat the Lord for opportunities to share our faith with them. We need to pray for the evangelistic endeavors of our home congregation and for the missionaries and mission efforts we support. From personal experience I can say without reservation that one of the most encouraging things that can ever be said to a missionary consists of five simple words: "I am praying for you." Our God and His perfect will must always be at the center of our thoughts, prayers, and activities.

PUT OUR PRAYERS INTO ACTION

Peter and John and their companions, having prayed for boldness to speak God's word, "spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). As Jesus was preparing to send out thirty-five pairs of missionaries, reminding them of the magnitude of the harvest and the scarcity of workers, He declared: "[T]herefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:1-2). Having exhorted these disciples to pray, the very next word from His lips was "go."

Surely we realize that the Lord's people are often the very instruments through which prayers are answered. It will do little good to pray for the hungry man on the street if we are unwilling to supply him food (Matt. 25:42). How will orphans and widows realistically be helped in their affliction if we pray for them without practicing "pure and undefiled religion before God" (Jas. 1:27)? Will it serve any useful purpose to pray for our lost neighbors if we refuse to share with them the sacred message that has the power to save their souls (Jas. 1:21)? Undoubtedly, if we will pray daily and fervently for those in our lives who are estranged from God, and if we will pray daily and fervently for opportunities to share God's word with them, and if we will pray daily and fervently for the courage and wisdom to take advantage of these opportunities, then it will be nearly impossible for us to just sit back and remain idle. May we never fail to appreciate the fact that the best way to ensure that a lost person stays lost is to say and do nothing.

Perhaps we are not taking the world for Christ because too much of our resources are tied up in the local work, which

unfortunately has become necessary to compensate for the lack of involvement of a large percentage of those who profess to follow Jesus. If members of the Lord's church are truly converted to Him, are ardently engaged in evangelistic praying, and are putting these prayers into action, then local evangelism will take care of itself. This in turn will free up more of our resources to be utilized in taking the gospel beyond the borders of our immediate environs.

In the spring semester of 1983 I enrolled in a course at Freed-Hardeman College on world evangelism taught by Earl Edwards. On the last day of class, brother Edwards shared the following statistic: the United States comprises only about six percent of the world's population, yet approximately ninety-five percent of our gospel preachers are laboring in this country. It immediately struck me that a gross imbalance exists in the Lord's church, as only five percent of our full-time evangelists are trying to reach ninety-four percent of the world! That very moment I made the decision to be an overseas missionary.

Now, in all fairness, this statistic needs to be amended. Since 1983 the number of foreign missionaries among churches of Christ has gradually increased, and there are also many national evangelists effectively doing the Lord's work in their home countries. Nevertheless, the number of those being sent out and supported by North American congregations is still a fraction of what it ought to be. At present there is approximately one overseas missionary for every 1,232 members of the church in the United States and about 109 countries where neither a local nor a foreign evangelist is represented among us.²

How can we increase both our involvement and effectiveness in foreign missions as well as local outreach? I am convinced that the only way to fail at evangelism is to not even try. Even if we feel that we have not been very successful in our humble attempts, we have at least succeeded in trying! People will not come to God unless we go to them, and once we have done our imperfect best to communicate the truth with those who are outside the body of Christ, the Lord will take care of the rest. "So

then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7).

Has the Lord given an impossible task? The testimony of Christ was to be proclaimed "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and the book of Acts covers the first thirty-two years of the Christian mission (ca. AD 30-62). When Acts closed, Christianity had spread as far as Italy (28:11-16), but no definitive record is given of the gospel having reached areas west of Rome, east of Syria, or south of Palestine. Howbeit there are indications in Acts that it probably did extend further (e.g. 2:5-11; 8:4, 27, 39). Luke did not reveal to his readers exactly how the church came to exist in Rome, for example, and much additional information, which did not suit his immediate purpose, was naturally excluded from his history.

The church of Christ rapidly grew from 120 disciples (1:15) to 3,000+ (2:41), to 5,000+ (4:4),³ and more (5:14; 6:7), and the number of believers may have been as many as 20,000 prior to Stephen's execution. Then these thousands of Jewish Christians "from every nation under heaven" dispersed from Jerusalem around AD 33, going "everywhere preaching the word" (2:5; 8:4). Twenty-four years later the Christian movement consisted of "myriads" (literally "thousands upon thousands") of converted Jews (21:20), not counting multitudes of Gentiles. While Luke focused primarily on the missionary activities of Paul, who obviously had not gone everywhere himself, a host of other Christian missionaries were also actively going into all the world.

As the record of Acts concluded, Paul had been a prisoner in Rome for two whole years (28:30), from about AD 60 to 62. Sometime during this period, as he wrote his prison epistles, he affirmed that the testimony of Christ had been diffused "in all the world" (Col. 1:5-6, 23). Hyperbole does not adequately describe Paul's language here, and whether this is interpreted as a "prophetic prolepsis" or an allusion to the whole Roman Empire, it is entirely plausible that the gospel had literally been taken around the globe by this time.

Consider the fact that the entire human population at the beginning of the first century AD is estimated at about 300 million. If the approximately 20,000 Christians of AD 33 each shared the gospel with one person per year, who in turn shared the gospel with one more person each year and so on, it would have taken less than fifteen years to reach the entire population of the world! One cannot escape the fact that the gospel is universal in scope (Mark 16:15), and Jesus had predicted that, prior to the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world" (Matt. 24:14).

Has the Lord indeed given an impossible task? Our first-century brethren believed that with God's help all things are possible, and in about three decades they carried the message of Christ to "the end of the earth" without the aid of motorized vehicles, jet airliners, printing presses, computers, financial prosperity, modern medicines, mass media, and a host of other technological advances that ought to be making our task much less daunting. Robert Speer has observed: "There is nothing in the world or the church -- except the church's disobedience -- to render the evangelization of the world in this generation an impossibility."⁴

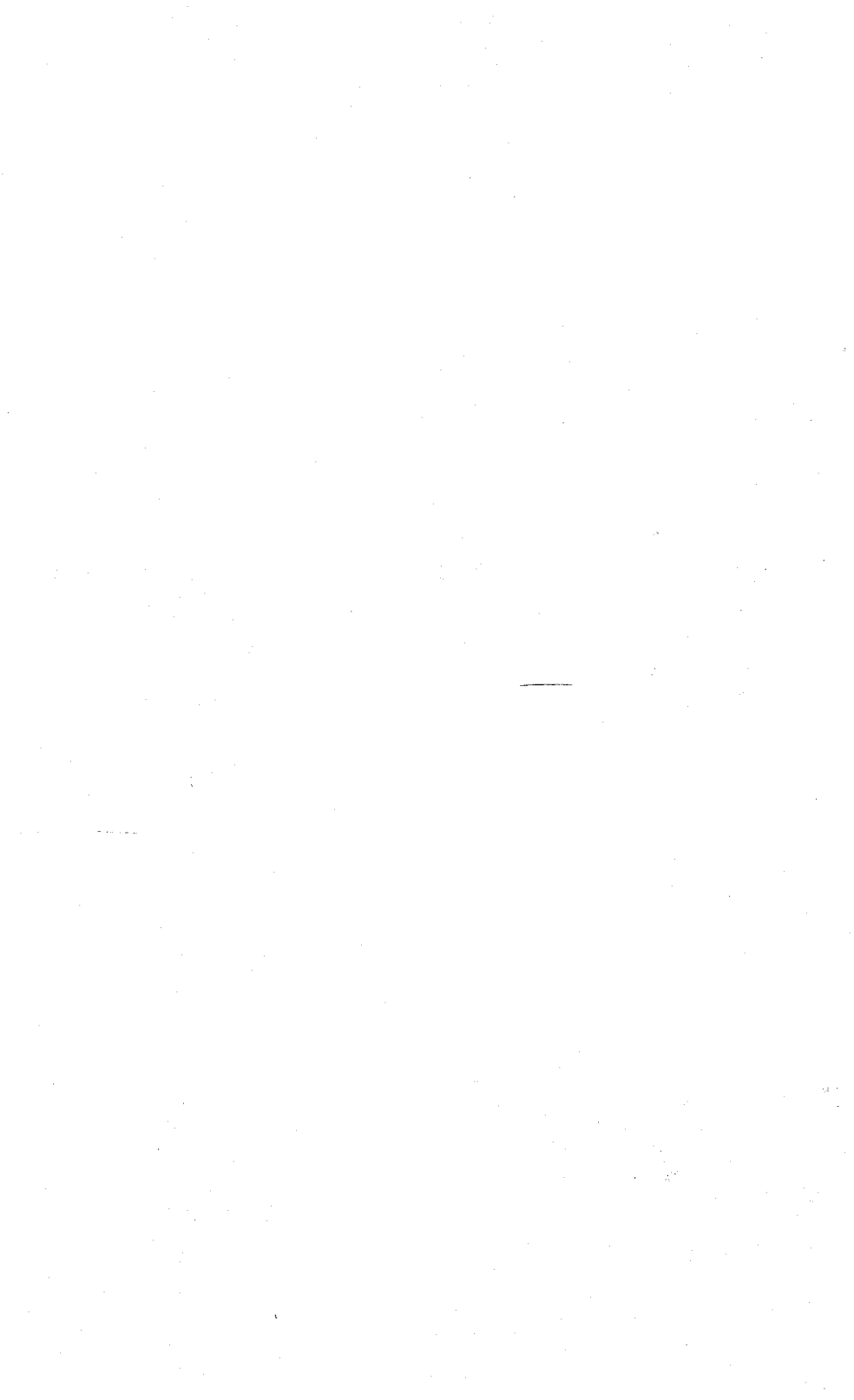
Let us be truly converted to Jesus and pray selfless, evangelistic prayers and then put our prayers into action. Only then will we achieve balance in our outreach, and only then will our purpose in God's kingdom be fulfilled.

ENDNOTES

1. All scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.
2. See Earl Edwards, "Churches of Christ in the 20th Century: In the U.S. and Around the World," in The Voice of Truth International 24 (n.d.): 102-110. Over a decade ago, Gaston Tarbet, in his unpublished "World Survey," estimated a total of 1,019 overseas missionaries in our brotherhood (counting husbands and wives separately), more than doubling the number approximated fifteen years earlier. However, since churches of Christ are autonomous and independently support their own missionaries, who in turn are regularly "coming and going," it is extremely difficult to maintain up-to-date and accurate statistics.

3. If Acts 4:4 is a summary statement of all the believers in Jerusalem at that time, then “about 5,000” would be the minimum estimate. However, Luke limited this figure to only the men (*andrōn*), suggesting that the number of women in the church would have potentially doubled the figure. If the 5,000 men of 4:4 do not constitute a sum total but are to be added to the 3,000 male and female converts of 2:41, then at least 8,000 Christians were present at this time in Jerusalem and likely more.
4. Robert E. Speer,
http://www.ccminternational.org/English/who_said_that/robert%20speer.htm. For a helpful resource focused on fulfilling the Great Commission both at home and abroad, see the twenty-eighth annual ETSPM lectureship book, The Whole Gospel for the Whole World (Knoxville: ETSPM, 2002).

SECTION IV
NIGHT SPEAKERS



DEVELOPING A BALANCED CONSCIENCE

JODY L. APPLE

INTRODUCTION:
BIBLICAL PRESUPPOSITIONALISM ASSUMES CONSCIENCE

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As an apologetic paradigm, presuppositionalism assumes too much, but there is a real sense in which we should explore another brand of “presuppositionalism.” Contrary to Calvinism’s claim, scripture presupposes that the readers who come to its pages are indeed qualified to understand its message. Every biblical passage carries at least the following unwritten, implicit assumptions:

1. Scripture assumes that God exists, He possesses a certain nature, He can communicate with humanity, He demonstrates benevolence, and He has made sure we can find Him.
2. Scripture assumes that its message is recognizable as divinely inspired, understandable, and implementable.
3. Scripture assumes that the Bible addresses universal human needs—for example, the need to know God, His will, and His word—and that it speaks to every human being.
4. The Bible assumes that an objective moral code exists, that it can be recognized, and that we have the ability to conform our will to that code. We function under its umbrella in our daily decision making whether or not we believe in God, accept His word, or attempt to follow it. In short, because we are made in the image of God (Gen.

1:26-27), God's divine stamp of conscience (moral oughtness) is so pervasive that God says eternity is stamped on our hearts (Eccles. 3:11; Heb. 12:9).

This final assumption, coupled with the intelligibility of God's word, implies that we can draw moral conclusions. Of course we are rational beings able to draw logical conclusions from scripture. But logical conclusions, grand as they are, are not the singular summum bonum of scripture. It is entirely possible to *understand* the gist of every jot and tittle of the word yet remain out of harmony with God's will. We must perceive that the morality of God compels us to draw *moral* conclusions, not just logical conclusions. We thoroughly honor God only when reason *and* moral oughtness prompt us to act in concert with His will and word.

Consider the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and its built-in assumptions. First, Christ assumed that the lawyer who challenged Him had the ability to know what the law said *and* what the law meant (vs. 26-28).

Second, Christ presented the follow-up parable in such a way that it shows He assumed the lawyer had the ability to understand its meaning. This epistemic assumption pervades scripture. God assumes that man—created in His image—possesses the ability to parallel the *thought processes* and *thought content* of deity (Prov. 2:1-22; Isa. 55:1-11; Acts 17:23-34). Jesus expected that honest souls hearing the parable would draw correct logical conclusions.

Third, Jesus assumed that the lawyer who challenged Him had both the inherent moral capability and amenability to *understand and obey* the meaning of the parable: everyone, regardless of race, is my neighbor. The lawyer drew the right moral conclusion, even though the parable's "hero" was a despised Samaritan and even though the Jewish priest and Levite were depicted unfavorably. He might have found the lesson hard to accept, but he grasped it anyway.

The lawyer was able to draw the right conclusion only because of the way God has arranged this world (Acts 17:26; Deut. 32:8; Job 14:5). He possessed a divinely built-in ability to make moral judgments. Christ's presentation built on that innate moral ability and conveyed God's truth in terms, expressions, and illustrations that effectively addressed it. Finally, Jesus left the scribe to answer the question "which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves" (Luke 10:36).

The Bible always presents itself with these same presuppositions: we can think as God thinks, feel as He feels, judge as He judges, have a will like His will and act as He does so that we can be in fellowship with Him.

THE CONSCIENCE: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS

To fully understand that we can recognize and obey God's moral code, we must see the connection between conscience—what prompts and/or restricts our behavior—and the overall nature of man.

We can classify man's nature in at least two ways. Some, citing 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 16-17 or Romans 8:1-10, emphasize the *dual* nature of humanity: mankind is both spiritual and physical. While this dual description is certainly adequate, a more fully developed concept appears in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. There, Paul refers to man as a *tripartite* being, comprising body, soul, and spirit. Two unique categories remain, one physical and one metaphysical, but the metaphysical category is further subdivided into soul and spirit. Scripture distinguishes between soul and spirit (Heb 4:12). Though the two terms are often used interchangeably, for our purpose we will note that soul (*psuche*) refers to our immortal nature, and spirit (*pneuma*) refers to our animating life force.

The body (*soma*) of man, made of dust (Gen. 2:7), returns to dust (Eccles. 12:7). The spirit, which enlivens us, separates from the body at death (Jas. 2:26) and returns to God, who gave it (Eccles. 12:7). The part of man that is most like God's image is the soul (Gen. 1:26-27), which continues into eternity. We are not

to fear those who can destroy us physically, but we are to fear Him who can destroy body and soul (Matt. 10:28).

To appreciate more fully what the New Testament teaches about conscience, consider this overview. The term rendered “conscience,” *suneidesis*, appears thirty-two times in thirty New Testament verses. It is made up of the prefix *sun*, meaning “with,” and *eido*, meaning “to see” or “to know.” Its meaning parallels our English term *conscience* (“with knowing”). A study of the term reveals:

1. It is the faculty of mind that convicts and prompts specific action (John 8:9).
2. Conscience is the faculty that generally governs our actions (Acts 23:1; 4:16).
3. It is the element of mind that bears witness and gives testimony with what we do (Rom. 2:15).
4. Conscience is the part of the mind that bears witness in the Spirit (Rom. 9:1).
5. It is the component that prompts subjection (Rom. 13:5).
6. Conscience refers to the ability which prompts us to function consistent with one’s own knowledge (or at least what one thinks he knows) but not necessarily consistent with true knowledge. In this connection, the conscience is identified as “weak” (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12; 1 Cor. 10:25, 27-29; Rom. 14).
7. It refers to the aspect of mind that testifies to our sincerity (2 Cor. 1:12).
8. Conscience is the feature of mind that is impacted by truth and attested to by other consciences (2 Cor. 4:2; 5:11).
9. It refers to what a good conscience produces—a pure heart and a sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5, 19; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16).
10. Conscience prompts us to hold to our faith (1 Tim. 3:9).
11. It is described as pure, or good (2 Tim. 1:3).
12. The conscience can be so seared, hardened, and corrupted that it appears to function automatically and destructively (1 Tim. 4:2).

13. It refers to the possibility that the conscience can be defiled to the extent that we determine what is pure and what is evil based solely on our wants (Tit. 1:15).
14. Israelites offering sacrifices under the Mosaic law never obtained a “perfect” conscience, but they did have forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18). The “imperfection” of conscience was due to the inability of the law to save, not the inability of God to forgive. In Hebrews 13:8, the conscience is good, indicating changes in law, sacrificial system, and priesthood.
15. Conscience designates that element of soul which prompts a lifetime of honesty, not just isolated moments of righteousness (Heb. 13:18). In this context our conscience guides us accurately, which assumes that it is in sync God’s will.
16. It is that segment of mind that prompts us to endure grief and suffering for God (1 Pet. 2:19).
17. Conscience identifies that part of the soul that causes us to live righteously even when others accuse us of sin (1 Pet. 3:16).
18. It refers to that element of mind that asks God for a good conscience by virtue of our obedience in baptism (1 Pet. 3:21). What we request in baptism is not self-oriented, but God-oriented. It is not a request that we initiate as if it were our own idea. The very opposite is true. We avail ourselves of the saving efficacy of the blood of Christ in obedient baptism *because God directs us to do so*, so that we can be saved by grace through faith. In this process we inquire, or request, of God that our conscience be cleansed. This passage should be understood against the backdrop of the Hebrew epistle (see under 14 above), where we learn that was impossible to have a perfect conscience under the Law. The Hebrews text does not refer to deficiencies of the human conscience, but rather the inherent deficiency of the Law to cleanse our conscience apart from the atoning death of the Christ.

THE GOAL OF CONSCIENCE: TO MAKE US LIKE GOD

By divine design, man's soul functions in a way that parallels the nature of God. Man's conscience uniquely *connects* all facets and functions of the soul of man. We often equate these functions—reason, morality, volition, emotion, and behavior—with the expression “free moral agency.”

As previously noted, the term “conscience” literally means “with knowing.” This connects it with our *rational* component. Rationally, we have the ability to think the way God thinks (Isa. 55:1ff), to follow His reasoning (Isa. 1:18; Acts 17:2; 18:4; 28:25), and to think His thoughts after Him (1 Cor. 2:9-16; Eph. 3:1-21).

Synonyms for “conscience,” such as morals, inner voice, standards, values, principles, scruples, compunction, and the like, all indicate a close connection with the *moral* component of man. Morally, we have the ability to weigh and make judgments that follow God's moral code (Deut. 11:26-28; 30:14-20).

The *will* and *emotions* of man also enter into the decision-making process. Volitionally, we have the ability to direct our lives in a way that is in sync with God's will (1 Kings 18:21; Josh. 24:15; Ps. 40:8). Emotionally, we have the ability to love what God loves and hate what God hates (Deut. 16:22; Prov. 6:16; Rev. 2:6, 15).

Conscience connects these functions of soul and directs our *actions*. Behaviorally, we have the ability to act in a way that pleases God (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2 Pet. 1:4).

In brief, we are conscious beings, aware of our self and our surroundings; sentient beings, able to perceive and feel things; and “conscience beings,” aware of moral right and wrong.

All of these faculties of the soul have both temporal and eternal consequences; that is, they affect us now and forever (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10).

THE PROBLEM: THE CONSCIENCE DOES NOT ALWAYS WORK PROPERLY

Imaginary tales frequently mirror reality. The good fairy bestowed life to kindly old Geppetto's puppet, Pinocchio, and admonished the now walking and talking marionette, "let your conscience be your guide." She gave Jiminy Cricket the role of helping "Pinoke" make the right decisions in "life." Initially, Pinocchio's conscience did not seem to be up to the task of keeping him on the straight and narrow. In the end, Pinocchio saved Geppetto's life and learned to think of others first but lost his puppet life in the process. His newfound unselfishness led the good fairy to make Pinocchio a real boy. En route to becoming a real boy, good-hearted, well-intentioned Pinocchio fell victim to every nefarious character who attempted to lead the unsuspecting waif astray.

How many good-intentioned, well-meaning *real* souls have faltered as did imaginary Pinocchio? We stumble through life, wanting to do what is right, but often falter or fail to make good on our best intentions. Pinocchio knew what he *wanted* to do and what he was *supposed* to do, but *knowing* what to do and *wanting* to do it are not the same as *doing* good.

In the first of its twenty-two octets, Psalm 119 extols the virtues of keeping God's testimonies (Ps. 119:1-8). While the opening verses champion the importance of obeying God's statutes and precepts and walking in His ways, they also speak of the possibility of being ashamed when we consider God's commandments (vs. 6). Here we are reminded of Pinocchio's dilemma. We hear, see, and know what we must do. We understand it and intend to do it, but then we dismiss it in favor of something we know we should not do. Browse through the remaining octets and note the number of times the psalmist expresses concern about wandering, sinning, forgetting, coveting, and looking at worthless things. The chapter certainly impresses us, even overwhelms us, with the psalmist's great devotion to God. He yearns to be ever-obedient to God's word, but he struggles with doubt and personal weakness.

We see this sort of dichotomy when we examine the terms rendered "will" in the New Testament (*thelo* and *boulomai*). There is the sense of will as *intending* to do right, and there is will in the

sense of *acting* to do right. Though the subtleties of distinction are not always agreed upon by lexicographers, sufficient differences are apparent when we examine the two terms in close context.

The distinction is evident in Matthew 1:19: "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting (*thelo*) to make her a public example, was minded (*boulomai*) to put her away secretly." Observe the distinction between will as *intent* and will as *action*. Joseph not only intended something; his intentions were designed to produce action.

The two terms appear again in Acts 17:20: "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want (*boulomai*) to know what these things mean (*thelo*)." The use here appears to reverse the meanings of the prior example. Here they want (*boulomai*—indicating desire) to know what these things mean (*thelo*).

This distinction appears in our own decision-making processes. We intend to do what is right, but at times we get no further than our good intentions. How can we change the outcome?

WORKING TOWARD A SOLUTION

Two men stand side by side and witness the same event. One accepts that a miracle occurred, but the other denies it. This scenario depicts what we read concerning the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-44). Some saw and acknowledged belief in the Christ (John 11:45). Some saw, acknowledged that a miracle took place, but rebelled and determined to destroy Jesus (John 11:47-57).

How do we explain these diverse responses? Assuming that the evidence presented was sufficient to produce faith in Christ, consider briefly why one believed and one did not:

1. One person was honest, and one was not.
2. One person had a higher regard for truth than the other.
3. One person realized that the evidence signified something different about Jesus, but the second failed to do so.

4. One person accepted the implications of the evidence and drew the conclusions demanded by it, while the other refused to follow the implications through to their conclusions.

What accounts for the difference between the two responses? The *background* of each paralleled the other. The *facts* presented to each witness were the same. The *recognition* that something unique happened was the same. The *ability to assess* the facts by each party was the same. The *possibility* for each to draw the same conclusion existed. Still, a difference remained. What, exactly, made the difference?

When two people stand at the same scenic overlook and survey the beauty before them, they do not necessarily see the same thing. The physical world each sees is not any different, but their respective perceptions are. One may be farsighted, the other nearsighted. One may be colorblind, the other not. For whatever reason, the scenic vista each perceives differs from the other. Our ability to see physically is usually determined by matters outside our control. Our ability to see spiritually, however, is very much determined by matters we can control. There are some who have better spiritual vision than others, not because they see things that can not be seen, but because they appear to see more clearly or more easily the things that God wants all of us to see. Seeing what God wants us to see when we are conditioned to see only what we want to see demands correction.

To overcome our deficiencies in spiritual vision we must:

1. Commit ourselves to know the will and word of God (John 7:17);
2. Demonstrate a willingness to find and follow the truth wherever it leads (Prov. 23:23);
3. Be careful in handling the facts and evidence we encounter (Acts 17:11);
4. Make sure that every aspect of our soul—our intellect, our emotions, our will, our moral oughtness, and our behavior—is in sync with the nature of God (see earlier discussion);

5. Display a high level of honesty in all aspects of our pursuit (Luke 8:15);
6. Be willing to submit to the will and word of God in humble obedience (John 15:8-10; Heb. 5:8-9); and (7) follow what is right regardless of the consequences (2 Tim. 3:12).

Does this resolve every difficulty? No. Does it fully explain why two witnesses of the same event vary in their convictions? No. While it lays the groundwork for how we can come to unanimity of faith, it does not address every contingency.

WE STILL HAVE DIFFERENCES

Two brethren, each of whom believes that the triune God exists, that Jesus is divine, that the Bible is divinely inspired and authoritative, that man is created in God's image, that there is but one church purchased by the blood of Christ, and that baptism is essential for salvation, stand side by side. Like the two who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, the evidence before them is identical. One believes that *it is sinful* to eat meat offered to idols, and the other believes *it is acceptable* to do so (1 Cor. 8, 10; Rom. 14). Each claims to follow the seven directives listed above. How can this be?

To help understand how differences might remain, consider how two key issues perpetuate them; one is *will*, which we discuss here, and the other is *conscience*, discussed in the final section.

The Jewish leaders once challenged Jesus by asking, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matt. 21:23-27ff). To make a point, as well as to answer their question, Jesus asked one of His own (vs. 25): "The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" Jesus asked this question to show that John was a prophet. They refused to follow Jesus' thinking, but not because they could not. Their faculties of reason, emotion, will, morality, and behavior failed to function in concert with God's will. They balked at Jesus' question because *they were unwilling* to see what Jesus wanted

them to see. Their failure to understand was primarily a *matter of will*.

Jesus' method of teaching here reflects what inheres in the term *dianoego*. It means "to open the mind of one, i.e. to cause to understand a thing" (Thayer). When we lead someone to draw conclusions based on the evidence presented to them, we "open" their mind. Regarding Lydia, the text of Acts 16:14 says, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." God did not directly force Lydia to see. However, through the divinely-inspired message called the gospel, God did convict and change Lydia's mind.

Jesus did the same thing with the two men traveling to Emmaus. Through His message He opened their understanding. Actually, there were two openings on that occasion. First, the text says their eyes were opened (Luke 24:31). They physically saw someone walking with them, but they did not recognize it to be Jesus. After their eyes were opened, they knew who He was. The text also notes that Jesus opened the *scriptures* for them (Luke 24:32). Jesus opened their understanding of the Old Testament and enabled them to see that those scriptures were actually fulfilled in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Before Jesus opened their understanding, they did not fully understand what the scriptures said about the Christ. Their problem was, quite simply, *a lack of knowledge*. The religious leaders who challenged Jesus' authority were taught. They were taught well, but excellent teaching does not guarantee complete knowledge. The travelers to Emmaus were convinced, convicted, and changed. The religious leaders who balked at Jesus' lesson concerning John's baptism were convinced and convicted, but they certainly *were not* changed. The difference between the two is largely a *matter of will*.

I did not choose to be nearsighted, nor did you choose to be farsighted. But my *spiritual vision* is what it is because of what *I choose to believe*. We fail to see what God wants us to see because of preconceived ideas, false or inadequate teaching, or any one of a number of matters. Those who chafed at Jesus' teaching

were wed to tradition more than truth. Their willful pride kept them from following Jesus' argument and prevented them from answering his questions.

The issue of whether it is right to eat meat offered to idols can never be fully resolved as long as some refuse to face the facts. Paul plainly said, "we know that an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4). This does not mean that an idol is only imaginary. The physical idol is real, but what it represents is not. Saying that an idol is nothing simply means that neither the physical idol, nor what it represents, is God. Offering a sacrifice to an idol is offering a sacrifice to nothing. It is useless, and the one who does so engages in a hopeless, meaningless act. Eating meat that may have been offered as part of this hopeless process neither condones nor commends idol worship.

Some Christians did not see that truth. If I can not see because I have *willfully* restricted my vision, then I am to blame. But what if I do not see something spiritually because I have *willfully* restricted my vision? Who bears the blame for that?

CONCLUSION: A FINAL SOLUTION

The issue of *conscience* comes into play when a Christian, as a matter of personal conviction, refuses to eat meat that was offered to idols for fear that it is tantamount to fellowshiping idols or idol worshippers.

These differences between Christians occur due to variations in our faculties of reason, morality, emotion, will, and, finally, in our behavior. At some point one or more elements varies from God's nature. Though all faculties are involved, the central issue is *knowledge*. And knowledge, at least what we claim to know, is key to understanding conscience.

What we claim to know affects what we *believe*. What we claim to know determines how we view biblical *authority*. What we claim to know affects our *tradition*. And what we claim to know determines the *interpretive* schemes we employ. Knowledge, then, whether real or imaginary, affects everything.

There are at least two general solutions to conscience issues. The first is rational, because it relates *directly to knowledge*, and the second is volitional, or *will* oriented.

The repeated emphasis of 1 Corinthians 8 is *knowledge*. God declares an undeniable fact that could easily resolve all differences. As noted previously, the text says “Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4).

At least eleven times in 1 Corinthians 8 and one time in Romans 14, scripture refers to what we can, or should, know:

1. (1 Cor. 8:1) we know (*eido*), we all have knowledge (*gnosis*), knowledge (*gnosis*) puffs up;
2. (1 Cor. 8:2) he knows (*eido*) anything, he knows (*ginosko*) nothing;
3. (1 Cor. 8:3) this one is known (*ginosko*) by Him;
4. (1 Cor. 8:4) we know (*eido*) that an idol is nothing;
5. (1 Cor. 8:7) there is not in everyone that knowledge (*gnosis*);
6. (1 Cor. 8:10) sees you who have knowledge (*gnosis*);
7. (1 Cor. 8:11) because of your knowledge (*gnosis*); and (Rom. 14:14) Paul says I know (*eido*) and am convinced (*peitho*).

These twelve explicit references do not exhaust the emphasis on knowledge. Other phrases, like “there is no other God but one,” teach the same thing as “we know that an idol is nothing in the world.” Though the term “know” does not appear, it is obvious the same truth is taught. Likewise, the phrase “there is one God” in verse six states the same truth as does “we know that an idol is nothing in the world.”

Without a doubt, knowledge is key to understanding and resolving the differences of conscience concerning meat offered to idols. If everyone agreed that idols are nothing, the issue of conscientiously refusing to eat meat would be less problematic, if not

non-existent. The rational solution is the primary one because, if fully implemented, the issue would no longer exist. It is only by failing to fully enact the first solution that the second becomes necessary.

While 1 Corinthians 8 emphasizes knowledge, Romans 14 emphasizes toleration, the second solution. When Christians do not have the knowledge they could and should have, the *volitional* solution must be employed. Though the stronger brother knows knowledge is on his side, he should not use that knowledge to judge or despise someone who does not share it. Willful toleration becomes the directive of the second solution.

Romans 14 is filled with references to receiving one who is weak in faith and respecting what others judge, esteem, believe, and observe. Regardless of what one does, he eats, drinks, lives, dies, and gives account of his conscience before the Lord. Whether he eats or does not eat meat, he can be justified before God. As long as peace is pursued and the kingdom is not destroyed over eating and drinking, toleration works. Again, it does not solve the logically prior knowledge problem, but it does, if followed, keep the body of Christ intact.

Some might object that preference is given here to the first solution, correcting knowledge, instead of the second, willful toleration. Of the two options, the first is obviously preferable. Why? If everyone had the same knowledge, there would be no basis for variations in conscience. Those with mistaken views about idols, if they learn that idols are nothing, no longer have a reason for weak faith. The second option does not resolve the knowledge issue, but rather allows varying levels of knowledge, conviction, and conscience to continue. Because it allows variations of conscience and understanding, it allows false ideas to continue. This could never be the preferred solution.

In closing, there are some caveats worthy of attention.

1. Not every issue parallels the matters of conscience addressed in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 and Romans 14. Claim-

ing that the essentiality of baptism is a matter of conscience, not a matter of doctrine, does not make it so.

2. Some have used the “weaker” brother position to maintain “false” knowledge in perpetuity. Did God intend for brethren to have false understandings of what idols were for the duration of their Christian lives? Does holding an issue as a matter of conscience continuously prevent the weaker brother from learning the truth? Has God granted perpetual toleration for ignorance on these matters, thus forbidding true teaching on the matter?
3. Toleration allows some to assume that the differing positions are epistemically equal. The false belief that idols are something can never equal the truth that idols are nothing.
4. The issue addressed in these passages appears to be uniquely congregational, that is taking place within a local congregation. The issues we witness in the body of Christ today are anything but congregational. They have become “trans-congregational.” Entire congregations and splintered “fellowships” have been founded on issues of conscience. Laws and lines of fellowship have been created, and both knowledge and toleration have been ignored.
5. Some have used the “weaker brother” position and the liberty of toleration mandated by the Lord to divide local congregations.
6. The three key chapters indicate that each “side” had problems judging and despising the other. It is easy to stand on our “side” and point to the problems on the other “side,” but that does not solve the problem.
7. Finally, those who understand that idols are nothing must certainly demonstrate tolerance as God decreed. However, tolerance does not mean that we capitulate on the principle issue of knowledge. Idols have never been anything. Neither the passage of time nor the number of souls involved changes that. Those who know the truth about idols and meats should continue to be tolerant, but with limits. The two statements, “there is nothing unclean of itself” (Rom 14:14) and “an idol is nothing” (1 Cor. 8:4), forever prove that the conviction of conscience, regardless of strength and depth, can never change truth. Though he was toler-

ant concerning matters of conscience, Paul never passed on an opportunity to teach and convict souls with truth.

FREEDOM FROM LEGALISM COLOSSIANS 2:11-17

DAN WINKLER

As a boy I loved “crawdad fishing,” and one of the things I remember most about them is their hard shell. Their back and sides felt like plastic. Such is true because crawfish are exoskeletons. Their skeletons are on the outside instead of the inside.

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In analogy, you and I need to be careful or the convictions that should support us could become something we callously wear on the outside, turning us into hard and hardened people. That is what happened to the Pharisees of Jesus’ day (cf. Matt. 23:4). They were harder on people than they needed to be. Such was also true with some of the Christians in Colossae, resulting in Paul’s words,

Let no man...judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come...Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility...vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (Col. 2:16-18).

Remember that Jesus had little tolerance for this way of thinking. The rigid Pharisees were the ones He called “hypocrites,”

“son[s] of hell,” “blind guides,” “fools,” “serpents,” and “the offspring of vipers” (Matt. 23:13, 15, 16, 17, 33). That is why it is incumbent on us to ask, “Am I like the Pharisees in the way I think and in the way I treat my brethren?”

Are you? Are you more restrictive than God is? Do you demand more of folks than God does? Are you harder on people than God is? To determine whether or not we are like the Pharisees—and the callused Colossians for that matter—let us ask three questions: “How did the Pharisees think?,” “Do we think like the Pharisees?,” and “What can help us not think like the Pharisees?”

HOW DID THE PHARISEES THINK?

In an effort to get inside this “right-wing” mindset, let us turn to our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Luke tells us that Jesus had been in repeated discussions with the Pharisees prior to preaching this sermon. In fact, in the days preceding, the Pharisees had been: sitting around, carefully watching others (Luke 5:17-20), reasoning, “Who does this Jesus think he is?” (Luke 5:21-22), complaining about and criticizing brethren for violating their opinions (Luke 5:30), dividing their fellowship (Luke 5:33), using their strict opinions to condemn their brethren (Luke 6:1-2), and watching and waiting for someone [in specific, Jesus] to mess up (Luke 6:7). Does that sound familiar?

Well, after these days, Jesus went up into a mountain, where He prayed all night. The next day he selected his apostles, descended from the mountain, healed the sick, and preached His Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:12-49).

This background is critical. Jesus had been wrestling with the Pharisees’ legalistic mindset for days. In response, He dissected their ways of thought in the Sermon on the Mount and taught His disciples not to be like the legalists with whom He had contended (cf. Matt. 5:20). In the sermon itself, we see several areas of concern.

“Attitudes.” First, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the attitudes they were to have and the influence they could enjoy if they had such attitudes (Matt. 5:3-16). Who struggled with their attitudes more than the Pharisees of whom Jesus said, “Beware” (Luke 12:1)?

“Authority.” Second, Jesus applied His authoritative message to life [i.e. conflict resolution, domestic responsibility, integrity, peacekeeping, and love] (Matt. 5:17-48). Who used the wrong standard to measure the lives of others (Matt. 15:1-3)?

“Accents.” Third, Jesus condemned egotism and materialism as false values (Matt. 6:1-34). Remember, the Pharisees lived “to be seen of men” (Matt. 23:5; cf. Matt. 6:2, 5, 16) and “were lovers of money” (Luke 16:14).

“Affection.” Fourth, Jesus taught His disciples not to jump to conclusions and hurt each other (Matt. 7:1-6). Who struggled with censorious judgments more than the Pharisees who, for example, falsely accused Jesus of blasphemy because of their preconceptions and prejudices (Mark. 2:1-12)?

“Ask.” Fifth, Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray and ask God for blessings (Matt. 7:7-12). But, wait. When Jesus told the story of two men going to the temple to pray, was it not the Pharisee who prayed unacceptably (Luke 18:9-14)? Is that not interesting?

“Afterlife.” Last of all, Jesus motivated His disciples to choose the road less traveled if they wished to go to heaven (Matt. 7:13-14). When we examine them carefully, the Pharisees were more interested in philosophy than eternity (cf. Matt. 23:15).

Now, with the above in mind, whom do you think Jesus had in mind when He said, “Beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15ff)? To know how the Pharisees thought and to see what concerned Jesus about their mindset, study the Sermon on the Mount.

DO WE THINK LIKE THE PHARISEES?

All of us tend to think we are balanced. Seldom will you meet a self-described extremist. To see if we are as centrist as we think we are, let us compare our ways to the Pharisees. Let us revisit the above areas of Jesus' concern and make a self-evaluation.

"Attitudes" (cf. *Prov. 23:7*).—Do others think of you as the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world"? What kind of attitude are you known for? Is it one that is seasoned by the traits Jesus specified in the beatitudes?

"Authority" (cf. *Col. 3:17*).—Some live by "hear say," going on what they hear someone else say about someone else. Do you? Others live by "fear say," guarding their words and actions out of a fear of what someone else might think. Do you?

"Accent" (cf. *Col. 3:1-2*).—Unfortunately, there are those who manifest a desire for popularity or prosperity and are, thus, more interested in "being someone among the Lord's" than they are in "doing something for the Lord." Is that you?

"Affection" (1 *Pet. 1:22; 2:17*).—Biblical love believes and hopes for the best until verified evidence forces some other conclusion (1 *Cor. 13:7*). Do you hope for the best or look for the worst in others? Are you "generous" or "carnivorous"?

"Ask" (*Jas. 5:16, 19-20*).—Think of the many names you have seen "written up" in bulletins or periodicals, or the names you have heard from pulpits. One cannot help but wonder, "Are these names mentioned just as much in prayer?"

"Afterlife" (*Gal. 6:1-2*).—Based on your past actions, if a brother has proven himself to be wrong, do you really want him to be right again, or do you just want to prove that you are right?

I would dare say that few of us find ourselves in each of the above areas of concern. But, if the truth were told, we might all be struggling with one or more of these areas. If so, to that extent

we are susceptible to the legalistic mindset that plagued the Pharisees and some at Colossae.

WHAT CAN HELP US TO AVOID THINKING LIKE THE PHARISEES?

Well, here are a few SUGGESTIONS.

First, we need to stand for what is right but, in doing so, remember that kindness is part of being right. As we recognize and retrace the line God has drawn in the sands of time, it is important to remember that kindness is one of the things he has prescribed (Eph. 4:32; cf. Prov. 19:22). Tact should always accompany our efforts to contact the hearts of others with the truth (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Second, we need to emphasize the precepts and principles of God instead of the personalities of man. Should we call the names of those who are wrong? At times. But, to avoid some sort of tirade, we need to be sure of two things in doing so. We need to be cautious and know that we are accurate in our assessments and accusations. To do otherwise is to forfeit our own integrity. We also need to be consistent. To be centrist, if we are going to call the names of those to "the left" we also need to call the names of those who are to "the right." Both are evil (Prov. 4:25-27)!

Third, we need to refuse to take part in "guilt by association." Think of the good men who have been "written up" for appearing on a program with someone their critics did not think they should have appeared with, and they did so without publicly rebuking the one(s) their critics thought they should have rebuked. We need to realize that "association" is not the same as "cooperation" or "capitulation." If it is, what are we going to do with Jesus, who ate with the publicans, the sinners, and the Pharisees? Which did His association prove Him to be? A liberal? A legalist?

Fourth, we need to be as true to God in our dispositions as we are in our positions. There are two kinds of false teachers. There are those who teach error, and there are those who teach

the truth but do so erroneously. Both are wrong. Remember the words of Paul to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:1-6)? He specified seven dispositions and seven positions that are essential to keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Of interest, he mentioned the dispositions first. We must give attention to ourselves and to our teaching (1 Tim. 4:16).

Finally, we need to stand for something and not just stand against something. The word of God is a sword that is to be used defensively (Eph. 6:10-11; Jude 3). It is also to be used offensively (Matt. 28:18-20; Phil. 1:27). Study Paul's missionary journeys. He went about converting and confirming (Acts 14:21-22). We need to be certain that we stand against those who are wrong—*no matter what extreme they promote*—and be equally sure that we stand up for that which is right.

CONCLUSION

When Jesus was told that He had offended the Pharisees, what did He say? "Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit" (Matt. 15:14). These are the same ones of whom he said, "This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:8-9).

Those who are harder on their brethren than God is, using their personal opinions or preferences to judge and criticize, ought to take these words of Jesus to heart...and be alarmed.

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BALANCE IN THE HOME

STEVE BAGGETT

Jim and Suzy grew up in the same town, went to the same schools, and along with their families, attended the same church. Thus, they knew one another well. At the age of twelve, they were both baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. They were extremely active in their church youth program, even going on several mission trips. After graduating from high school, they, along with several from their youth group, enrolled in a good Christian college. During their junior year in college, their relationship moved from friendship to romance. They became engaged during their senior year, were married following their graduation, were blessed with two children who became Christians and who married Christians, and enjoyed a long and happy Christian marriage. Even though Jim and Suzy have experienced disappointments, trials, and temptations, they approach their fiftieth anniversary having shared a lifetime of faithful service to God and one another. Does that sound too good to be true? Well, it should not! When people obey God's Word and fill their hearts with the spirit of Christ, the above-described scenario will be the norm rather than the exception. In order to help us with a better understanding of God's plan for the home, let us consider the wonderful blessing of "Balance in the Home."

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Webster defines *balance* as "to keep in equilibrium on a small support; to poise; to have equal weight or importance; the

part of a clock which regulates the beats.”¹ The need for balance in life simply cannot be overstated. Whether the subject is an automobile, a wall in a construction project, a grandfather clock, a set of scales, or a relationship, balance is critical. Ira North said, “It is impossible to overestimate the importance of balance. In nature, in the mechanical world around us, and in individuals, it is easy to see the importance of balance.”²

LOVE – THE CRITICAL ELEMENT

The critical element in the balance of the home is the same element critical to a right relationship with God. Jesus stated it this way: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39). An appreciation of the context in which Jesus made this statement will further emphasize the importance of what He said.

Jesus had just finished a conversation with some Sadducees regarding the resurrection. The fact that the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection (Matt. 22:23) emphasizes that the purpose of their question to Jesus was not to gain information regarding the resurrection; rather, their purpose was to entrap. They did not believe Jesus was the Messiah; in fact, they believed He was an imposter. In an effort to expose Him, they presented a scenario in which a man died, having no offspring. His widow was then married to his brother, who also died before having offspring. This happened with five other brothers as well. Finally, the woman died. Their question was, “In the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be?” (Matt. 22:28). Jesus completely silenced the Sadducees when He correctly taught them about the resurrection, saying that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30).

Matthew then tells the reader that the multitudes were “astonished at His teaching” (Matt. 22:33) and that the Pharisees decided that since the Sadducees were unsuccessful at exposing Jesus, they would do so themselves. Thus, “one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher,

which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matt. 22:35-36). When one considers the number of commandments developed by the Pharisees, he can easily see that their purpose was to entrap Jesus. In order to "help" the concerned Jew keep the Ten Commandments, the Pharisees had come up with hundreds of additional laws. If Jesus picked one particular law as the greatest, was He saying that the others were unimportant? The Pharisees were convinced that they had Him this time. However, rather than playing their little game, Jesus quoted their father Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 6:5, when he commanded the people of Israel to love the Lord their God.

When Moses originally gave this command, he emphasized the critical nature of love for God in a balanced family by saying,

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you are in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut. 6:6-9).

Moses was trying to help the children of Israel understand that in order for their families to grow and function as God had designed, love for the Lord was paramount. In fact, to accomplish Moses' command to instruct their children, parents had to spend time with their children, for it takes time to teach God's will and model godly behavior. Moses further emphasized how love for the Lord is critical to a balanced, godly family when he instructed parents to remind children of their heritage.

When your son asks you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your son: "We were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out

of Egypt with a mighty hand and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord" (Deut. 6:20-25).

Thus, by quoting Moses' instructions to the children of Israel regarding the responsibility to love the Lord, Jesus silenced the Pharisees. They would not dare contradict Moses. Matthew even went so far as to say, "nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore" (Matt. 22:46).

In His answer to the Pharisees, Jesus added another element with which they could not disagree. Even though they only asked about the great commandment, meaning one, Jesus added a second commandment. He quoted from Leviticus 19:18 and said, "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39).

The responsibility to love God and one another is what drives and shapes the direction for a godly family and keeps it in balance. It is as though love for God and one another is on one side of the scale while family behaviors and interaction are on the other side of the scale. Without love to keep the family balanced, our actions are chaotic and without purpose.

EACH FAMILY MEMBER DOING HIS PART

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the need for every member of the body of Christ to function as God had designed, he used the analogy of the physical body. The foot, the ear, or the eye cannot decide to function independently of the body or to function in a way different from what God designed. He said, "But now God has set the members, each one

of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Cor. 12:18). Every member of the physical body was designed by God, has a purpose to fulfill, and cannot simply decide to change its function or to leave the body and operate separate from it. It must function as God designed!

In a similar discussion with the Ephesian brethren, Paul identified some spiritual gifts God had given and the purpose for those gifts. He said,

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share* (emphasis added), causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:14-16).

In order for the church, the body of Christ, to grow and develop, every member of the church must do his share, his part. This truth applies to the family as well as to the spiritual body of Christ, the church. When family members cease functioning as God designed or forsake the family altogether, then the wonderful balance God provides for the home has been diminished. Referring back to what Jesus told the Pharisees, it is one's love for the Lord his God and for one another which motivates family members to do their share. Loving the Lord causes one always to do his best (Col. 3:23), and loving one another causes one always to place the interests of others before his own (Matt. 7:12).

Godly men have a number of important responsibilities in a balanced and godly home. As husbands, they are to submit to their wives in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21), they are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25, 28), they are to nourish and cherish their wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:29), they are to honor and care for their wives (1 Pet. 3:7), and in every way they are to serve as leaders in their homes (Josh. 24:15; Eph.

5:22-23). As fathers, they are to refrain from provoking their children to wrath, and they are to bring their children up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Like godly men, godly women also have a number of important responsibilities in a balanced and godly home. As wives and mothers they are to “love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (Tit. 2:4-5). They are to “submit to [their]...own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). And, “Just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:24). They are also to respect their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Like godly men and women, godly children also have a number of important responsibilities in a balanced and godly home. The apostle Paul instructed children, “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’” (Eph. 6:1-3). He further instructed, “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Col. 3:20).

Robert Taylor wrote about the responsibilities of godly children, which he said include:

1. Holding an allegiance that runs more deeply than their relationship with their friends.
2. Recognizing that there are other people living within the home and selfishness is unacceptable.
3. Realizing that friendliness is a quality that is required on an everyday basis.
4. Understanding their need to be both cooperative and helpful inside the home.
5. Being a person of your word, let it “be your bond,” that is, to be a dependable person.
6. Working diligently in order to keep a pure mind, heart, message, and life.
7. Obeying the gospel.³

Taylor went on to say, "When children lift up the Bible in the home, the Bible will lift up childhood in the home."⁴

APPLICATION

Balance in the home today will result when family members love the Lord their God more than anything or anyone else, love others as themselves, and work hard to fulfill the roles God ordained for them. Examples of godly balanced homes abound in the Lord's church today. Wallace and Viola Sullivan are a precious godly couple who, at this writing, have been married sixty-nine years. They are faithful members of the Walnut Street congregation in Dickson. Though their health will not now permit them to attend the worship assemblies as they would like, they pray regularly, read their Bibles, and are a wonderful blessing to all who know them. Lynwood and Vonette Smith moved to Dickson about six years ago. They have been married fifty-four years. For ten of those years they actively served in Sojourners (retired members of the church who travel from place to place to help churches build new buildings, repair buildings, and actively engage in other needs), blessing the lives of thousands across this land. Randy and Suzanne Hinton have been married forty-three years, the last four of which have been in Dickson. They are deeply involved, not only in the lives of their grown children, but also those of their grandchildren. They teach the sixth grade Bible class at Walnut Street; and Suzanne, a Spanish teacher at a local high school, teaches a Spanish class for our members wanting to learn this language. Ted and Sharon Williams have been married twenty-one years. Their oldest son is in the ninth grade, and their younger twin sons are in the fifth grade. Ted grew up at Walnut Street and Sharon grew up in Savanna, Tennessee. Ted serves as a deacon at Walnut Street, and together they teach seminars on strengthening marriage. Joe and Liz Dewese have been married five years. Joe teaches the college class at Walnut Street and is preparing for an eventual career in teaching at a Christian college. Having been married from sixty-nine years to five years, these wonderful godly couples are reaping the benefits of a balanced home because of their love for the Lord and others. The thrilling news is that this same formula for success is available to all families.

ENDNOTES

1. Virginia S. Thatcher. The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English
2. Language (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1970) 61.
3. Ira North. Balance: A Tried & Tested Formula for Church Growth (Nashville, TN:
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BALANCE IN PERSONAL LIFE

T. DOUGLAS COUCH

His high school classmates voted him "Best All-Around Male," an award given to one who possessed good moral character and excelled academically, athletically, and socially. But twenty years after graduation, his life was spinning out of control. He was having problems at home and work. A professional therapist suggested that a study of religion might help him find peace of mind. For the first time in his life, he started reading the Bible. Jesus intrigued him. He adopted Luke 2:52 as his motto, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." He thought that if it was important for Jesus to grow in these four areas, so should he. He concluded that Jesus was the perfect man who lived a balanced personal life.

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WHAT IS BALANCE?

Balance is a state of equilibrium, equal distribution of weight, being in harmonious or proper arrangement and proportion (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary 157). Though the word "balance" does not appear in the Bible, the idea is certainly taught. Paul said an elder must be "orderly" (1 Tim. 3:2, ASV). The word (κόσμιος, *kosmios*) is translated "of good behav

ior" (KJV) or "respectable" (NASB, NRSV). Arndt and Gingrich define it as "honorable [1 Tim 3:2]...modest apparel [1 Tim. 2:9]" (446). Roy Deaver suggested that one must be well ordered in mind and character, "neat in appearance, gentle in manner, studious in habit, and systematic in work" (13). This word apparently refers to both the internal and external arrangement of a man's life (Robertson 569, 572). Elders then are examples of mature, Christ-like character and are worthy of imitation (1 Cor. 11:1).

According to the ancient sages, the pursuit of an ordered and balanced life was a great virtue. The exercise of self-government according to one's virtue, said Confucius (551-479 B.C.), was like the "polar north star which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it" ("The Confucian Analects" 2:1; Bartlett's Familiar Quotations 60). Euripides (484-406 B.C.) said, "The best and safest thing is to keep a balance in your life, acknowledge the great powers around us and in us. If you can do that and live that way, you are really a wise man" (<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/2776.html>). Peace of mind in a chaotic world was possible said the Stoics, when one had an inward harmony with the universe (NIDNTT II:439). Maturity then was achieved by the possession of an orderly, self-controlled life.

An orderly life recognizes that all things are not equal. Some things are more important than others. A balanced, mature person must have the ability to set priorities. He must weigh things that differ. He places people before things. He knows when to say no. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-10 that the Christians in Philippi would be able to "approve the things that are excellent." The ASV margin has "distinguish the things that differ." It is one thing to know the difference between truth and error. It is another to know the difference between the things that are good and those that are excellent. Our greatest difficulties come in determining what is good as opposed to excellent.

"Daddy, seesaw with me," asked a four-year-old child. A 200-pound man can seesaw with a four-year-old girl, but he must protect her from the jarring impact of gravity. He can also place

equal weight on each side of the seesaw, or he can move closer to the center, thus balancing the seesaw. In the same way, a self-controlled person can balance different activities by weighing their value and by positioning his life closer to God.

SYMPTOMS OF AN UNBALANCED LIFE

Obsessions and Addictions. Sin has the potential of ruling over us (Ps. 19:13). “Dominion” (משל, *mashal*) is like the rulership of heavenly bodies (Gen. 1:18), civil authorities (1 Kings 5:1), or God (Ps. 103:19) (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 605). Addictions to internet gambling, pornography, drugs, alcohol, food, or shopping reveal that we are a nation out of control.

Unfinished Projects. Our disordered life reveals clutter and disorganization. We waste time searching for lost items. Despite our good intentions, we are seen as dishonest because we do not keep all our promises. When making promises, are you conscious of the priorities that God has established in your life? Like the church in Sardis, our works are not perfect before God (Rev. 3:2).

If someone visited your house, office, or workshop, would he find things in an orderly fashion? Is your time organized, or do you find yourself sometimes anxious (too many tasks) or bored (not enough tasks)? Are you a good steward of the possessions God has given? Do you make sure that they are well maintained and repaired?

Emotional Problems. We worry over things we cannot control. Memories of our moral failures cause guilt. Our intolerance for even minor irritations causes us to explode in anger. Constant anxiety makes our adrenal glands work overtime and leaves us exhausted. We are burned out by life.

Relationship Problems. Being ruled by our passions or character flaws, we neglect our relationship with family. We build walls of silence to keep others at arm's length and to protect us from the judgments they would make about us if they knew us. We disappoint others and ourselves.

BALANCED PHYSICALLY

The scriptures imply that Jesus was physically fit. All Levitical sacrifices had to be physically perfect (Lev. 1:3; 22:20). These victims were typical of the moral, psychological, and physical perfection of Jesus (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). On two occasions, Jesus drove out dishonest merchants from the temple (John 2:14-19; Matt. 21:12-13). If He was only a proverbial ninety-eight pound weakling, the money-changers would have killed Jesus. His ability to drive them out suggests a high degree of physical strength. The physical fitness of Jesus was not so others could admire His masculine physique, but so that He could give the best service to God.

Because the Bible teaches that the human body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), the Christian is responsible for his own health. If his lifestyle damages God's temple, is he a good steward? Would our medical doctor say that we are living a healthy lifestyle? Do we eat properly? Do we exercise? Are we overweight? Do we get enough sleep, or are we sleeping too much? Bodily exercise does provide some benefits to the soul (1 Tim. 4:8).

While some may neglect physical health or fitness, others, by their devotion to their physique, make the human body an object of worship. They make a total commitment to living a healthy lifestyle but leave their soul completely impoverished. Why expend so much effort on a physical body that will exist only sixty or seventy years but neglect the eternal soul?

BALANCED SOCIALLY

Jesus was not a socialite who needed the presence of others to validate His existence or fill up the emptiness He felt from being alone, nor was He a hermit who completely abandoned being in the presence of others. Jesus built relationships with others in order to serve men and elevate their spirituality. Among men, Jesus was close to Peter, James, and John, but the latter was His best friend (John 21:20).

Jesus was not deliberately abrasive to those who disagreed with him. However, when He defended His disciples against the

Pharisees' unjust criticism, the Pharisees were so infuriated that they began to plot His murder (Matt. 12:1-14). The Lord's withdrawal from that location was seen as the fulfillment of one of Isaiah's prophecies. "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt. 12:19-20).

A reed was a bamboo-like plant that served many uses. Carpenters and seamstresses used it as a measuring rod (Ezek. 40:3; Rev. 11:1). The elderly used it as a walking stick (Ezek. 29:6-7). It could repair a roof or be used as a weapon (Matt. 27:30). Strong winds bent and bruised some reeds growing in the marsh. What good is a bruised reed? Considered useless, they were cut and burned. Jesus did not break ties with people who were bruised reeds. He did not reject people whom the world considered useless. Jesus was called "the friend of sinners" (Matt. 11:19). In His eyes, every person had some value and possessed a dignity that should be honored. One test of our character is the way we treat those who are not going to help us climb the "ladder of success."

The smoking flax was a wick in an oil lamp that was nearly out of fuel. The smoking flame produced soot that irritated the eyes and nasal passages. By blowing out the flame and leaving the room, one could escape the irritation. Jesus allowed people whose words and actions were irritations to intrude upon Him. He tolerated the immaturities of others.

What kind of friends do we have? Do we have at least one significant friend whom we can trust with the deepest secrets of our hearts? Do we "condescend to men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16)?

BALANCED SPIRITUALLY

By age twelve, Jesus' understanding of scripture astounded those who heard Him (Luke 2:47). As an adult, Jesus never allowed anything to interfere with His personal relationship with God. When tempted by Satan, Jesus said of scripture that, "it is written" (Matt. 4:4,7,10). Each time he used the same perfect tense verb (γέγραπται, *gegraptai*). "It *has* been written and *stands*

written" (Vincent 24). Jesus' relationship with God began with the authority of what God said. The scriptural truths uttered through Moses were not obsolete even though they were fifteen hundred years old. The ease with which Jesus used scripture suggests that He was extremely familiar with God's word. How many man-hours had Jesus invested in Bible study? A failure to prepare would have made Jesus vulnerable to sin. Bible study became one tool Jesus used to build a strong relationship with His Father.

Jesus was also a man of prayer. The New Testament records nineteen different occasions that prompted our Lord to pray (Nave's Topical Bible 708-710). The ministry of Jesus began and ended with prayer (Luke 3:21; 23:46). No disciple ever asked Jesus to give instruction on preaching, but He was asked to teach on prayer (Luke 11:1). The disciples could see the intimate relationship that Jesus had with God and knew that prayer was in some way connected.

Are we passionate in our pursuit of a relationship with God? Are we filled with God's word (Col. 3:16) and God's Spirit (Eph. 5:18)? Do others know us as a person of prayer? An elderly couple from Johnson City, Tennessee, replaced the worn-out carpet in their home. When workers removed the carpet in the living room closet, they noticed it was also worn. The wife explained that her husband spent two hours every day praying in that closet (Matt. 6:6). Edwin Keith said, "Prayer is exhaling the spirit of man and inhaling the Spirit of God" (Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations 342). Bible study and prayer can assist us in the pursuit of godly character.

BALANCED INTELLECTUALLY

Jesus was an excellent student. He knew that man's God-given dominion can only be exercised by using the mind. As a carpenter, Jesus was required to have a working knowledge of mathematics and geometry. Jesus was a keen observer of nature. He studied animals (Matt. 6:26), plants (Matt. 6:28), weather phenomena (Matt. 16:2-3), and human nature (Matt. 11:16-19). He knew sound principles of logic and debate (Matt. 12:25-28). Jesus' enemies were never able to win an argument with Him (Matt.

22:15-46). Though Jesus had little or no formal educational training, people were astounded by what He taught (Matt. 13:54).

God is the source of all truth, whether the truth is from science, politics, or theology. Truth is reality. Two centuries ago, the Bible was considered the textbook for every academic topic. At that time, education was connected with good moral character. We must learn to think "Christianly." This requires us to develop a Christian worldview, and to do that, we must be a good student of the Bible. Do we have an organized plan of Bible reading or study? How many books do we read per year? A May 2007 Barna survey revealed that about 90% of churchgoers do not have a Christian worldview. Learn to love God with all your mind (Matt. 22:37).

BALANCED RECREATIONALLY

All work and no play make Johnny dull. Even Jesus knew the importance of occasional rest and relaxation. Mark 6:31 states: "And he said unto them, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while': for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." There are times when we fast from people, work, or tasks. A change in routine helps us to recharge and refocus. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity (Mark 2:27). On the seventh day, the Jews rested physically from what could be a harsh routine of work.

All play and little work make Johnny lazy and dishonest. What happens when play becomes a full-time obsession? America's recreational industries are a multi-billion dollar part of our economy. What does it say about our national character when students cannot learn unless the lessons are presented in an entertainment format, or when church leaders must plan their religious calendar around sporting events? Have hobbies, sports, vacations, and entertainment become the gods whom we worship? The obsession for amusement is evidence of an inward spiritual hunger that is demanding to be satisfied. When one rejects an infinite God, one requires an infinite number of things to satisfy that emptiness.

BALANCED VOCATIONALLY

Every able-bodied Christian should work (Eph. 4:28). We should give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay (Luke 10:7). Jesus was no parasite who depended upon the hard work of others for His existence. Trained as a carpenter, Jesus experienced the rigors of hard work. He knew what it was to dig the foundation for a house or to cut a tree, trim it, and square it. During His public ministry, Jesus was sometimes exhausted by the demands of travel and teaching (John 4:6). His day was filled with a sense of urgency: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

While we should be loyal, honest, and respectful to those who employ us (Eph. 6:5-9), our boss is not our god. Do demands of work intrude upon religious or family obligations? Is your work satisfying? Do you take at least two weeks of vacation each year? Would someone who knows you classify you as a workaholic? An insecure man may overcompensate by spending too much time on the job.

BALANCED DOMESTICALLY

The essence of Christianity is about man's relationship with God and his fellowman (Matt. 22:37, 39). When God opened His heart to man, He gave us truth about His own nature and about human nature. He then sent His Son to show us how we could have a relationship with Him. Thus the foundation for all of our human relationships is God.

Jesus had a close relationship with His parents (Luke 2:51). As a sinless, submissive child, Jesus never fought with His brothers or sassed His parents. Even though His brothers rejected Him as the Messiah, taunted Him (John 7:3-5), and were embarrassed by Him (Mark 3:21), at least two of Jesus' brothers became disciples after the resurrection (Acts 1:14; Jas. 1:1; Jude 1). As He was dying, Jesus took steps to insure that His mother would be cared for (John 19:26-27).

What kind of relationship do we have with our family? Are we leading them to heaven? How intimate is our knowledge of various members of our family? How well do they know us? In some homes, televisions, computers, and other electronic gadgets serve as surrogate family members and cripple face-to-face communication.

CONCLUSION

For the Christian who lives by faith, his mind is focused on heavenly things (Col. 3:1-2). "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:304). Paul called Christ "our life." The devotion Paul described here can be seen in other areas. "Sometimes we say of a man, 'Music is his life--Sport is his life--He lives for his work.' Such a man finds life and all that it means in music, in sport, in work, as the case may be. For the Christian, Christ is his life" (Barclay 149). Christ helps us stay focused and balanced in the right areas so that we can serve God "heartily" (Col. 3:23).

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SECTION V

LADIES SPECIAL CLASSES

KEEPING BALANCE THROUGH PRAYER

PATSY LODEN

Life was good. Everything Eve could want was in her life – love, a home that was quite luxurious, and a husband who was the best looking man on the earth and loved her dearly. There was no financial worry, no problems to be solved, and each day their Father came to visit and talk and teach; all was peaceful and lovely, and life was perfect. How did it all go so wrong? We know the answer was Satan. Once Adam and Eve allowed Satan into their lives, all went wrong. They lost their home, they lost their innocence, death entered their lives, and most of all they lost the intimacy of their heavenly Father. Does this sound like our lives at times? What goes wrong? Usually, is it not Satan entering our lives and creating havoc? What was Eve's main problem? Could it have been that she did not discuss this proposition from Satan with her Father, not to mention consulting with Adam? Could that be one of the big reasons our lives turn upside down and we do not stop to realize Satan has caused all the turmoil? What brings balance to our soul? What makes us able to bear up under the burdens Satan introduces to us? The answer to every question is prayer. Prayer is our longing to reach out to God the Father through Christ our Savior by the help of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is what keeps us near the throne of God, and constant, fervent prayer avails much with our Father.

Patsy Loden was reared in Eden, Texas. She attended Abilene Christian College and graduated with a BS in Elementary Education. Her master's work was completed at the University of Texas with a Master's of Education. She especially enjoys teaching her wives' class entitled "Loving Your Husbands."

The fervent prayers of righteous men are so powerful because such men have a relationship with God, with Christ, and

with the Holy Spirit. Righteous men trust in the power of the Godhead, and realize that their prayers of intercession are of more worth to the world than any army, money, or earthly power. This knowledge is what gives balance to life and helps keep us in the peace of God, which passes understanding.

John reveals the source of love to us in I John 4:19 by instructing us that we love God because He first loved us. How do we learn to reverence and adore the Father in order to develop a relationship with Him? James gives us the answer in James 4:6-10. James lists the order of growth as first submitting ourselves to God, resisting the devil, and drawing nigh to the Father. Then we must cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. After that we must be afflicted, mourn, and weep, turning our laughter to mourning and our joy to heaviness, and lastly humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. Then God will lift us up, and our souls will be ready to be filled with His love and peace and to have communication with Him via prayer. In order for God to heed us we must come out from the world and be separated to Him alone (2 Cor. 6:17). We allow the Spirit of God to fill us with His holiness and then rest in the knowledge that we are the sons of God and joint heirs with Christ, and this gives us the privilege of going to the very throne of God with our prayers (Rom. 8:1-17). We must develop the same attitude of Jesus as given in John 4:34, which reads: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." To have the right relationship with our Father, we must realize that it is "by grace [that we] are...saved through faith; and that not of [ourselves]...it is the gift of God...for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). Prayer is our burning desire to be as intimately connected with our Father as Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden.

In order to have the right relationship with Jesus, we must crucify the flesh with its affections and lust and walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:24-25). Revelation 17:14 describes Jesus as being our Lord of lords and King of kings, and because we are with Him we are called and chosen and faithful. We are promised that He will feed His flock as a shepherd, gather His lambs in His arms and carry them in His bosom, and lead the sheep that are with young very gently (Isa. 40:11). Psalm 23 gives the Bible's most beautiful

essay on the total care and love Jesus provides as our shepherd. Paul expressed Jesus' love for him with these words in II Timothy 4:16-18:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me...Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me...and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom.

This gives us confidence that Jesus will be with us at all times. He has promised us His peace, for in the world there is tribulation, but in Him there is triumph because He has overcome the world and loves us dearly (John 16:33 and Rom. 8:35-39). He promised that whatever we ask in His name we will receive, and this will make our joy full (John 16:24).

We must also have a relationship with the Holy Spirit to have balance in our prayers. Jesus promised His followers that a Comforter like Him would come when He went back to heaven. The Holy Spirit came on the apostles as a cloven tongue of fire, just as God appeared to the Israelites in fire at Mount Sinai (Acts 2:3; Ex. 19:18).

Romans 12:11 commands children of God to be fervent in spirit and to serve the Lord. The word "fervent" in Greek means to be hot, to boil. Christians are to be on fire with their love of God, to be on fire in their walk with the Holy Spirit, and to be on fire with love and obedience for Jesus, as this proves our love to Him (John 14:15). The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us in our prayers by the authority of the will of God, according to Romans 8:26-27. Galatians 5:25 instructs Christians to walk in the Spirit and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, and Ephesians 4:30 commands us not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Having the proper loving, obedient relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will make our prayers full of life, full of hope, and full of expectation that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will grant us all that we need in this life and in the life to come.

The second necessity for a balanced life in prayer is: to have full trust in the Father's ability to hear and answer our prayers; to understand that Jesus knows how we feel, will help our prayers reach the Father, and will plead with Him to answer our prayers; and to know that the Holy Spirit can be trusted to translate our prayers into the will of the Father and to ask the Father in words we cannot know or understand. This child-like way of looking at the Godhead will give us peace in knowing that we will be cared for in the same loving manner in which the shepherd looks after his sheep's needs and safety. As children of the Father, we fully believe what He has promised us in Romans 8:28 that "we KNOW that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." We are comforted by the thought expressed in Philippians 4:6-7: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." This is the balance in our life: God will see us through everything with which Satan will trouble us. Job is our model to imitate in life. David is another example of balancing life through prayer. He always sought God's favor, especially when he had sinned. God called him a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

Paul is a great example of how trust grows in a child of God. Acts introduced us to a man who was on fire to annihilate the followers of Jesus. When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he learned that in fighting the Christians, he was also at war with Christ. To Paul's sorrow, he discovered that he had been responsible for the deaths of the true Messiah's followers, and he repented. After Paul's baptism, he was on fire to spread the gospel of Jesus to the world. He learned the true meaning of fervent prayer with an unexpected blessing he received from God by such praying. Paul was stoned and left for dead, and in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 he detailed the trip given him by God to the third heaven after this stoning. This great event was followed by being given a thorn in the flesh, which he described as a "messenger of Satan to buffet [him]...lest [he]...be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul prayed three times for the thorn to be removed from him, but the request was answered with: "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness"

(2 Cor. 12:9). As Paul matured in Christ, he realized that he would rather glory in his infirmities so that the power of Christ would rest within him and give him strength when he was the weakest. His life was balanced through the prayer of faith that the Lord would do what was best for him. Paul was at peace and rejoiced in the constant reminder of the grace of God within his life, because he realized the thorn was truly a blessing from the Father to protect him from Satan. Later, as he continued his life walking with the Spirit, he made this statement in Philippians 4:11: "Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Toward the last days of his life Paul wrote these poignant words to Timothy from that dank, dark, dreary Roman prison: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:6-7). Later, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul spoke thusly:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Paul is a perfect example of balancing life with deeds and prayers.

Paul told the Romans in the first chapter, verse 9, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." This is an example of the third way of balancing our life with prayer, and that is praying prayers of intercession. The Holy Spirit guided Paul in writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-3 that he "exhorts therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." The Father wants us to pray for those in leadership roles so that our lives may be lived in quietness and godliness. Jesus wanted His followers to pray for

those who despitefully used them so that they would be children of His Father (Matt. 5:44-45), for God is good to both the evil and the good. Christians are to pray for the forgiveness of those who sin against them, because our own forgiveness rests upon our willingness to forgive others (Matt. 6:14-15). Prayers for workers to reap the harvest of the world are to be prayed, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 9:38.

We are to take Jesus as our example in our praying to balance our life. Jesus never made a decision of importance without spending the night in prayer. In John 17, Jesus asked the Father to keep His children from evil. He prayed that you and I might be one as He and the Father are one, that the world would believe that He was the Christ, the Son of God. His last thoughts on this earth were for others: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" and "Woman, behold your son" (Luke 23:34; John 19:26). He taught His disciples how to pray and gave them the example of a praying Son. We read the finest example of prayer for oneself in the account of Jesus praying on the Mount of Olives on the night of his betrayal. This was truly a fervent prayer, and never has another prayed to the extent our Savior prayed when He asked to not have to endure the shame and horror of having sin placed upon Him who knew no sin. The answer is also the finest example of God answering a prayer in the best interest of the one praying. Jesus went into the garden a very troubled man. He went there to pray in order to find balance in his hour of crisis. His Father could not answer His prayer as requested, but the Father replied to Him with something better than a "yes." The Father sent angels to strengthen Jesus for His all-but-unbearable time ahead. Hebrews 12:2-7 gives us a beautiful description of the answer to a fervent prayer and an answer to us when we beseech the Father during stressful times:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the JOY that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten

the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, you despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?

Christ left the garden not as the troubled man who entered, but as the determined, perfect Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. His prayers helped Him triumph over His sorrows of sin.

Sometimes the answer to our prayers is far greater than we ever imagined but in a different way; however, if we trust totally in the goodness of our Father, we know that He answers us in the best way possible for our soul's safety and that we might give Him the praise and glory due Him. The greatest gift we can bestow on another is to be diligent in presenting that person's name before the very throne of God and petitioning Him to work what is best in that person's life. How comforting it must be for elders to know that their flock is praying for them to have the wisdom and courage needed in feeding Christ's precious sheep, into whose hands He has given them. What joy it must give the Father to have His children make requests of Him, especially for others' good. Abraham, Moses, and David all give us examples of the fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much. Balance in life cannot be had without prayer for self and for others.

The Godhead created man to have intimate communication with someone made in its image. Sin separated us from that oneness with God. The Father sent Jesus to the earth to live in an earthly body, endure earthly sorrows, pain, and temptations, and finally to die as the perfect Sacrificial Lamb in order for mankind to once again be brought back into a oneness with the Godhead through Him. The Father and Jesus are in heaven on their thrones looking down upon us with love and waiting for us to communicate with Them by prayer, and They communicate to us through the Holy Bible. The Holy Spirit was sent as a Comforter (which means "another of the same sort" in Greek) to dwell within each child and give aid in the same way

Jesus did while He was on earth. It is through fervent prayer, not just haphazard praying, that we as children of God have a balance in our life. We rest with the words Jesus spoke as He lovingly said His earthly farewell to His apostles. They are seared within our heart:

Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And whither I go you know and the way you know (John 14:1-4).

We balance our lives by prayer, because we rest in the knowledge that our relationship with our God, our Savior, and our Holy Spirit is a oneness as They are one. We trust They are all They say They are and that they will keep the promises They have given us if we are faithful to Them. Lastly, the perfecting of our souls that intercessory prayer develops within us helps us to become more like Them in love and mercy. How do we balance our life? It is by our faith which grows through knowing God's truth and the many, many prayers which as incense ascend from our lips to the heavenly throne as a pleasing aroma to God. Not only do we pray for others, but we open and close each day with the closing words of God's book of prophecy. Revelation 22:17 records this thought for us: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Let us pray as the bride of Christ that our prayers, our lives, and our words will invite the world to "Come to Jesus!"

PURITY IN A SENSUAL WORLD

MELONY WEBSTER

One day a young minister was being escorted through a coal mine. At the entrance to one of the dim passageways, he spied a beautiful white flower growing out of the black earth. "How can it blossom in such purity and radiance in this dirty mine?" the preacher asked. "Throw some coal dust on it and see for yourself," his guide replied. When he did, he was surprised that the fine, sooty particles slid right off the snowy petals, leaving the plant just as lovely and unstained as before. Its surface was so smooth that the grit and grime could not stick.

Melony Webster is the wife of Chuck Webster, and they have four children, Bailey, Grant, Logan, and Griffin. She resides in Hoover, Alabama where Chuck is the pulpit minister for the Hoover church of Christ.

How can we be like this flower, maintaining our purity in a world where sex is used to sell something as innocuous as toothpaste? In a world where marriage is viewed as an unnecessary formality and illicit affairs are the basis of best-selling movies and books? Ours is a sensual world where the principals of purity and virtue have largely been forgotten. How, then, can we reflect the pure light of Christ to a world so filled with darkness?

First, we must be mindful which "wolf" we are feeding.

The story is told of an old Cherokee having a discussion with his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil — he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is good — he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility,

kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you — and inside every other person too.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather which wolf would win.

The old Cherokee’s answer was simple: “The one we feed.”

The same principle applies when considering the purity of our hearts. We must guard what goes into our hearts. Paul addresses this idea in Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”¹ As we go about our lives, the temptation to take part in sensual pleasures surrounds us. The struggle is there. The question is real. Which wolf are we feeding?

Consider how greatly the face of entertainment has changed in the past several decades. Gone are the days when families would gather together around the radio and listen to the evening broadcast. Today the entertainment industry is overwhelmed with sex, violence, and profanity. *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Leave it to Beaver* have been replaced with MTV, *Sex and the City*, and *Desperate Housewives*. According to a recent study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the number of sexual scenes on television has nearly doubled since 1998. This study included over 1,000 hours of programming from all types of shows except newscasts, sporting events, and children’s television. The findings were astounding.

1. Among the top twenty most watched shows by teens, 70% include sexual content, nearly half (45%) with sexual behavior. These shows average 5.0 sexual scenes per hour, compared to 56% and 3.2 scenes per hour respectively in 1998, and 64% and 4.4 scenes per hour in 2002.
2. During prime time hours sex is even more common, with nearly eight in ten (77%) shows including sexual content, averaging 5.9 sexual scenes per hour.

3. Two-thirds (68%) of all shows include talk about sex and 35% of all shows include sexual behaviors.
4. The study found reality shows are the only genre of programming in which less than two-thirds (28%) of shows include sexual content. The percentage of shows with sexual content by genre includes movies (92%), sitcoms (87%), drama series (87%), and soap operas (85%).²

“But it doesn’t affect me!” This is the attempt most often made at justifying one’s viewing habits. King Solomon, in his wisdom, understood the connection between what we see and who we are. “Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Prov. 23:7a). What we take into our hearts and minds does make a difference. If we are feeding on a steady diet of sexual immorality and lust, it is like a slow poisoning of the conscience. What once would have enraged us, soon fails even to get our attention. Remember the words of Christ: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). No television show, movie, or novel is worth risking that.

Second, we should focus on the message we are sending. Just a five-minute walk through the mall is enough to confirm the fact that modesty is no longer a concern for a large number of American women. From a time when it was considered inappropriate for a woman to show her ankles in public, we have come to an age where anything goes. Not only ankles, but calves, thighs, midribs, and chests are proudly exhibited. Fashion designers boast of the sex appeal their creations pose, and weight loss companies promise to deliver the perfect bikini body just in time for swimsuit season.

In the words of Paul, “Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness” (1 Tim. 2:9-10). The adverb “modestly” (“with shamefacedness,” KJV) reflects the idea of blushing. In America blushing is nearly nonexistent.

As women of God, we need a different standard of modesty. We want to be women professing godliness, not sex appeal. God has called us out of the world for His use.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:9-11).

In order to make a difference in the world, we must be different from the world. By our appearance, we should bring glory to God, causing others to focus on Him. How can I help my Christian brothers, as well as other men, praise the Lord if they are too distracted by the way I am dressed?

Third, we should remember the legacy we are leaving. Our emphasis on purity has more consequences than simply the way we are perceived by people at the mall or in the neighborhood. It displays itself most vividly in our primary sphere of influence — our homes. Our daughters learn from us what it means to be Christian women, and this image should be a stark contrast to what they learn from magazine covers, runway models, and movie stars. If we neglect our responsibility at home, our daughters will mature into young women who believe their worth is determined by their measurements, their appeal by their curves, and their identity by their weight, height, skin tone, or other such superficial characteristic. Why do so many adolescent girls struggle with self-confidence, identity, self-loathing, and eating disorders? It could be that they have bought society's cheap imitation of what girls should be, and they have failed to realize that they have value because they have been created in God's image with inherent worth as His children.

Likewise, our sons need to learn that women should be valued and respected not because of a fleeting and shallow sex appeal, but because of the important roles that women play in God's plan for the home and church. When they start preparing for marriage, they need to be able to distinguish the difference between physical attraction, which is based largely on external factors, and true compatibility, which relates to character, values, priorities, and spirituality — things which endure long after the beauty begins to fade.

Girls who are reared by mothers whose primary goal is to keep themselves pure in their walk with Jesus will be more likely to fulfill the wonderful roles God has given to women (1 Tim. 2:15). Boys with godly mothers will value women for their unique characteristics and will appreciate their distinct roles in God's plan.

Establishing this legacy is "caught" more than "taught," however. Children whose mother teaches them about purity listen if her words are confirmed by consistent actions and priorities. They recognize the incongruity of a woman who teaches purity to her children but then flaunts her sexuality by her outward appearance. They recognize the inconsistency of saving oneself for marriage, but then watching dozens of immoral sex encounters on television and reading magazines or books that contain images or stories that fail to meet God's plan for purity.

"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). As Christian women, we should desire the praise of the Lord rather than the praise of others.

Early in her career, adult film star Marilyn Chambers appeared on Ivory Snow boxes, holding a sweet baby. As her screen popularity in X-rated movies grew, Ivory sought out a cover girl that better reflected its image of 99.44% purity.³

Are you a good cover model for God's Ivory Snow? Or have you allowed yourself to be influenced by the world? Let us all resolve to fill our hearts and minds with God's teachings, focus on bringing glory to Him, and keep ourselves pure in this sensual world.

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the New American Standard Version.
2. "Sex on TV4," www.kff.org/entmedia.
3. ABC news.com, February 22, 2002

IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

CYNTHIA DIANNE GUY

Paula was an enthusiastic believer who lived in late fourth century Rome. She was thirty-five years old, a mother of five, and recently widowed. Christianity was at its height as a fully embraced religion of the Empire. Because it was so enmeshed in society, sound doctrine inevitably became diluted, and ethics were compromised. Many of those with religious fervor withdrew from this environment of “watered down” spirituality. They denounced the world and headed for the deserts and caves. Paula followed this course.

Cynthia Guy is an instructor for women at Heritage Christian University. She has a BA in Bible and an MA in New Testament Greek. Her first book, What About the Women?, was published in 2005.

She entered the life of the ascetics, who, in an effort to give themselves completely to the service of the Lord, vowed celibacy, turned to prayer, and freed themselves from worldly pleasures. These believers identified with Christ's description in John 17:16, “They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.” With excessive zeal, many followed the third century theologian, Origen, by “sleeping on the floor, going barefoot, and extreme fasting.”¹

Paula was ascetic to an extreme. In unbalanced passion, she justified leaving her children with Scripture, “He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt.10:37). Jerome, a fourth century historian, described the day of her departure at sea. “On the shore the little Toxotius stretched forth

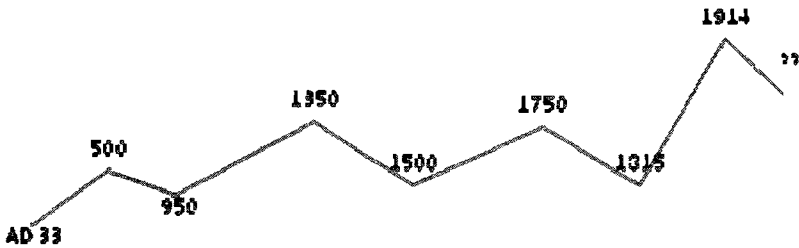
his hands in entreaty, while Rufina, now grown up, with silent sobs besought her mother to wait till she should be married.”² Paula was as extreme in her physical self-discipline. Though often troubled with bodily weakness,³ she rationalized redoubled fastings, quoting 1 Corinthians 9:27, “I keep under my body and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.” She imposed redoubled fasts on the younger women who followed her, and her own daughter, Blesilla, died while imitating her mother’s legendary fasting. Paula neither understood nor practiced Philippians 4:5, “Let your moderation be known unto all men.”

Withdrawing from society, abandoning children, and rigorous physical sacrifice were common practices of ascetic piety and commitment in the early centuries of Christianity. How did the world view these people?

How do we view the Amish, Mennonites, and others who, in the name of religion, separate themselves from the world today? They have set themselves apart from the world’s sin, its values, and its goals, but is this what Jesus meant when He said, “Ye are not of the world” (John 15:19)? Like the early ascetics, some may demonstrate piety and commitment, but by having little or no meaningful contact with people in the world, they fail to serve as the preserving agent—salt—which Christians are commanded to be: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men” (Matt. 5:13). Christians must not withdraw from the world but hang in there and be an influence for good.

The spiritual climate in which Paula lived is not unlike our own in America a few years ago. The Roman Empire had become a “Christian” nation under the leadership of Constantine (AD 280-337) in the early fourth century. God was honored, everyone was “expected” to belong to a church, and those who broke the commandments or professed atheism were rebuked. Religiosity reigned, and all was well in the world. However, the ecumenism resulted in a diluted spirituality that lulled Christians into comfortable self-satisfaction.

The consequence of this religious apathy is alarming. According to Kenneth Latourette's Overview of the History of Christianity, the Roman Empire (tied to "Christianity") fell (AD 479) and was invaded by Muslims (AD 632). Over the next six centuries, Christianity (in the broad sense) plummeted in what is called the "First Great Recession." The prince of this world, Satan, seemed to be in control. Believers found themselves in a world that hated them. The following chart shows the ebb and flow of Christianity's spiritual climate in world history.



As shown, we are living in the midst of a fourth spiritual recession. Many are finding themselves ostracized for their faith. Those speaking up against gambling, abortion, homosexuality, and a host of other sins are targeted, harassed, and threatened. Christians are again finding themselves hated by the world. In some areas, they are even being martyred.

Jesus' words in John 15:18-25 and 17:14-17 explain our plight and provide strength as we strive to swim upstream in today's plummeting spiritual climate. Christ spoke these words in the intimacy of the upper room as He gently informed His disciples of His impending departure. Jesus was about to die on the cross. He knew these immature disciples were going to flee and scatter without His leadership, and for a little while, they would be in distress and doubt over their condition. R. C. H. Lenski, in his commentary, explained, "But when his visible presence is taken from them, they will still have each other, and thus ought to be the more closely attached to each other, loving each other just as Jesus loved them while he was still in their midst."⁴ Attachment to each other would become very important considering their task ahead. They would spread the gospel to the whole world in the face of hatred and persecution. Jesus told them, "A new

commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). The command applies to us today. When we actively preach Christ and stand up for the faith, we will be so hated by the world that we really will need and appreciate the love we have for each other.

As Jesus continued His discussion with the disciples, He spoke the words included in our first text, John 15:18-25. This passage describes persecution as common to those who associate with Christ.

If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause (John 15:18-25).

The world hated Jesus. He was the Light that shone in the darkness (John 1:5). Those who loved the darkness did not know Him (v.10), did not receive Him (v.11), and did not understand Him (v. 5). The majority “loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil” (John 3:19). When their hearts and lives were exposed to the righteous Light, their sin and unrighteousness became clearly visible. They hated Him. They hated His fellowship, His teaching, and His influence over teachable followers. They plotted to destroy His influence in the

world and assumed success at His crucifixion. However, no one has ever influenced the world like this One, the Son of God.

The world hates us. When we, as Christians, walk with Christ, we walk in the light with Him (1 John 1:7). People who love darkness today are just as uncomfortable around us as people of that day were around Him. They do not enjoy our fellowship, our teaching, or our influence over others who are teachable. Albert Barnes, in his commentary, observed, "A Christian may esteem it as one evidence of his piety that he is hated by wicked men. Often most decided evidence is given that a man is the friend of God, by the opposition excited against him, by the profane, the Sabbath-breaker, and the dissolute."⁵ The world will taunt and persecute us, making life miserable. However, we cannot withdraw from the world and head for the deserts and caves. We cannot retreat into sheltered communities. We are the salt of the earth, and we must not confine ourselves to the saltshaker. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. How do we do that?

Jesus provided an answer in our second text:

I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth (John 17:14-17).

Sometimes persecutions can overwhelm us. As Christ sat in the upper room with His disciples, He encouraged them to be strong in their Christian walk. In this prayer, He asked God not to take them out of the world, but to provide the strength they needed to be His witnesses. Matthew Henry observed,

If the world will be vexation to them, the readiest way to secure them would be to hasten them out of it to a better world, that will give them better treatment. Send chariots and horses of fire for them, to fetch them to heaven; Job, Elijah, Jonah, Moses, when that occurred which fretted them,

prayed that they might be *taken out of the world*; but Christ would not pray so for his disciples...Because he had work for them to do in the world; the world, though sick of them (Acts xxii.22), and therefore not worthy of them (Heb. xi.38)...⁶

John 17:14-17 offers three helps for the Christian striving to live in the world and not of the world. We can live in the world but not live like the world because we have Christ as an example, we have the Word of God, and we have divine protection from the evil one.

First, we have Christ as an example. We are not of the world, just as He was not of the world (John 17:14). Christ was sanctified—set apart—for a specific purpose, to do God's will. Christians are called saints in scripture (2 Cor.1:1; Eph.1:1; Phil.1:1) because we, too, are set apart, sanctified, meet for the master's use (2 Tim. 2:21). As Jesus was sent "into the world" on a mission by His Father, so we are sent "into the world" on a mission by the Son.⁷ Our mission is to "Go... into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). We cannot do that if we isolate ourselves. Like Jesus, we must feed the hungry, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, and aid those in prison (Matt. 25:35-40). This requires our being in the world, but it also necessitates keeping ourselves "unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). If we were motivated by the principles of the world, we would be like them: "vain, earthly, sensual, given to pleasure, wealth, ambition," and the world would not oppose us."⁸ But, just like Christ, we are so intensely focused on going about our Father's business that we will not let the world deter us. Albert Barnes beautifully described the mindset of the first century disciples: "They had seen the example of Jesus. No opposition of the proud, the wealthy, the learned, or the men of power, no persecution, or jibes, had deterred him from his work."⁹ We can live in the world but not of the world because Jesus is our example.

Second, we have the Word of God. Jesus stated in His prayer, "I have given them thy word" (John 17:14). C. E. W. Dorris, commenting on this verse, wrote,

The prayer was to separate them and set them apart (from the world) to God through the truth. Lest men should misapprehend what he regards as truth, he adds, "Thy word is truth." No one can be separated from the world, or sanctified to God by the truth, save as he makes that truth the rule of his life and is led away from all other paths into the path marked out by this.¹⁰

God's word imparts His power for holy living and provides what we need to serve Him as witnesses in this world. Lawrence O. Richards wrote, "God's way is not to take us out of the world, but to take the world out of us. The Gk. *hagiazō* means to set a person apart. Through God's word He sets us apart from sin and from evil, that we might glorify him."¹¹ Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." God's word is our guide: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, And light unto my path" (Ps.119:105). God's word offers protection from temptation. Jesus used it to fight Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:4, 8, 10). It compares itself to a sword in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword." In Ephesians 6, God's word is described as part of the whole armor of God: it is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v.17), and we must have our "loins girt about with truth" (v.14). God's word is truth. We are blessed to have this spiritual protection, and we must take advantage of it, as did the psalmist, who wrote, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps.119:11). We can live in the world but not of the world because we have the Word.

Finally, we have divine protection from the evil one. Hatred and persecution by the world are tools Satan uses to discourage Christians. "As a roaring lion, [he] walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Our battle "is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). We need

protection. We are commanded to put on the whole armor of God, specifically the shield of faith, which will enable us to “quench all the fiery darts of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16).

It is comforting to know that God watches over us from heaven, offering His own protection. This is done through His sanctification and His truth. R. C. H. Lenski explained, “By so sanctifying the Father will guard them. ‘Thine own word is truth’ certifies the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word excepting no portion of it. The holy garment of the Word is seamless; it has no rents of errors—or call them mistakes—which hands today must sew up.”¹² As God watched over Daniel in the lion’s den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, He promises to be with us in our trials and persecutions. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa. 43:2). Jesus made a similar promise to His followers before leaving them to ascend to the Father. He presented His mission for them and for us, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19-20). Christ expects us to remain in the world but not of the world to accomplish His purpose, and He promises to be with us. Richards added, “God does not remove us from danger but protects us in the midst. We are on a mission in this world in which we live as aliens. Therefore, we cannot be taken out of it.”¹³ We can live in the world but not of the world because we have divine protection from the evil one.

The fourth-century ascetic widow, Paula, failed to follow Christ’s command. Perhaps, living in a time of spiritual complacency, she became frustrated with ecumenicalism and diluted Christianity. She forsook all and withdrew from the world. Jerome wrote, “Disregarding her house, her children, her servants, her property, and in a word everything connected with the world, she was eager—alone and unaccompanied – to go to the desert made famous by its Pauls and by its Antonies.”¹⁴

While Paula languished in the desert on her goat hair mat and meager diet, other believers maintained balance in their lives, courageously clinging to the words of Jesus in John 15 and 17 and remaining in the world. They faithfully sustained their example of salt and light. Many continued steadfastly as Christianity reached its first zenith and then plummeted into a Great Recession. How did they respond to the inevitable hatred, harassment, and threats that came when the prince of darkness seemed to take control? Did they look to Jesus as their example? Did they hold fast the word of God? Did they seek divine protection from the evil one? Were they able to draw strength from Jesus' promise to be with them as they strove to live in the world but not of the world? Will we?

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BALANCE IN THE MIDST OF A STORM: A WOMAN'S ANCHOR

TERESA HAMPTON

What do we do when the storms of life come upon us? What happens to the spiritual woman when the storms envelop her life? What happens when she suddenly loses a child in death? What happens to her level of spiritual devotion when the doctor tells her she has an incurable disease? What is the measure of her faithfulness when she faces widowhood and must make decisions without the comfort and counsel of her husband? When she is disappointed and discouraged by brothers and sisters in Christ, does her loyalty to Jesus remain steadfast? When she suffers the betrayal of her husband, and her world is turned upside down, where does she go? To whom does she turn?

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These storms, and many others, crash down upon women regardless of age and station in life. Obstacles come small and large. Some are simply a nuisance, while others are of tsunami proportions! Whether small or large, troublesome times threaten to erase the joy from our hearts and minds. As Christian women, we want to be spiritual, but we have human frailties, doubts, and fears.

One who sails a vessel or steers a ship faces similar challenges. He must rest safely in the assurance of the ship's anchor and the trustworthiness of the cable that connects it to the

ship. With a storm approaching, each of these must work together with precision to bring lives safely to shore. When there is sufficient trust in the cable and anchor, the approaching storm does not bring fear and dread. It serves as a test of courage and endurance, and it creates a sense of balance in the midst of a storm.

Anchor. Even the word brings a measure of stability, a sense of trust and hope. Let us identify specific anchors that will allow Christian women to have a measure of stability during troublesome times.

Anchor # 1 – Grasp the hand of God in prayer. Sometimes in the midst of the storm we rely on our own instincts for survival – fight or flight! However, the woman of God will find her first anchor in speaking to the Father. Just as the sailor must toss out the anchor in order to steady the ship against crashing waves, the Christian woman must reach out to God, casting her fears, despair, and loneliness into the arms of a loving God. When we release those burdens, a certain measure of calm and hope enters our souls. Paul described it as, “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).¹

Queen Esther called all the Jews living in Persia to join her in fasting so that she might safely enter the king’s court. Prayer usually accompanied fasting, especially under such dire circumstances. When faced with impending doom, Esther led her people to seek God’s mercy and protection.

Elijah lived under the wicked and powerful rule of Ahab and his wife Jezebel. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain for more than three years. He prayed again, and the heavens gave rain (Jas. 5:17-18).

In the model prayer, Jesus instructed His disciples to ask God to help them withstand temptation and deliver them from the evil one (Matt. 6:13). Approaching the time of His betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane to grasp the hand of God in prayer. An angel came to Him, giving him strength (Luke 22:43-44). Luke continued, “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly.”

We, too, bring our doubts and fears, our needs and concerns, to the throne of God. We petition the Father for relief from suffering. James spoke of the assurance of God's help when we cry out to Him with physical suffering and pain (Jas. 5:13-15). We ask God to increase our faith. Mark wrote of the man who cried out, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

Prayer is one of our anchors. Peter said we should "cast our cares upon Him" because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). Never underestimate the power of prayer, a power not in the person who prays, but in the One who hears!

Anchor # 2 – Rely on those who love us. Another word for "rely" is the word "trust." Our trust must first be in the Father, the One who has shown the greatest love for us. He was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of His Son. Paul encouraged suffering saints by reminding them of God's great love (Rom. 8:31). He said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Putting this in context, Paul was writing to those who were facing cruel persecution at the hands of a sadistic emperor, Nero. Paul continued, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (v. 32).

The wise man said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). When we find ourselves in the midst of a frightening situation, let us fully rely, or *trust*, in God.

Let us also rely or depend on family members and friends who love us dearly. One of the greatest challenges for an independent person is simply *asking for help*. At age seventeen, David was able, with God's help, to defeat the giant Goliath. However, at a mature age, when he came against some of Goliath's relatives, he had to rely on trusted friends (2 Sam. 21:15-22). When David grew faint as he fought against the giant Ishbi-Benob, his loyal servant and friend Abishai came to his aid. The other faithful soldiers saw the gravity of the situation and resolved that David would no longer go into battle alone. Instead, they

would fight for him and for Israel. David's friends remind us that at times we need aid and assistance from those who love us. Friends and family can be a powerful strength and comfort to one weathering the storms of life.

Anchor # 3 – Embrace the humbling that comes with the storm. Pictures of devastation in cities struck by hurricanes clearly demonstrate the humbling effect of a great storm. The communities slowly repair damages or rebuild. The same is true with those who go through the physical and emotional storms of life, such as sudden illness, an unstable marriage, loss of a job, or loss of a loved one. Each is a humbling experience.

When I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in the summer of 1996, there was an assault to my pride. It was not a puny punch but a full frontal attack on all that women by nature take pride in – abilities, strength, and any measure of beauty that we possess. It was an attack that now periodically recurs, reminding me that there is more to life than walking and having good vision. The measure of a woman is not “the outward adorning..., but...the inward person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

Paul told of the humbling nature of his own “thorn in the flesh, ...a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7). Reminiscent of the trials of Job, God allowed Satan to buffet the apostle, lest he be exalted above measure because he had been caught up to the third heaven, where he heard inexpressible words. Paul earnestly prayed three times that it might depart. Finally, God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). Paul began to reframe the pesty thorn by saying, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (v. 10). When we find ourselves in a storm, let us emulate Paul by embracing the humbling that comes with adversity.

Anchor # 4 – Acknowledge the power of God's word. Within the pages of the Bible we find many examples of faithful men and women who faced stormy situations with assurance and

grace. The entire book of Job is devoted to that endeavor. Job came to acknowledge God's power (Job 42:2). Samuel experienced rejection by his own people after giving them the best years of his life. He acknowledged God's presence (1 Sam. 8:7). Elijah experienced a roller coaster of emotions with victory on Mount Carmel immediately followed by Jezebel's murderous threats. He feared losing his life. He suffered with loneliness and depression. Elijah acknowledged God's voice in the form of a still small voice (1 Kings 18:20 – 19:18).

God's word lifted up these men when they faced obstacles, trials, illness, disappointments, grief, loneliness, and depression. God's word will also supply all we need during troublesome times. David acknowledged the importance of God's word when he said so beautifully, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). When a person is being tossed by a fierce storm, what can bring more comfort than seeing a lighthouse in the distance?

Anchor # 5 – Thank God for all things, whether good or not so good. Paul said, "...in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). Our Father loves a thankful heart. Paul told Christians, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18). Gratitude is not limited to prayer but encompasses every waking moment. Even during difficult times, a thankful spirit draws one to see God's great gifts. There is also the possibility that those in the world will see the effect of a grateful heart and a door of opportunity will be opened to draw souls close to Jesus. Scripture reveals that level of thankfulness and devotion in Paul and Silas as they were praying and singing hymns to God in the Philippian jail, "and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25-34). The two men were not wringing their hands in despair but lifting their voices in praise and prayer.

Anchor # 6 – Imagine the beauties of life eternal. By nature, we tend to focus on things we see, touch, taste, smell, and feel. It goes against our nature to think about things that are intangible. However, Paul said, "...we do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things

which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Our goal is heaven. God wants us to focus on the prize and ultimate joy of victory.

When the storms of life threaten, we may be tempted to act like the disciples on a vessel that was being tossed by the wind (Matt. 14:22-33). Jesus approached them walking on the water. They were stunned to see a figure walking toward them, thinking it was a ghost. Jesus calmed their fears. The bold one, Peter, asked if he could walk on the water to Jesus. The Savior said, "Come."

Despite the waves crashing around him, Peter stepped out in faith. As long as his eyes were focused on Jesus, he walked on water. However, the boisterous wind soon captured his attention. He began to sink into the icy sea. Peter cried out for salvation, and Jesus saved him. A momentary lapse in attention made Peter realize the importance of focusing on Jesus.

Though we are nearly two thousand years removed from Peter, we learn from his example. The storms of life batter us. They threaten to sink us physically, emotionally, and spiritually unless we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews encouraged Christians to look "unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). He gave us a beautiful word picture of our audience in heaven, "Therefore, ...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us ...run with patience the race that is set before us" (v. 1). The victorious faithful saints are cheering us on to reach heaven. When we face ominous life situations, let us remain focused on Jesus and our eternal reward.

Anchor #7 – Allow God to lift you above the storm. Someone once said, "the eagle does not escape the storm....it rises on the winds that bring the storm....it simply uses the storm to lift it higher."

In the midst of a threatening storm, we come face to face with our own fears and doubts. It is tempting to question God, to ask, "Why?" The storm may involve disappointments in others. We may be tempted to hold grudges or to retaliate with angry words, gossip, words or other unChristlike actions. We may also be

tempted to let ungodly thoughts and attitudes of heart flood our minds with jealousy, envy, and hatred.

Instead of being defined by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, let us rise above the negative situations and negative people. Let us allow God to lift us above the storm to be defined as His child. Isaiah said, “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles” (Isa. 40:31). Allow God to lift you up!

Anchor # 8 – Meditate on the positive lessons to be learned from the storm. Ask yourself, “What can be gained from this experience?” One who is dealing with a life-altering situation like illness, death, or divorce undergoes dramatic changes. The changes are inwardly or emotionally, horizontally or with relationships, and vertically or spiritually. We might take inventory by asking ourselves these questions: “How did I handle this obstacle on an emotional level?”, “How were my relationships with others affected by this trial?”, and “Did the storm have an adverse affect on me spiritually?”

James, the brother of our Lord, encouraged Christians to see trials as a way to increase one’s patience. He gave us a beautiful way to reframe a seemingly negative experience, saying, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith works patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas. 1:2-4). Everyone has the ability to learn from difficult situations. Let us choose to see the lessons in a positive way that will help us be better people – better Christian women, wives, mothers, sisters, neighbors, and coworkers.

Anchors help us weather the storms of life. We have recognized the value of these reliable anchors: **Grasp – Rely – Embrace – Acknowledge – Thank – Imagine – Allow – Meditate**. Each of these directs us to the One ultimately in control of *all* things – the **GREAT I AM!**

Our Father, the **Great I Am**, gives us balance in the midst of the storm. “The soul clings, as one in fear of shipwreck to an anchor, and sees not whither the cable of the anchor runs – where it is fastened: but she knows that it is fastened behind the veil

which hides the future glory." Our soul is the ship, and the world is our sea. The cable connecting us is our faith in Christ Jesus. The bliss that awaits us beyond is the distant shore of heaven.

With a storm approaching, the anchor and its cable are secure. The approaching tempest, then, does not bring fear and dread, but serves as a test of courage and faithfulness. Let us set our anchor firmly in holy ground, confident in our faith, resting with assurance in the GREAT I AM!

ENDNOTES

1. All Bible references are from the NKJV.

SPIRITUALITY: FORM OR FUNCTION?

SHEILA KECKLER BUTT

Having worked as managing editor for the Tennessee Cattlemen, the official publication of the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association, for a number of years, it was regularly part of my job to design and lay out ads for cattle farms across the state. Many times I would have an ad designed using pictures of the cattle and pertinent information. Often the owner of the farm would preview the ad and ask me to add this statement beneath the pictures of his cattle: "Form follows Function."

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What idea was the cattleman trying to convey to prospective customers for his cattle? The cattle pictured in the ad had great conformation (form) for their particular breed. We had used pictures of the best looking cows and bulls in his herd! But as every seasoned cattleman knows, the best looking cow may be unable to breed or have very little milk, and the best looking bull may be sterile! The most important characteristics to consider for anyone who is trying to build a herd of cattle are whether the bull can breed a good number of cows and produce calves that are not too big for birthing and whether the cows are fertile and have plenty of milk to sustain a calf that may soon be half her size!

The form of a cow or bull is irrelevant if it is not functional. We know that many times we have elaborate forms of things that

are really very dysfunctional. For example, when I travel on an airplane, I know that the airlines have a very elaborate form of security. I now take off my shoes, give up my lip gloss and often stand and publicly endure a full body scan. However, in reality, I am not much, if any, safer than I was before September 11, 2001. I know that the cargo area has very little security. There is still the human element and those who are willing to die to prove a point. We have a form of security, but actually not much security.

The same is true of many things in our culture. We have multiple forms of communication, i.e. cell phones, text messages, computers, news media, etc., but the actual abilities to successfully communicate and to communicate the truth are rare. We have many forms of communication, but very little actual meaningful communication. The forms of communication are irrelevant if we cannot spell, write a heartfelt letter or note, or clearly convey a truthful message.

We are the richest country in the world, and we have a form of prosperity. However, there is a famine in our land when it comes to truth, morality, goodness, purity, and peace of mind. One of the most popular books written recently is entitled One Nation Under Therapy. There is a famine in this land of plenty. People are more unhappy than they have ever been. We have only a form of prosperity.

Our national education system has established a program called "No Child Left Behind," which has become relatively benign because there is much more form (regulations, red tape) to the program than actual function.

Unfortunately, there are many people who have a form of religion, but in reality it is not very functional in their lives. With the rise of secularism in our culture, many people have become comfortable with compartmentalizing their spirituality. While it is true that in our worship assemblies God has given us a pattern for worship, Jesus taught that our spirituality should permeate our everyday lives!

Paul told Timothy that there were those who had a "form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5) but denied its power. True godliness

recognizes God's power to transform lives! That transformation should become evident in our families, in our homes, in our jobs, in our relationships, in our attitudes, in our hearts, and in our desire to do the will of God on a daily basis, not just when it is convenient or when we are in the presence of other Christians. Paul admonished the Romans, "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). The spiritual person lives life in the presence of God daily. Paul told the Colossians, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3). How many of our daily decisions are actually based on the fact that our lives are hidden with Christ in God?

How does this translate into "spiritual balance" in our lives? Let me share some practical suggestions:

1. Always keep a Bible in your vehicle or purse. You will find there are times that you can read while waiting in the "car line" at school, waiting for the drive through teller, or sitting in a traffic jam. You may want to take a Bible in to your doctor's office instead of flipping through whatever magazines are available in the waiting room. There are so many times when we have to wait, and these are great times to concentrate on the Word of God instead of lamenting our wasted time. When all of those few minutes of Bible study are added up over your lifetime, you will have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and understanding. I used to teach our little boys not to write in their Bibles. Now that they are preachers, their pages are covered with notes, and mine is, too!
2. Invest in some great CDs of the Bible being read. These are wonderful for short or long trips. They will keep your mind in the Word. Also, try to get tapes or CDs every time you hear a good sermon preached or attend a Ladies' Day, Gospel Meeting, etc. These will prove invaluable to you if

you will listen to them over and over. The truth is that you have to want to fill your mind with God's Word, and there are many great avenues available. After a while you will be "thirsting" for the Word and disappointed when you do not have something spiritually uplifting in your vehicle.

3. Always be willing to invite Christians into your home. Our home was always open for the visiting preacher and his family. Many Sundays we sat around our table with strong men and women of God. We felt honored to be in their presence, and our children were impressed by them and their knowledge of the Word. It seems that today preachers are more interested in staying in a motel. If that is the case, try to make time for them to spend with your family by sharing a meal together or inviting them into your home for a visit.
4. Pray when you are happy. Pray when you are sad. Pray when you are hurt. Pray when things seem hopeless. Pray when things seem perfect. If you have children at home, pray with them about everything, including tests, fieldtrips, track meets, football games, basketball games, relationships, etc. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). By example, teach them a forcible lesson that no one can keep them from praying and receiving strength from God.
5. Keep good reading material in every room of your house. By good reading material we mean the Bible, books on creation, Christian evidences, and biblical truths and principles. Depending on the ages of your children, you want your home full of books that support the truth of God's Word. This is imperative for you and your children. If you sit down in any chair in your house, is there a Bible or good sound material to read? If not, you are missing a great opportunity. Over the years, our bathrooms have proven to be great places to put good reading material. Get rid of those magazines that cannot do one thing to help your family for eternity and replace them with reading material that will help all of you grow in knowledge and truth.
6. Keep your children involved in the activities of the local congregation. You, too, must feel a personal responsibility for the welfare of your congregation and the members in general. They are a part of your body. By example teach

your children that you love the body of Christ and that participation in its functions is important (1 Cor. 12:13-31).

7. Most of us, when we were babes in Christ, practiced a "form of godliness." We prayed, we sang, we took the Lord's Supper, we attended worship and Bible class most of the time, and we occasionally read our Bibles at home. Unfortunately, after many years of belonging to the body of Christ, many of us are still like some of the Hebrew Christians:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

How does the mature Christian learn to discern good and evil? How does the spiritual person exercise his or her senses? Certainly the world is trying to exercise our senses in many ways. The world is calling "evil good and good evil" and actually celebrates sin! The world is incrementally trying to sabotage the Christian mind and blur the distinction between what is good and what is evil. We are told very plainly how to keep this from happening. The Hebrews writer says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

The spiritual person measures every thought, every action, and every intent of the heart by the Word of God. The spiritual person would never be comfortable compartmentalizing their Christianity. Our secular humanistic society has convinced many Christians that one's "Christian" life is separate and apart from one's "secular" life. The spiritual person wants more than anything in the world to reflect the love and goodness of Christ in every aspect of his life. That means that we exemplify Christ at a

ballgame, in our choices of recreation, in our choices of entertainment, how we spend our money, how we spend our time, and how we treat other people. We will strive for consistency and will take joy in the journey. Will we always succeed? No. Only Christ could say with certainty, "...The Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29b). However, the person who desires a balanced spiritual life will weigh his life on the scales of God's Word on a daily basis and take great comfort in knowing that the blood of Christ makes up the difference!

There is also no room for fear in the life of a spiritual person. John tells us that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). At some point in our spiritual growth, our motive for serving God and our fellow men changes from fear of going to hell to an abiding love for Christ and for the word of God. When I was a child, I served my Mother out of fear of being swatted with the closest object if I did not obey her...sometimes it was her flip flop, sometimes it was a hair brush, and sometimes the nearest branch of a tree. Right now my mother is in her 80s and is a very tiny lady. If she calls and needs to run an errand, I will get to her house as fast as I can to take her. Is it because I am still afraid of her? Of course not. It is because I love her. And all of us understand how much more joy there is in service when it is motivated by love.

Think of what Christ did for us. God sent His only begotten Son because of His love for us (John 3:16). Many times in the Scriptures we are told that Christ's motive was His love for us. God and Christ were able to look down the corridors of time and see your life and mine and our desperate need that only Christ could fill! It was His love for us that nailed Him to the cross, and it was His willingness to bear our sins that separated Him from His Father when He cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46b).

The spiritual person will "Let this mind be in [them] ... which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He

humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). The essence of a spiritual life is humility and obedience in action. I am afraid that many people think spirituality consists of humility and obedience inaction. There is no way a person could study the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and not believe that spirituality is a way of life. Spirituality cannot be something separate and apart from the world. Christ made it clear that we must live "in" the world and not be "of" the world. We have been called to be salt and light, and we cannot be that unless we engage the world!

It is only when we decide that Christ is the first love of our lives that we can even begin to understand what it means to be spiritual. The truth is that most of the time living a spiritual life will mean making decisions and choices in direct contrast to what our human nature would have us to do. The world will not understand why we make certain decisions. The world will never understand a person who lives life in view of eternity. The world will not understand the peace that "passes understanding" that the spiritual person radiates in spite of adversity.

Paul told the Philippians, "For to me, to live is Christ. . ." (Phil.1:21). His spirituality was functional. He had once been a Pharisee, and at one time in his life he had been all about the "form" of his religion. However, after his encounter with Christ and his obedience to His will, Paul learned the truth about spirituality. He knew, like Peter, that "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). The Apostle Paul understood and taught, like Christ before him, that in the daily spiritual life of a Christian, form really does follow function.

SECTION VI
STUDENT SPEAKERS

BALANCING THE COVENANTS

JEFF ARNETTE

INTRODUCTION

What benefit is the Old Testament to the Christian today? Is the Christian under the Old Testament as a system of justification? Should the Christian look to the Old Testament for guidance regarding the work, worship, and organization of the Lord's church? If not, why even bother with reading and studying the Old Testament?

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It is true that Christians are not subject to the Old Covenant, but Gentile Christians were never under the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was made with the Israelites at Mount Horeb (Sinai). In Deuteronomy 5:1-3, Moses plainly stated that this covenant was made with the children of Israel and not with their fathers. Not even Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc., were under the Old Covenant. Gentile Christians were never required to keep the Law and be circumcised. The main reason for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was to finally answer the question: "What covenant are the Gentiles under?" The overwhelming answer to this question was that Christians have been delivered from the Old Testament law. We have been delivered through the body of Christ (Rom. 7:1-6) and by His death on the cross, where Jesus ended the Old Covenant (Eph. 2:14-16). The whole

purpose of the Law of Moses was to lead the Jews and us to Christ (Gal. 3:23-25).

Unfortunately, some Christians conclude from this that we need not read the Old Testament. I have known individuals who have been Christians for more than sixty years and have never once read through the Old Testament. I have heard of some who will not attend services if the Bible class or sermon series is based upon the Old Testament. They conclude, "Why bother, if we are not under the Old Testament?" This is the flawed reasoning of some Christians.

Is that the proper attitude of Christians toward the Old Testament? I submit to you that this attitude is wrong and contrary to the teaching of the New Testament itself. This attitude deprives the Christian of a wonderful source of peace and comfort that God provides for His children, today. It prevents the Christian from gaining wisdom and understanding concerning the life that now is and that which is to come.

To help us appreciate the value of the Old Testament and come to some sense of balance here, let us begin by asking a big question: why should we study the Old Testament?

THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION

In the first ten verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth of Israel's fall in the wilderness. Notice carefully what he said in verse 11: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." The events described may have happened to Israel but they were "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." What we call the Old Testament was written and preserved especially for the benefit of Christians!

We should not be surprised to see how often New Testament writers appealed to the Old Testament in admonishing Christians, as Paul did here. The writer of Hebrews did the same

in exhorting Christians to remain steadfast (Heb. 3:12-19). James used the same kind of Old Testament examples in encouraging Christians to be patient in their suffering (Jas. 5:7-11). Peter also warned of false teachers and scoffers (2 Pet. 1-3).

THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING

Secondly, the Old Testament was written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). Paul had just appealed to a Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament in verse 3. Note carefully what he said in Romans 15:4, that these things "written before" (i.e., the Old Testament) were "written for our learning." Again, the Old Testament was written and preserved especially for the Christians' benefit! The Old Testament provides "patience and comfort" that we "might have hope"! The Old Testament provides a record of God's faithfulness and how He kept His promises:

1. To Abraham and the nation of Israel.
2. To judge the wicked and avenge the righteous.
3. To forgive the penitent and protect the humble.

As we read this history of God's dealings with Israel, it gives us hope that God will keep His promises to us!

THE OLD TESTAMENT MAKES US WISE UNTO SALVATION

Third, the Old Testament makes one wise regarding salvation in Christ. In 2 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul noted that Timothy had known the "Holy Scriptures" since his childhood. When Timothy was a child, the only scriptures available were the Old Testament. Therefore, Paul clearly had the Old Testament in mind when he said that the "Holy Scriptures" were "able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." How is this possible? The Old Testament provides:

1. The fall of man and the rise of sin.
2. The background and development of God's scheme of redemption.
3. Hundreds of Messianic prophecies, which described what to expect when He came.

One cannot hope to fully understand such books of the New Testament as Hebrews without an understanding of the Levitical priesthood. Without a thorough understanding of Old Testament prophecy and apocalyptic literature, the book of Revelation is almost impossible to understand. If one wishes to be wise concerning his salvation in Christ, it is imperative to study the Old Testament!

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS PROFITABLE TO US

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul wrote that "all scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, [and] for instruction in righteousness." The phrase "all scripture" would include the Old Testament, especially in the context of this passage. Therefore, the Old Testament is profitable for:

1. Doctrine - such as the nature of God, man, and sin.
2. Reproof and correction - the need for repentance.
3. Instruction in righteousness - how to live godly lives.

Note that the apostles frequently appealed to the Old Testament in instructing Christians concerning their conduct. In Romans 12:19-21, Paul quoted two different Old Testament passages (Deut. 32:35; Prov. 25:21-22) to encourage the Roman Christians to put their trust in God, and in 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 he used several Old Testament passages to encourage the Corinthian Christians to keep themselves holy before God. In 2 Corinthians 9:7-10, as Paul encouraged them to give from their hearts, he used more Old Testament passages to accomplish his purpose. James did the same thing in James 2:20-26. As he wrote to encourage them to a faith that is actively involved (a faith that works), he used the faith of two Old Testament people, Abraham and Rehab the harlot, to illustrate his point. As Peter addressed the conduct of Christians in 1 Peter 3:8-10, he used several different Old Testament verses to show them what God expects of Christians.

Should we as Christians study the Old Testament? Of course! Along with the New Testament, it was written "that the

man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). Not studying the Old Testament would deprive one of much admonition, learning, wisdom, and instruction that God intended for His children. If we can see how important the Old Testament was to the men and women of the Bible, it will help us also to avail ourselves of this great treasure.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING THE OLD TESTAMENT

In encouraging others to study the Old Testament, I would like to offer some suggestions that have helped me.

The Old Testament needs to be included in our Bible-reading program. Do not limit your daily Bible reading to just the New Testament. I would encourage everyone to read the whole Bible through each year, both the Old and New Testaments. I usually start with Genesis and end with Revelation; others prefer reading portions from both the Old Testament and the New Testament each day throughout the year. The most important thing is to make the Old Testament a part of your regular study of the Bible.

Another thing that helps is to use a modern translation. I grew up reading from the King James Version, and I did not have many problems with the New Testament but the Old Testament was difficult for me. Therefore, I began to use other translations to help me understand the sections that were hard for me. (I personally recommend the New King James Version, New American Standard Bible, or the English Standard Version.) Using these will make your study of the Old Testament come alive for you.

Take advantage of the Bible classes and sermon series that congregations offer. If your congregation offers a study in the Old Testament, attend that class, as it will benefit your study of the Old Testament. If the preacher presents a series from the Old Testament, give close attention to it! Do not be like some who will not attend whenever the class or sermon is taken from the Old Testament.

Certainly all of God's word is of great value, but one might appreciate the value of the Old Testament more quickly by giving attention to:

1. The Psalms, which are a great source of comfort, peace, and drawing near to God, especially in troubling times.
2. The Proverbs, which are a great source of practical wisdom for everyday living.
3. The Prophets, which are a great source for learning about the righteousness, justice, mercy, and love of God.

CONCLUSION

Should one study only those Scriptures that pertain to the covenant or dispensation under which they live? If so, the Jews should have discarded Genesis and the first fourteen chapters of Exodus, and we should discard the gospels, since Jesus lived and died under the Old Covenant.

We should not ignore the Old Testament, for it provides the background and setting of the New Testament. It provides much in the way of admonition, learning, comfort, hope, and wisdom concerning our salvation in Christ! Be careful not to neglect that which was written and preserved for OUR benefit. And remember that **"ALL Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable..." (2 Tim. 3:16).**

BALANCE BETWEEN THE GOSPELS AND THE EPISTLES

KEN HICKS

The need for balance is critical and pervasive in our lives. When we walk across the room, the delicate workings of our inner ear provide the proper equilibrium, or balance, to prevent embarrassing stumbles and painful falls. As important as the inner ear is for equilibrium, without the continual training and refinement of the neuromuscular system, it would be of little help. Both systems are essential to effectively traverse the room without falling on your face! Both are required for balance, otherwise babies would be walking immediately upon birth. As in walking, the fine art of balance cannot be overestimated when it comes to New Testament Christianity. Within the inspired pages of the New Testament, we find both detailed accounts of the life of Christ and the application of Christ's life to the everyday problems recorded in the epistles. Central to both is Christ, who is the clear point of balance between the two very different sets of material. When one part, either the gospel accounts or the epistles, is emphasized over the other, an unbalanced view is fostered. Christians must possess a clear understanding of the life of Christ and the lessons that we can learn from Him, balanced with the correct attitudes (or mind) of Christ, which is the primary thrust behind the teachings found in the epistles.

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JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS LOOKED TOWARDS EACH OTHER

Balance between the Gospels and epistles is seen in the inspired writings themselves. As we look at the gospel accounts, Jesus clearly told the apostles that there would be a “Comforter” or “Helper” who would come after He ascended back to the Father (John 14:15-17). This Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would do several things. He would convict the world of sin, He would bring to their remembrance the things Christ said, and He would guide the apostles “into all truth” (John 16:13). In saying this, Jesus acknowledged that there would be teachings to come and that there was truth yet to be revealed. This clearly points towards the truths contained in the remainder of the New Testament (the book of Acts, the various epistles, and the book of Revelation).

Conversely, the inspired writers of the New Testament drew extensively on the life and experiences of Christ. Paul repeatedly referenced the suffering, sacrifice, humility, and servant-like qualities of Jesus. It is in the context of these statements that Paul urged all Christians to have the very mind (attitudes) of Christ in Philippians 2:5-8. There were also many times when Paul explicitly quoted Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 11:23; 1 Thess. 4:15). The book of James is perhaps the best example of the synergy between the New Testament writers and the life of Christ as recorded in the gospel accounts. James, the Lord’s half-brother, extensively incorporated practical teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. This demonstrates that the teachings of Jesus are just as relevant for Christians as the material recorded in the epistles. The attributes that Jesus expounded upon are the very attributes that are valued by God and expected of all who would follow Christ.

WHAT ARE SOME REASONS FOR IMBALANCE?

It is evident that there is a natural tendency to gravitate towards one pole or the other. What causes this tendency? It may be due to the difference in content and the way that people think. The Gospels are primarily narrative, while the epistles are generally written to address specific needs. The Gospels require

effort to see the pertinent truths in the narrative. These truths are seen in the way that Jesus lived and in His interactions with sinners and religious leaders of the day (as well as in their reactions to His teachings). His life reveals to us the things that God loves, hates, and desires, but it requires more effort than a study of the epistles. It requires a significant expenditure of time and mental energy but richly rewards the diligent student. The epistles are more concrete in thought, containing “doctrinal” specifics and elements that define standards for purity of the Christian life. The truth is not hidden in parables or guised in the actions of Jesus; it is fully displayed and readily available for all. Those who are simply seeking a “how-to” guide for Christianity (or worse yet, a divine “rule book”) would easily gravitate to the corrective teachings found in the epistles.

This tendency may also be explained by the desire to differentiate ourselves, as the body of Christ, from the denominational world. Since all denominations claim to love and serve Jesus Christ, the obvious place to begin a defense of the body of Christ is in the areas of doctrinal differences. These differences include such obvious things as baptism for the remission of sins, the observance of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week, weekly contribution for the saints, singing without the aid of mechanical instruments, the organization of the church, etc. These positions are all supported in the New Testament, primarily in the epistles, and that fact provides an explanation for some of the drift in that direction. The preeminent defining attribute of the church should always be Jesus Christ and the church (singular) that comprises His body.

THE PROBLEM OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The problem of imbalance is not new. In fact, Jesus repeatedly addressed the spiritual imbalance of the Pharisees in the gospel accounts. The Pharisees focused entirely on the strict observance of the Law, even going so far as to add rules and regulations around it to prevent someone from violating it. This created a massive burden that they themselves failed to observe. Like the Israelites of old, they offered sacrifices religiously, yet they had stripped the heart out of their worship. They had turned

the focus from God to themselves. Because of their poor attitudes and lack of mercy (Matt. 12:7), they were routinely condemned by Christ.

This problem did not end with the Pharisees. In later times, Martin Luther was so enamored with the epistles of Paul that he considered them of more value than three of the four gospel accounts, while also discounting the books of Hebrews and James. This imbalance raised its head again in the ranks of our brotherhood in the writings of Ketcherside, Moser, and others in the middle of the last century. These sought to promote “the man... not the plan.” It is continued today in the “rediscovery of grace” (never realized that we misplaced it) and the not-so-subtle denial of a divine pattern for worship by the liberal elements of the brotherhood.

For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and this is seen in the vitriolic outcries for hyper-conservatism in certain brotherhood publications. Those not in lockstep are called liberal, and tradition is bound as a new law. Both views are wrong. The “Gospels-only” view discounts the value of the epistles in lieu of a more “grace-centered” focus, but this denies the Word of God that states, “All scripture is inspired, and profitable...” (2 Tim. 3:16). The other view focuses more on strict “rule keeping” to the detriment of the right attitudes of heart. This is only one step removed from the actions that brought condemnation on the Pharisees. God is just as concerned with the right attitudes in worship as He is the correct methods (Mal. 1:6-14).

THE NEED FOR A BALANCED VIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since the entire New Testament corpus is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16 ESV), then there must be spiritually satisfying components to be found in each division and individual book. A singular focus on one aspect or division of the New Testament, no matter how exhaustive in nature, deters from the rest and fosters the unbalanced development of the individual Christian. In like manner, a person should not expect to eat meat only and hope to be healthy (a balanced diet is required). Just as Paul declared the

“whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) to the Ephesian church, we too must consider, study, and teach the entirety of the inspired scriptures. In doing this, one is presented with the example of Christ, as seen in the gospel accounts, as well as the mind of Christ, as seen in the exhortations to live lives characterized by the same attitudes as Jesus.

The exhortations found in the New Testament epistles have meaning only when viewed through the life of Jesus Christ. This is one reason why so much emphasis is given to the life of Jesus in the New Testament. The Gospels account for approximately 43% of the entire New Testament (compared to the 38% total for the combined epistles). The Gospels are recorded from four different points of view with differing purposes, emphasis, and intended audiences. When combined, they blend to form a definitive view of the divinity, humanity, and modus operandi of Jesus Christ. Through them we can gain a better understanding of Him and what is expected of us.

The delicate balance between the life of Christ and the mind of Christ can be best described by the workings of a gyroscope. A gyroscope is commonly used in inertial guidance systems and is used to track deviation from a specified path. It is comprised of a free spinning rotor (creating momentum in a specific direction) and is mounted to two rotating frames called gimbals. This arrangement provides a stable platform where the gyroscope remains balanced despite the movements of the gimbals around it. In this arrangement, the gyroscope adjusts to changes in attitude of the rocket, airplane, or ship. In this, Christ is pictured as the central rotor of the spiritual gyroscope; spinning and providing momentum and life to the entire navigational arrangement of our lives. The central aspect of Christ is framed by two very critical gimbals, the life of Christ as seen in the gospel accounts and the mind of Christ as revealed in the epistles. With only one of these gimbals, a balanced view of Christ is impossible, causing the Christian to become spiritually wobbly. With both working in harmony, balance is inevitable and a true path can be followed.

CONCLUSION

As diligent students of the Word and disciples of Jesus Christ, we must always guard against the real and present danger that is posed by an unbalanced view. The teachings of the New Testament provide a complete and balanced picture of Jesus Christ. We must strive to avoid the narrow focus of the “epistles-only” mindset (preaching only the plan or lessons from the “divine rule book”) and the “gospels-only” mindset (preaching only the man to the detriment of the divine pattern for worship). Both should complement each other, as both have the singular intent of producing people with the same mind as Christ.

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FROM MILK TO MATURITY HEBREWS 5:12-14

MICHEL MORGAN

INTRODUCTION

Paul's goal for ministry was to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." That is, they should be "spiritually mature in Christ" (Col. 1:27-29). Tragically, not everyone who grows old grows up. Ideally, the older we are, the more mature we should be, but too often the idea does not become reality. Immature Christians who refuse to grow up will cause problems in their personal lives, in the home, and in the church. They are children "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). God's word is the instruction manual to help us progress from milk to maturity so that we might be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (Eph. 3:16-17). Failing to move forward makes one a victim rather than victorious.

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HUMAN GROWTH

The digestive system is an important part of the body. Without it you could not get the nutrients needed to properly grow and stay healthy. The fact that babies are born without teeth indicates their lack of development and need for only liquids. Milk provides the nutrients one needs at the beginning of life. With age comes the ability to chew and digest solid food (meat). As we

mature, a strict diet of milk is no longer sufficient; it must be supplemented with solid food for continued growth. Solid food (meat) is not absolutely necessary for preserving life, but it is necessary for acquiring greater strength. ¹

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The normal Christian life is to be one of spiritual growth and progress. Spiritual growth begins with the milk of God's word. As babes in Christ, we are "unskilled in the word of righteousness" and only able to digest the elementary principles (the ABC's) of the Gospel (Heb. 5:13). As we mature in Christ, our spiritual senses are exercised to discern good and evil. We are in little danger of being imposed on by false doctrine, by the lies of hypocrites, or by the subtleties of Satan. We are then able to progress to the highest, most sublime doctrine (strong meat). A diet consisting of meat must also include milk, or a periodic review of the first principles, in order to stay healthy and maintain a balanced life. ²

GOD COMMANDS SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The blessings enjoyed in Christ include not only redemption, but renewal. In baptism, we undergo a "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (1 Tit. 3:5). Our old man is crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be destroyed, and from that point on we do not practice sin (Rom. 6:6). From baptism, we are raised to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Growth is implicitly expected in the Great Commission. Implicit in the command to teach is that disciples would progress from babes to mature, obedient learners, constantly growing as they trust and obey their Lord (Matt. 28:18-20). Growth is explicitly stated in the apostolic epistles. Peter began his second epistle by describing how we are to grow by adding to our faith such graces as virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc. (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Peter ended his second epistle with the command to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Christians who did not grow were sternly rebuked and admonished to move forward (Heb. 5:12; 6:1). Spiritual growth is

not an option reserved for the chosen few; it is a command to all who desire to see Jesus Christ face to face.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS A CHOICE

Physical growth and spiritual growth have similarities but in some ways are as different as day and night. People grow physically by default, unless there is some disorder. No special effort is required on our part; we mature physically whether we want to or not. Spiritual growth requires concentrated effort. Like every other decision in life, we choose the path we will travel, either towards the wide gate that leads to destruction, or the narrow gate that leads to eternal life (Matt. 7:13-14). Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (John 6:27). Paul encouraged the faithful to work out their "own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Spiritual growth requires "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward [or pressing on] to those things which are ahead" (Phil. 3:13-14). The most important decision a man or woman must make is to obey from the heart that form of doctrine that leads to salvation (Rom. 6:17) and walk faithfully (not perfectly) unto death (Rev. 2:10). History teaches that, whatever decision we make, God is faithful to keep His promise to bless the obedient and punish the disobedient.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS ASSISTED BY GOD

We can take comfort in the fact that we are not alone in our spiritual walk. God said, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). This is especially true when it comes to our choice to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). While we work out our own salvation, God is at work in us "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). Just as He was with us in producing our new birth (Tit. 3:5), God will complete it unto the day of the Lord (Phil. 1:6). Through His strength in the inner man, we are rooted and grounded in love (Eph. 3:16-17). God provides spiritual armor to stand strong in the power of His might and quench the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph. 6:10-17). Spiritual growth is not only possible, but it is guaranteed if we abide in Christ (John 15:1-5).

THE DANGER OF NOT PROGRESSING

Hebrews 5:12 indicates that those who were being addressed were not new converts. They had heard the Gospel and professed to be Christians for a long time. By this time they should have had a good understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Instead of moving forward, they failed to grow because of spiritual apathy and laziness. The author of the book of Hebrews had much to say about Christ our High Priest, but the spiritual immaturity of his readers made it difficult, so he thought it necessary to digress (Heb. 5:11-14).

Despite the years of walking with the Lord, they remained immature children. If one remains spiritually immature, they will not come to fully appreciate their standing and blessings in Christ. In this state, they are more susceptible to the wiles of the devil and falling away.

SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

First, one is dull of hearing. Growth requires a wholehearted love for God and a regular, systematic study of His word. Many of the Hebrew Christians had failed to progress in their understanding of spiritual things due to lack of study. The fact that they had “become” dull of hearing may imply a regression. At one point they may have been like the Bereans, “who received the word with all readiness” (Acts 17:11). Somewhere along the way they lost the excitement they experienced as new Christians; apathy set in as they were tempted to return to Jewish ways of worship, and their desire to study and grow was lost. When one becomes “dull of hearing,” one begins to regress to a state of spiritual immaturity.

Second, there is a diet of milk. The first thing necessary in building any structure is laying a strong foundation. The basic foundation of Christianity is “repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:1-3). When these are properly understood and obeyed, it is time to

move forward to perfection or a mature understanding of Christ. For some, the natural process of spiritual development has been hindered due to their refusal to give up the milk bottle and consume solid foods. Today, many in the church can only tolerate the milk of God's word and are spiritually immature.

Third, there is the inability to discern. Discernment begins with crucifying the flesh and walking in the spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). Then, "by reason of use," we learn to distinguish between good and evil. We learn right from wrong by studying clear examples set forth in the Scriptures. Through a study of God's word, we are able to apply general principles to specific situations that we face. Refusing to dig deep into God's word will keep one spiritually immature and be evident to all.

Finally, there is an inability to teach others. A natural result of spiritual growth is to bear fruit. One way to bear fruit is to teach others. He does not mean to say that all ought to be public teachers or preachers of the Gospel, but they ought to be able to explain the truths of the Christian religion, to share the good news of Christ and the hope of their salvation with others (Acts 8:4; 1 Pet. 3:15; Tit. 2:1-10). Their need for someone to teach them again "the first principles" demonstrated their spiritual immaturity.³

TIME FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

First, am I dull of hearing? How is my Bible study? Do I "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6)? Am I growing "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18)? If hearing the word of God has lost its appeal, am I now spiritually immature and in danger of apostasy?

Second, what has my diet been lately? Has it been limited to milk, or is there a balance of meat also? A milk-only diet leaves one immature and by default "unskilled in the word of righteousness."

Third, do I have the ability to discern? Can I apply general principles to a specific situation, or do I require a clear "Thou shall not" to determine if something is wrong? Am I dependant on

someone else to spoon feed me and tell me what is right and wrong, what is truth and error?

Finally, am I able to teach others? Assuming enough time has passed, can I share my faith with a lost and dying world? Do I find myself saying, "I don't know what to say"? If so, I have forgotten the "first principles" and need someone to teach me again.

CONCLUSION

The Christian life has much in harmony with physical life. There are definite stages in both. The first stage is infancy, in which Christians are "little children." New Christians can be assured that their sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ (1 John 2:12). The next stage is youth, in which Christians are "young men and women." The source of their strength is the word of God. The final stage is maturity, in which Christians are "parents." They "have known Him who is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13). May God grant us the grace and commitment needed to grow as we should and to enjoy His full blessings as we progress from milk to maturity.

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BALANCING EVANGELISM AND EDIFICATION

CRAIG RESSLER

INTRODUCTION

As Christians we have a great responsibility to evangelize and to edify. We also have a great responsibility to reach a balance between what can be two extremes. Balance is to achieve “a state in which two factors are of equal strength or importance.”¹ This is accomplished by giving sufficient and equal emphasis to both parts so that they are effectively proportioned and stability in both areas may be maintained. We need to focus on the importance of evangelism and edification while striving for a balance between the two so that we do not neglect our obligations to save the lost or to fulfill the needs of our brethren.

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OUR OBLIGATION TO THE LOST: EVANGELISM

What is 750,000 miles long, can wrap itself around the earth 30 times, and grow an additional 20 miles longer with each passing day? It is the line of people on earth who do not know Jesus Christ. This is a clear description of the broad path to destruction as described in Matthew 7:13: “wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”² This is partly true because, from the first century

on, we have failed as the churches of Christ to continue our zealous efforts to evangelize.

We are the body of Christ, entrusted with the Word of God. We are entrusted with the only words that can bring sinful men to salvation. God has chosen us, "his people," to bring the saving message of the gospel to the lost. Before we further discuss man's state of hopelessness, we need to consider some biblical truths.

We need to be reminded of the greatest commandments in Mark 12:30-31. As God's children, if we are not willing to evangelize, we must ask the question, "Do I really love God?" You cannot love God if you do not love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, loving your neighbor as yourself is a major part of loving God. These two commandments work together. It is impossible to separate one's love for God from one's love for man. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We must realize that we do not love our neighbor as ourselves if we are not willing to share the gospel with him.

Would you want to die lost, never having obeyed the gospel? I think not. Actually, that is why we obeyed the gospel. We did not want to die a sinner, who is condemned and unclean. In the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10, Jesus made it clear that we are to help our neighbor who is in need. Jesus concluded the parable by stating that our neighbor is anyone who is in need. Can we then not conclude that a person who is separated from God (Isa. 59:1-2), and is therefore in a state of dying in his sins (John 8:24) and on his way to everlasting punishment (2 Thess. 1:7-9), is in dire need? No, they are okay, right? The fact is that we know they are in need and can only be saved by hearing the message of the gospel.

If we love God and claim that we love God, then we will love what God loves—the souls of men. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Jesus Christ gave His life for the lost of this world, and many of us are unwilling to give just a little of our time to say some words that just might lead the lost of this world to Him. So, ask yourself, "Does my

life reflect only religious activity, or does it bear the mark of profound love?" Evangelism is not an option for the Christian. Rather, it is each Christian's responsibility to evangelize the world.

What keeps us from evangelizing? We are so judgmental about appearances of others that we cannot look past the exterior. We are not to judge outwardly (Matt. 7:1), but so many times we do. We get so wrapped up in others' outward appearances that we do not give them a chance to hear the gospel. Who are we to determine whether so-and-so will obey the gospel? In fact, we should be motivated if a man or woman looks rough, rugged, and appears to have a hard heart. It should instill compassion in us for that person and his spiritual state. This is loving our neighbor.

Jesus Christ identified Himself with the unimportant, the weak, the sinful, the poor, and the powerless. We see in Jesus' example that each and every person was of supreme importance. We, too, need to have that mindset. We are not to judge whether a given person will or will not obey. We are just told to spread the gospel by planting the seed. Just think about how many people we come into contact with during a day, who might obey the gospel if we would only take the time to tell them the good news of Jesus!

Another reason we do not evangelize is that we become so wrapped up in our own lives that we do not take the time to spread the gospel. We must be willing to sacrifice our time in order to reach the lost. Our bodies are to be living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). We are to be slaves to God for the cause of Christ. As we serve God we need to do so willingly and submissively, sacrificing our time so that our interests and God's are so interlinked that we lose ourselves in the will of God and in our attempts to evangelize. The bottom line is that we cannot go to heaven on the combined efforts of the church. We have to do our part as individuals.

OUR OBLIGATION TO THE BRETHREN: EDIFICATION

When we read the New Testament, we quickly see that edification is an important issue in a Christian's life. Edification literally means to "build up."³ The work of building up is the

responsibility of every Christian. Both giving and receiving edification are a necessity for every Christian (Rom. 15:1-2). The letters in the New Testament were written to edify the church, not to evangelize the world. We need to realize that evangelism gets people to Christ and edification keeps people in Christ. In evangelizing the world, we bring people to the church, which is a necessity. However, it is just the beginning; edification grows each member to the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph.4:12-13). God intends for the members of the body of Christ, from conversion on, to grow into the full maturity of the faith. This is accomplished by edification.

To reach this goal and to fulfill our responsibility as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to consider the value of one's soul, even among our brethren. Often we have a lack of concern or show neglect for our brethren because in our minds they are already saved. The scriptures clearly teach of the possibility of apostasy, in which our brother backslides into the world and is eternally lost, having a later state that is worse than the beginning (2 Pet. 2:20-22). Apostasy should help motivate us to be mindful of edification. We are not to act like Cain, who asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). Yes, Cain, you are. We, too, are our brothers' keeper. We need to realize that our brethren can fall from God's grace and be eternally lost.

Many passages in scripture stress the ability of apostasy. Therefore, a lot of New Testament writers warned Christians to keep the faith, lest they fall away (Col. 1:21-23; 1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 3:12-19, 4:11). Everyone gets weary fighting the good fight of faith, so it is crucial that we encourage and edify one another. Often we, as well as our brethren, become spiritually stressed and are brought to spiritual fatigue. It is important that we are there for our brethren, edifying them, helping them attain a good foundation in the faith. The stronger we can help the brethren be in the faith, the better they will cope with the trials and spiritual low points in their lives. This also helps the church to become a stronger family and lowers the number of members who fall back into the things of the world. This can only be accomplished, however, by attending all services so that we may stir one another up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25).

As we strive to help build one another up in the faith, it is so important that we are equipped to do so. We cannot edify one another if we, ourselves, are not equipped for the work of edification. We need to “long for the spiritual milk that is without deceit so that we may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). We need to be Christians who build our house upon the rock (Matt. 7:24-27). With firm foundations, we will be equipped to help build others upon that same rock, which is done through sound doctrine (Eph. 4:11-16). Sound teaching is the proper biblical edification. If we are not building one another up with the biblical truths of God’s word, those foundations will fall, either in this life or at the final judgment. “Other foundations can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). It is the truths of God’s word and only the truths of God’s word that can build up foundations worthy of a heavenly inheritance (Acts 20:32). Sound doctrine builds firm foundations and keeps our brethren from falling away and from being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16-4:5; Tit. 1:9-13). It is very clear that edification is a work of the church. We must take our responsibility seriously and teach, support, encourage, comfort, correct, and discipline so that we might edify our brethren to the full maturity of the faith.

OUR OBLIGATION TO BALANCE EVANGELISM AND EDIFICATION

Within Matthew 28:18-20 lie two great commissions or one great commission with a two-fold responsibility. Either way, this command from Christ is great and is the vital responsibility of every Christian who claims to be a follower of Christ. Since these commands are so great and so important to the salvation of mankind, as was emphasized, we can conclude that it is crucial that we properly balance and maintain our area of focus and emphasis on evangelism and edification.

If we put too much focus on evangelism and fail to edify the body of Christ, we are, in a sense, de-evangelizing the neighborhood, and we are doing more harm than good for the cause of Christ and the growth of His church.

There was a church that looked as though they were really thriving: they had about 500 people attending and had many outreach ministries reaching their community, and many people were coming to Christ and to church through their ministry. The problem was that the church was not growing in numbers – people were leaving as quickly as they were coming in. They began to do some research on the people who were leaving and they found that the majority who left were not attending another church. They just stopped going to church all together. They realized that, although the church was great at evangelism, because of their inability to hold people, they were actually de-evangelizing their neighborhood. Those who were leaving were almost impossible to bring back to the faith.⁴

Although this church was very evangelistic in its efforts, it failed to properly ground and build up its new converts in the faith. It is so vital that we teach our new converts, as well as our existing members, the whole council of God's Word.

There is also the other extreme, where a congregation focuses so much on edification that it neglects the lost of the outside world. There is a thought that maybe, if we become so spiritually inclined, we will spontaneously begin sharing the gospel. When the emphasis is only on edification, there is a resulting failure to evangelize and a failure to achieve what is to be our goal: Christ-likeness. When the church focuses just on edification, not only does it lose its God-given purpose, but it also loses its compassion for the lost.

CONCLUSION

The truth is that there are essentially two major principles that are necessary for man's salvation: evangelism and edification. For this reason, it should be our goal to emphasize and to arrange the two different parts of the great commission so that they form a harmonious and well-proportioned whole. We

need to be very cautious in balancing the two. Christianity is essentially personal in that our number one priority should be to get to heaven, but a major part of getting to heaven is based on our ability to fulfill our obligations to our fellow man and our obligations to our fellow brethren. God legitimately laid great responsibilities on the church, and they are evangelism and edification. Let us strive to balance the two so that we might properly carry out the great commission of the church.

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