



THE RESTORATION HERALD

SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY

By Jim Nichols

*The following article is adopted from Jim Nichols' outstanding book, **More Than a Book**. Jim's work is focused on providing an evidential case for the authority of the written Word of God, its accuracy, its supernatural character, and its overall purpose to draw the fallen human race back to God through the Man Jesus Christ. **More Than a Book** is available from the CRA online bookstore.*

“Looking for someone with a little authority? I have about as little as anybody!” That statement on a placard I saw amused me, as much as it apparently amused others.

Beyond the quip, though, is the issue of authority. If we enter into a conversation, don't we want to be taken seriously? Where do we get authority to speak? In formal academic papers, we cite references and publish a bibliography at the end of our work.

When Jesus came down from the mountain after He had just given the often quoted “Sermon on the Mount,” Matthew tells us that the people who heard Him were astonished at His teaching, “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” — Matthew 7:28-29.

The scribes of the people in Jesus' time used their “footnotes.” They appealed to other rabbis and the various traditions of the elders. Jesus spoke with authority all His own. “You have heard it said... but I say to you....” As the Son of God, He certainly had authority that commanded the respect of all who listened. How could you or I speak with such authority that people would not even think of contradicting it?

Since you and I don't have the authority of the Son of God, we have only one way to speak with authority: We say what He has given us to say!

Dr. Lewis Foster did graduate studies at Yale University, and he did them among liberal professors who considered themselves smarter than God. He related several different anecdotes of the doctors in that theological “cemetery” and the antics they displayed in class, attempting to prove that Paul didn't write most of the epistles attributed to him, that John didn't write the Gospel of John, and many other such things. One thing that sticks out in my memory is an encounter Dr. Foster had with a fellow student at the seminary. The man said, “Fos, I envy you. All of us have pulpits we're filling when we go out each weekend. You have something you know for certain when you preach, while we don't have as much certainty.”

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Over this past Christmas holiday break, I took the time to read two books. First was *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. The other, Jack Cottrell's 45th book, *Baptism: Zwingli or The Bible?*

A Christmas Carol recounts the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, an aging and bitter old man who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley. Marley's ghost wanders about, bound by heavy chains and cash-boxes, wearing "the chain I forged in my life." Marley informs Scrooge that he soon will be visited by three spirits and that he must listen to them, else he will be cursed with an even worse fate.



John R. Mitchell

The visit by the last of these spirits, Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, is by far the most interesting and thought provoking. This silent ghost (for he never speaks) shows Scrooge scenes of a Christmas day in the future. These scenes revolve around a repulsive man who has recently died, a man much disliked by all in the community. Scrooge grows increasingly disturbed by the lack

of sympathy from anyone over the death of this man. At last, the scenes conclude with the spirit escorting Scrooge to a graveyard to visit a neglected grave, only for Scrooge to gaze upon a tombstone bearing Scrooge's own name! Horror upon horrors, all these scenes were future visions of his own death — he was the repulsive, bitter, despised old man.

A Christmas Carol — a fascinating tale by a true literary master.

Now, on to Jack Cottrell's *Baptism: Zwingli or The Bible?* The CRA exists to defend and disseminate pure New Testament Christianity and this latest work by Dr. Cottrell does this as well as any work we have ever published.

The book opens with a discussion of what Dr. Cottrell refers to as "The Biblical Consensus," namely that for the first 1500 years of Christendom, baptism was acknowledged to be for the remission of sins, that baptism is in truth a salvation event. It was accepted throughout the Christian world that baptism is the occasion when God, through His grace, bestows upon the one being baptized the forgiveness of sins.

What happened to undermine and destroy this biblical consensus? It is the result of one man, Huldreich Zwingli. Dr. Cottrell develops in detail exactly how this unfolded. As Dr. Cottrell says in the introduction, the early chapters make

"known to the Christian world (especially within the Restoration Movement) the dastardly role of Huldreich Zwingli in destroying the true Biblical doctrine of baptism."

Many of us, so deeply committed to New Testament Christianity, grow frustrated at folks who can't seem to understand the Bible's simple, straightforward teaching on baptism. After all, verses such as Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:27, 1 Peter 3:21, etc. just aren't that hard to understand. Dr. Cottrell's thorough examination of Zwingli and his "dastardly role" provides us with valuable and practical insights into the thinking of those so adamantly opposed to clear Bible truth.

Dr. Cottrell then moves on to a detailed discussion of Faith, Works, and Baptism. Here he explains "the most important thing I have learned" during his illustrious career of theological study. This most important thing turns out to be *the definition of the term WORKS in the writings of Paul.*

It is no exaggeration to say that words cannot express how valuable *Baptism: Zwingli or The Bible?* can be in our efforts to defend New Testament Christianity. Without a doubt, this latest effort from Dr. Jack Cottrell is a must-read.

Following the visit from the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, Scrooge awakens a changed man, determined to live a life characterized by generosity and compassion. Having been afforded the opportunity to see the damage caused by his selfish and greedy ways, he vows to change the course of his life.

I can't help but wonder where the Christian world would be today if the Ghost of Baptism Yet to Come had visited Zwingli one dark night and escorted him to a dreary graveyard to gaze upon the tombstones of the myriad of souls shipwrecked by his false doctrine. Would he have abandoned his efforts to create a new view of baptism? Would he have renewed his efforts to cling to the apostolic word?

Thanks to Dr. Cottrell and his exceptional scholarly work, we have the information we need to confront error, better understand the thinking behind such error, and prayerfully, "... correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

Baptism: Zwingli or The Bible? — an epic theological treatise by a true Biblical scholar. ~RH

THE RESTORATION HERALD

Editor, John R. Mitchell

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Does the Ontological Argument Prove God's Existence?

Part 1

In a previous column entitled “Is It Possible to Prove God’s Existence?” I discussed three approaches the church has used to respond to skeptical attacks on the Christian faith: the Christian worldview, Christian evidences, and natural theology.¹

“Natural theology” refers to attempts to prove God’s existence by reason and from *general revelation* (God’s revelation of His existence and essence in nature), as opposed to *special revelation* (God’s revelation of His existence and essence via the spoken word of God, the Bible). Natural theology attempts to construct logical proofs of God’s existence using either deductive or inductive logic and either *a priori* or *a posteriori* knowledge.² In the coming months, we will look at several of these proofs which have been popular in many circles. This month, however, we will examine a proof which has been around for over 900 years. Critics have consistently rejected it and pronounced it dead, yet it continues to be revived periodically.



Richard Koffarnus

The proof, called the *ontological argument*, was first formulated by Anselm of Aosta (1033-1109), an Italian of noble birth. He joined the Benedictine order when he was 27, and entered the Abbey of Bec, in Normandy, France. Three years later, Anselm was elected Abbot of Bec by his fellow monks. In 1093, Anselm was installed as Archbishop of Canterbury, England, a position he held until his death.

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Anselm completed most of his philosophical writings while he served at Bec. Among those writings was *Proslogion* (“Discourse”), a book of meditations. In it, he formulated two ontological arguments.³ The first argument, in chapter 2, attempts to predict the existence of an absolutely perfect Being. The second argument, in chapter 3, claims that the nonexistence of a necessary Being is inconceivable. Christian philosopher Norman Geisler has paraphrased the first argument as follows:

1. God is by definition that than which nothing greater can be conceived. (This definition is understood by both believers and unbelievers.)
2. It is one thing to exist in the understanding (i.e., as an idea in the mind) only and another to exist both in the understanding and outside the understanding (i.e., in the real world).
3. It is greater to exist both in the understanding and outside the understanding than in the understanding only.
4. Therefore, God must exist both in the understanding and outside the understanding, for if He did not, then we could conceive of One who did, which would be greater. But God by definition (premise one) is the greatest Being conceivable. Hence, God must exist.⁴

In other words, Anselm argues that everyone (believers and unbelievers alike) understands the word “God” to refer to the greatest Being imaginable (One possessing all the greatest attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence). However, if God exists *only* in our imagination, then we could conceive of an even greater Being: one Who possesses all of God’s attributes and Who exists both in our minds *and* in the real world! But premise one rules out such an option, so God must also exist in the real world.

It did not take long before criticism of Anselm’s argument was offered by a fellow Benedictine monk, Gaunilo of Marmoutier Abbey in Tours, France. Gaunilo first objected Anselm’s argument was based on the false premise that whatever exists in the mind must also exist reality. Of course, if that were Anselm’s argument, Gaunilo would have been correct. Just because I imagine a red Ferrari sitting in my driveway, doesn’t mean it’s really out there! However, Anselm replied that his argument doesn’t apply to just anything or anyone but only to an absolutely perfect Being.

Undeterred, Gaunilo objected the existence of God can no more be inferred from the idea of a perfect Being than the existence of a perfect island can be inferred from the mere

idea of a perfect island. To this, Anselm responded the idea of a perfect island may lack existence, but an absolutely perfect Being cannot lack anything, especially existence.

Seven hundred years later, the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, offered his critique of the ontological argument (as well as the name, “ontological”). Kant’s most famous criticism is his claim that “existence is not a predicate.” That is, existence is not a property which can be affirmed of something, because existence adds nothing to the concept of a thing’s intrinsic nature (or *essence*). Therefore, existence is not part of an essence.

For example, suppose I am imagining my perfect pizza. In my mind it would have thick crust stuffed with cheese and covered with LaRosa’s sauce. The toppings would include pepperoni, Italian sausage, and extra cheese (but no anchovies!). So, what am I leaving out? Existence, of course! For without existence, there would be no pizza to have any of the perfect ingredients listed above. That’s Kant’s point: existence cannot be part of the pizza’s essence; rather, the pizza must exist to have an essence. Put another way, our concept of something does not imply that the thing must exist.

Many philosophers believe that Kant’s criticism spelled the death of Anselm’s argument. However, some philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga, have argued that all Kant proved was that it is not possible to define *contingent things* into existence. On the other hand, Anselm wanted to prove that the proposition, “God exists,” is *necessarily* true, which has nothing to do with essences at all.⁵

This leads us to Anselm’s second ontological argument in part two, next month. ~RH

To Be Continued

(Endnotes)

1 *Restoration Herald* (August 2020): 4, 18.

2 A deductive argument uses true premises to provide *irrefutable* grounds for its conclusion. An inductive argument, on the other hand, uses true premises to provide *probable* grounds for its conclusion. *A priori* knowledge is knowledge gained by pure reason (deductive logic), independent of any sense experience. *A posteriori* knowledge is knowledge gained by sense experience (inductive logic).

3 Ontology is the branch of metaphysics which deals with the nature of being. Anselm’s ontological arguments reason that either a perfect Being or a necessary Being must exist.

4 Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduran, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 123-124.

5 See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 95-97. See also Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (London: Cornell U. Press, 1967), 29-63.

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What About Transgenderism?

Question:

I have a friend whose daughter wants to change her identity to a boy, and my friend is supporting her. This woman talks a lot about Christianity, but does not seem to understand the contradiction she is involved in. Can you help me to know how to talk to her and others, using the Bible to show her how wrong this (transgenderism) is?

Answer:

To begin with, I consider transgenderism to be an extreme form of homosexuality. The Bible does not mention transgenderism by that name, but it has some clear teaching about homosexuality. Most of what I can say about transgenderism is based on what the Bible says about homosexuality. I will not go into all of that data here, but will refer you to my Biblical analysis of that on my website, thus:

- “Homosexuality in the Bible,” <https://jackcottrell.com/?p=356>,
- “Understanding Homosexuality,” <https://jackcottrell.com/?p=356>, and
- “Homosexuality and the Biblical World View,” <https://jackcottrell.com/?p=2595>.

From this point on, I will refer to homosexuality and transgenderism together as H/T.

First, we can ask, why do people have H/T tendencies or urges? The answer lies in the Biblical world view. (If the person you want to counsel does not accept the Biblical world view, there is very little that you can do.) The Biblical world view begins with CREATION (Genesis 1-2) and is followed by the first SIN and the CURSE that followed it (Genesis 3). Creation establishes the human race as being of two genders or two sexes, period. This is a fundamental truth. The curse in Genesis 3 is God’s judgment upon sin; it involves a corruption of the physical universe, including the

human body. The curse upon the human body is epitomized by human death but includes many forms of “little deaths,” i.e., the myriad of diseases and defects that plague the body. Anything that is included in this curse is NOT NORMAL.

H/T tendencies or urges must be considered as a part of this curse. We need to read Romans 8:18-25 about how Christians must handle the results of the curse. I repeat: this includes not just physical human death itself, but all diseases, birth defects, and abnormalities that afflict us. I believe we can consider H/T as a kind of birth defect (rather than something environmentally or psychologically learned). It has not been shown to be a genetic deficiency, but it could be an inherent brain abnormality (e.g., chemical deficiency) that does not show in experimentation. Thus, it would be considered to be a kind of birth defect.

Any kind of birth defect is abnormal; and one must either correct it if possible (such as a cleft palate), or learn to live with it if not correctable (such as Down syndrome or cerebral palsy). What makes H/T different from innate defects such as these is that it includes urges to commit immoral or sinful actions, such as alcoholism does (see <https://www.addictioncenter.com/alcohol/genetics-of-alcoholism>). Thus “learning to live with” something like H/T means learning to resist the temptations to homosexual acts, which are clearly described as sinful in the Bible. When applied to transgenderism, this would mean learning to resist the temptation to transition to the opposite sex.

An H/T person will no doubt object to living with these limitations by asserting, “But that’s *who I am!* That is my *identity!* It can’t be wrong to go against my very *nature!*” Here is where the Christian world view must take charge. By virtue of creation, every individual is either male or female, and God’s word lays down sexual laws governing how we are supposed to use and guard our sexuality. A person born biologically male cannot say, “But I identify as a female,” or “But I am attracted to other males,” as if that is normal for him. *It is not normal!* Romans 1:24-32 makes this abundantly clear. We are required to live as we are *supposed* to live, not necessarily as we *want* to live.

This will lead to complaints about unfairness: “It’s not fair that my heterosexual friends get to experience marital/sexual relations the way they want to, but I am not allowed!” “It’s not fair that most of my friends and family get to live out their inner feelings, but I am not allowed!” The answer to this: that is part of the very nature of living in a sin-cursed world! Diseases of all kinds prevent afflicted individuals from living as they would prefer (e.g., blindness, cerebral palsy, polio), but those so afflicted must learn to live with them.

How can this be done? For those who do not accept the Christian world view, this can be devastating. “I have only



this one life to live, and I must live it under these limitations? Why me? It's so unfair!" Here, in light of the Christian world view, is where Christians can approach such situations with a positive outlook. How? Because we know that life on this present physical earth, no matter how burdensome and difficult it may be, *is only temporary and is very short compared with eternity*, when we will be given new bodies completely free from the curse of death and all of its evil and debilitating servants!

This is where Romans 8:18-25 comes in. Note how it begins: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us!" Yes, because of Adam and Eve's sin (Genesis 3), this present physical existence has been subjected to futility, to a bondage to decay, to a state of groaning as if in the pains of childbirth. The main point is that, even if this bondage and groaning last for a lifetime, they will not last for an eternity! The entire creation itself one day will be set free from all of this decay and replaced by new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13), and within which we shall dwell for eternity in new, glorified bodies (Philippians 3:21)! Thus, even though we may groan inwardly throughout this lifetime, we are waiting eagerly for "the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" (Romans 8:23-24)!

This is the way Christians must approach all of the deformities and abnormalities within our fallen lifetimes, including homosexuality and transgenderism. We must do our best to live the kind of lifestyles for which God created us and saved us to live, even though that may be much more difficult for some than for others.

Again, here is where our Christian faith comes to the rescue, long before we exchange our limited and suffering bodies for our glorified and perfect ones. This can be true only if we have accepted the Christian world view, which includes accepting Jesus as our Savior and giving our all to living by God's law. Here I am talking about one of the grace-blessings God gives us in Christian baptism, namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we all find ourselves fighting against sinful tendencies in this lifetime, but this is why God gave us the indwelling Spirit. He is there within us to give us the spiritual strength to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13). And if we do this, we shall live eternally with Him.

~RH

Dr. Jack Cottrell is a retired seminary professor. He is the author of many books.

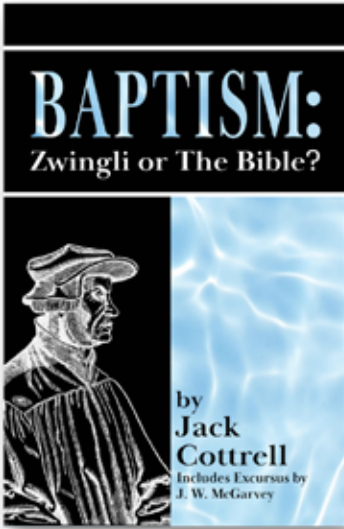


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JIM BOOK

Defunding the Police Has Come Back to Haunt our Major Cities

I am for defunding anything that is outdated, inefficient, and a drain on society. Hence NPR and the NEA should have been defunded years ago. Is there a need to monitor spending for our military and police agents in America? Yes, I have said for years that many politicians have their hands in the proverbial pot when it comes to spending, even for the things we hold dear to our hearts such as our first responders and our military.



Jim Book

In sharp contrast, the outcry to defund the police in our major cities has nothing to do with stewardship. It has everything to do with removing what is left of order in our concrete canyons and turning the streets of America into war-zones. This is intentional. John Kass, who is a syndicated conservative columnist for the Chicago Tribune, writes:

“The strategy of the left is undeniable and clear. It is about the use of force, about using media as both handmaiden and the lash. It is about those who virtue-signal most often about due process considerations to those with whom they disagree.”

The provocateurs are obvious. The clamoring for less policing and more tolerance and freedoms for the criminals are coming from organizations whose desire is to destroy the lives of the innocent at the expense of the criminal element. Race-baiting, rioting, and destruction will continue to be the tools used to accomplish their warped agenda.

Michael Barone writes:

“Central cities, starting with Minneapolis, proceeded to ‘defund the police,’ only to see murder rates

zoom upward and many black lives end. The 50 largest cities cut their 2021 police budgets by 5% but a USA Today poll found only 18% nationally favor defunding the police and 58% are opposed.”

Again, who better to accomplish the Marxist agenda than a handful of anarchist and cry-bullies using the media and the twisted entertainment industry to jeopardize the lives of those within the minority community?

Ann Coulter shed some much-needed light on the subject as well in an April 2021 article where she sites, “Already, 2020 marked the largest year-to-year increase in murders in the history of the country. In Minneapolis alone, the murder rate doubled. Get ready for a lot more violent crime, emboldened criminals and less aggressive police.”

When we, as civilized Americans, begin to search diligently for the truth in relationship to crime, punishment, and policing, we see a much deeper problem at hand. Bill Donahue wrote a book back in the 80’s named *The New Freedom*. In that book he writes:

“The new-freedom’s moral relativism is not accepting of the idea that crime may be the result of a defect in the individual. The defect, if such an admission is granted at all, is in the nature of the economy, or the social structure of society; the individual would naturally incline to doing good if it were not for man-made institutions that have corrupted his nature.”

This explains the motivation behind the small but vocal hate groups uniting behind the “defund the police” movement. See, society is to blame. If we would just remove the societal restraints that have encouraged what is deemed criminal behavior, we would no longer need courtrooms or police officers. Secondly, violent behavior could now be explained away by advocating as a response to, as Mr. Donahue puts it, “violence-inducing situations that have been created by society.” Ah, yes, it’s never the perpetrator’s fault. It’s society’s fault. By removing these unnecessary barriers we call laws and by putting the blame squarely on the back of society for creating these misunderstood individuals, we are no longer responsible for punishing anyone since moral neutrality and radical non-intervention have become the new standard for analyzing “criminal behavior.”

The anarchist behind the “defund the police narrative” wants all labeling removed. It is now imperative that society refrain from stigmatizing folks with terms such as “wrongdoers or criminals.” Mr. Donahue goes on to write, “What the advocates of tolerance really want is for society to alter its norms and values so as to be in compliance with the norms and values of deviants.” What comes from this

twisted ideology is more tolerance and leeway given for the criminal element and less police protection and rights enjoyed by the law-abiding, taxpayer within our major cities. Police now ask, since the courts won't back them, why they would put their lives at risk for a community that deplores their vocation. Is it any wonder a growing number of police officers are resigning or retiring early?

I find it interesting that as police departments are defunded, crime skyrockets. Did anyone with a functioning brain cell not see this coming, or is this pure Marxism being played out intentionally? There are so many moving parts to this dilemma. I think crime in America could be cut in half, or more, if the family unit were not so fractured, especially in the minority communities.

So, the church has its hands full. We must be the voice of reason. Paul understood the value of law-enforcement when he stated these words to his audience in Romans 13:1-4:

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”

~RH

James C. Book ministers with the Kissimmee Christian Church of Kissimmee, FL. Contact him at Jim.book@kissimmeechristianchurch.org.

Churches Seeking Ministers

Charlotte, MI — With the recent retirement of their minister of 20 years, the Charlotte Church of Christ is searching for a new minister. They are a mid-sized congregation with an average weekly attendance of approximately 100.

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Bellbrook, OH — Heritage Christian Church is searching for a preaching/lead minister.

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His Sufficient Grace

I gave birth to a baby girl in the spring of 1991. Within the first few hours of her life, it became evident that something was very wrong. What everyone thought were the repetitious cries of a newborn were instead a newborn infant's struggle to breathe. The community hospital called



Jennifer Bullard

for a critical care transport unit to come from the nearest big city. Everything was suddenly chaotic, emergent, critical, and taking place down the hall from my recovery room where I'd been since my c-section. The emergency transport crew hustled into my room with my sweet newborn daughter inside an incubator on wheels and I was given the opportunity to reach through the armholes of the enclosure to touch her before they

fled from my room with my baby.

My husband made his way to the hospital where they'd taken our daughter. It was the middle of the night; he was at a city hospital a few hours away while I remained at a hospital in another town. They'd determined that she had Persistent Fetal Circulation and a 10% chance to survive. They were trained and licensed in a new procedure being performed at just a few places in the nation at the time that they said was her only hope medically. It was called ECMO (Extra-corporeal Membrane Oxygenation). ECMO is a heart and lung bypass routing the patient's blood outside the body into an oxygenating system and then transferring the oxygenated blood back into the body.

Through the years, I've taught adults and teens and my own children that memorized scripture will always be wisdom while at the loss of any other kind. As I lay in my hospital bed in the dark, miles away from my baby, the passage that flooded my mind was "God's grace is sufficient for me." Over and over, drowning out all other thoughts was "God's grace is sufficient for me." I can say with confidence the following two things: God knew the desires of my

heart. I wanted my baby to live. God also knew I genuinely believed His grace was sufficient no matter the outcome. I knew of no other way through the circumstances. Within a few days, my husband and I were both at our baby's side as she lay there in a medically induced coma with cords, gadgets, and machines streaming from her little body. ECMO continued to oxygenate her blood as hours upon hours passed. Of all the scripture I had memorized through the years, the wisdom that came to me the night of her birth and dominated my thoughts in the days that followed was the Apostle Paul's record in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you."

It seems evident in this second letter to the Corinthians that Paul was revealing both his fragility as a human being as well as his power through the Heavenly Father — both vivid realities. He had such intimacy with God that he had no doubt of God's love and protection, yet something afflicted him. Something proved a torment or limitation. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, he refers to a "thorn in his flesh" and calls it a "messenger of Satan to torment" him. In some manner, Paul in his humanness suffered a relentless agony and it was this that he asked God to remove from him. Three times he asked God to remove it. I've read many theories as to what the thorn in the flesh might have been as it wasn't made clear in scripture. Mine is as much speculation as that of others, but I've often wondered how Paul managed the memories of his former life as a murderer of God's people. How did he put away the eyes of a child who watched him give the word to kill his Christ-following father, or how did he forget the screams of a young woman who would not denounce the name of Jesus? Did any of these scenes visit him in his dreams? The regret or shame has but one relief. Grace — the grace of God poured into Him in the form of Jesus. Regardless of whether this was the "thorn" or not, how perfect is God's answer when Paul asked for relief? "My grace is sufficient..."

Paul was a man whose life was constructed of extreme events. His second letter to the believers in Corinth was a passionate plea to stay the course and to regard the authority

of his words. As his pleas poured out, we learn a great deal of Paul's sufferings in this life. In the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians, he explains that he had experienced hunger and thirst, had been shipwrecked as well as afloat on open sea, had been beaten, flogged, and stoned and had been near death on multiple occasions. Can you imagine a man who once hunted down and killed Christians going through a conversion so profound, each time henceforth when he was brought desperately low in life, he struggled to his feet and stepped onward toward the next lost soul who needed to know Jesus? Down, down, and low to the earth, bleeding and broken, he stands again. Why? Because he loved Jesus that much. The love he had for Jesus surpassed the agony he'd suffered for His Name.

Paul is the one who said in Romans 8:37-39:

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul understood how the blood-spilled body of Jesus poured into his wounds and his hollowness that painful loss left behind. Let's face it. Nothing on earth – nothing – can fix the way life batters us. People apart from Christ attempt to remedy wounds and hollowness with an assortment of things of this earth but when all is said and done, only Jesus can mend and occupy the pain in a transformational way. Paul claims our victory as conquerors because he lived the joy of Jesus so intensely, he stood up again and again and again.

The Lamb of God understands. Not only did Jesus stand up again and again, He walked straight into harm's way. He faced the soldiers in the garden squarely. He stood in judgment in silence. He took on the mockery of the crowd and the humiliation heaped upon Him. He took the scourge. A lamb was encircled by a jealous and angry mob who willed to heap vengeance on such innocence in a gross display of superiority saturated in their gluttony for power. The Lamb, bleeding and gouged, was nailed to a cross for all to see even while still breathing just to show that little lamb where He stands in this world. Did I say "stands?" Yes, I did. While the truth is you and I are standing in that crowd at the foot of the cross watching the Lamb's blood flow, our sins are being carried away. Oh, the sufficient grace! The blood flows over us, offering redemption and, for the receptive, soothes the wounds and occupies the hollow spaces that life carves into us. Though sealed away in a tomb, the Lamb stands. He stands outside alongside a stone rolled away.

We'd only purchased one gift for our baby while I was still expectant. It was a little stuffed lamb. We asked the hospital staff if it was possible to place the lamb with her, knowing her physical life may be ever so brief. They said no. They didn't want to risk getting it entangled in the abundance of attachments medically necessary. We didn't notice the lamb mobile the hospital staff had already hung from her IV apparatus. That happened a few days later. My husband asked why she alone had a lamb mobile in this critical care unit. The ECMO technician said that when they are trained to oversee the ECMO machine, they must practice doing the heart and lung bypass procedure on a lamb. The mobile was a reminder of their training and to stay focused.

I questioned, "What happens to the lamb once you've practiced the procedure?" The technician responded, "Unfortunately, the lamb dies." I then quietly asked, "You mean... a lamb had to die so that she could live?" The technician tenderly replied, "I guess so." Looking down at my baby and swallowed up in humility, I acknowledged, "That is not the first time." God's grace is, has been, and will be sufficient for me.

Ultimately, our daughter beat the odds. Our daughter lives. She is now 30 years old, the wife of a minister, the mother of two, and a mental health therapist. This victory over death should not be viewed as more relevant than the grace that was sufficient as we faced the probability that she would die. The truth is, she has lived long enough to be battered in this world, as is the circumstance for us all. Nevertheless, the grace of God soothes her wounds and pours into her hollowness because God's grace is sufficient. She is a Christian...and she stands. ~RH

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FIRST THINGS FIRST



STRIVING TO BE FAITHFUL

The sixth chapter of John is one of my favorite scriptures. In the beginning of the chapter, Jesus, with the help of a small lad, feeds 5,000 men, plus women and children.

Later that evening, our Savior astonishes the disciples as He walks on the water. Up to this point in His ministry, many of those who were gathered with Him had seen Him do countless amazing things.



Tony Sullivan

They had seen Him feed over 5,000 people with five loaves and two small fish. Some of them had been there to see Him raise up the widow's son at Nain. They had witnessed Him healing an indefinite number of those who were sick and diseased. A few had been there watching as He turned water into wine. Yet they are having trouble understanding what He is really talking about when He tells them that He is "the Bread of Life." They can't focus on the message

because they are so focused on the meal that He gives them.

They not only can't understand Jesus, but for the most part they don't care what He is saying. They have no real interest in the message He is delivering to them. Still Jesus forges ahead and continues to teach. When you read what the Jews are saying and how they are reacting to the message, it is almost like you are reading about the church today. The same people that were there in John 6 are in the church pews on Sunday mornings.

There are the whiners and complainers. Read John 6:41, "So then the Jews were complaining about Him because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.'" Since time began there have been those who can look right past the blessing and find something to complain about.

Job complained, Jonah complained, and the world champion complainers had to be the Children of Israel. Moses wrote in Numbers 11:1, "Now the people complained about their troubles in the hearing of the Lord. When the Lord heard it, His anger burned." (God does not appreciate the people He has blessed complaining.)

Many are so wrapped up in their own whining and complaining they shut Jesus out. People are so busy listening to their own voices they can't hear the voice of God.

Whining seems, for some, to be the great church of Christ pastime. Much like the sons of Israel in Numbers 14:2, "And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the entire congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or even if we had died in this wilderness!'"

The people listening to Jesus' sermon seem to be saying, "This is just too hard. It's a very unpleasant and offensive thing to hear."

When we make complaining and whining a part of our life, it leads to inactivity in our Christian service. We are so busy complaining and whining, we can't see the needs that are right in front of our eyes.

This is what Christ speaks of in Matthew 25:44, "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or as a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'"

Members of too many congregations walk into the building on Sunday with their only goal being to find something to whine or complain about. My advice to those people is to, "Stop it, and stop it now." People sit in church week after week. The gospel is preached and taught. Their sin is exposed, and they are called to repentance. Yet they do not change or grow. Over and over through God's word they are reproved and rebuked, but they do nothing. They are too busy looking for faults to do anything else.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul, "Do all things without complaining" (Philippians 2:14).

Then in that group were the quitters and deserters. John tells us in verse 66, "As a result of this, many of His disciples left and would no longer walk with Him."

There are times when following Christ can be hard. Following Christ calls for service and obedience. Jesus told us in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

When it becomes hard to follow the teachings of Jesus, many will just “throw up their hands” and quit. Paul told of one such person in 2 Timothy 4:10, “for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me.”

People leave the congregation they attend and never find anywhere else to worship. They just give up following Christ altogether. People do this because Christianity demands a total surrender to Christ. It requires us to accept Christ as the final authority on all things. They quit because they do not have a desire to reach the moral standard following Jesus requires.

The truth is “Many a man’s refusal of Christ comes, not because Christ puzzles and baffles his intellect, but because Christ challenges and condemns his life.” (Please forgive me, I forgot where I found this quote.)

I am sure today Jesus still asks, “Will you also go away?” When we leave Jesus, when we walk away from a life dedicated to serving Him, we are turning our backs on the only hope we have of eternal life.

Then there are those who are faithful and fruitful. (Read

John 6:68-69.) We line up with Peter when he said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have already believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68).

Those who stay faithful to Christ, even when times are hard, even when they don’t understand, even when they can’t see because of the darkness surrounding them, they are faithful ones who keep the Lord’s work going.

These are the fruitful who keep the world together, they are the ones that keep praying and praising, they are the ones that keep us all sane. They give us hope. They set the example for us to follow. All I can say is “May their tribe increase.”

Where do you fall in this list of people who were there with Jesus and still fill the pews today? God bless you. See you next month. ~RH

Tony Sullivan is the Evangelist with the Lester Road Christian Church in Fairburn, GA. He is also an associate evangelist with the CRA. He can be reached by email: Tonycra@att.net.

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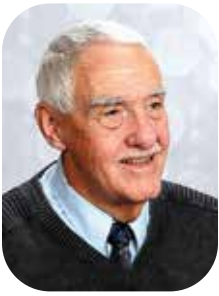




LESSONS FROM THE PAST

MICHAEL HINES

Ready or Not, Here *It* Comes!



Michael Hines

Helsinki, Finland — April 30, 2021. Päivi Räsänen, a member of the Finnish Parliament, has been under investigation since 2019 for social media posts questioning the Evangelical Lutheran Church's official affiliation with the Helsinki LGBT Pride event. Räsänen is charged with three counts of hate speech and faces two years in prison if convicted.

What did Räsänen post? She posted a photograph of Romans 1:24-27, where Paul writes:

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”
— Romans 1.24–27

Ottawa, Ontario — February 28, 2013. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Biblical speech opposing homosexual behavior, including in written form, is essentially a hate crime.

Stories like these proliferate news media from around the globe — especially in Europe. Just last July, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Scotland expressed fears the country's new “hate crime” legislation could criminalize the mere possession of a Bible. According to the Bishops, lan-

guage in the legislation is unprecise at best and could allow an overly broad interpretation at worst. Provisions in the statute say behavior or communication is “hate speech” if it is threatening, abusive, or insulting. Moreover, it is “hate speech” if it is likely to “stir up hatred” against a protected group. Such speech could be “hate speech” if an individual claims a biological male cannot become a woman or suggests such a claim is nonsense. “Hate speech” rests “in the ear of the hearer.”

I know what you are thinking! Nothing like that could happen here. Oh, really? Have you played Rip Van Winkle for the past year or so? During the “Ides of Covid,” government and “big tech” consistently limited your right to freely express what you think and believe. Christianity has fallen under the spell of today's cancel culture. Arthur Milikh notes the extent of such overt repression:

“In America, Members of Congress issue their support for speech restrictions, and Big Tech's digital oligarchs, enjoying a disproportionate power over society, continue to impose speech restrictions in exchange for access to their platforms. So are America's colleges and universities more and more governed by an aggressive chorus of students, faculty, and administrators who demand and impose speech codes. These fronts promise to grow in size, strength, and confidence in the coming years.”

From attempts to squelch open expression through political correctness, the country now sees blatant censorship which silences some voices but promotes others.

Were we living in the first century, the Apostle John writing Revelation would recognize our contemporary experiences as persecution. Writing in AD 96, John knew the Roman Empire hated Christians, but few believers were martyred until later. Romans ostracized believers, seeing them as atheists, sexual perverts, or simply unpatriotic for refusing to acknowledge the emperor as “lord and god.” Those who died by Roman execution were recalcitrant and obnoxious Christians who refused to bow to pressure to recant.

One of the best-known examples is the death of Polycarp which took place nearly 60 years after John wrote Revelation. Polycarp, at age 86, was the bishop of Smyrna (Izmir). At the time, Smyrna was noted for its devotion to the empire and the imperial cult. Hoping to make an example of the aged Polycarp for refusing to sacrifice to the gods, authorities called upon him to renounce Christ. Polycarp refused. Because he was well thought of in the community, authorities pleaded with him to deny Christ or die. Again, he refused, and thus he was affixed to a stake and burned alive.

Polycarp being executed for his faith is the way we view



persecution, but it is a limited view. A biblical view of persecution suggests a much broader scope. Persecution, as portrayed in Scripture, includes aggression, oppression, and violence affecting the body, mind, and emotions.¹ Geoffrey Bromiley defined persecution as follows:

“Persecution is the suffering or pressure, mental, moral, or physical which authorities, individuals, or crowds inflict on others, especially for opinions or beliefs, with a view to their subjection by recantation, silencing, or, as a last resort execution.”²

I doubt American Christians will face much in the way of physical life-threatening persecution any time soon. With the growing secularization and polarization in the country, persecution *at first* will be experienced by estrangement from family and friends, increasing victimization, job loss, and ostracism. You see it already as the culture attempts to silence those who disagree. For example:

- Five years ago, Joe Kennedy lost his coaching job for silently praying on the field after each game.
- The Brooklyn City, Minnesota City Council fired City Manager Curt Boganey for insisting on due process for a police officer involved in a shooting.
- Sports writers and fans mocked Tim Tebow for praying on the athletic field while lauding Colin Kaepernick for the same.
- Through “diversity education” and Critical Race Theory, schools and universities teach their students to view their parents as racists and bigots.

What we are seeing around the world can happen here. It is happening here now; it is just less explicit. Christ’s disciples should expect oppression and persecution from those in the world. Jesus speaks of the disciples’ relation to the world. After predicting His betrayal (John 14:21ff), Jesus comforts His disciples, then tells them to expect rejection and repression. He says,

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have

Were we living in the first century, the Apostle John writing Revelation would recognize our contemporary experiences as persecution. Writing in AD 96, John knew the Roman Empire hated Christians, but few believers were martyred until later.

no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also.” — (John 15:18-24)

Jesus lists four specific reasons for the world’s hatred:

1. Christians are *different* from the surrounding culture,
2. Unbelievers reject Jesus,
3. Unbelievers reject God, and
4. Jesus’ message and the presence of Christians rebukes them for sin.

As He continues to prepare His followers, Jesus reminds them they will not face oppression or danger alone.

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me...” (John 15:26, 27)

He reminds them His instruction was given to keep them from stumbling when persecution comes:

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.” — John 16.1–4

Because the American culture continues to drift farther from its Judeo-Christian roots, preachers and church leaders need to prepare believers for increasing oppression. Believers must be reacquainted with the genuine gospel and sound doctrine. Doing so will lead many to abandon Christ's church to avoid rejection. In fact, God may already be pruning His church as membership and attendance figures following the pandemic came to an all-time low. These words, written to describe Gnostics and others in the first century, also define apostates:

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." — (1 John 2:19)

It is time for the American church to prepare for greater oppression by emphasizing the commitment necessary to stand firm. "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2).

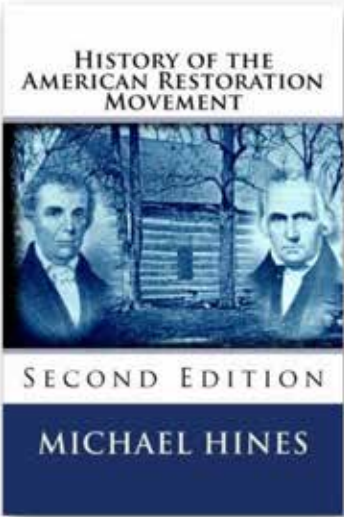
Here are a couple of books I recommend for understanding how to understand the culture and prepare believers to stand firm: Rod Dreher, *Live Not By Lies*; J. Paul Nyquist, *Prepare*; and Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines*. ~RH

(Endnotes)

- 1 J. Paul Nyquist, *Prepare* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), p. 16.
 - 2 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Persecute: Persecution," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 771 cited in Nyquist, p. 16.
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Last month we examined “The Heresy of Statism.” This is essentially Part Two. There are problems that are less likely to plague us when we stay away from the heresy of statism. We will see what they are as we examine . . .

Politics As a Worldview



Kent B. True, aka Harold Orndorff

“Politics Makes a Lousy Worldview”

John Stonestreet and Maria Baer at Breakpoint.org

June 10, 2021

The authors of this article begin with this thought: “There used to be many things we could do all day long without other people minding in the least.” They list things like what we eat, what we watch on TV, and all sorts of things

that really are not anyone else’s business. Now everyone tends to scrutinize everyone else’s every action, because “*More and more we choose to find our answers in politics*” (emphasis original).

Stonestreet then defines politics as “. . . more than just the process by which we decide how to govern. The way we understand politics today is more like a game, complete with teams - good guys, bad guys, opponents, fandom, celebrities.” This, Stonestreet says, is the problem. Politics, he points out, isn’t “big enough” to answer our questions.

Politics in this sense, according to Stonestreet, “doesn’t tell us the truth about real people.” He complains about using “another person’s politics as grounds for our acceptance and love for them, or to excuse, or dismiss, or deny their personhood - or even hate them.”

Another point he makes is that politics cannot “tell us the full truth about ideas.” That is, the fact that someone on “our side” of the political fence says something does not make it true. Likewise, the fact that someone of “the other side” of the political fence says something does not make it false (that is known as the “genetic fallacy”).

He also complains that “politics is just as trendy as fashion can be.” What was unthinkable ten years ago can become “politically” required today. He concludes that “politics today is merely a show, a reality show that doesn’t give us the reality about us, or about the world.” In something of a follow-up article (“The Evangelical Fracture,” 11-29-21) Stonestreet extends this to the “evangelical” church, which is “breaking apart” due to carrying over “bitter partisan divide” into church life.

Stonestreet isn’t wrong, but his analysis is incomplete. He misses something that gets more at the heart of what is going on here. *Why* do people today — including Christians — tend to see the world and everyone in it in terms of political categories? *Why* do so many work so hard to inject their ideas into governmental structures? *Why* is politics such a big deal, sometimes even within the church? What contributes to “ressentiment” which is “a political psychology that expresses itself with ‘the condemnation and denigration of enemies in the effort to subjugate and dominate those who are culpable’” (Russell Moore drawing on James Davison Hunter in “Always Festivus and Never Christmas,” *Christianity Today*, 12-16-21).

A simple answer is that heresy of statism we discussed last month. Why do people scrutinize their neighbor’s political views with such intensity? Why are we tempted to hate and reject anyone who differs from what we see as correct political views? The truth is that this is not as irrational or surprising as Stonestreet seems to think — not, that is, given the wide acceptance of the heresy of statism.

The fact that someone on “our side” of the political fence says something does not make it true. Likewise, the fact that someone of “the other side” of the political fence says something does not make it false.

If you see the state as the primary way to make the world a better place and if you want to invest the state with the power to make the world the way *you* and your group think it ought to be, then everyone outside your group is your enemy. When the government controls almost everything, almost everyone will fight to the bitter end to control government. In that situation, why should we expect anything else?

This is the essence of statism: the desire to use the state



to make the world the way you want it. If you assume this is correct, then the war for the control of the state is the only war that matters in society. Everyone has a grand plan that he wants to impose on everyone else to make the world better, perhaps nearly perfect. Furthermore, the only way to do this is to have and control a vast and powerful state that interjects itself into nearly every aspect of everyone's life.

There is a way forward from this mess that does not involve using the state. It is learning that many aspects of human life — most of them in fact — are not the proper business of governments. It involves understanding government as an agency to punish those who violate the proper rights of others and nothing more than that. While there are still things to debate about that job, it is a very limited job indeed.

It involves a dramatic change of view of what the proper scope of government is. Statism is at heart a serious misuse of power or force. It is not just, as one writer says, recognizing “an important role for the state in securing common goods but [recognizing] that the state cannot finally secure the most important ones, like salvation and complete personal and social regeneration” (Ben Peterson, “Temporal Power and Christianity's Conflict of Visions,” at lawliberty.org, 12-29-21). That is a necessary start, but much more than that is needed. Repenting of the heresy of statism means giving up the idea of using power to make the world a better place.

Just for a trivial example, if you like parks and want one near your house, there are two general ways you could proceed. One would be to go to the government and demand a park. If you are successful, the government forces all your neighbors to pay for building the park you want. That is the way of force or power. The other way would be to seek out other individuals who agreed with you, form a group, ask for contributions, and build your park if others are willing to be involved. That would be the way of persuasion.

It is likely that if most of us saw the state as having a limited role, our views of “politics” simply would not matter as much. If we were not always afraid of one group co-opting the power of the state to impose its will on the rest of us, there would be much less to fight about. Our response to that sort of thing should not be to redouble our efforts to wrest control of the government from our opponents. The correct response is to insist that, while government has a role, it is a very limited role as appointed by God.

While government is not the original context, we can

If you see the state as the primary way to make the world a better place and if you want to invest the state with the power to make the world the way you and your group think it ought to be, then everyone outside your group is your enemy.

probably rightly apply the thought of James 4:1-2 here, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.” When the power of the state is used to get what we want in life, we are naturally going to tend to quarrel and fight. Part of the solution is simply to see the power of the state as off-limits for getting what we want in life.

Stonestreet says, “Politics first and foremost is merely a process. It's a way to do things. It cannot give us the purpose of life.” Here Stonestreet goes awry. “Politics,” as he is using it here, is *not* just a process. It is a process, and it is a way to do things, but it is not just another way to do things. Rather, it is the very *wrong* way to do most things in life. It is not and cannot be a worldview, and it cannot give us purpose in life. If we see it for what it rightly is, we should not expect it to do any of that.

We are easily convinced politics is everything because we see the state as something like God—that is the heresy of statism. The move toward a solution begins with whittling down, down, and down our ideas of what the government can and should do. A government doing only what it should do is a government most people are not going to notice much. A government doing *only* what it should do is not going to be something worth much fighting over.

When we put government into its proper place and out of the place of God, the world will not be perfect, but it will be better. ~RH

* Kent B. True is the alter ego of Harold N. Orndorff, Jr., a retired campus minister who has taught college and seminary courses in the fields of apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and logic. Lately he enjoys studying his grandchildren, who are very interesting one and all. Contact him, if you must, at hnoii@hotmail.com.

Six Behaviors That De-Motivate Giving

By Charlie Crowe

When it comes to motivating our people to be generous, less is more and more is less. It is ironic, but focusing specifically on money often de-motivates giving. We will discuss six behaviors churches often practice with the hopes of increasing giving but actually have the opposite effect.

Typically, these are used when churches are facing financial difficulties or uncertainties. However, they can become part of the fabric of our church and how we think about giving. When we develop a sense of panic and are afraid, we employ these to respond to our need for fiscal survival. This is called ‘survival giving.’ Because these seem to address the pressing need of the moment, they are very attractive. It feels that if we can just get these things right, then somehow the budget problem or crisis will be resolved. The reality is that these will never motivate people to be long-term, healthy givers.

Budget Numbers

Budgets are useful tools for a church. They serve as a way of expressing vision and goals in tangible ways. No church should operate without a careful and well-planned budget, so why are budget numbers not a good tool for motivating giving? In short, numbers don’t tell stories; they are not exciting. Most folks in your church do not want to be a part of the budgeting process. Most of these folks do not care how much the electric bill is expected to be each month. Sharing the numbers can create awareness with a budget, which is not a bad thing, but it will not create a lot of excitement for giving.

Equal Monthly Division of Annual Budgets

Many churches print in their bulletin a line that states something to the effect “Weekly needs...\$XXXX.” The idea is to take the annual budget and divide it by 52 and post that number in the bulletin or newsletter. The number indicating 1/52 of the annual budget is an almost useless number. This may help people be aware, but that awareness will not translate into concern. A church almost never receives exactly 1/52 of its annual budget on any given Sunday. Most people are paid on a 2-week cycle so half the time the offering will be well below the “weekly need” which can be discouraging, and half the time the offerings will be well above the “weekly need,” which may create a sense that

generous giving is not necessary. Additionally, giving varies month to month. No month will receive exactly 8.33% of the annual budget, because giving is fluid. Typically, giving at the first of the year is low, as folks are paying off Christmas bills, but giving grows towards Easter. After Easter, giving begins to decline and bottoms out during summer vacation season. It begins to increase in the fall and tends to grow until sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Don’t think of your giving over the course of the year as a straight line; think of it as a two-hump camel. Don’t expect to have a steady income.

Bills

In the classic film “The Sound of Music,” there is a song that praises “a few of my favorite things,” and after listening to that song a number of times, I have never heard “paying bills” as one of the favorite things. People are not motivated to give generously because the church has bills to pay. No one lists the weekly or monthly bill paying moment as the high point of the week. While paying bills is an important thing to do, it is not a motivational thing. I have heard offering meditations and even sermons in which the speaker says something in reference to the offering as, “It is time for us to pay the bills.” Remember that the word “offering” is essentially a word about worshipful giving to God. When something as holy as an offering is reduced to paying the bills, it takes us from something grand and wonderful to something plain and even boring.

Guilt

Guilt trips are almost always short trips and generally are not taken a second time. One of the least effective ways to try to motivate people to give is to attempt to guilt people into giving.

“Have you done your part?”

“Those who have gone before have done so much, what have you done?”

“Many of you will spend more on Sunday dinner than you put in the offering plate.”

“What have you done to support this church?”

As young teenagers, our parents may have guilt-tripped us into cleaning our room, but none of us was ever guilt-tripped into being neat. Guilt as a manipulation for giving

fails to motivate people to have a generous heart. It can never reach the real center of our will and will never effect long-term change toward generosity.

Crisis Moments and Emergency Appeals

Emergencies happen; they are by nature unexpected and unpredictable. At times they require special giving. However, if they come often, it leads to the opinion that resources are not being managed well and that long-range planning is not being done. We need to be a little narrower in what we label an emergency. A tornado hitting our town is an emergency. The air conditioner breaking down should not be an emergency. It was bound to break, and we should plan for that event. A rainy-day fund is not a luxury; it is a prudent preventative.


An ongoing pattern of crisis appeals will cause church members to doubt the wisdom of its leadership and will teach people not to give generously consistently, but to wait for the next crisis.

Power Giving

“If you give, you get your way.” We would never in a million years say this out loud or publicly, but we communicate this in many different ways. If giving volume (amount), rather than faithfulness (sacrifice) is part of the consideration in the selection of leadership, we can inadvertently communicate this message. If we are more apt to have a follow-up call with a wealthy visitor than a poorer one, this attitude has a foothold. Because we live in a culture of consumerism and preference for wealth, this sinful attitude is subtle, and we will have to be diligent to guard against it.

Take time to do an evaluation and see if you are attempting to motivate giving using these practices and consider doing away with them or revising them to help motivate your people to give with a joyful and generous heart. ~RH

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If we can't speak with certainty without citing "book, chapter, and verse," how is that any different from the scholars of Jesus' time who footnoted all of their teaching? Is it really any different if we are also tethered to the *Talmud* in our own way?

What is the *Talmud*, and what do we mean when we speak about being tethered to it? The *Talmud* was the extensive collection of rabbinic commentary and tradition handed down through centuries. It was to this that Jesus referred when He criticized the Scribes and Pharisees for voiding the Law with their traditions. These were the traditions which made for burdensome Sabbath observances. They were the exceptions to what the Law said about oaths when people were swearing by the gold of the Temple or by the sacrifice of the altar rather than swearing by the Temple or by the altar. They were a convoluted excuse from caring for your parents in their old age if you contributed their "pension" to the Temple treasury. In its ultimate practice, it was what kept the Temple leaders from putting Judas' returned thirty pieces of silver back into the treasury "because it is the price of blood," but never prevented them from paying those same pieces of silver to Judas from out of that same treasury in the first place.

Most Christians have never seen a text from the *Talmud*, so how could this have application to the church? It has a parallel when we speak of church traditions and the New Testament. Just as the Mishnah and Talmud were long lists of traditions while the *Torah* was the word of God, so are creeds, church traditions, and New Testament commentaries different from the New Testament. No matter how much we might agree with things we find written in these sources

“Book, chapter, and verse” will always trump footnotes and quotes from scholars. If we can quote from the Gospels or the other writings of Holy Spirit inspired New Testament authors, we speak with the same level of authority as the One Who commissioned the Apostles.

outside of the New Testament, they do not carry the same measure of authority as the New Testament itself.

You and I can appeal to the Ante-Nicene fathers, we can cite respected Bible commentators and scholars, we can even convene church councils to vote on some of these issues, but all of them put together will not hold a candle to the authority of Scripture. “Book, chapter, and verse” will always trump footnotes and quotes from scholars. If we can quote from the Gospels or the other writings of Holy Spirit inspired New Testament authors, we speak with the same level of authority as the One Who commissioned the Apostles.

It was to the Twelve in the Upper Room that Jesus promised:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.” — (John 16:13, ESV)

The same measure of authority by which Jesus spoke was conferred to them, to give authority to the things they would say when they spoke as Jesus' appointed witnesses. This was specifically why the newborn church at the end of Acts 2 continued steadfastly “in the Apostles' doctrine.” The Apostles' doctrine was what was given them by the Holy Spirit to teach to the new converts. It is the Faith once and for all delivered to the Saints.

When Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and was called upon to recant the things he had written challenging papal authority and the right of the Catholic Church to ascribe equal or greater authority to its councils, its theologians, and its tradition than to the Bible itself, he said:

“If then I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not brought into subjection to God's word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it cannot be safe or honest for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me.”

A while back I had published an article in *The Restoration Herald* entitled “The Chicken or the

Egg?” in which I addressed the question of which produced what — did the church produce the New Testament, or did the New Testament (first, the Apostles’ doctrine; then, the Apostles’ writings) produce the church? If you accept the biblical teaching of special creation, it’s easy to answer the “chicken or the egg” question. God created the chicken. With the same ease we can answer the question of the New Testament and the church. The church is the product of the Apostolic Doctrine. The content of the New Testament existed before the church was established, not some three hundred years later after an “official church” emerged and identified an “official canon.” The same basic points made in that article, particularly the passages in the New Testament which appealed to the permanent, immutable nature of the Apostolic teaching, the immediate recording of that teaching in the New Testament writings, and the contemporary acceptance of those writings as Scripture, are applicable to this present discussion of authority. The article was well-received by the vast majority of those who read it.

There was, however, one person who took great issue with me. He claimed that *sola scriptura*, the slogan of the Reformation, was the source of a great anarchy. He offered no evidence and cited no sources for that statement. A shame, because I would have countered with the observation that the Reformation did not fragment until the teachings of men were again interjected in the form of creeds, confessions, and commentaries such as Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

What was most noteworthy, though, was that my critic cited no Scripture to oppose what I had said. For that matter, he didn’t reference any authority. By what authority did he criticize what I had written? Why should I accept what he said? Who made him any more of a source of truth than an atheist like Voltaire or the priest of some pagan religion? While he seemed to be defending church councils as the source of the New Testament canon, he did not specify that stance. If that was what he held as the final source of authority, I would ask, “Which councils?” They aren’t all in agreement!

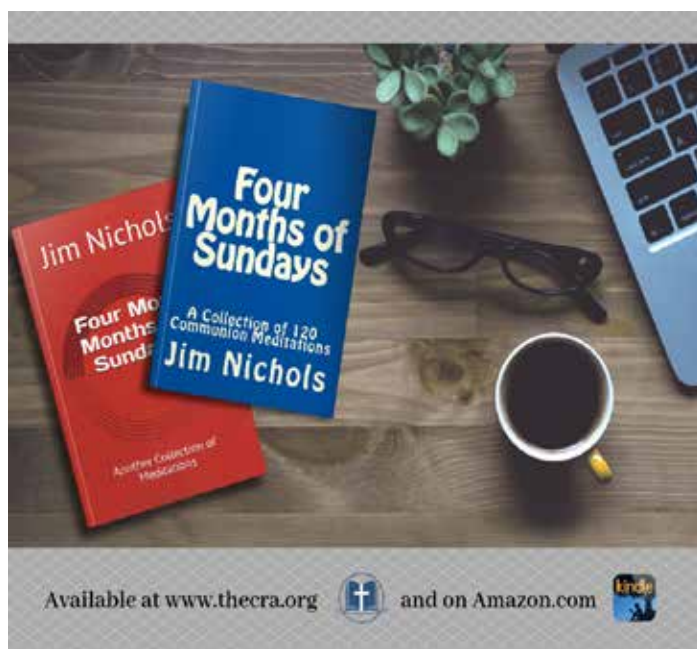
His failure to establish a commonly accepted standard of authority made a lengthy correspondence pointless. In essence, he proved the point I wished to make in the article: Without Scriptural authority, mankind is left to anarchy. Each man is a law to himself, in the same manner as in the time of the Judges of Israel. No one has greater authority than anyone else. So why should I pay attention to him?

In an online discussion, my view that homosexuality is a learned and recruited behavior more than it is genetically inherited was challenged. That’s fine. I’m ready to defend my stand. A participant ended the discussion by saying “I know what God says; I say otherwise.” It’s hard to persuade someone to a different point of view when he considers himself smarter than God!

When God speaks, we have a final word. When we speak where God has spoken, we speak with an authority greater than our own. This is especially true of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, since it is not only something God has spoken; it is something He has commanded us to speak. When we say something different from, or beyond what God has said, we speak on our own authority and really have no more importance than anyone else speaking intelligently of his own accord. When we say something contrary to what God says, we align ourselves with the father of lies, the devil, and we become liars even as he is a liar.

The truly good part of the Good News is that it is real! It comes from God. It is confirmed by the best attested miracle of all human history — the Resurrection of Jesus! When a human instrument bears the word of God to others, he speaks with an authority not his own; he speaks the very words of God. ~RH

Jim Nichols is a preacher/writer who makes his home in Pekin, IN. He is a frequent contributor to The Restoration Herald and has published many books. His books can be found on the CRA website and on Amazon.com.



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About Our Lesson Writer



Michael Chappel is an Evangelist who loves to preach and teach the word of God. He is currently serving faithfully at Movement Christian Church, Knightdale, NC. Before this, he served for five years as the Evangelist of Fredericksburg Christian Church, Fredericksburg, VA, and for six years as Associate Minister at Fauquier Christian Church, Warrenton, VA.

He has been blessed with the opportunity to serve as the director of the Rappahannock Area Gospel Meeting and speak at various rallies, but his heart is with the local church.

Michael and his wife Tricia have been blessed with three wonderful children.

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.
— 2 Corinthians 5:14-15*



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Background of Text

The decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple, in the first chapter of Ezra, marks the end of a dark time for Israel. Now, the same God who preserved His remnant in Babylon and Persia is ready to challenge them to step out on faith. What we learn is that which He leads us to, He provides the resources for.

Can you think of a time when God opened doors you thought were closed?

Jesus spoke of the importance of counting the cost to follow Him (Luke 14:28-33) but also of the importance

of trusting Him for your daily needs (Matthew 6:25-34). When Christ sent His disciples out to preach the good news (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12), He instructed them not to take any provisions with them, so they could learn how God could provide for them on the road. Later, He asks, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing” (Luke 22:35).

We learn something similar from our text today. These men have been stirred up to do good work for God, and God blesses them with the resources to do it.

1:1-8 — It is no accident that Cyrus decides to be generous with Israel; God has prepared Cyrus for this very occasion. The Prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the Jews would be captive for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12), and Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus would be the one to bring it to an end and start the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Isaiah 44:28). In the same way, we should not expect God to be “haphazard” with our lives or calling either. God not only knows what He has in store for you to do, He knows how to provide the resources to get it done.

When Israel left Egypt in the Exodus, God used the people of Egypt to bless Israel with the material resources they needed to construct the Tabernacle (Exodus 12:33-36). So extreme was the gift God stirred up in the heart of the Egyptians that Moses records it by saying, “Thus they plundered the Egyptians.” This scene replays itself here in Ezra when Cyrus decrees the people are to aid the Jews in their return with “silver and gold, goods and beasts.” This was in addition to what people gave of their own free will! In this case, the Proverb is true: “The sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous” (Proverbs 13:22).

1:8-11 — God also preserved the items from the first temple, which they lost under Nebuchadnezzar. It is astonishing to think that after 70 years God would be able to return these to His temple in Jerusalem. God brought Nebuchadnezzar in as “His Servant” (Jeremiah 27:6; Jeremiah 43:10) to destroy and punish the Southern Kingdom, but when the 70 years were up, He used Cyrus to return what was lost. How different we find these two Kingdoms. Where one is determined to destroy the culture and religion of the Jews (which Nebuchadnezzar ultimately found quite difficult), the other comes in as a conqueror of the Babylonians but restores cultural and religious freedom to the Jews. He even goes so far as to right previous wrongs, return plundered treasures, and help rebuild destroyed cities. It is no wonder that God calls him “shepherd” and “anointed” (Isaiah 44:28; Isaiah 45:1).

If God can rescue His people from hopeless captivity and provide them with everything they need to continue to serve Him, is there any doubt that God can rescue you from the captivity of your own finances? Our passage teaches clearly that God’s power extends over the realm of human financ-

es and that God will bless those who set out to do His will with the income to accomplish what is required. As it is written, “Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully... He who supplies seed to the Sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:6,10). When we step out on faith to give generously to God, God will give us what we need to give.

So go ahead, send that check to those missionaries, drop that extra bonus in the offering plate, buy that tank of gas for the single mother in your congregation, and take a youth group kid out to lunch because God hasn’t given you money so you can store it up in bigger and bigger barns (Luke 12:18-21). He gave you seed so you would sow it, and that is exactly what the Jews who returned from captivity did.

2:64-70 — They didn’t receive all the blessings that God had given them for their own selfish gains. Instead, they invested back into God’s plan. This they did *of their own free will*. Isn’t that beautiful? God thinks it is, as it is written: “I love a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Support for Needed Projects

Background of Text — It can be difficult to continue in the face of opposition. As the exiles return from Persia to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, they experienced opposition firsthand. The “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” come in and begin disrupting the work. Ultimately, the people of the land are “discouraged” and “afraid to build” and the work stops.

It is easy to get discouraged with our situation. It is easy to give up the work that God has called us to do. Especially when we feel like the governments and secular institutions are a part of the opposition. As Christians, however, we need to remember that God is the ultimate source and power behind all authority (Romans 13:1, Matthew 28:18).

In this challenging time, God sends the prophets Hag-

gai and Zechariah to challenge the people to continue to build despite the opposition (Ezra 5:1). Oftentimes when things get difficult, our first instinct is to shut down and keep quiet, but this can be quite the opposite of what we or the people around us need. It only took two men who were willing to speak up for God’s plan and two men who were willing to listen (Zerubbabel and Joshua) to get the construction of the temple restarted. God can do amazing things with just a few faithful people. Jesus took 12 men and turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Sometimes we feel discouraged because, as Christians, we are in the minority (Matthew 7:13-14), but God doesn’t look to the majority. Instead, He looks to the faithful remnant (Romans 11:4).

When the people are questioned by the local official, Governor Tattenai, about who authorized the building of the temple (Ezra 5:3-4), they respond truthfully, and God looks favorably on them. Because of this, Tattenai allows them not only to continue to build but also petitions the emperor on their behalf.

6:1-5 — Sometimes people forget. Sometimes promises are broken. Fortunately, the Persians were excellent record keepers. When Darius realizes that a royal decree may have been overlooked, he is eager to set things right. Do we sometimes forget that God’s hand is behind all authority and all government? Do we have faith that God can move the hand of politics as easily as he can part the Red Sea, or is He somehow restricted in His ability to make national change?

Now we see that God blesses Israel in three specific ways:

6:6-7 — First, protection from government interference: The people of God should never break the commandments of God because of what a government official states (Acts 5:29); however, we also are called to recognize the government’s authority in everything that does not violate God’s

direct command (Romans 13:1-7). The balance of these can be tricky at times and is the subject of much debate by many men smarter than us. However, we can be sure that things are much easier when what the government wants/allows and what God commands agree. Therefore, it is good and right for the people of God to petition their local government, as well as the One who is ultimately in control of the outcome.

6:8-9 — Second, the king provides material assistance: This support, which was promised originally by King Cyrus, apparently had not been continued. This was most likely due to the bribes the enemies of Judah sent to key officials. Just because the government is not keeping up its end of the bargain now, doesn’t mean they never will. God has limitless resources and provides those who are active in His Kingdom with what they need to accomplish His will.

6:10 — It is of interesting note that the King specifically mentions desiring prayers for himself and his sons. Although it is unlikely that he is committing to serve the One True God exclusively, his request is godly, as we are instructed to do just that in 1 Timo-

thy 2:1-2, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” The Christian would do well to spend less time complaining about our government and more time praying for those who are in power.

6:11 — Lastly, the king makes an enduring promise: Since the last decree was thrown off the rails due to corruption and bribery, Darius makes the promise steadfast by adding on a humiliating punishment to deter anyone who would try to alter his decree or arrangement. This likely made the enemies of Judah very nervous, but gave Judah great certainty that the promised support and protection from interference would be something they could rely on!

6:12 — God’s support is all that is needed to complete any project He has blessed. Darius speaks these words as a curse upon anyone who would oppose the building of the temple. We ought to be careful how we build, build with the supplies God has chosen, and woe to those who try to destroy what God has blessed.

Celebration of Completion

Background of Text

Having examined the difficulty with which the Jews have constructed the new temple in Jerusalem, you can imagine the relief on their hearts as they reached its completion. It feels good to complete something, but there is a special joy in completing a hard task. As Proverbs 13:19 says, “A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul.”

What’s the hardest thing you’ve ever done? How did it feel when you finally accomplished your goal?

Joy and celebration are central parts of the Jewish faith. God commands seven annual feasts (Leviticus 23) for the Jews to celebrate and they enjoyed them so much they added at least two more (Purim and the Feast of Lights). These were like national holidays, acting as reminders of important truths or events. Sometimes, they would gather in Jerusalem as an entire country; on other occasions,

they would get together with smaller family groups. They would perform certain ritual ceremonies, often prepare a large meal, laugh, fellowship, and celebrate the things God had done for them.

During captivity, the Jews’ ability to perform most of these feasts was somewhere between impossible and severely limited. So, when the opportunity finally came, they celebrated with great joy!

Under the New Covenant, we are not bound to keep these Old Covenant feasts, but there is a weekly feast that the Lord asks us to use as a reminder of the great things the Lord has done for us. That ‘feast’ is, of course, the Lord’s Supper. In it, we gather for remembrance and reflection upon the past and anticipation of a glorious future.

6:13-15 — It took approximately four and a half years to complete this second temple. When Solomon built the first temple, it took him roughly seven years. The shorter time can be at least partially explained by the site which had already been prepared, but there was also an apparent difference in the grandeur of Solomon’s temple and the new one. So much so that the people who had seen the first temple mourned at the laying of the foundations of the second temple (Ezra 3:12-13).

6:16-18 — Compare these sacrifices to those marking the dedication of the first temple. Here we see about 700 animals slain while in the case of the first temple, around 142,000 animals were sacrificed (1 Kings 8:63). Things are different now. This is not a prosperous kingdom under the rule of a wise king — this is a remnant of an exiled people trying to start fresh. While there were likely over 800,000 Israelites during the time of the first temple dedication, only 42,360 returned from Babylon to aid in the reconstruction of the temple

(Ezra 2:64). They have lost much as a consequence of their sin.

This sacrifice is a sobering reminder of their sins which led to their captivity in the first place (Hebrews 10:3-4). Can you imagine the amount of blood that would be drained from 700 large animals, let alone 142,000? The Jewish people were no strangers to blood, and they could see the effect their sin had on the world in a very literal way.

We too, as Christians, have a reminder in the Lord’s supper of our sin (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). It serves as an opportunity to reflect on our behavior but also to reflect on the high cost of the blood that was paid for our sins (1 Corinthians 11:25). However, instead of the blood of bulls and goats, we have required the precious blood of the Son of God to wash away our sins.

6:19-22 — Yet, despite all of that, we find them celebrating with joy. Two times it is specifically mentioned in our text (verses 16, 22), because despite the hardship, despite the failings, and despite the struggles along

the way, God had again rescued them and brought them home, and that is what truly matters. Once again, they are free to bask in the glory of their God and the fellowship of His people.

It had been 70 years since the Jews had been carried off into captivity, but at last, the day has come where they can celebrate Passover as they did in the old days, with a sacrifice and a feast! Can you imagine what joy that must have been?

In Christ, we have cause for even more joy. Jesus chose to use the Passover (a celebratory feast) as the occasion for His institution of the Lord’s Supper. We should not treat it with casual indifference, but neither should we treat it as a strictly somber affair. Jesus has rescued us from the terror of sin and restored us to a spiritual Kingdom (Colossians 1:18). He has shed His blood for us and is coming back to take us home with Him. That is truly good news worth rejoicing over!

What is an example of some things God has helped you do for others that are worth celebrating?

Background of Text

Have you ever made it through the day without remembering to pray? Unfortunately, I have. I think if we are honest, we've all had days like that. You wake up early because you have some special thing to rush off to, or maybe you wake up quite late instead and begin rushing around to make up for lost time. The busy day sets in, and before you know it, your head is hitting the pillow and the day God has given you is a thankless day.

Hopefully, those days aren't often, but it can be difficult not to get distracted when we have so much peace in our lives. Many people have an "on-again, off-again" relationship with God. He is there for you when you need Him, but we can lose sight of our relationship when things are

good, and dangerously think we don't "need" Him (see Proverbs 30:7-9).

How would you feel if your friend or spouse treated you that way? Have you ever seen someone who comes to God with their life in shambles but as soon as things get back to "normal" they are no longer focused on God?

When the Israelites refuse to trust in God's ability to help them take the promised land (Numbers 13-14), God sent them into the wilderness for 40 years (Numbers 14:33). They've been wholly dependent on Him for everything in the wilderness, but God knows as they prepare to enter the promised land that with security comes the temptation to forget.

8:1 — Deuteronomy translates as "Second Law." Moses is reviewing and repeating the commandments first handed down on Mount Sinai some 40 years earlier. This "Whole Commandment" he refers to would include sections such as The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:5-22) and the Great Commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5). To follow God, we must be careful not to choose only the commandments that we like or even the commandments that we are good at, but we must also strive for excellence (James 2:10).

8:2-4 — In the wilderness, God uses a strange bread to teach the Israelites humility. This manna (which means, "what is it?") would become infested with maggots and rot if kept until morning (Exodus 16:19). Thus, the people were forced to trust each day that God would send new bread. Jesus teaches His disciples to pray "Give us today our *daily* bread" (Matthew 6:11). We must be humble, lest we forget that God is the true source of each day's supplies (Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34).

In John 6, Jesus proclaims that He Himself is the "Bread that came down from Heaven" (John 6:50-51). He promises that this "True Bread" does

not merely satisfy physical hunger but sustains an everlasting life. How foolish we must be to remember to feed our bodies but forget to feed our souls! This is one reason fasting is so important (Matthew 6:16-18). When we fast, we consciously forsake physical food, and our hunger becomes a reminder of our need for spiritual nourishment.

8:5-6 — No discipline seems pleasant at the time (Hebrews 12:11), but it is a great kindness that God treats us as legitimate sons and gives us discipline (Hebrews 12:10). God is not against us but for us (Romans 8:31), and He is working diligently to bring about the best result. We only need to "trust and obey."

8:7-10 — God has good plans in store for His children (James 1:17). God promises Israel a bountiful and fertile land and instructs them not to forget who gave it to them. We should always return praise and thanksgiving to God for blessing us with both physical and spiritual blessings.

What are some ways we can show our gratitude towards God when He blesses us?

8:11-18 — God is willing to humble us, discipline us, and provide for us, but He cannot remember for us.

That's the job He has given to us. The danger in forgetting is that we might start to believe we did it all ourselves. Humanity has always been tempted to replace God with our own accomplishments. This was a major component in the fall of man (Genesis 3:5-6, 1 John 2:16).

Never is this more egregious than regarding our own salvation. It is easy to recognize how much we need Jesus when our flaws and weakness are still so apparent. As the process of sanctification progresses, and His Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives, pride can begin to creep in. "Look at how much I've improved! Look at all the service I do! Thank God I'm not like those 'Sinners'" (Luke 18:11).

It is important that every Christian remember the humble beginnings God rescued them from. Let us not forget our need for God or pretend that others have a greater need than we do. For "'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

What are some ways we can encourage one another to remember that which is truly important?

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Calendar of Events

Events are added to the calendar as they are provided and at the Editor's discretion. Please keep us informed.

2022

- Person to Person Spring Clinic..... May 10-12
Hillsboro, OH
Contact: p2pm_office@yahoo.com
- Rock Lake Family Camp May 18-21
Vestaburg, MI
Contact: Terryst710@gmail.com
- Preaching in the Mountains June 12-16
Hyndman, PA
Contact: tshaffer248@yahoo.com
- Southern Indiana Family Rally..... June 29-July 2
Madison, IN
Contact: jake.brown@live.com
- Hillsboro Family Camp..... July 25-28
Hillsboro, OH
Contact: p2pm_office@yahoo.com
- Winning at Winchester September 2-4
Winchester, VA
Contact: ccmv4thebible@gmail.com

The CRA Today

CRA Bible Conference
October 20-21, 2022

REDISCOVERING ROMANS

Save the Date — our next biennial CRA Bible Conference will be October 20-21, 2022, in Mason, OH. This year's theme is **Rediscovering Romans**.

As Dr. Jack Cottrell says in the introduction to his commentary on Romans, "It is *always* time to 'rediscover' Romans, and down through the history of Christianity individuals have been doing just this. The results have been earth-shaking. It can and does happen over and over, in the lives of individuals, in congregations, in the Church at large."

Please mark your calendars and make plans to attend as we endeavor to "**Rediscover Romans**."