



THE RESTORATION HERALD

An Unbreakable Chain

By Paul Ponchot

When I was growing up, I was taught the biblical plan of salvation had been settled once and for all by God, revealed as it is in the New Testament. I learned from Scripture the redemptive work of Christ and the proper response each sinner should make in meeting the conditions on which God bestows forgiveness of sins and gives the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit. Of course, we are talking about faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. These conditions are clearly marked out for us in Scripture.

Unfortunately, the belief in God's perfect plan is not widely accepted in Christendom. As one preacher put it, "It appears that the plan of salvation has been reopened for negotiation." This is both a sad and spiritually tragic development. We are talking about the predominant religious view of the unimportance of baptism (immersion) in water as an essential part of the plan of salvation.

There are several reasons for this, not the least of which is the use of poor hermeneutical principles in understanding and interpreting Scripture. Context is often ignored, and Scripture is twisted to fit false ideas. The Bible is the only book of Divine word revelation in existence and should be studied with careful attention to each text in its context, also remembering the meanings of words matter.

When properly approached, a study of the Bible should produce a correct understanding of every passage and subject one might pursue. This, of course, includes what the Bible has to say about the necessity of baptism as a condition for salvation.

It is important to realize everything written in Scripture is held together by an unbreakable chain of Divine authority. When this chain is put together link-by-link, as it were, we have a solid defense of all Biblical teaching. These links form an unbreakable chain to show the veracity and necessity of what God says about His plan for saving sinners. I have chosen to explore eight links in this unbreakable chain that validate the New Testament teaching about the importance of baptism in receiving salvation in Christ.

Link # 1 — God the Creator and Truth Giver

The first link in this chain is none other than God Himself. Since He is the Transcendent All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and Everywhere-Present Creator, He holds the position as the ultimate authority over all things (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1). Despite man's belief to the contrary, God is in charge. God alone is qualified to set all standards of right and wrong.

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2022 CRA Bible Conference

Next month, October 20-21, we will host our biennial CRA Bible Conference, developing the theme “Rediscovering Romans.” This theme was Jack Cottrell’s suggestion for he wrote in his Romans commentary, “Actually, 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.”



John R. Mitchell

It’s difficult to express how valuable the study of Romans has been to the church down through the ages. Over and over, it has been noted that when the church turns to the book of Romans for an understanding of man and his condition in the world, revival follows. As Dr. Cottrell notes, “Romans is *the* theology of the New Testament; it is also *the* definitive statement of the gospel. In this epistle, doctrine and gospel merge, and the result is a spiritual feast for Christians.”

Our Bible Conference has traditionally consisted of seven messages. When I sat down to begin planning this conference, it became abundantly clear that narrowing Romans down to seven messages would be a challenge. Thanks to invaluable input from Dr. Cottrell, we settled on a comprehensive array of messages. The messages that will be presented and the respective speakers are:

- How Lost are the Unevangelized? — Ken Nichols
- The Impotence of Law-Keeping — Harold Orndorff
- The Righteousness of God — Mike Shannon
- Accepting God’s Righteousness — Jason Cole
- Original Grace, Not Original Sin — Kendall Faulk
- The Two Stages of Salvation — Jamie Franke
- What About the Jews? — John Mitchell

I’m extremely excited about this year’s conference. Although I took Romans as a student at Summit Theological Seminary, it wasn’t until I studied afresh and preached through Romans did this magnificent epistle truly impact me personally.

As we continue to recover from the negative impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on our churches, it is my prayer that the topics addressed will similarly stir the hearts of those who attend and kick off true revival among our Restoration Movement churches. As F.F. Bruce says, “There is no telling what may happen when people begin to study the Epistle of Romans. What happened to Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Barth launched great spiritual movements which have left their mark in world history. But similar things have happened, much more frequently, to very ordinary people as the words of this Epistle came home to them with power.”

The conference will be held at the Manor House Event Center here in Mason, OH. For registration and additional information, please visit our website, thecra.org.

As I have traveled the past year or so, one thing I have consistently heard is how much our readers are enjoying the *Restoration Herald*. Rest assured we are working diligently to make the *Restoration Herald* the absolute best publication it can be, and it is encouraging to hear such positive feedback. A couple of comments are in order.

First, I must thank Kristy Rickert (Desktop Publishing & Web Support) and Tessa Perry (Administrative Support & Subscription Coordinator) for their invaluable assistance with each issue. Without the hard work of these two fine ladies, the *Herald* would not be the quality product it is. Kristy handles all the graphic images (including the cover) and advertising spots. Tessa assists with the layout and proofreads the final copy. Tessa’s keen insights have truly made the *Herald* a much better publication. If you contact our office for any reason, please take time to thank these two ladies for their incredible support.

Second, a big thank you to our proofreaders, Jillian Ponchot and Bev Nichols. Proofreading is a behind-the-scenes, yet incredibly important, element of publishing the *Herald*. These two ladies are superb and greatly appreciated.

Finally, as an avid *Restoration Herald* reader, we encourage you to tell a friend how much you enjoy the *Herald* and recommend that they subscribe too. One of our highest priorities is to increase our readership. Perhaps the best way you can say “Thank you” for the *Restoration Herald* is to help us achieve this goal.

~RH

THE RESTORATION HERALD

Editor, John R. Mitchell

OUR PLATFORM

The Christ: The only begotten Son of God, man's only Savior and Lord.

The Bible: God's revelation to man, its authority and finality, man's only rule of faith and practice.

The Gospel: The power of God unto salvation, its proclamation and defense.

The Church: The true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.

The Unity of Believers: In the "unity of the faith" as prescribed in the New Testament.

The Fellowship: Of brethren of "like precious faith," in the furtherance of the gospel and the building of churches of Christ according to the Bible pattern.

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Does Fulfilled Biblical Prophecy Prove God's Existence?

Part 3

In Part 2 last month, we laid out the following argument from fulfilled prophecy and explained the logic of each step:



Richard Koffarnus

1. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly predicted that God would send the divine Messiah to restore Israel and be a light to the nations.

2. The odds against any mere mortal fulfilling even a handful of these prophecies by chance or guile are so astronomical that only the true Messiah could accomplish the feat.

3. According to His own claims and the claims of His disciples, Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament Messianic prophecies.

4. If #3 is true, then Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

5. Therefore, if #4 is true, then God exists.

Of course, an argument such as this is not without its detractors. Below are some objections along with our responses.

First, some critics argue that the language of Biblical prophecy is so vague that believers can easily twist it to say whatever they want. However, many prophecies use very specific language which requires no twisting. For instance, Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 specifically identify Cyrus as the rebuilder of the Temple 200 years before he conquered Babylon. Likewise, Micah 5:2 says the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (cf. Matthew 2:6).

Second, the critics claim that some prophecies are artificially fulfilled. Jesus could have arranged to “fulfill” some of the prophecies concerning Himself. Certainly, Jesus took some actions, such as the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:1-5) which were deliberately done to fulfill prophecy. However, most of the Messianic prophecies, including His birthplace, His rejection (John 12:37-43), and the manner of His execution, were beyond His ability to self-fulfill.

Third, some critics believe the New Testament writers interpreted Old Testament passages to turn them into “Messianic prophecies.” Actually, as we pointed out in part one, the Jewish rabbis already identified many Old Testament prophecies as Messianic before the time of Christ. For example, Numbers 24:17, an accepted Messianic prophecy, says:

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.

On the other hand, the *Targum Onkelos*, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch, renders the same verse:

I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but it is not near. When the mighty King of Jakob's house shall reign, and the Meshiha, the Power sceptre of Israel, be anointed, He will slay the princes of the Moabae, and bring to nothing all the children of Sheth.

Notice that the *Targum Onkelos* inserts “King” and “Meshiha” (Messiah) into the text as the meaning of “star” and “scepter.” When the church began in Jerusalem, they gained Jewish converts by showing them how Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies which the Jews already accepted. See Acts 8:26-35, for example.

Fourth, according to critics, some “prophecies” were actually written after their “fulfillment.” Opponents commonly point to Isaiah's Cyrus prophecies and to Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem as examples of “post-fulfillment” origin. Their argument looks like this:

1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke claimed that Jesus predicted Jerusalem's destruction.
2. Predictive prophecy is impossible.
3. Therefore, Matthew, Mark, and Luke must have been written after A.D. 70.

The first problem with this argument is premise two. How do critics *know* that predictive prophecy is impossible? It is only by assuming that every claim of a successful prediction is false. Keep in mind our earlier statement that fulfilled prophecy is a type of miracle. C. S. Lewis' assessment of a similar argument against miracles is relevant here:

Now of course we must agree with [David] Hume that if there is absolutely “uniform experience”

against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.¹

Likewise, the claim that predictive prophecy is impossible is also a case of circular reasoning. One could reasonably argue that true prophecies are incredibly rare. That would actually support the second premise of our argument from fulfilled prophecy. However, to say that they are impossible is a philosophical presupposition, not a scientific or historical conclusion.

The second problem with the post-fulfillment argument centers on the conclusion. Both external and internal evidence from the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) point to their being written prior to A. D. 70, not before. This evidence includes testimony by Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies* (c. 180):

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him.²

Note that Irenaeus claims that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. That would have been prior to Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome beginning in A.D. 64. After Peter and Paul were martyred sometime between 64-67, Mark wrote his Gospel. Irenaeus also mentions that Luke, a traveling companion of Paul, wrote his Gospel, but doesn't indicate when. We know that the book of Acts, written by Luke, ends with Paul under house arrest for two years (61-62) in Rome, waiting to present his case to Emperor Nero (Acts 28:30, 31). Since Acts mentions neither Paul's release nor his execution, it is probable that Luke wrote Acts no later than 62. As Luke wrote his Gospel prior to writing Acts (cf. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3), he must have written his Gospel prior to 62, probably while Paul was under arrest for two years in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32). Thus, the evidence points to a pre-70 date for all three Synoptic Gospels.

Even if the critics were right about these few prophecies being written after their "fulfillment," there would still be

over 100 prophecies written long before and not subject to this argument.

Fifth, critics argue that many other religions and cults also claim to be able to foretell the future. So, why should we consider Christianity to be any better? As Jim Nichols pointed out in Part 1 of this column, it is one thing to *claim* to prophesy the future; it is quite another to *do* it. Thus, Wilbur Smith responds:

The ancient world had many different devices for determining the future, known as divination, but not in the entire gamut of Greek and Latin literature, even though they use the words prophet and prophecy, can we find any real specific prophecy of a great historic event to come in the distant future, nor any prophecy of a Savior to arise in the human race. Neither can the founders of any cult in this country rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling their appearance.³

James Smith sums up the argument from fulfilled Messianic prophecy with four facts:

1. Jesus was of the right lineage (the tribe of Judah, the family of Jesse, and the house of David), just as the prophets predicted.
2. Jesus appeared at the right time, in the days of the Roman empire, while the Temple still stood, and Judea was still a nation.
3. Jesus appeared with the right credentials. He performed miracles associated with the Messiah and He rose from the dead.
4. Jesus' appearance provoked the response predicted by prophets. "He was despised, rejected and slain" (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53).⁴

Clearly, if Jesus were not the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament, then we would look in vain for another. ~RH

(Endnotes)

- 1 C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 105.
- 2 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (c. 180): 3:1.
- 3 Wilbur Smith, *The Incomparable Book* (Minneapolis: Beacon Publications, 1961), 9, 10.
- 4 James Smith, 36, 37.

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Who Planned the Crucifixion of Jesus?

QUESTION:



Dr. Jack Cottrell

Someone who claims to be a Christian scholar has advanced the view that Jesus' death *on the cross* was not God's plan but was actually a plan concocted by the devil in order to confront and destroy God's purpose to redeem mankind through the death of Jesus. The claim is that God did plan to have Jesus die in the place of sinners, but by means of an entirely different kind of death — namely, by being sacrificed on an altar as God ordered Abraham to do with

Isaac, and as the Old Testament priests offered up animal sacrifices on the altar of the temple. Satan arranged it so that wicked men took over and used a *sinful* means of putting Jesus to death—something God would never have done. However, Jesus saved the day by voluntarily agreeing to allow the sinful act of crucifixion to take His life, which somehow made His death by crucifixion acceptable to God the Father.

The man who composed this view has prepared a seven-page outline explaining it, and our church has received a copy of it. It has become a topic of discussion and division in our congregation. Some of our elders and our minister have accepted this teaching that “the cross was not God's original plan.” They are bringing this teacher to speak to our congregation. Some of us are planning to leave this church if they continue this path. What do you think about all this?

ANSWER:

Thanks for sending me a copy of the seven-page outline. I admit I was quite shocked to read statements advocating such a concept, such as the following:

“Satan devises a plan to defeat God's plan for saving the world through... Jesus.”

“God's intention was the sacrifice of Jesus... The cross was not in God's plan in the sacrificial system.” In other words, in the Old Testament, the animal sacrifices “which Jesus replaced” were “never crucified on a cross, rather, an atonement altar... I believe there would have been an altar such as God told Abraham to offer Isaac upon.”

“The cross was against God.”

“God did not kill Jesus. He was killed or executed as a criminal by a wicked government outside the law of God. Satan had a plan...” God's plan mentions only the *death* of Jesus, and the blood He shed—not a cross, but “Satan opposed this plan and tried everything in his power to resist it” — “even the criminal death of Jesus.”

Now, I have been asked what I think about this view. In a nutshell, I believe it is one of the most anti-God, anti-Biblical heresies I have ever seen. I cannot understand how any serious Christian could devise such a view, or how any church leader acquainted with the Bible could be persuaded to accept it. Let me show you why this falls into the category of “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

First, it reduces God to the level of a finite being who is no greater than, if not lower and weaker than, Satan himself. At the same time, it elevates Satan to the level of divinity. The Creator-God of the Bible is infinite (unlimited) in every way. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-controlling (i.e., completely sovereign) over all creation. If He plans and determines to accomplish something, *it will be done!* Through His wisdom and power He foreknows all of human history and is able to *use* foreknown human inventions, inclinations, and decisions to accomplish His purposes without Himself causing or being responsible for these decisions—even if they are evil and criminal.

This is the very point of Acts 2:23, which says that Jesus Christ was “delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God,” even though He was “nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men” and was in this manner put to death. Note: this was the predetermined plan and foreknowledge OF GOD, not of Satan! Here is a crucial truth: Satan is a created, finite (limited) being, and does not have divine powers—as this view assumes. He has no true foreknowledge, and no sovereign control over history. He would not be able to concoct a plan from ancient times to have Jesus crucified; only God could foreknow what culture would invent crucifixion as a death penalty and send Jesus into the world at just that period of history! Thus “when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4).

The fact is once Satan observed God “sending forth His Son” to redeem believers, he did try to foil this divine plan by influencing evil men to kill Jesus—without knowing he was playing right into God’s hands! That Jesus’ death was by crucifixion was not Satan’s specific point; he simply assumed if he could get Jesus killed, he would be preventing Jesus from setting up His redemptive Kingdom. He was not able, of course, to anticipate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (see Revelation 1:18 and 12:7-11).

This heresy says that Christ’s death *by crucifixion* would foil God’s plan and prevent Him from using Christ’s death for holy purposes, because it was an *evil act* performed by *evil men*. What is not understood here is that God can work His plans into *any* actions of *any* human beings, since He is not necessarily *causing* those actions, but rather *foreknowing* how they will occur (Acts 2:23). The Old Testament records many situations where God punished guilty behavior by turning wicked people over to even more wicked people. Consider the tenth plague God sent upon Egypt, for example. Also, consider the many times God permitted pagan armies to punish unfaithful Israel (e.g., Judges 2:11-15; 3:8-9, 12-14; 1 Samuel 28:18-19).

The point is this: *God is sovereign!* He can intervene and intercept and nullify ANY plan of any mere creature—angel or human. The heresy being considered here assumes a helpless God! What an insult!

A second reason why this view is so seriously wrong is that it robs the death of Jesus of all its atoning power. The only purpose for the suffering and death of Jesus was to take upon Himself the equivalent of the eternal punishment deserved by all the sins committed by the entire human race. This near-infinite suffering was much more than what could be poured out upon Him by physical death, no matter how cruel and tortuous that might have been. The true substitutionary atonement was accomplished only by the divine outpouring of divine wrath upon the divine nature of Jesus as it accompanied and transcended the physical agony suffered by Jesus’ human nature.

Thus, the atonement was something that was possible and personal for God and could not be snatched away from Him by some puny creature such as the devil. The simple fact is this: the cross has no saving power apart from the participation of God the Father. He was the One who was actively inflicting eternal wrath upon God the Son, in the latter’s planned role as the substitute sufferer for the human race. Satan had no place at all in Christ’s atoning death, and the human executioners were merely being used by God in terms of Acts 2:23.

A third reason to reject this false view is that it contradicts the very words of Jesus which He uttered in the

Garden of Gethsemane. Remember, the view says God had a plan involving Jesus’ death that did not involve a cross, and that Satan created his own plan that did use crucifixion. The assumption is Satan’s plan was in fact fulfilled, *except* that Jesus’ voluntary participation in it somehow makes it accomplish what God intended it to, even though God’s own plan was not actually fulfilled. But wait! When we examine what Jesus prayed to the Father in Gethsemane, we see that what was about to happen *was God’s plan all the way!*

I am thinking of the first recorded words of this prayer (Matthew 26:39): “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” Note first that the “cup” Jesus is expecting (and dreading) is the cup of God’s divine wrath (see Psalms 11:6; Isaiah 51:17), not some plan that Satan has devised. Second, note that Jesus accepts the fact that what is going to happen to Him is NOT “as I will,” i.e., not something He is *wanting* to happen to Him. Finally, and decisively, Jesus submits His will to GOD’S WILL, *not* to Satan’s will! Satan’s will or plan has nothing to do with what is about to happen!

This is confirmed by the later prayer as recorded in Luke 22:42, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” Here Jesus completely dissociates Himself from anything Satan wills and declares again that His upcoming atoning suffering and crucifixion are GOD’S WILL alone!

See also John 12:27-28a, where another prayer of Jesus anticipates His Gethsemane mentality: “Now My soul has become troubled, and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!” “Save me from this hour” shows that He knew exactly what was ahead for Him, and “for this purpose I came to this hour” shows that this was all the purpose and plan of the One to whom He is praying.

Jesus was already thinking in these terms even earlier during His ministry. In Matthew 16:21-23, He taught His disciples how He had to “suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed.” When Peter objected that “this shall never happen to you,” Jesus rebuked him thus: “Get behind Me, Satan!... You are not setting your mind on God’s interests [lit., ‘the things of God’], but man’s.” In other words, His upcoming killing on the cross was “a thing of God” — not of man or Satan.

To those who have accepted this “doctrine of demons” which we have been considering, I repeat the words of Jesus to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan!” ~RH

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JIM BOOK

Communism: More Than an Ideology — *It's a Religion!*

When the Berlin Wall fell, the free world could not get enough of watching it fall. To see East and West Germany reunite after years of division was a great victory for human rights and democracy. After years of totalitarianism at the hands of the Soviet Union, seeing the Baltic States become independent nations again was something many felt they would never witness in their lifetime. The fall of what we knew as the “Soviet Empire” and the so-called end of the “cold war” gave many people around the world a sense that maybe the threat of communist expansion may have been thwarted once and for all.

As a young man, I would hear people on the news and even politicians state that communism had fallen. Yet I believe even though it is somewhat dormant, communism still poses a great threat to the free world. As we witness the atrocities unfold in Ukraine, we are left with the grim realization that communist aggression, controlled and driven by a ruthless dictator, presents a threat not only for the people in Europe but people around the world.

Is Communism dead or does it pose a significant threat to global peace and religious expression? It would be prudent to reflect for a moment on what drove Karl Marx, the architect of communism. His plan of redemption for humanity centered on the fact that society had been severely corrupted and tainted by the drive for personal ownership of property. This created what he called a struggle between the rich and the poor. Being an ardent supporter of Darwinism, he, along with his disciple Lenin, regarded the material and cosmic world as supreme. The natural world became the ultimate cause of all causes.

Robert Wesson, famed historian, wrote, “Eventually the proletariat becomes the redeemer in society. He will rise up and eventually conquer the capitalist, therefore the ‘Savior-proletariat’ will by its suffering, redeem mankind and bring the Kingdom of Heaven to the earth.” Notice the

spiritual overtones. The language used for the salvation of man and the overall healthy society is eerily similar to the language the gospel writers used to describe the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. Marx essentially took the words of Jesus Christ and inserted himself and his message.

Paul warned the church not to be sucked into “hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on human tradition and the spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Jesus reminded His followers, “Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name, to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Notice wholeness and healing and hope is directly attached to the name and teachings of Jesus. Karl Marx had a goal in mind, specifically world domination using his ideals and political influence to create a religion. What we have is Salvation through Socialism. Marx was on a quest to introduce a new religion into the landscape of the world. The word “liberated” made its way into the language of those who espoused this false doctrine. Chuck Colson wrote, “Across the globe, groups gathered around ideologies of gender, race, and sexual orientation, seething with rage against alleged oppressions, of one kind or another.”

Let’s reflect on this statement for a moment. Our culture is at war with itself. With the advent of “Critical Race Theory,” racial tension is at a fever pitch. The gender war continues to heat up. The media is constantly reminding us of how the rich aren’t paying enough in taxes and the planet is being abused daily by big corporations. The government and state-controlled media did their best to pit the vaccinated against those who did not get the shot. Creating tension and strife amongst people is what communism does best, and the American media has become the avenue for Marxists in America to move their message.

Lenin, who took the mantle when Marx passed away, wrote, “There are no morals in politics. There is only expediency. Salvation lies only along the road of international socialist revolution. Promises are life piecrusts made to be broken.” Ray Jordan wrote, “Lenin made it clear that there can be no Deity in their interpretation of life.”

That statement helps clarify a lot. People who value life, respect the life and property of others, then witness the atrocities taking place in Ukraine, cringe in utter dismay. Why? Because our worldview teaches us that we don’t have permission to take whatever we want by whatever means we deem necessary. Christians pattern their lifestyle after the teaching of Christ whose message is diametrically different than that of Marx and Stalin. Covetousness, greed, murder, hatred, and violence are not what defines a Christian man or woman. Chuck Colson shares this insight, “To make room for this ‘New World Order,’ communism puts absolutely no moral restraints on the leaders in the new order.”

Politicians can and will steal elections if they feel it advances their political cause and dreams. They will burn emails and smash computer hard drives to suppress the truth. They will literally destroy and dismantle anyone or anything that gets in the way of advancing their narrative.

Marx had as his ultimate goal to be completely autonomous from any set standards or mores. He wrote, "A being only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his existence to himself." The problem we have here is a person was never created to exist for himself. He was never created to worship himself and elevate himself over his Creator. Colson hit the nail on the head when he wrote, "A person cannot be independent if his is the creation of a personal God, for then he lives by the grace of another." In sharp contrast, Marx determined to become his own master, a god to himself. Marxism is a substitute religion that wreaks devastation and death.

I so wish communism were dead. Why? Because everywhere it goes, people of faith are persecuted. The Bible is marginalized or burned. Economies tank. Innocent people are killed by the millions. I fear for America. I see more and more people in government sounding more and more like Marx and Lenin and less like Jefferson and Washington. John Adams, the second president of the United States, wrote that the Constitution was made, "only for moral and a religious people." He knew if the Spirit of the Divine Creator did not often oil the political machinery, it would be controlled by men who leaned on their own self-centered and destructive understandings.

Communism dead? Hardly.

~RH

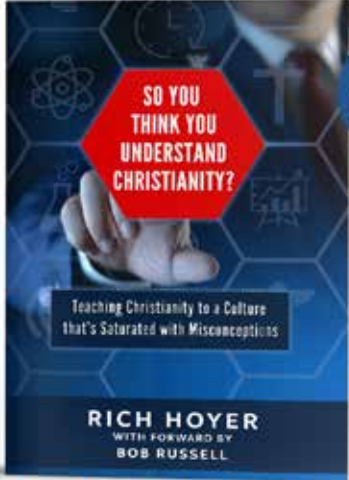
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Be Still

It was just a few days ago at the time of this writing that the Supreme Court made a rendering on the Dobbs case that resulted in Roe v. Wade being overturned. Since then, there are passions aflame from all sides of the issue and presented in unpersuasive ways. A particular vein of argument that caught my attention is the condemnation of the “religious” who, for their moral convictions about when life begins, have now created a world that will be filled with considerably more suffering. These assignments to organized religion are coming from both the secular and a swath of people identifying as Christ followers.



Jennifer Bullard

The view is that the church cares about the baby until the baby is born.

What happens then? They see it as a moral failure to bring people into a world where suffering is a high probability. The kind of suffering they are referencing involves abandonment, an absence of belonging, lack of provisions, and no family to call their own. The condemnation also extends to the absence of compassion for the mother who may lack a support system, quality healthcare, an appropriate parenting partnership, and financial stability. All these concerns are very real, though I am not convinced they are as inevitable as the current angry climate suggests. More relevant to me is all these concerns exist today just as they did before the Roe reversal and are not limited to expectant women carrying unwanted babies. There are and have been children starving in Africa. There are and have been villages of people dying from disease in India. There are and have been women and children swept into sex trafficking throughout Southeast Asia. I could go on. God supplies the earth with enough to provide for all, yet humanity fails to achieve it. These concerns are humankind concerns, and providing solutions extends to everyone. The blind spot that surfaces in this ire toward the church is a failure to see or value the church’s efforts toward like concerns but on a much broader scale. God’s people wouldn’t be reacting to those identify-

ing as pro “reproductive rights” or pro-life, but rather the lost or the saved.

I find it essential to address this because we are amidst people identifying as Christians and making these arguments against the church from *within* the church. One former Bible College professor publicly defended the “wrongness” for the church experiencing the ruling as a moral victory by saying abortions were going on in the time of Christ and Jesus chose not to address it, eluding, therefore, that Jesus is probably pro-choice. This excuse for specificity foregoes everything else we know from scripture regarding the sanctity of life. The professor’s argument was linked to other comments that suggested human suffering justifies terminating life in the womb. There are people in the church who are taking scripture and aligning it with their belief system, and their beliefs are clearly in line with the world’s. One example was a Bible College graduate claiming that Psalm 139’s “you knit me together in my mother’s womb” is poetry and not - what? - reality? Being completely transparent, I’ve come to simplify this debate in my own mind as predominantly born out of the human will to build a hedge around sexual impurity.

These times where the church is subject to mixed messages from within the flock has me looking back on some of the experiences among the prophets. In Ezekiel 12 and 13, God told Ezekiel to emulate punishment for waywardness that was in “all the house of Israel” by packing up his belongings and exiling himself from the city. God said Israel’s rebellion was going to be addressed and the time was upon them. When other voices among the Israelites claimed that such a punishment wasn’t happening any time soon and spoke their proclamations with the same authority as Ezekiel the prophet, God said their words were out of their own imaginations and we all know what happened. They were, in fact, punished and exiled to Babylon. The same scenario played out in Micah 2 when God again warned against false prophets. God appointed a divine messenger in Micah with a divine message and a portion of his audience responded with, “Do not preach these things; disgrace will not overtake us” (Micah 2:6). But it did.

While I have not experienced messengers from within the church claiming to have received their objectionable messages directly from God, there is still the troubling matter of elevating man's opinion or preferences to a place of superiority over the Word and the Spirit. These objectionable messages rest harmoniously with those who deny Christ and don't believe in God. I don't want the church to be perceived as a band of modern-day Pharisees, but when a follower's position becomes that reflective and snugly compatible with the world, something's terribly awry. I have to confess there have been two occasions since the ruling came down that I've responded to the words and messages being said that condemn the church for its "heartless" and "hypocritical" position on abortion. I wanted to offer hope that the Kingdom has many servants who will be a solution for concerns relating to birthing babies who weren't planned. I also wanted to convey that the compassion for mother and child is made up of the same compassion the church is experiencing with similar needs around the world. Was I effective in offering hope and relating to the compassion? No.

"Do not give dogs what is holy; do not throw your pearls before swine. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 7:6). Pearls to the swine is not to suggest "don't waste your time." It's the act of offering something valuable to someone who cherishes it not. The pearls are received as a disappointment and frustration because they're looking for something else. It is noteworthy that the five verses preceding this one are telling us not to judge and to remove the beam from our own eye. Now, sequentially, it then says in so many words, "Don't insist on offering something important when the receiver has absolutely no interest. That will just make them mad." If a pig turning to tear me to pieces is the analogy, I think we can safely conclude that pearls, in these instances, are alienating.

"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet" (Matthew 10:14). When Jesus gave instructions to the disciples to go out and share the words and works of the Messiah, he told them how to approach their audience from start to finish. He told them to be willing to walk away. For some, that may be hard to do. There's another difficult challenge He issued in the same list of instructions. "Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you" (Matthew 10:11-13). When we walk away, we are to do so with the blessed peace we wanted them to have.

Finally, for me, this is the hardest one yet. Romans 1:21-25 says:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and darkened in their foolish hearts. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity for the dishonoring of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is forever worthy of praise! Amen.

This text is clearly speaking of people who knew God and knew the Truth! They have abandoned Him so they could choose the creature over the Creator. God then gave them up. This must be among the saddest passages in scripture. The finality, though, is unless God is involved, we can't make it happen.

We have the answers in His Word and through the Spirit. God isn't going to be cagey about the Truth. He has been very intentional in word and deed. We must cling to the Truth steadfastly and share it generously, but we must also acknowledge some are not receptive and we've been instructed what to do. Do not antagonize, walk away in peace, and don't try to accomplish something God Himself has elected to let go.

In the meantime, we can rest assured of this. Jesus chose the most unlikely messenger to alert the town of Sychar of His Messiahship via the woman at the well. Sometimes, it takes someone just as unlikely to achieve what we cannot. So be it. "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted over the earth" (Psalm 46:10). Praise God! ~RH

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FIRST THINGS FIRST



SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

In last month's article I wrote about advice that P.H. Welshimer, a well-known preacher of his day, had given to the young preachers in 1937. I told you this month I would give you my top ten suggestions for preachers today.

Some would ask, "What qualifies you to give advice?" Well, just so you know, I've been in the ministry for fifty-five years. I think I've earned the right to have an opinion. With that in mind, here are my top ten suggestions for young preachers, and older ones too.



Tony Sullivan

1. Preach from the Scriptures. Stay in the Word of God. There seems, in some circles, to be a drought of Bible preaching. The Bible has been set aside for pop psychology, often with the message based on ideas from sources outside of Scripture. There is nothing wrong with preaching a sermon on being happy, having a fulfilling life, or having a successful marriage if that is based on the Scripture.

In Jeremiah 37:17, King Zedekiah asked Jeremiah, "Is there a word from the Lord" (NAS)? I think sometimes those who hear some preaching might still want to know, "Does God have anything to say about this?"

I recently read a letter from a preacher who said his elders told him he was "using too much Scripture in his sermons." I don't understand these elders. How can we possibly use too much Scripture? In my opinion, there needs to be more. Stay in the Book.

2. Listen to people. Hear what those to whom you are preaching are saying. Don't ignore a suggestion someone comes to you with just because they aren't in leadership.

Listen to everyone. In one of my first ministries, the leadership was about to make a decision that would affect the congregation. A lady called and asked me to come to her home. I went. She talked to me about the decision and gave me, what I thought, were good reasons we were about to make a mistake. I listened to her and then spoke to the men who would make the decision. They agreed with the lady. What could have been a bad mistake was avoided.

While we are on this topic, listen to everyone, even the

children. When you talk with children, get down on one knee and make eye contact with them. Answer their question or address their idea as you would an adult.

3. Spend time with your family. What have we gained if we win the world and lose our family? Many of you *Restoration Herald* readers have seen a minister's effectiveness destroyed because of his family falling apart.

There are no guarantees in marriage and there are certainly no guarantees in raising children, but we must do the best that we can. We must make every effort to see that our family is what a Christian family should be.

In writing to Timothy, Paul wrote concerning the qualifications of an elder that "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (1 Timothy 3:4). If God requires an elder to have his family "under control," shouldn't a preacher also have control over his household?

Spend time with your wife. Make her your priority in life (next to Jesus of course). Let her know you are proud to be her husband. Do not ever allow your children to speak disrespectfully of their mother.

Spend time with your children. Be there for their activities. Take them with you when you are calling. Let them understand what it is that you do. Understand, too, that being a preacher's kid isn't "a walk in the park." The eyes of everyone they meet are on them. It's hard to have that kind of life. Understand that and do all you can to make things easier, not harder, on them.

4. Be a thoughtful guest speaker. Most preachers will be invited to speak at an event outside of their congregation. If you are invited to speak at such an occasion, be thoughtful about what you need to do. It is an honor for someone to ask you to bring a message to their event.

It could be a revival, a camp meeting, a men's retreat, or any one of several events. If you accept a speaking invitation, remember that you are a guest at their church. Act like a guest.

Be on time. On your arrival, check in with the person in charge and let them know you have arrived. If they are like me, they are looking for you and can relax once they see you.

Stay within the time limits they have given you. If they have asked you to speak on a certain topic, speak on that topic. Don't try to be controversial. This will only make trouble for your host. Of course, preach what Scripture says but stay within the confines of the Scripture and don't create a problem for those who invited you.

If you are speaking as one of several preachers, make sure to be there to listen to the other men. You want them to hear you, so you need to listen to them. Support them; it will mean a lot to them to see you there in the crowd. Don't have the "Super Star" attitude that following your speaking you must hurry away because you are so much busier than the other men who are there. You are a part of a team at this event so be there for the team. If you need to go, then explain to your host why you are having to leave. If you know ahead of time, let your host know that you are willing to come but you will have to leave early. That is just common courtesy.

5. Be careful who you trust. Most preachers need a confidante. Just be careful who you talk to. Everyone will tell you that they can keep a secret and will not let what you have told them go any farther. However, many men have been hurt when they find that the person with whom they confided broke their promise. Sometimes they will even use what you have told them against you.

I wish I could tell you a foolproof way to choose a confidante, but there isn't one. I have found if I can find another preacher whom I trust, that works out best. Use your judgment. Get to know someone well before you trust them with information that you don't want to get out.

There are those who say, "My wife is my confidante." Our wives are a great source to speak to and "vent" to. Remember, however, she is a part of your ministry and what you are telling her affects the way she feels toward the congregation. Don't put more on her than she already has—be careful what you tell her.

If someone comes to you and confides in you, keep it to yourself. Don't betray a trust.

Well, that's five. Next month I will give you five more.

P.S. This is the time of year when congregations begin to make their plans for next year, 2023. I have open dates and would love to come and work with you. (At 75, I'm glad to be anywhere.)

God bless you. I'll see you next month.

~RH

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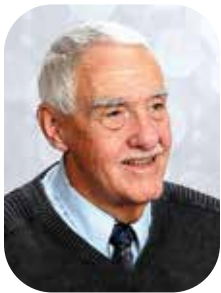
LESSONS FROM THE PAST

MICHAEL HINES

Cause for Concern

For the past two years I've written quite a bit on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Social Justice Movement (SJM). My concern grows out of my knowledge of Restoration Movement history. George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it." Despite professions otherwise, I see the entire "woke" movement as a false *religion* making its way into Christendom and I strongly believe someone needs to speak out against it. Let me explain!

Then



Michael Hines

In his recent book, *Christianity and Wokeness*, Owen Strachan writes about the liberal takeover of Christian institutions and churches at the end of the 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century, biblical scholars no longer believed in an inspired biblical text and thus no longer saw Christianity as *the* means of personal salvation. Instead, liberals understood salvation not in personal terms but as social change. As a result,

the Social Gospel movement became part of the Christian landscape. As Strachan put it, "Man's core problem was not his own sin, but social brokenness, political corruption, and economic oppression."¹ What made liberalism's "invasion" of the church so insidious was the fact they continued to use traditional Christianity's vocabulary but redefined its meaning. Classical theological liberalism *sounded* orthodox but was, in fact, heretical. By the time biblically centered leaders picked up on what was happening it was too late. Strachan explains how liberals captured churches, seminaries, and parachurch organizations in the process.

During all this theological confusion, few influential voices spoke out. J. Gresham Machen was one of the few recognized leaders who realized what was happening. He recognized liberalism's threat accomplished the formation of a new religion distinctly different from biblical Christi-

anity. Strachan cites Machen's seminal book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, as saying,

What the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is *so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category.*²

Mainline Christian denominations tried to staunch liberalism's encroachment with heresy trials but failed.³ Liberals labeled those who resisted their takeover as *fundamentalists* and simply ran over moderates who pled for peace and tolerance.

Liberalism also made its way into the Restoration Movement during the latter half of the 19th century. Disciples returning from advanced study in Europe brought with them the concepts of source and form criticism as well as the documentary hypothesis. Robert C. Cave, Herbert Lockwood Willett, Edward Scribner Ames, and others brought theological liberalism into the movement.

Willett serves as a prime example of liberal *modus operandi*. Willett studied under William Rainey Harper, who was an outstanding liberal scholar first at Yale then the University of Chicago. Willett earned a Ph.D. in Semitic studies and sounded steadfastly orthodox. He was anything but! Willett used biblical language but invested it with new meanings caught only by other liberals. While sounding conventionally biblical in his preaching, Willett's writings revealed he accepted an evolutionary view of Scripture and attributed accounts of God's activity to myth, legend, or simply a morality tale.

Liberals wormed their way into the movement taking numerous colleges and seminaries, missionary and parachurch structures, and churches.⁴ Moderate Disciples, such as J.H. Garrison simply wrote off liberal views as "opinion" and let it go at that. Moderate institutions, such as Manhattan Christian College, Minnesota Bible College, and Northwest Christian College tried to walk the line between what became known as "the antis" (conservatives) and "the cooperatives" (liberals), but were eventually forced to take sides.⁵

To my knowledge, only one influential voice spoke out consistently against liberal encroachment. J.W. McGarvey (1829-1911) resisted liberalism in a series of articles entitled "Biblical Criticism" published in *Christian Standard*. In his article in the Stone-Campbell Encyclopedia, M. Eugene Boring described McGarvey as adhering "fervently to the doctrine of revelation understood in positivistic, static, and factual terms, thereby continuing to feed the restorationist mindset."⁶ Other historians have not been quite so nice as they described McGarvey. Some present him as "fixed and rigid," bombastic and pugilistic, yet a gentleman in person.

Theological liberalism irreparably damaged Christ's church as it entered the 20th century. Local churches fractured and entire denominations floundered. "Fighting Fundamentalists" did not do enough. They lost! They lost churches, seminaries, missions, agencies, parachurch structures—they lost until there was nothing left to lose.⁷ As I've pointed out, the same was true in the Restoration Movement. Growing megachurches appeared to contradict that judgment. The picture appears to change today, but it is only due to decline in liberal churches and a resurgence of biblically-centered churches.

Now

Christ's church faces a different threat today, but it is one sounding eerily familiar. Like 19th century liberalism, this threat redefines biblical language, luring Christians away from biblical truth. It is "marching through the institutions," capturing churches, colleges and seminaries, and parachurch organizations, leaving confusion in its wake. This new threat is the *religion* of "Wokeism" rooted in Critical Race Theory and the Social Justice Movement.⁸ One is not "Woke" until there is acceptance of CRT and SJM combined with a commitment to repentance, as defined by CRT, SJM, and social action.

Christians convert to Woke religion in droves led by well-meaning but confused leaders. The Southern Baptist Convention is currently experiencing division due to its acceptance of CRT and Intersectionality as tools to understand the nation's current racial divide. Campus Crusade reports tension within as Woke issues divide its staff. Strachan points to several influential evangelical authors who tout Woke doctrine. I will list their names and their publishers so you can evaluate their material: Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith (Oxford), Soong-Chan Rah (IVP), Daniel Hill (IVP), Eric Mason (Moody), and Jemar Tisby (Zondervan). In my research, I have identified at least three individuals within our own movement who peddle the Woke agenda. I could also list preachers within the Restoration Movement who drew messages on race and justice from material promoting CRT and SJM.

Why am I so concerned about "Wokeism"? It is because "Wokeness" is like the liberalism of 100 years ago but with a less supernatural frame. It presents a different system of thought than Christianity. Wokeness is grounded in worldly systems God calls Christians to refute. Paul told the Corinthian believers of the spiritual battle waged at the time, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ..." (2 Corinthians 10:5). In every generation, God calls upon His people to resist pagan philosophy (see Colossians 2:8-10). Be

assured, the new Woke religion is paganism recapitulated in our day.

I am not alone in seeing the entire Woke program as a new religion. A quick internet search will bring up numerous articles from a variety of journals pointing in the same direction. Perhaps the most persuasive is liberal scholar John McWhorter. While there is much to disagree with in his book, he states his belief that the new Woke religion permeating America and the American church is evangelistic, possesses its own concept of original sin, and presents a definite apocalypse. It is as zealous in attacking those considered heretic as any Fundamentalist Christian. It is creedal with a definite canon and a collection of saints and martyrs to its cause. As I've stated here throughout, the priests and proclaimers of Wokeism couch their rhetoric in biblical terms. If not countered, the results will be identical to those experienced in biblically-centered churches of the 19th and early 20th centuries — division!

Ministers, church leaders, and our college faculties must not bury their heads in the sand and pretend Wokeism does not exist. While I would never hope for division in the body of Christ, the church must take a strong stand in opposition to Wokeism's false gospel. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "If any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). ~RH

(Endnotes)

1 Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021), 3.

2 Ibid. Emphasis added.

3 Presbyterians charged David Swing (1830-1894) with "being out of harmony with the Confession of Faith." Crawford H. Toy (1836-1929) resigned from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary because of his views on biblical inspiration. Presbyterians convicted Charles A. Briggs (1841-1913) for denouncing verbal inspiration.

4 Falling to liberalism were Texas Christian University, Drake University, Hiram College, Lexington Theological Seminary among others. Missions associated with the United Christian Missionary Society and numerous local congregations adopted liberal views as evidenced by the practice of open membership.

5 Manhattan Christian College associated with the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ after Disciple Restructure. Minnesota Bible College moved from Minneapolis to Rochester before it ceased to exist. Northwest theoretically still tries to maintain relationships with Disciples and Independents, but it is viewed as theologically to the left of center.

6 M. Eugene Boring, "McGarvey, John W. (1829-1911), in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnavant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 506-507.

7 Strachan, 55

8 Writers increasingly identify "Wokeism" as a *religion*. John McWhorter, Columbia University associate professor, identified Woke racism as a new religion in his 2021 book. *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*. Wokeism is a religion replacing God with political and cultural crusades.

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Inflation is much in the news lately, and for good reason. We are seeing its effects in ways that sometimes remain hidden. It was interesting to see a recent article “explaining” some things about inflation in a business and technology newsletter, *the Hustle* (find it at thehustle.com).

The Inflation Explanation



Kent B. True, aka Harold Orndorff

“Why Thinking About Inflation Leads to More Inflation”

Mark Dent and Zachary Crockett

theHustle, April 9, 2022

In the musical *The Music Man*, there is a character you might remember: Professor Harold Hill. If you recall, he was neither a professor nor much of a musician. Instead, he was a confidence man with a somewhat complex scam scheme. He knew so little about music that, pretending to teach his students to play their instruments, he advocated “the think system.” Just “think” about the song, and you will be able to play it.

The authors of this article appear to be very confused. Their thesis is found in their sub-title, “America is dealing with its worst inflation in nearly 40 years. It could get worse if inflationary psychology takes hold.” According to these authors, there is inflation, and then there is more inflation because people think there will be more inflation. In their words, “Inflationary psychology is when: 1. Consumers speed up purchases or seek higher salaries because they believe prices will rise in the future. 2. Businesses raise prices in anticipation that costs will go up in the future.”

It is interesting and revealing that Dent and Crockett never define inflation. They do assume inflation is what most people incorrectly think it is: rising prices. Of course, the meaning of words like “inflation” can and do change. You could argue inflation now just means rising prices. Even though that is what people usually mean by the word,

that change of meaning leaves something important hidden. It is good to remember, as a *Forbes* article tells us:

Don’t think of inflation in terms of higher prices for just one item or service, however. Inflation refers to the broad increase in prices across a sector or an industry, like the automotive or energy business—and ultimately a country’s entire economy (“How Inflation Erodes the Value of Your Money” by John Schmidt, May 3, 2021).

Dent and Crockett say:

Economists have pointed to 3 root causes for this recent inflation. 1. Supply shortages from Covid: Many factories shut down during the pandemic because of Covid precautions and an expected loss of demand. 2. Higher than expected demand: Demand has been high because of rising wages from a strong job market, increased savings from government stimulus checks, and pent-up spending that was curtailed in the earlier stages of the pandemic. 3. Russia’s war against Ukraine: Fuel prices have increased after the U.S. banned Russian oil imports, and food prices may rise with a reduction in Ukrainian wheat and fertilizers.

It is true that when there is less of something and people still want a lot of that something, the price of it will tend to increase—that is just supply and demand. Every thinking person knew that if lots of workers were forced to stay home from work for a year, some things would be in short supply. Things in short supply will normally be bid up in price. It is also true if a lot of people have stopped working, the demand for workers will be reflected in increasing wages. Again, this is just supply and demand. No one should be surprised world events that disrupt supply will lead to price increases in the things now in short supply.

It is an important economic mistake to think that changes due to supply and demand are what inflation is. It is difficult to find a meaningful definition of inflation these days. The *Forbes* article mentioned above never really defines it. An article about inflation at investopedia.com says it is “the decline of purchasing power of a given currency over time.” At taxfoundation.org we are told, “Inflation is when the general price of goods and services increases across the economy, reducing the purchasing power of a currency and the value of certain assets.” The same general idea is found at federalreserve.gov.

Of course, if prices are generally increasing, then the purchasing power of a currency is decreasing. That tells us nothing important. What we would like to know is WHY the purchasing power of a currency would generally decrease. Again, we are not thinking about supplies and demands for

certain goods. Rather, we want to know what happens to a currency so that it very generally will just not buy as much anymore.

For example, let's take my lifetime (so far, at least). This year I hit the ripe old age of seventy, being born in 1952. What happened to that dollar my dad gave me when I was born, assuming I put it into my piggy bank for use in my old age? According to one of the many inflation calculators you can find on the web, the U.S. dollar has lost 91% of its value since 1952. In other words, my birthday dollar is worth less than 10 cents today. That is dramatic, to say the least.

The cat escapes the proverbial bag over at the financial dictionary section of thefreedictionary.com where it is revealed that inflation is “the reduction in the purchasing power of a currency. Inflation has historically occurred when a country prints too much of its currency in too short a period of time.”

Now we have finally arrived at something helpful. Inflation is connected to a government creating too much of its currency. Before people started using “inflation” to mean “price increases” there was a much more useful and revealing definition of inflation: an increase in the supply of a currency.

We don't have to think of giant printing presses spewing out great mounds of bills. Our government creates currency by turning its debt into money. One of “3 root causes” of recent inflation cited by Dent and Crockett involves “increased savings from government stimulus checks.” In 2020-21, most people received amazing, magical payments from good old Uncle Sam. The government didn't tax anyone for that, nor did the government cut its spending somewhere else to provide that. Instead, the government simply issued more credit to supply everyone with some “free” (that's a lie) dollars. One of the effects of that was people suddenly having more money to spend, but that was an illusion because creating all those dollars just meant dollars would eventually not buy as much as they used to buy.

It can take some time for that sort of increase in the money supply to work its way through the system, but it always does eventually. If producers are busy creating even more goods and services, prices might not increase quickly, but if many businesses have stopped operating as many recently did, we should not be surprised when prices begin to increase rather dramatically.

The U.S. government has been *very* busy inflating the currency in my lifetime. According to the St. Louis Federal Reserve website, the money supply in the U.S. in January 1959 was 286.6 billion dollars. By March 2020 it was 21,809.7 billion dollars. Think very carefully about that. Do we really need to say more?

The Old Testament is filled with condemnations of cheating people by using weights and measures intended to deceive people in regard to what they are buying... When the government that creates a currency continually makes more of it, it is cheating people in a way very much like the purveyor of “false weights and measures.”

The money moral to this story is this: hinder production and create more dollars = expect those dollars to buy less. Small wars in Europe contribute to this, of course. However, prices were going to increase in any case apart from wars.

The Old Testament is filled with condemnations of cheating people by using weights and measures intended to deceive people in regard to what they are buying. The scale says you are getting (in our terms) one pound, but it is really only 15 ounces. One of the things people are often trying to do with currency is to store value. If you are saving to buy something, you hope that the dollars you first save will purchase just as much as the last ones you need to make your large purchase. When the quantity of a currency is continually increased, its purchasing power has to go down in the long run. When the government that creates a currency continually makes more of it, it is cheating people in a way very much like the purveyor of “false weights and measures.” One of the more poignant of these is Micah 6:10-12:

Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed? Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.

Just put “dollar” in for “ephah” and you have a description of our situation today.

Without going into much detail, most governments actually maintain a policy of inflating the quantity of currency in many circumstances. This is based on the theories of a twentieth century economist John Maynard Keynes. While there have always been significant dissenters among economists, Keynesian economics is to government fiscal policy what neo-Darwinism is to biology — the view that is usually not questioned and simply assumed to be true and then acted upon. According to Keynesian ideas, an economy that is functioning well needs to have an inflation rate of 1-2% annually. In some situations that rate needs to be higher, at least according to the Keynesians.

The moral problem is that this amounts to at least a 1-2% theft from anyone who holds the currency in question, such as dollars. At one time, dollars were tied to some commodity, but a currency tied to a commodity cannot be inflated the way Keynesian ideas require. In 1971, the U.S. government cut dollars completely loose from any commodity. That made it easier to create ever more and more of them.

The point Dent and Crockett want to make is one they got from an economist at the University of Michigan. They claim when people expect inflation, three trends result: workers want higher wages, people begin to purchase things because they expect prices to be higher in the future, and producers increase prices because costs are rising. As they summarize, “the perceived need for a higher salary and for higher prices to withstand future inflation leads to higher prices and higher salaries. And inflation keeps churning on.”

They are claiming that if there is some inflation or some kind of reduced supply that creates increased prices, people’s *perception* of all this is the cause of more inflation. The very last line of the article reads, “And the great fear of inflationary psychology is that perception can turn into reality.”

It appears Dent and Crockett have conjured up yet another flimsy attempt to prop up the irrationality and immorality of Keynesian economics. The expectations and fears of people regarding inflation are completely reasonable. Inflation, meaning the creation of more and more currency, is happening and has been happening for many decades now. The results (higher prices due to a debased currency) are always with us. Sometimes events make them more visible than usual, but people buying things before their currency will not purchase as much as it used to is not just some cycle of perceptions. It is completely rational worker/consumer and business behavior.

No part of this problem is worker/consumer psychology. Currency inflation is something we are especially suffering the effects of just now, but it goes on all the time. It is a deception and an evil. It makes currency, in practice, a kind of lie. Even when its effects are not being seen as dramatically as they are just now, it is ever-present. It is the product of a society whose “people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully” as the prophet Micah said. You can take that to the bank—but don’t walk too slowly. Your currency won’t be worth as much when you get there. ~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.



A MILLENNIAL MOMENT

Become a Sponge

I love the lessons that can be pulled out of the Old Testament. The historical events recorded within the pages have this amazing ability to make you sit back and think.



Erick Clemens

And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works that the LORD had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals — Judges 2:7-10 ESV.

What a passage for us as Millennials to think about and reflect on. In the book titled *So the Next Generation Will Know*, J. Warner Wallace shares with his readers about how he prepared to be an investigator in his agency’s gang detail in Los Angeles. When accepting the position, he was worried he was too old and out of touch to effectively interact with the gang members he would encounter. He had to come up with a strategy to catch up.

What would you do if you were placed into a situation for which you felt unprepared? Part of his strategy was to plug in by attending every organized gang meeting he could find in Los Angeles in order to listen carefully to what the other, more experienced officers had encountered and learn from them. There is wisdom in leaning on those who have already been on the journey we are only beginning. His plan is the essence of becoming a sponge. It is time for us to become a sponge!

It wouldn't be fair to claim the mistakes seen in the Judges passage quoted above are only one-sided. It is possible that the older generation failed to train, just as it is possible that the younger generation failed to accept what they were taught. The time has come for both the older and younger generations of today to reflect on passages like what is found in Judges and ask: How do we avoid making the same mistakes seen by those generations throughout Judges?

Regardless of your age or your position, my encouragement to you is to become a sponge. I say this for a few reasons. If you are wanting to reach the younger generations in a genuine way, it is important to know and accurately understand what they are thinking, seeing, and feeling about the world. It is too easy to fall into the trap of believing that it is safe to make assumptions. Instead of being a victim of the trap, be a good listener.

Being a youth minister, I think this has incredible value if you are wanting to relate something to the youth in a way they can understand. Listening to the younger generation is a seed that is needed to grow an authentic relationship with them. Once that seed has sprouted into a genuine relationship, then you are able to pour into them, helping them grow and develop into disciples of Christ so they can engage with the world. This will only happen if those who you are trying to build a connection with first feel heard by you. There is true value in becoming a sponge. Soak in all the information you can. Get to know what they are thinking, seeing, and believing.

Secondly, remember a sponge doesn't just soak in water. Sponges also have this wonderful ability to release the water they absorbed into something else.

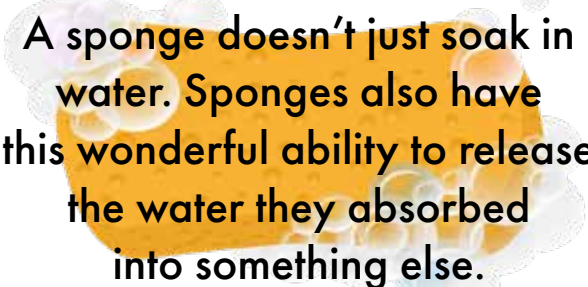
Within the text, the elders may have done a great job ensuring everyone followed God, but they seemed to have dropped the ball when it came to training up the next generation. However, if that is not the case, then the younger generation failed to take in what they were taught, dropping the torch that was passed down. Either way, for us today, there is much work to be done, so this principle of becoming a sponge should be applied to all. It is not a secret this is a problem in our churches. Young people are becoming more isolated from the church, but that doesn't mean it has to continue. In fact, don't let that be your church, your leadership, or your testimony.

It is not an exaggeration to say the solution to our problem is to equip the younger generations with everything we have to offer. It is not good enough to only listen and learn about this generation. There must be a point in that relationship when you start to pour into them. Speaking as a millennial, I have come to realize I need those who have more experience than me to equip me with what they have. There are men who have knowledge about the great and wonderful

things God has done that I have not been able to see with my eyes or hear with my ears. This is information we need to know, but how would we know if no one tells us?

There is value in the younger generations not only knowing the "what" but also having a clear understanding of the "why." Equipping the younger generations with both is needed for them to grow in their faith. Once again, I encourage you to become a sponge by equipping the younger generation with the knowledge you have. By investing into them like this, you will be encouraging and training them to become faithful disciples.

I am convinced this is nothing new. God has already had this strategy planned out from the beginning. We see it within the Bible in passages like Matthew 28. After proving once and for all that Jesus is the Son of God by raising from the dead, He said to His apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."



A sponge doesn't just soak in water. Sponges also have this wonderful ability to release the water they absorbed into something else.

What happens if we fail to do this? Failing to become an effective sponge has devastating side effects. If the elders written about in Judges failed to effectively train the younger generation, it started them down a path of suffering. Without those needed relationships, instead of being built up as servants of God, they started to seek counterfeits to fulfill that hole.

The world is filled today with many counterfeits. There is an endless sea of options, with many of them having an additional danger of being addictive. Sit back for a moment and think about the obstacles that are waiting for them when the "elders" are not around. It doesn't take long to think of an intimidating list staring us in the face.

Partner with me in learning from the mistakes of others so we don't make those mistakes ourselves. This world can be a scary place to face when you are alone. However, if you commit to becoming a sponge within your community, the process will continue onto the next generation. **~RH**

Erick Clemens is the Youth Minister at Kent Christian Church, Madison, IN. He has a passion for his family: Ciera his wife, and their two boys, Jedi and JJ. He can be reached by email at boldyouthministries@yahoo.com.

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God is not just the absolute authority; He is also the Truth-Giver. Whatever God says and reveals is always, and will always be, true. Therefore, whatever God says about His plan of redemption and the conditions for receiving it is the only way salvation can be bestowed by Him on mankind.

I affirm without hesitation my belief that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. It is inspired by God and is inerrant since He is its source. This is the Bible's own testimony about itself. Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . ." Similarly, 2 Peter 1:21 says, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Proverbs 30:5 makes this statement, "Every word of God proves true . . ." Jesus prayed in John 17:17, "Your Word is truth."

Link # 2 — Jesus Comes to Bring Salvation

The second link focuses on Christ. He is the Eternal, Pre-Existent Word sent from God (John 1:1-5, 14). He is the fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic prophecy. Jesus is the perfect God-man. He accomplished redemption by His death, burial, and resurrection, and was given all authority over all things by God the Father (Matthew 28:18). This includes Headship/Lordship over everything regarding His church (Ephesians 1:15-23). All that Jesus says regarding salvation will always be binding and applicable to us. This certainly includes what Christ says about baptism (John 3:5; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16).

God is not just the absolute authority. He is also the Truth Giver. Whatever God says and reveals is always, and will always be, true. Therefore, whatever God says about His plan of redemption and the conditions for receiving it is the only way salvation can be bestowed by Him on mankind.

Link # 3 — Jesus Calls the Apostles

The next link has to do with choosing the twelve Apostles as His special spokesmen and ambassadors to the world. Since we know Jesus was God come in the flesh, and also Creator, and has the same all-encompassing authority as God the Father, the delegation of His authority to others becomes quite significant. This begins with Matthew 4:18-22, where we find the calling of the first disciples. The four mentioned here are Peter, Andrew, James, and John. There were also others as seen in Mark 3:16-19. These, Jesus called and named "Apostles." These men became ambassadors of Christ in a specialized sense. They were given special credentials and authority from Christ Himself (John 20:21-23).

Link # 4 — Jesus Gives the Keys of the Kingdom to Peter

This leads to a fourth link, which has to do with a special privilege of delegated authority given to the Apostle Peter. In Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus asks His disciples the question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" After giving some of the answers they had "heard on the street," Jesus asked them directly, "But who do you say that I am?" On this occasion, Peter spoke up and gave the right answer, namely, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Because of his answer, Jesus told Peter that he would receive the keys to the kingdom of heaven. "Keys" represent authority. Jesus was promising to give Peter a special, authoritative privilege regarding the preaching of the gospel in establishing the church.

Link # 5 — Jesus Promises Holy Spirit Inspiration to the Apostles

Although Peter was given a special privilege and responsibility, all the Apostles became the Holy Spirit-inspired spokesmen and kingdom builders in the first century (Ephesians 2:20). This is clear from the promises Jesus made to and for the Apostles only in John 14-16 (see specifically John 14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit as an Advocate was to come upon these men and teach them all things, bear witness about Christ, guide them into all truth, and take from what was Christ's and declare it to them. The Apostles would preach and teach the message of Christ and His salvation to the world.

It is no wonder that in His High Priestly prayer in John 17:17 Jesus prays, "Sanctify them (the Apostles) in the truth, Your Word is truth." The Apostles were being set apart for the purpose of preaching the truth.

Link # 6 — Jesus Commissions Disciples

Link six is the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16, Jesus gives His marching orders to His disciples. Matthew records Jesus saying:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark states the words of Christ in his narrative as,

“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

In each case, baptism is directly connected to the plan of salvation, so says Jesus Himself. Remember, He has “all authority in heaven and on earth.” In Matthew, baptism is a concurrent action with the verbal command “make disciples.” One becomes a disciple when he/she is baptized into Christ. In Mark, both belief and baptism must take place so one can be saved. Salvation is given by God when faith is present, and the believer has submitted to baptism.

Link # 7 — Jesus Tells the Apostles They Would be His Witnesses

Link seven has to do with Jesus telling the Apostles they would be His witnesses to the world as seen in Acts 1:8. The Apostles were witnesses in a unique way that does not apply to us. They were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus and had been with Him during His earthly ministry (Acts 1:21-22).

Link # 8 — Jesus Starts His Church

The final link in our chain is the establishment of the Lord’s church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Here Peter, for the first time, used the “keys to the kingdom,” when he preached the gospel to the Jews. Peter used the “keys” a second time in Acts 10 when he preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household who then became the first Gentile converts to Christianity.

After preaching the great gospel sermon to the Jews, Acts 2:37 tells us many of those gathered were “cut to the heart” regarding the message Peter had preached. They were convicted about their sin in rejecting Christ and having Him put to death. They wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved. Peter (the keyholder) uses the authority giv-

en to him by Christ, and answers the question in verse 38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” We often stop reading right there, but the next verse is extremely important as well. Verse 39 says, “For the promise (of salvation when you repent and are baptized) is for you (the Jews listening at that moment) and for your children (those Jews who would come after them) and for all who are far off (far off in time, that is the Gentiles), everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”

What this means is the plan of salvation was settled from the very beginning of the church. Peter, who spoke with the authority of Christ, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, stated the conditions for salvation at the start of the kingdom. Recognizing the faith of the Jews as evidenced by their question in verse 37 and belief in the message he preached, he tells them next to repent and be baptized. These conditions become normative for the rest of history. Whatever the Jews were told to do on Pentecost, the same applies for those of us who are “far off.”

This comes through clearly in the case of Cornelius as well (Acts 10). After witnessing the sign of tongue speaking, which was meant to convince Peter and the Jewish Christians that the way of salvation was now open to the Gentiles, Peter said to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:47, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people?” Immediately, Peter had Cornelius and his family baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, just as had the 3000 Jews who responded to the message in Acts 2.

Conclusion

God has established an unbreakable chain of authority regarding His plan of salvation. We can trace the absolute authority of God through Christ, delegated to His Apostles, and revealed through Holy Spirit-inspired preaching and writing. This unbreakable chain applies to everything taught in the New Testament, which means it certainly applies to baptism. Remember this: If God said it, it’s true, and it is settled once and for all. May we use the unbreakable chain of Divine authority we have been given in God’s Word so that the world might be led to Christ. ~RH

Paul Ponchot is the evangelist with the Cumberland County Christian Church in Vineland, NJ. He is also the director of South Jersey Evangelism. Paul and his wife Ronda have been with the church and ministry since 1994. They have three children: Jillian, Chris and wife Grace, and Kayla. They also have one grandchild, Susan.

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Chris Mulpas is a minister of the Gospel who, after a twenty year preaching ministry in the local church, is now traveling full-time to churches all over the country. He is available for concerts, revivals, supply preaching, and seminars.

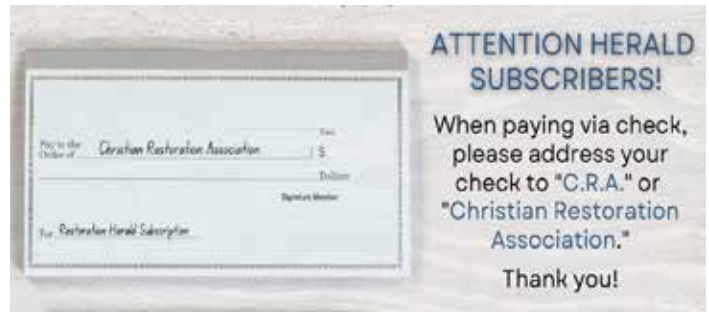
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About Our Lesson Writer



Phillip Gore was raised in a Christian home on a farm in northeastern Missouri. During his youth, he became a Christian and decided to enter the preaching ministry. Upon graduating from Central Christian College of the Bible in Moberly, Missouri, he served in occupational ministry for 16 years.

He currently works as a web application developer. However, he continues to preach and teach on a volunteer basis. Phillip also serves as an elder in the First Christian Church, Vandalia, MO. He and his wife Lanaya have been married for 22 years. They have two daughters, Elizabeth (20) and Phoebe (16), and two sons, Jonathan (18) and Harrison (12).



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Unbroken Promises

Background of Text — The importance of Abram (later renamed Abraham) cannot be overstated. Nineteen chapters of the Bible are devoted to Abram, who lived 175 years. In contrast, all of history from Creation to the Flood is covered in only six chapters.

In Genesis 14, we read that warring kings of the land

took Abram's nephew, Lot, and all of Lot's possessions. Then Abram led 318 trained men of his household against the kings. He defeated them and rescued Lot. After this, Melchizedek king of Salem and priest of the Most High God brought Abram bread and wine. Then he blessed Abram, and Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Genesis 12:1-3 — God told Abram to go. Literally in Hebrew, "Go for your sake!" In other words, it would be of benefit for Abram to follow the Lord's command. Even so, it required great faith for him to obey. He was not promised the land. The land was not described to him. He was not even told where the land would be or how long it would take to get there. He was simply commanded to go and God would show him the land (Hebrews 11:8).

By God's decree, much will result from Abram's obedient faith: (1) A great nation from him—Israel. (2) A great name for him—Jews and Christians alike revere Abram. (3) A great blessing through him—Monotheism, the Law, and the Messiah. (4) A great curse to avenge him—anything but following his example of faith leads to condemnation. (5) A global reach by him—the church is spreading this saving faith to the uttermost parts of the earth. Of course, the ultimate fulfillment of each part of God's promise to Abram is found in Jesus (Galatians 3:8,16).

Verses 12:4-6 — Abram obeyed. He took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. Family is a blessing and a priority. They took their possessions. Material goods are a blessing and a necessity. In all of this, however, what is most important is that "Abram went, as the Lord had told him."

Abram passed through the land, undoubtedly taking in all its potential. He arrived at Shechem. Abram also saw that the land was already inhab-

ited by the Canaanites. This fact will again require Abram to trust God in what God tells him next.

Verse 12:7 — Previously God spoke to Abram. Now he appears to him. In what form, we do not know. What we do know is that God added a sixth item to his previous decree of blessing. Abram's promised descendants would possess the land upon which he stood — the land to which he traveled by faith at the Lord's command.

Apparently, Abram took God at his word. Once again, he believed, and to commemorate the experience, he built an altar to the Lord.

Like Abram, God asks us to trust Him. We have greater knowledge of God's promises and His fulfillment than Abram did. We should seek to emulate Abram's obedient faith in all things.

What has God commanded us to do? How might our faithful obedience result in great blessing?

Genesis 15:1 — Abram had just defeated a coalition of wicked kings and rescued his nephew, Lot, from their capture. The difficulties of life in this new land had become all too real. It was after these things that the Lord came to him again. This time He came in a vision. God encouraged Abram to not be afraid. The Lord was his shield (protector) and his reward (provision) would be great. God is both protector and provider to those who are faithful.

Verses 15:2-3 — Abram responds by asking what God will give him. Sure-

ly it will be something other than the previous promises of blessing. It had been 10 years and he had no children. It seemed the heir of his wealth would be a member of his household, Eliezer, most likely a servant of Abram's. He was struggling to trust that God can and will keep His promises.

Verses 15:4-5 — God reassures Abram that His earlier promised blessings will come to pass. Eliezer will not be his heir. He will have a biological son, not an adopted son, and that son will be his heir. God keeps His promises on His own timetable, not ours.

Next God directs Abram's attention to the stars in the night sky. He dares him to number them. God promises Abram that his descendants will be as plentiful as those stars.

Verse 15:6 — Abram's response is silent but significant. Contrary to everything his senses and experience told him, Abram believed God could and would give him a son. He believed God and it was counted as righteousness. The Bible assures us that no one is righteous. However, God counts faith as righteousness (Romans 4:1-5).

Verse 15:7 — Then God reminded Abram that it was He who had brought Abram out from Ur of the Chaldeans. It was He who would give Abram the land to possess. Ultimately, God would fulfill all His promises.

(1) How is God our protector and provider? (2) How do we struggle in trusting God's promises? (3) How does God encourage us to keep the faith?

An Unexpected Choice

Background of Text — Last week we discussed God’s promise to Abram (now renamed Abraham) that he would be the father of a great nation and that many blessings would flow from the fulfillment of that promise. We now

leap ahead to a time when God continues to be faithful through Abraham’s son Isaac even though he and his family have problems and sin.

Genesis 25:19-21 — Like his father Abraham, Isaac’s faith was tested. He was forty years old when he married and sixty years old when his sons were born. God had promised that Abraham would be the father of a great nation through his only son Isaac (Genesis 12:2, 15:4-5). For 20 years, Isaac and Rebekah’s inability to have children seemed to threaten that promise.

Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of himself and his barren wife. God granted his request.

Verses 25:22-23 — Rebekah’s pregnancy was a difficult one. She was having twins and the babies in her womb seemed to be in constant turmoil. It was such a difficult situation that she wondered, “If this is the fulfilled promise of God, why is the pregnancy so very hard?”

Ultimately, she inquired of God. Three items were revealed to her: (1) Her twins would be the beginning of two separate peoples. (2) One would be stronger than the other. (3) The older would serve the younger.

The lives of these brothers and their descendants was going to be contentious. The trouble between them was already evident in their mother’s womb.

Verses 25:24-26 — Isaac and Rebekah’s boys were very different from the minute they were born. Esau was covered in hair. Some scholars suggest the name “Esau” relates to the word “hairy.” Jacob was grabbing at Esau’s heel as if to hold him back. Some have understood the name “Jacob” to mean “heal grabber.” Skimming ahead in the text, we begin to see the reversal

that would happen in their birth order as Jacob becomes prominent in the Biblical narrative.

Verses 25:27-28 — As grown men, more differences emerge between these two brothers. Esau was favored by his father. Esau was a skilled hunter who provided game to eat. He was a “man of the field.” It’s possible that Isaac did not know that the boys’ positions would be reversed. This may explain why he focused on Esau as the elder brother who was to receive the birthright.

The birthright involved: (1) Being head over the family. (2) Being priest for the family. (3) Inheriting double the family wealth. (4) Being the line through which the family covenant with God would be fulfilled.

In contrast to Isaac, Rebekah favored Jacob. He was quiet and stayed close to home. Perhaps this gave his mother less worry and gave the two of them a deeper relationship. It is also possible that knowing Esau would eventually serve Jacob added to Rebekah’s favoritism.

The obvious favoritism of the parents could not have helped the contentious relationship of their sons. A family divided this way is unlikely to create a happy home. No two children are alike, even in the same family. Each child should be dealt with as a unique individual. However, parents must not choose favorites. We should deal justly with all our children.

How can we interact with our children as unique individuals? How can we avoid showing favoritism?

Verses 25:29-34 — God’s plan to reverse the position of the twins was accomplished when Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. Esau was famished after what we assume was a long and perhaps unfruitful hunting trip. He was not literally “about to die” as some translations put it. That is just a way of saying he was extremely hungry. He was famished.

Jacob offered to sell him some stew. The price was his birthright. Clearly being a man controlled by his appetites (Hebrews 12:16), Esau made the deal. “I am really, really hungry, so what good is my birthright?” is not the thinking of a mature man. Esau may have appeared to be a man’s man externally, but he had much maturing yet to do.

It may very well be that Esau despised his birthright because he had no interest in taking on the responsibility that came with being head over the family and priest of the family. It’s just not what he wanted. However, it is more likely he simply lacked foresight and self-control. He just wanted some stew and he wanted it right now. In the moment, he didn’t care what it cost. Given Esau’s particular lack of maturity and disinterest in his birthright (Hebrews 12:16), it was wise for God to give it and all its corresponding responsibilities to Jacob.

(1) There are many wonderful externalities we associate with masculinity, but what kind of character truly makes a man a man? (2) How can we guard against our appetites (desires) derailing us from receiving our birthright (salvation)?

Background of Text — Jacob is returning to Canaan when he receives word that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. Esau had foolishly sold his birthright to his brother and Jacob had deceitfully tricked their father into giving him Esau’s blessing. Things were not good between the men.

Jacob split his people and his possessions into two camps. If Esau attacked one camp, perhaps the other camp could escape. He prayed to God for deliverance. In addition, he prepared a peace offering for Esau. As we face the difficulties of life, we must both pray to God and do all that we can do.

Genesis 32:22-25 — Jacob helped his family cross the river to hopeful safety. Perhaps this was done at night to avoid detection and attack. Jacob remained alone on the other side of the river.

As the night wore on, he found himself in a wrestling match with an unknown assailant. Was the man Esau? Was he one of Esau’s 400? Was he just a bandit? Who knows what questions went through Jacob’s mind? The two grappled with one another in the darkness until the man realized he had not beaten Jacob. At that point the man revealed himself. In what seemed to be a supernatural act, he touched Jacob’s hip socket and it was put out of joint. This was no mere man. He obviously had divine power.

Verses 32:26-29 — The assailant demands that Jacob let him go because the sun is coming up. Why? The Bible never identifies the man, but the best understanding is that this is a theophany—God appearing in human form. Is he giving Jacob a chance to avoid looking upon his face (Exodus 33:20)?

Jacob refuses to let him go without receiving a blessing. Before blessing him, the stranger asks his name. When Jacob responds, the stranger gives him a new name, Israel, which means “he who struggles with God.”

Now Jacob asks the man for his name. The stranger seems to think Jacob should already know who he is. Perhaps his identity has already been given in the name Israel. He refuses to provide a name but blesses Jacob before they part ways.

Verses 32:30-31 — The full identity of the supernatural stranger seems to be disclosed in the name Jacob assigns to the place. Peniel means “face of God.” It was a theophany after all. Jacob has wrestled with God and has lived to tell the tale.

As he limped away under the rising sun, Jacob must have had increased faith and confidence to meet his brother and deal with whatever lay ahead. Indeed, he had striven with God and man, and he had prevailed.

Observations To Ponder — The New Testament never draws the comparison, so we must be careful. However, it is interesting to note the similarities between Jacob’s theophany and Jesus’ incarnation. One might even call it foreshadowing:

(1) Both the stranger and Jesus seemed at first to be mere men with whom to contend. One is wrestled with physically. The other is wrestled with intellectually. (2) Both the stranger and Jesus were then revealed to be more through the miraculous. One was perhaps an angel. The other seemed to be at least a prophet. (3) Both the stranger and Jesus gave new names to key men of God. The stranger gave Jacob the new name Israel. Jesus gave Simon the new name Peter. (4) Ultimately at the break of day, both the stranger and Jesus were revealed to be God made in the likeness of man.

Whether we are intended to look back and see these parallels or not, we learn from both Jacob’s theophany and Jesus’ incarnation that in this life we are free to wrestle with God. He

will not crush us. In the struggle, He will reveal Himself to us. He might discipline us. He will most certainly change us. But He will not crush us.

(1) Does struggling with God or questioning your faith feel like something you are free to do, or does it seem taboo?

(2) How have times of difficulty, doubt, or struggle brought you closer to God?

Verse 32:32 — As a reminder of Jacob’s encounter with God, the people of Israel would not eat the sinew of an animal’s thigh. In modern times Kosher butchers still remove the sciatic nerve from meat for this very reason.

In New Testament times, we have been given two physical reminders of what God has done: (1) Communion reminds us that God not only took on the likeness of man, but He died on the cross for our sins. (2) When we look back on our baptism, we are reminded of our personal encounter with the saving grace of God through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The memory of baptism and the weekly practice of communion are tangible markers that help anchor and grow our faith.

(1) What memory do you have of your own baptism?

(2) Do you ever struggle to stay focused during communion?

(3) What else has God given to anchor and grow our faith?

Background of Text — Jacob’s wife Rachel had just passed away. Now sin would disrupt the family. The oldest, Reuben, would engage in sexual sin. Then the brothers would conspire to sell Joseph into slavery. Then Judah

would engage in sexual sin. In this lesson, we will be focusing on the sexual sins of the two brothers and the different ways they handled it when it became known.

Genesis 35:22-26 — Why would Reuben dishonor his father by having a sexual encounter with Bilhah? Commentators offer a couple of unsatisfying explanations: (1) It was a power grab. (2) It prevented his deceased mother from being officially replaced by Bilhah. The text does not say why. It may very well be a simple matter of lust, as these things often are.

It appears the matter was not addressed until Israel (Jacob) was on his death bed (Genesis 49:3-4). Jacob removed Reuben from the position of firstborn because of this incident. His rights as firstborn fell to the sons of Joseph (1 Chronicles 5:1).

Bilhah most likely endured shame. Jacob undoubtedly endured embarrassment. Sadly, there seems to be no remorse on the part of Reuben for his sin.

Genesis 38:12-14 — At the time, the widow of a deceased brother was to be given in marriage to a living brother. This would provide the support and protection of marriage as well as the opportunity to have children. Shelah, the only living brother, had previously been too young. However, he was now grown, and Tamar had not been given to him in marriage.

There was a provision that the father-in-law could marry the widow in place of a brother. Perhaps with this in mind, Tamar took matters into her own hands. She changed out of her widow’s garb and covered her face with a veil. She positioned herself on the road to Timnah. Then she waited for her father-in-law Judah to pass by.

Verses 38:15-19 — Judah assumed Tamar was just a prostitute. He engaged her “services” for the promise of a young goat. As a pledge that he would keep his promise, Tamar demanded his signet, his cord, and his staff. Judah agreed and they fornicated. Through this encounter, Tamar conceived a child by Judah.

Then Tamar left. She took off her veil and put on her widow’s garb. For the moment, no one was the wiser.

Verses 38:24-26 — Word got out. Tamar had engaged in immoral sexual behavior. It had led to a pregnancy. She had betrayed Judah’s third son Shelah to whom she was technically pledged. Judah called for her to be put to death by burning.

However, Tamar had shrewdly prepared for these consequences. She produced Judah’s signet, his cord, and his staff as proof that Judah had been the one who had gotten her pregnant. When Judah saw this, he declared her more righteous than himself because he had denied her the husband she was due, which was the original sinful act that set everything in motion. Judah never had sexual relations with her again. Tamar gave birth to twin boys (Genesis 38:24-30). In addition, she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:3).

In contrast to his brother Reuben, Judah confessed his sins and took responsibility for the immediate consequences. Rather than lose his place in the family, Judah would be the beginning of the royal line that would ultimately produce the Messiah.

Before his death, Jacob gave patriarchal prophecies concerning his sons. As we have noted, Reuben was stripped of his position of firstborn because of his unrepentant sexual sin. Judah however fairs much better. The first positive words of prophecy are recorded for him.

Genesis 49:8-12 — There are a number of items stated in this blessing for Judah. We know they were fulfilled through the fact that Judah was the father of Israel’s kingly line. (1) He would be praised by his brothers. (2) They would bow before him. (3) He would be successful in combat. (4) He would be feared. (5) He would lead until the one comes to whom the scepter truly belongs.

The last item is translated as “Shiloh” (“rest bringer”) in some versions and “tribute” in others. The general idea is that there is an ultimate possessor of the scepter who is to come. This is most certainly a reference to Jesus, the promised Messiah, who was of the tribe of Judah. All peoples shall be obedient to him. The wealth is such that donkeys can be tied to choice vines without concern. Wine can be used to wash without care.

Discussion Questions — (1) Does the sin of Bible characters ever shock you? Why or why not? (2) What is to be learned about God and His dealing with sinners from these accounts? (3) Jacob came from a dysfunctional family (parental favoritism), and he was the father of a dysfunctional family (sexual sin, among other things). How do these passages help us deal with the dysfunction in our own families?

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2022

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Winchester, VA

Contact: ccmv4thebible@gmail.com

National Prayer Clinic..... October 11-13
Grundy, VA

Contact: Jerrybliffen@hotmail.com

CRA Bible Conference October 20-21
Mason, OH

Contact: thecra@thecra.org

Restoration Destination . November 11-13, 14-16
North Myrtle Beach, SC

Contact: cclongs@sccoast.net

2023

Florida Bible Conference..... January 16-18
Kissimmee, FL

Contact: thecra@thecra.org

The CRA Today

Meet Our Trustees

Tom Claibourne became a trustee of the CRA in 1996 and since 2004 has served on the executive committee as vice president. Besides publishing many feature articles in the *Restoration Herald* over the years, he wrote a monthly column called "Let Me Illustrate" from 1997-2017.



Tom has served with the Bethlehem Church of Christ in rural southern Ohio since soon after his graduation from Cincinnati Bible College in 1979. During this 43-year ministry, he has also preached for special services for many other congregations, led many workshops and conferences related to ministry in smaller congregations, written numerous articles and guest editorials for other publications, and contributed chapters for two books on ministry. His 6-year involvement with a prominent Ten Commandments lawsuit led to him speaking and writing often on subjects related to America's heritage and the issue of religion in the public arena.

Tom is husband to Linnea, dad to two married daughters and one son, and "Pops" to one grandson (and one granddaughter due in October).