

## EDITORIAL

Before the Iron Curtain fell, Dr. Bob Provost (now President of Slavic Gospel Association) traveled to meet with the Baptist Union president in Prague. Arriving at the headquarters, Bob discovered the president had journeyed to a city three hours away. Dr. Provost continued on by bus, but still could not find the official nor speak the language. So he fervently prayed, “Lord, please direct me to this man.”

Early Sunday evening had arrived by now. What should he do? Then Bob saw some older women walking by and he simply said, “Baptist.” Their eyes lit up and they beckoned him to follow them to a Baptist church, where the people asked if he came from Grace Community Church in America (and he did). Later, he inquired how they could possibly have known about his home church; they said Grace was the only church in America that they knew by name.

Bob preached that night, having been invited to do so since he was from a well-known church in the States. After delivering the message, he retired to the front pew. A man then walked in a side door, sat down next to Bob, and introduced himself as the president of the Baptist Union. Bob received God’s answer.

Christians long to hear from God, as did Dr. Provost. We can identify with the psalmist’s prayer, “Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. . . . be merciful to me and hear my prayer” (Ps 4:1; also 13:3, 20:9, 141:1). God promises to hear the saints’ prayers (Pss 50:15, 91:15; Jer 33:3; Zech 13:9; Matt 7:7; John 15:7). Both the prophets and apostles testified to God’s faithful answers (Pss 66:19–20; 86:6–7; 138:3; 145:18–19; 1 John 3:22; 5:14–15).

How does God speak to us today? How will we hear from Him? He communicates in three basic ways: (1) the created world (Ps 19:1–2); (2) Christ and the Scriptures (Heb 1:1–2); and (3) life circumstances (compare Matt 26:39 with 26:47–27:56). God wants to be heard far more often than we actually hear; but all too often we are not listening for Him. We need to be more alert like Samuel, who said, “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9).

### Hearing When We Have Not Prayed

Hearing from God does not always follow a cause and effect sequence, humanly speaking. Sometimes God intervenes when we have not petitioned Him. The most incredible times of hearing often involve gracious and merciful Divine responses, unprompted by our prayers.

On April 6, 1970, around 8:00 p.m. at Scott Memorial Baptist Church in San Diego, I heard from God about an issue over which I had never prayed—my personal salvation. Others had been praying, like our next-door neighbors and several family members, but I was the one who heard the answer. Their prayers were according to God's will concerning my salvation (1 Tim 2:4).

Four months later, July 1970, I again heard from God concerning an issue that had never crossed my mind—resigning my officer's commission in the United States Navy and going to seminary and entering the ministry. No one, to my knowledge, prayed for me concerning this, but the Lord definitely directed me into His will.

At the time, I became firmly convinced that this new direction originated neither from my own desire nor at the instigation of Satan, so I began to make plans immediately. However, the people closest to me urged a slower approach. To them this "call to ministry" seemed somewhat mysterious. It was not like "God told me" with an audible voice, but the sense of Divine direction would not go away. My wife and I presented ourselves before God to do His will and prayed that He would make it so clear that, as new believers, we would not miss it. Forty years have passed. Looking back now through almost four decades of ministry, it seems much more certain to everyone that the impressions I had in 1970 were of God and He actually did call me to the ministry.

God knows our needs (Matt 6:32) and does not necessarily require someone's prayer to prompt His action. For example, have you ever been convicted of sin when you were certain no one else knew about your iniquity? God knew (Ps 139:1–6) and, most likely, impressed your conscience by bringing to mind a portion of His Word with which you were already familiar and which identified your transgression as sin, similar to David's experience (Ps 32:3–4).

### **Hearing Before We Have Prayed**

We often quickly pray, not realizing that God may have already spoken; all we need to do is prayerfully find His previously delivered answer in Scripture.

Take God's will, for instance. Much of what we seek has already been given to us. Significant Scripture passages explicitly state "this is the will of God," such as "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices" (Rom 12:1–2), "avoid[ing] sexual immorality" (1 Thess 4:3), or "give[ing] thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18). For additional specific statements about God's will, see Ps 103:21; Eph 5:17–21; 1 Tim 2:4; 1 Pet 2:13–15; 3:7; 5:2; and 1 John 5:14–15. God's Word often contains His answer to the prayer, "Lord, show me Your will for my life."

One of the most amazing Bible texts on prayer is, "For your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt 6:8). Its import deeply etched itself in our family's memory during the first semester of seminary (Fall 1971). My wife saw a man crawling across an empty lot; he had tumbled out of a tree

while trimming it and broken his leg. She helped him into our car and rushed him to the hospital. We thought nothing more of the event.

Two weeks later, my spouse shared by phone our testimony and the gospel with an unsaved acquaintance whom we had known in the Navy. The friend received Christ. My wife then wanted to send this new believer a ten-dollar Bible, but our meager seminary budget just couldn't afford such a luxury. So, our family began to pray for the extra cash. Within days a thank you note arrived from the man with the broken leg. He wrote to express his gratefulness for helping him and included a check. If you guessed \$10 for the check amount, you are right; that is how God anticipated our prayer and provided for it, even before we knew the need.

### **Hearing Because We Have Prayed**

God normally answers prayer with one of four responses: (1) directly as asked (Acts 12:5–17); (2) delayed, but as requested (Luke 1:13); (3) differently than we prayed (Rom 8:26–27); or (4) denied altogether (2 Cor 12:8–10).

James writes that we ought to condition our entire life, including prayer, with “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (Jas 4:15). John assures us that God hears and answers prayer according to His will (1 John 5:14–15). Jesus exemplified this kind of prayer life. “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39). Certainly, God’s will frames all of His answers.

Several years ago, Patricia MacArthur (wife of John MacArthur) had a nearly fatal automobile accident that should have resulted in paralysis. A little over a year later, she had completely recovered. I later interviewed her for my book, *The Healing Promise* (Christian Focus), and asked “How were you praying and how did God answer your prayers?” She responded, “When my extremities went numb, I asked the Lord to restore me. . . . Because of the effect it would have on His ministry, He saw fit to answer the prayers according to the way they were asked—not because I was deserving of this particular kind of healing.” She received because she asked and her prayer conformed to God’s will (Matt 7:7–8).

### **Hearing but Rejecting God’s Answer**

The nation Israel often sought direction from God; however, Israel frequently rejected the Divine answer (Ps 81:11; 106:24–25). After Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., the remnant inquired about God’s will through the prayers of Jeremiah (Jer 42:2–6), but the very people who commissioned Jeremiah later rejected the Lord’s answer (Jer 43:2–4). Similarly, the Jews of Jesus’ day had been praying for the arrival of Messiah, but did not receive Him when He arrived (John 1:11; 5:39–40). This pattern of disobedience does not fit God’s desire (Ps 81:13), nor does it match the characteristic pattern of submission in

true believers (John 10:27). However, Jesus continues to beckon obedience (Rev 3:20).

Years ago my wife disciplined a girl who attended a Christian college. Tragically, this young woman became pregnant outside of marriage and then sought our counsel. I told her the first step to recovery involved confessing her immorality as sin against God (Gen 39:9; Ps 51:4). Her response startled me. She blurted out that nowhere in Scripture did God expressly forbid intimate relationships between two people who intended to marry. I took her to a passage she apparently had overlooked or forgotten (1 Thess 4:3). Then she blustered, "I don't care what the Bible says, we are in love." She clearly heard God's will, yet defiantly rejected it.

### **Hearing God's Silence**

Not hearing from God sometimes provides louder messages than actually having your prayers answered. Scripture details many negative reasons why God acts as if He hasn't heard. "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives . . ." (Jas 4:3). "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened . . ." (Ps 66:18; cf. Isa 59:2). ". . . be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect . . . so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Pet 3:7). "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (Jas 4:2). To these reasons, you can add: (1) faithless prayer (Jas 1:5-7); (2) praying outside of God's will (1 John 5:14-15); (3) ignorant prayer (Rom 8:26); (4) a lack of persistent prayer (Luke 18:1-8); and (5) arrogant prayer (Matt 6:5, 7).

On the positive side, the lack of an immediate answer could mean that God wants to test your faith (Jas 1:3; 1 Pet 4:12). Additionally, the response could be delayed because God has planned a better time. The Master's Seminary recently completed a major building project that would normally last two years, but it continued eight years. The unexpected and, at times, unappreciated additional time enabled us to (1) make design changes which significantly enhanced the building's utility, (2) take advantage of rapidly changing technology, and (3) complete the fund raising so that an expensive bank loan proved unnecessary. We can now look back through those agonizing years and see God's wisdom which extended the timing of His final answer for our new Library and Faculty Office complex.

### **Hearing Someone Other Than God**

A small segment of Christendom asserts that God normally and frequently communicates to His people through visions, dreams, angelic messengers, theophanies, and the voice of God. Beware of this patently false boast, however real it may appear at first. Take dreams for example. In the entire Old Testament (which spans at least 4,000 years), fewer than 20 specific dreams to fewer than 15 people are recorded. Only six appear in the New

Testament, all in Matthew. Regarding visions, less than 25 particular visions were given to not more than 15 people in the Old Testament. Even fewer examples are found in the New Testament. Biblical dreams and visions were extremely rare and never in Scripture given for mundane purposes or to the masses for communicating God’s will.

Make certain you have heard from God and not some human or demonic source. Don’t listen to a voice within you (probably your own inner voice) or look for signs that make sense only to you. Most important, don’t be influenced by people who claim to have a word from God. This mistake cost King Ahab (1 Kings 22:1–40) and the prophet Hananiah (Jer 28:1–17) their lives. Don’t be deceived by the counterfeit claim, “God told me!”

When God truly answers your prayer, several features will authenticate it as from Him. First, it will not contradict Scripture. Second, it won’t direct you to act sinfully. Third, it will not take you outside of God’s will. Fourth, it will not come by supernatural means such as that experienced by Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles.

### **Hearing for Effect**

George Mueller (1805–98), one of the church’s most effective prayer practitioners, recorded this entry in his prayer diary:

This day has been one of the most remarkable days concerning the funds. There was no money on hand, and I was waiting on God. I asked Him repeatedly, but no supplies came. The headmaster called to tell me that one pound two shillings was needed to buy bread for the three houses and to meet the other expenses. . . . At four o’clock I wondered how the sisters had gotten through the day. I went to the Girls’ Orphan House to meet for prayer and found that a box had come for me from Barnstable. The delivery fee was paid, otherwise there would have been no money to pay for it. See how the Lord’s hand is in the smallest matters! The box was opened, and it contained more than fourteen pounds for the orphans and the Bible Fund.

I commend the following basic prayer pattern to help you also hear from God (Ps 138:3).

- |    |                     |   |                                    |
|----|---------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Admission</i>    | – | Lord, I am unworthy and unable!    |
| 2. | <i>Submission</i>   | – | Lord, you know best!               |
| 3. | <i>Transmission</i> | – | Lord, please intervene!            |
| 4. | <i>Intermission</i> | – | Lord, I wait on you!               |
| 5. | <i>Permission</i>   | – | Lord, thank you for your response! |

### **Hearing Aids to Prayer**

When you hear from God too infrequently, or you want to listen attentively so that you miss as little as humanly possible, regularly employ these “hearing aids.”

1. Review biblical reasons that contribute to not hearing from God; ask yourself if any one or a combination of these features is true of you.
2. Reflect on God’s creation; ask yourself what God is communicating through it (Ps 19:1–6).
3. Spend time in God’s Word; let Him communicate what He has already written (Job 23:12).
4. Talk to God less; quietly reflect more on His glorious majesty (Ps 46:10).
5. Rehearse significant answers to prayer from your past; praise God for them (1 Thess 1:2–3).
6. Be faithful with small, seemingly insignificant prayer answers (Luke 16:10).
7. Delight yourself in the Lord (Ps 37:4).
8. Maintain a constant attitude of prayer (1 Thess 5:17).
9. Thankfully count all things, e.g. food, clothing, and shelter as gifts from God, even though you have not prayed specifically (1 Thess 5:18).
10. Use your prayer life to personally worship God (Ps 119).
11. Pray for God’s glory, pleasure, and will to result from His answers to your prayers (1 Cor 10:31).
12. Keep a prayer diary; record God’s responses.

Richard Mayhue  
rmayhue@tms.edu

**PREACH THE WORD:  
FIVE COMPELLING MOTIVATIONS FOR  
THE FAITHFUL EXPOSITOR**

John MacArthur, Litt.D., D.D.  
President and Professor of Pastoral Ministries  
The Master's Seminary

*For the biblical expositor, 2 Tim 4:2 majestically stands out as sacred ground. It is precious territory for every pastor who, following in the footsteps of Paul, desires to faithfully proclaim the Word of God. In this single verse, the apostle defined the primary mandate for God-honoring church ministry, not only for Timothy, but for all who would come after him. The minister of the gospel is called to “Preach the Word!”*

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As Paul penned the Spirit-inspired text of 2 Tim 4:2, he knew he was about to die.<sup>1</sup> The words of this verse stand at the beginning of the last chapter he would ever write. Alone in a bleak Roman dungeon, without even a cloak to keep himself warm (v. 13), the unwearied apostle issued one final charge—calling Timothy and every minister after him, to herald the Scriptures without compromise. Paul understood what was at stake; the sacred baton of gospel stewardship was being passed to the next generation. He also knew that Timothy, his young son in the faith, was prone to apprehension and timidity. That is why he prefaced his exhortation to pastoral faithfulness with the strongest possible language:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season;

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<sup>1</sup> Along these lines, R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell note, “The heat of the apostle’s focus was intensified by the burning realization that he himself was in truth a dying man. . . . The charge in verses 1–5 initiates the final thoughts of what is the old apostle’s ministerial last will and testament.” *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 242.

reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Tim 4:1–2).

The heart of that brief passage, *preach the word*, summarizes biblical ministry in one central mandate.

That command is consistent with what the apostle had earlier explained to Timothy about the qualifications for spiritual leadership. In 1 Tim 3:2, Paul noted that—in addition to numerous moral and spiritual qualifications—overseers and pastors must possess one universal skill: the ability to teach. They must be competent Bible expositors—men who are able to both clearly explain the text and effectively exhort the congregation.

But being called to preach and teach is not just a sacred privilege. It is also a serious responsibility—one that the minister is expected to carry out *at all times*. He is to fill his pulpit “in season and out of season.” Whether it seems acceptable or unacceptable, wise or unwise, his mandate and his mission never change. The man of God has been summoned to boldly preach the message of God to the people of God, no matter how often the winds of popular opinion swirl and shift.

Faithfulness to the Word demands, furthermore, that the minister preach *all of it*. Timothy was not to focus solely on the positive, heart-warming aspects of pastoral ministry. He was also to “reprove, rebuke, [and] exhort” the flock, refusing the temptation to shy away from Scripture’s warnings and corrections.<sup>2</sup> Yet, his reproof was to be balanced out with “great patience and instruction”—his fiery firmness tempered by his compassion and tenderness toward those under his spiritual care. For the faithful shepherd, patience toward people is of paramount importance.

But, while his shepherding is characterized by gentleness and longsuffering, his preaching must not be marked by uncertainty or ambiguity. Instead, the faithful minister proclaims the truth of God’s Word with the confidence and certainty that it deserves. Authority in preaching does not come from the pastor’s office, education, or experience. Rather, it derives from the highest possible source—God Himself. Insofar as the sermon accurately portrays the biblical text, it comes with the Author’s own authority. The power of the pulpit, then, is in the Word preached, as the Spirit uses His sword to pierce human hearts (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). Consequently, the pastor’s task is to faithfully feed the flock with the pure milk of the Word (1 Pet 2:1–3), trusting God for the resulting growth.

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<sup>2</sup> As Homer A. Kent, Jr., explains, “He must proclaim as a herald (*kēruxon*) the message which has been given to him by his Lord. He must announce it in its completeness (Acts 20:27), without alteration, addition, or subtraction. He must proclaim, not philosophize or argue. . . . To proclaim God’s Word involves all the themes of Scripture, not picking out some and ignoring others. The Word of God in its entirety is the basic material of the preacher’s message.” *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 283.



In the verses surrounding 2 Tim 4:2, Paul provided his protégé with much-needed motivation to stand firm and persevere to the end. For Timothy, the command was clear: *preach the Word*; and the calling was deadly serious: souls were at stake. In order to equip him for the task, Paul gave Timothy five compelling reasons to persevere in ministry faithfulness. These motivations, found in 2 Tim 3:1–4:4, are as applicable today as they were when the apostle wrote them nearly two millennia ago.

### **Motivation 1: Preach the Word Because of the Danger of the Seasons (2 Tim 3:1–9)**

In 2 Tim 3:1, Paul warned Timothy “that in the last days difficult times will come.” Used here, the phrase “the last days” refers not merely to the end of the church age, but to the entirety of it, from the Day of Pentecost to the Parousia.<sup>3</sup> Paul’s point is that, until the Lord comes back, the church will continually experience difficult times. As commentator William Hendricksen explains, “In every period of history, there will be a season during which men refuse to listen to sound doctrine. As history continues onward toward the consummation, this situation grows worse.”<sup>4</sup>

The phrase “difficult times” does not refer to specific points of chronological time, but rather to seasons or epochs of time.<sup>5</sup> And the term “difficult” carries with it the meaning of being “savage” or “perilous.”<sup>6</sup> Paul is expressing the reality that, throughout the church age, there will be seasons of time in which believers are savagely threatened. With his execution imminent, the apostle certainly knew a great deal about the difficulty that Christians might face. He also understood that Timothy was facing persecution and hostility; and that his young apprentice would be tempted by sins of cowardice and compromise. But that was exactly why Timothy needed to preach the Word. The looming threat made his ministry mandate all the more necessary and urgent.

In 2 Tim 3:13, Paul wrote, “Evil men during these dangerous epochs will proceed from bad to worse.” Such men are “lovers of self, lovers of money,

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<sup>3</sup> C. Michael Moss correctly observes, “[The phrase] ‘the last days’ is [also] used elsewhere in the NT to refer to the Messianic age from Jesus’ coming until the final consummation at the end of time (cf. Acts 2:17; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3; Heb 1:2). The language and concept really represents an OT idea (cf. Joel 3:1; Isa 2:2).” *1, 2 Timothy & Titus*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2003), 224.

<sup>4</sup> William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 311.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 544.

<sup>6</sup> The term *difficult* “is translated ‘times of stress’ (RSV) and ‘dangerous’ (Norlie). It is used in Matt 8:28 to describe the bizarre actions of a pair of demoniacs” (Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 223, n. 22.)

boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (3:2–4). They are externally religious, “holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power,” as they “enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (vv. 5–7). Being of a depraved mind, they are filled with sin, error, and destruction. They oppose sound doctrine and reject the faith.

Significantly, based on Paul’s description, it is clear that the greatest threat to the church comes not from hostile forces without, but from false teachers within. Like spiritual terrorists, they sneak into the church and leave a path of destruction in their wake. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt 7:15); and it is their treachery that makes the *difficult times* of the last days so perilous.

The church has been threatened by savage wolves and spiritual swindlers from its earliest days (cf. Acts 20:29). Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), has always sought to undermine the truth with his deadly errors (1 Tim 4:1; cf. 2 Cor 11:4). It is not surprising, then, that church history has often been marked by difficult times—seasons in which falsehood and deception have waged war against the pure gospel. Consider, for example, the havoc created by the following errors:

#### Sacramentalism

One of the earliest deceptions to infiltrate the church on a massive scale was *sacramentalism*—the idea that an individual can connect with God through ritualism or religious ceremony. As sacramentalism gained widespread acceptance, the Roman Catholic Church supposed itself to be a surrogate savior, and people became connected to a system, but not to Christ.<sup>7</sup> Religious ritual became the enemy of the true gospel, standing in opposition to genuine grace and undermining the authority of God and His Word. Many were deluded by the sacramental system. It was a grave danger that developed throughout the Middle Ages, holding Europe in a spiritual chokehold for nearly a millennium.

Though sacramentalism was exposed, by God’s grace during the Reformation, it still represents a lingering threat. Even today, it continues to thrive in the apostate systems of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, destroying those who are doctrinally ignorant.

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<sup>7</sup> Two excellent treatments on the development of the Roman Catholic sacramental system are: William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2003); and Norman L. Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

### Rationalism

Not long after the Reformation, a second major wave of error crashed upon the life of the church: *rationalism*. As European society emerged from the Dark Ages, the resulting Age of Enlightenment emphasized human reason and scientific empiricism, while simultaneously discounting the spiritual and supernatural. Philosophers no longer looked to God as the explanation for the world; but rather sought to account for everything in rational, naturalistic, and deistic terms. In the words of one historian, “As a result of the Enlightenment, no longer was it as easy or acceptable for educated, intellectual people to say with the majority of Christian thinkers through the ages, ‘I believe in order that I may understand.’”<sup>8</sup>

As men began to place themselves above God and their own reason over Scripture, it was not long until rationalism gained access into the church. Higher critical theory—which denied the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible—infiltrated Protestantism through seminaries in both Europe and America. So-called Christian scholars began to question the most fundamental tenets of the faith, as they popularized quests for the “historical Jesus” and denied Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

The legacy of that rationalism, in the form of theological liberalism and continual attacks on biblical inerrancy, is yet alive and well. As such, it represents a continued threat to the truth.

### Orthodoxism

A third historic threat to the church might be labeled *orthodoxism*. With this movement came the desire to return to orthodox Christianity. But the primary means used to accomplish this goal was the imposition of external standards. The end result was not true Christianity, but a cold formalism and superficial moralism. This kind of dead orthodoxy was prevalent, for example, in early eighteenth-century England, where the church had become a spiritual desert.<sup>9</sup> Even in Puritan New England at that time, the spiritual climate was characterized by apathy and hypocrisy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 523.

<sup>9</sup> Historian Michael A. G. Haykin describes the spiritual temperature of that time period: “Few . . . preached anything but dry, unaffecting moralistic sermons. The *mentalité* of the first half of the eighteenth century gloried in reason, moderation, and decorum. The preaching of the day dwelt largely upon themes of morality and decency and lacked [spiritual passion]. . . . Even among many of the churches of the Dissenters, the children of the Puritans, things were little better.” *The Revived Puritan* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2000), 28–29.

<sup>10</sup> The Half-Way Covenant of 1662 exemplifies the spiritual state of New England in the late 17th- and early 18th-centuries.

Though the truth was accessible, genuine belief was severely lacking. True conviction was exchanged for a lifeless indifference to the Word of God; true conversion for a shallow pretense of spirituality. It was in the midst of this spiritual deadness that the Spirit of God sparked a revival—both in England and in colonial America—through the ministries of George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and John and Charles Wesley. Yet, dead orthodoxy still persists in the church today. Twenty-first century congregations are filled with cultural Christians—professing believers who look good on the outside, but internally do not truly know God.

### Politicalism and Ecumenism

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in America, the church grew increasingly fascinated with government and political power. Many Christians became convinced that the best way to influence the world was through civil action and social activism—whether the issue was prohibition or, more recently, prayer in public schools. Over the last 150 years, and especially in recent decades, millions of man hours and billions of dollars have been spent attempting to legislate morality. Yet, the results have been less than encouraging as American society grows continually worse.

In its preoccupation with politics, the church has neglected the fact that its primary purpose on earth is not *political* but *redemptive*. The Great Commission is a call *to make disciples*, not *to change the government*. If society is to be truly changed, it must be through the transformation of individual sinners. But that kind of heart renewal cannot be legislated; it is only possible through the preaching of the gospel by the power of the Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Sadly, the church's desire for political influence opened the door to rank ecumenism. In their quest to moralize America, some evangelicals began to view other religious groups (like Roman Catholics and Mormons) as political allies, rather than the mission field. The assumption was that by partnering with such groups, the church could increase its influence in society.<sup>12</sup> But nothing could be further from the truth; when the gospel is compromised, any real influence is lost (cf. 2 Cor 6:14).

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the Christian's relationship to politics, see John MacArthur, "God, Government, and the Gospel" in *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 121–30.

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent treatment on the history of contemporary evangelicalism's infatuation with popularity and influence, both in the United States and in Great Britain, see Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000).

### Experientialism, Subjectivism, and Mysticism

In the 1960s and 70s another dangerous doctrine arose called the Charismatic Renewal Movement, as Pentecostal *experientialism* began to infiltrate the mainline denominations. As a result, the church was tempted to define truth on the basis of emotional experience. Biblical interpretation was no longer based on the clear teaching of the text; but rather upon feelings and subjective, unverifiable experiences, such as supposed revelations, visions, prophecies, and intuition.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1980s, the influence of clinical psychology brought *subjectivism* into the church. The result was a man-centered Christianity in which the sanctification process was redefined for each individual, and sin was relabeled a sickness. The Bible was no longer deemed sufficient for life and godliness; instead, it was replaced with an emphasis on psychological tools and techniques.<sup>14</sup>

*Mysticism* arrived in full force in the 1990s, ravaging the church by convincing people to listen for a paranormal word from God rather than seeking out truth in the written Word of God. People began neglecting the Bible, looking instead for the Lord to speak to them directly. Consequently, the authority of Scripture was turned on its head.

All three of these movements attacked the sufficiency of Scripture. Whether people supplemented the Bible with supposed miraculous gifts, or with the human wisdom of psychology, or with their own imagined intuitions, many in the church began to seek something beyond the pages of God's Word.

### Pragmatism and Syncretism

At the end of the twentieth century, the church was also greatly damaged by the Trojan horse of pragmatism. Though it looked good on the outside (because it resulted in greater numbers of attendees), the seeker-driven movements of the 1990s quickly killed off any true appetite for sound doctrine. Ear-tickling became the norm as "seekers" were treated like potential customers. The church adopted a marketing mentality, focusing on "what works," even at the expense of a biblical ecclesiology.

Pragmatism inevitably gave way to *syncretism*, because popularity was viewed as the standard of success. In order to gain acceptance in a postmodern

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<sup>13</sup> For a survey of some of the extreme errors that characterized the charismatic movement during this time period, see John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> A helpful critique of the "Christian psychology" movement of the 1990s is found in Ed Bulkley, *Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993). For a biblical alternative to psychology, see John MacArthur and Wayne Mack, eds., *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

society, the church became soft on sin and error. *Capitulation* was masked as *tolerance*; *compromise* redefined as *love*; and *doubt* extolled as *humility*. Suddenly, interfaith dialogues and manifestos—and even interfaith seminaries—began to sprout up on the evangelical landscape. So-called evangelicals started to champion the message that “we all worship one God.” And those who were willing to stand for truth were dismissed as divisive and uncouth.

The church today is the hodgepodge product of these accumulated errors—from sacramentalism to subjectivism to syncretism. The “difficult times” that Paul spoke of certainly characterize the contemporary situation. Yet, in the midst of this chaos and confusion, faithful ministers are still required to carry out the very task that Paul gave to Timothy. In fact, the only solution for the church today is for pastors to diligently fulfill their God-given responsibility to *preach the Word*.

### **Motivation 2: Preach the Word Because of the Devotion of the Saints (2 Tim 3:10–14)**

The faithful preacher is also motivated by his love and appreciation for those believers who have gone before him. Like a great cloud of witnesses, the examples of steadfast spiritual leaders from generations past spur the biblical expositor on toward greater commitment and ministry effectiveness.

In Paul’s case, he reminded Timothy of his own example, and urged him to follow suit. Thus, he says in 3:10–11, “Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, sufferings. Such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured and out of them all the Lord rescued me!”

The gospel Paul taught, Timothy was to continue preaching. The conduct, confidence, and Christ-likeness that marked the apostle’s ministry was likewise to characterize his son in the faith. Even the suffering that Paul endured, Timothy was to embrace as well. The young pastor was to stay the course and follow in the same path as his mentor.<sup>15</sup>

The integrity of Paul’s ministry had been obvious to Timothy. In their travels together, Timothy had witnessed the consistency between Paul’s public teaching and his private practice.<sup>16</sup> The testimony of the apostle’s life was one of

<sup>15</sup> Along these lines, Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 44, observes, “This is a personal word to a beloved follower. He reminded Timothy of their longtime acquaintance (3:10–11) and appealed to his loyalty to Pauline teaching (1:6–14; 2:1–13; 3:10–4:5). To Paul this was also loyalty to Christ (see 1 Cor 11:1). . . . No doubt the memory of Timothy’s warm affection and sharing of difficulty gave warmth to the lonely, weary heart of the apostle.”

<sup>16</sup> Sound teaching is one of Paul’s primary emphases in the pastoral epistles. As Raymond F. Collins notes, “More than two-thirds of the New Testament’s uses of the term ‘teaching’ (*didaskalia*) are found in the Pastoral Epistles.” *I & II Timothy, Titus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 255. The author goes on to highlight, in this epistle, “just how much and

unwavering conviction—a fact that Timothy knew firsthand. Thus, Paul is able to commend himself to Timothy and encourage him not only to preach faithfully, but also to follow the same God-centered purpose: to passionately pursue faithfulness in his own life.

Throughout his missionary journeys, Paul had suffered greatly for the sake of the gospel. Even as he wrote this letter, he was suffering for Christ. Timothy surely felt the weight of Paul's words, when the apostle added, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (v. 12). Yet, Paul is clear, such tribulation is no reason to shy away from following the way of faithfulness.

The world will continue to grow darker; and "evil men will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (v. 13). Nonetheless, Timothy must not capitulate or be deceived. His task was not easy, but it was simple: to stay true to the Word of God and preach it carefully and consistently. Thus Paul challenged Timothy with these words, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (v. 14).

In exhorting Timothy to hold fast and endure, Paul called on his disciple to remember his own example. Timothy did not need a new strategy. He simply needed to follow the pattern of faithfulness he had observed in the man of God who had gone before him.

Paul understood that uniqueness and novelty in ministry is deadly. The right approach is not to reinvent the paradigm; but rather to follow in the well-worn paths of those who have come before. The faithful preacher appreciates his spiritual heritage—recognizing that he is linked to a long line of godly men from whom there can be no separation. Moreover, he understands that it is his responsibility, as part of the current generation of church history, to guard the truth that has been entrusted to him. Then, one day, he will pass it on to those who come after him.

That this was Paul's expectation is clear from his instruction in 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The four ministerial generations described in that verse include Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others also. From generation to generation, the truth was to be safeguarded by each generation and then passed on without innovation or deviation.

It is the brash folly of young men today that tempts them to disregard the wisdom of previous generations and instead to glory in their own cleverness or originality. Those who scorn the faithful examples of saints now in heaven,

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how faithfully Timothy has learned from Paul (see 1:13–14; 2:2, 8–9, 11–13). Thus, [in 3:10] it is Paul's teaching, 'my teaching,' that Timothy has followed."

and instead prize their own self-styled, inventive approaches to ministry, do so to their own peril.

But, as evidenced by Paul's instruction to Timothy, the faithful preacher is motivated by the heritage left by prior generations of church history. And like the spiritual giants of past centuries, he is committed to the same ministry mandate as they were. It is a privilege to stand on their shoulders. But it is also a responsibility to carry on their legacy. Therefore, through both his life and his lips, he must *preach the Word*.

### **Motivation 3: Preach the Word Because of the Dynamic of the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:15–17)**

The faithful expositor is motivated, thirdly, by the nature of the Bible itself. He understands that Scripture is no ordinary book; it is the inspired revelation of God Himself. If the pastor desires to honor the Lord in his ministry, or to see the Holy Spirit's work unhindered in the lives of his people, he has no other alternative than to preach the Word faithfully.

Timothy experienced the power of God's Word from a young age. Paul reminded him of that reality with these words: "From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (3:15). It was clear to Timothy where the power and authority in ministry lay.

The term Paul used for "childhood" refers to an infant. From the time Timothy had been a baby in the arms of his mother he had been exposed to the Word of God. And it was through the Scriptures he had come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle appealed to Timothy's past, essentially asking, "Why would you do anything other than preach the Word when you know, from your own personal testimony, that it alone is the wisdom that leads to salvation?" When the mission is to present the message of salvation in all its Spirit-empowered fullness, the only option is to faithfully proclaim the truth of God's Word.

Having already appealed to Timothy's upbringing, Paul reinforced his point by emphasizing the Bible's true nature and dynamic effectiveness: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (3:16–17). This sacred book is "inspired by God," or more literally, *God-breathed*.<sup>17</sup> And, as these verses indicate, it is not only powerful to save (v. 15), but also to sanctify.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Enns, *Approaching God* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991), 55 explains that: "The word 'God-breathed' [in v. 16] is not active, as though the Scriptures are purely a human product, but passive, meaning that the Scriptures have their origin with God, not man. That is also consistent with many Old Testament passages that state, 'God spoke all these words' (cf. Exodus 20:1; Deuteronomy 5:22), or, 'the Lord speaks' (Isaiah 1:1), or, 'thus says the Lord' (Isaiah 44:2), or, 'the word of the Lord came to me saying' (Jeremiah 1:4). The emphasis in those passages is that God



The Word of God is *profitable*, or useful towards sanctification, in four ways. First, as the sole source of divine truth, it provides the doctrinal content for *teaching*. Second, it is the authority for admonition and *reproof*, because it confronts sin and error. Third, it provides the vehicle for *correction*. The Scriptures not only expose wrong-doing, they also show transgressors how to be restored to an upright position. Finally, after the truth of God's Word has torn down sin and error, it builds up the believer through *training in righteousness*. Clearly, the function of the Scriptures in the life of the believer is a comprehensive work.

The result of this all-encompassing work is that the man of God and everyone under his influence is made mature, whole, complete, and equipped for every good work (v. 17). The first student of the Word is the preacher, who himself must be impacted. He is the primary beneficiary, and his ministry to others flows out of the Word's transforming work in his own heart.

With such a comprehensive work of both salvation and sanctification available through the power of the Scriptures, why would anyone be tempted to preach anything else? The pastor who cares about the spiritual growth of his people must make God and His Word the centerpiece of his ministry. In order to do that, he must *preach the Word*.

#### **Motivation 4: Preach the Word Because of the Demand of the Sovereign (2 Tim 4:1–2)**

Up to this point, Paul has prefaced his command to preach by warning Timothy about the dangerous seasons that will come, and by pointing to his own example and to the supernatural power of Scripture. But in 4:1, the apostle escalated his exhortation to an even greater level. Invoking God himself, Paul expressed the seriousness of the situation in explicit terms: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and do so by His appearing in His Kingdom."

Those piercing words should strike holy fear into the heart of every preacher. They stand as the apex of Paul's previous statements, and should serve as the most compelling motivation in the life of the expositor. The Scottish Reformer John Knox certainly understood this reality. Upon being commissioned to preach, and feeling the weight of that responsibility, Knox "burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber."<sup>18</sup> He was completely overwhelmed by the awesome accountability of that duty.

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spoke, and the result was a perfect word. That is the idea of the Scriptures as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16. God spoke forth, and the Scriptures were the result."

<sup>18</sup> Marion Harland, *John Knox* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1900), 16. Prior to this reaction, a fellow preacher named John Rough read Knox a charge very similar to Paul's words in 2 Tim 4:1.

Timothy's call to preach came not simply from Paul, but from the Sovereign King by whom he was commissioned, and before whom he would one day give an account. Jesus Christ is the one who will judge the faithfulness of his ministers.<sup>19</sup> As men of God, they are under holy scrutiny from the Lord himself. This is nowhere made clearer than in Rev 1:14 where Christ is portrayed as surveying His church with penetrating eyes of fire. Those who are called to preach are under inescapable divine observation (cf. Prov 15:3). There is no relief from His gaze, no hiding from His evaluation (cf. Ps 139:7–12).

It is for this reason that James exhorted his readers to stop being so many teachers, as theirs is a greater judgment (Jas 3:1). It is why the Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor 4:3–4 that it was a small thing what men thought of him, including what he thought of himself, because he was accountable to God. Hebrews 13:17 plainly states that leaders “will give an account” for their ministry. The most dominant force in the preacher's life and ministry is the realization that he will one day give an account to God (cf. 2 Cor 5:10).

Consider the following anecdote from Spurgeon's ministry:

A young preacher once complained to Charles Spurgeon, the famous British preacher of the 1800s, that he did not have as big a church as he deserved.

“How many do you preach to?” Spurgeon asked.

“Oh, about 100,” the man replied.

Solemnly Spurgeon said, “That will be enough to give account for on the day of judgment.”<sup>20</sup>

Serious ministry is motivated by that weighty reality. Popularity with people, recognition from peers, winsomeness in the pulpit—these are not the standards of success. God's opinion is the only one that ultimately matters. And His measure of success is *faithfulness* (cf. Matt 25:21, 23). Knowing this, the biblical expositor is driven to carefully, clearly, and consistently *preach the Word*.

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<sup>19</sup> William B. Barclay, *1&2 Timothy* (New York: Evangelical Press, 2005), 284, writes, “Christ is not just the King; he is also the Judge. . . . This reality impacts on the servant of Christ in two ways. On the one hand, it gives confidence that the opponents of the gospel will be judged. On the other hand, it reminds believers that they, too, will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account for what they have done (2 Cor. 5:10). They must be about the work of the kingdom.”

<sup>20</sup> Cited from Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2001 ), 2:254.

**Motivation 5: Preach the Word  
Because of the Deceptiveness of the Sensual (2 Tim 4:3–4)**

Having reminded Timothy of the ultimate accountability, Paul continued by warning him that *faithful* preaching will not necessarily be *popular* preaching. As the apostle explained, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (4:3–4).

Sinners, throughout all of church history, have refused to heed the truth that saves and sanctifies.<sup>21</sup> Instead, hardening their hearts, they seek out soft-peddled messages that accommodate their sin. Thus, they search for preachers who make them feel good, not guilty. And false teachers are happy to oblige, tickling the ears of their audiences with man-centered messages and false hopes.

In the process, the seriousness of sin is downplayed and disregarded; greed is promoted with promises of prosperity; worship is reduced to vain emotionalism; and felt-needs are highlighted while the true gospel is ignored. These false teachers are the same people who, according to 2:16, pursue worldly, empty chatter that leads to further ungodliness. Their worldly message may be popular, but like gangrene, its spread is actually deadly.

Paul’s words certainly describe the scene in contemporary American Christianity. *Doctrine* has become a bad word; *truth* is viewed as relative; and *numbers* have been made the measure of ministry effectiveness. The temptation to tickle ears is great, since the preachers who attract the largest crowds are deemed the most successful. But to pervert the truth by watering down the gospel is a deadly form of wickedness. The minister who caters his message to the whims of the world, telling unregenerate hearts only what they want to hear, has sold out.

By contrast, the faithful minister is willing to boldly speak the whole truth, even when it is not popular to do so. The only way to see lives transformed from sensuality to salvation is to faithfully proclaim the message of the gospel. If those who wish to have their ears tickled are to be radically transformed, they must be confronted with the truth. To that end, the faithful expositor will not cease to *preach the Word*.

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<sup>21</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 227, explains, “The time will come—future for Timothy, but already here for those living after him—when people will not ‘endure’ sound teaching. Paul chooses an intriguing Greek word, translated ‘endure,’ which means ‘to be patient with, in the sense of enduring possible difficulty.’ The idea is that they find the truth of God to be so torturous to their sinful desire that they must ‘endure’ in the same manner Christians must ‘endure’ hardship.”

### Faithful to the End

Paul was under no delusions that the commission would be easy for Timothy, or for the faithful men coming after him. It had not been easy for Paul either. Yet, in spite of the many trials he faced, the apostle had remained true to the end. As a result, he could say, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (4:6–7). In this, his last appeal to Timothy, he invited the young pastor to likewise run the race with endurance (cf. Heb 12:1–2).

But Paul went to his grave not knowing how the story would end for Timothy. He had to trust that the Lord would preserve him. Would Timothy remain faithful to the end?

The book of Hebrews offers an initial answer to that question. In Heb 13:23, the author told his readers, "Take notice that our brother, Timothy, has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you." These words, written after the death of Paul, indicate that Timothy had been in prison, but was soon to return to the work of ministry. The implication is clear: Timothy had been persecuted for the sake of the gospel. Yet, like Paul, he had remained faithful and steadfast in spite of the suffering he faced.

Church history provides a later glimpse into Timothy's legacy of faithfulness. According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*,

Timothy was the celebrated disciple of St. Paul, and bishop of Ephesus, where he zealously governed the Church until A.D. 97. At this period, as the pagans were about to celebrate a feast called Catagogion, Timothy, meeting the procession, severely reprov'd them for their ridiculous idolatry, which so exasperated the people that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful a manner that he expired of the bruises two days after.<sup>22</sup>

To his dying day, Timothy courageously confronted the culture around him with the truth of the gospel. That unwavering commitment cost him his life. Like Paul, he was martyred for his faithfulness.

At the end of Timothy's life, he too was able to look back on a ministry that had been devoted to honoring Christ through the preaching of His Word. In the same way that Timothy had received a legacy of faithfulness, he passed it on to the next generation of Christian leaders. Bible expositors today, though removed by many centuries, are the recipients of that faithful heritage. The motivations that drove Paul and Timothy ought to compel the current generation

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<sup>22</sup> John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. William Byron Forbush (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 7.

of preachers and teachers. God is still delivering His divine mandate to faithful men: *Preach the Word.*

## A CATALYST FOR THE CHURCH TO PRAY

James E. Rosscup, Th.D, Ph.D.  
Adjunct Professor of Bible Exposition  
The Master's Seminary

*God has entrusted many facets of ministry to the local church. Teachers are to edify others who are Christ's people, and seek to lead the unsaved to salvation and then to edification. It is consistent for all the genuinely redeemed to show in their lifestyles the fruit of a believing life (Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9). The church ought to cultivate and equip leaders to be true to the Scripture. Leaders should counsel those of the church family in moral living that truly reflects the riches of God's grace. In all that the church is and does, prayer is a native breath, and of utmost importance. Ephesians highlights the church in vivid images—Christ's "body," "bride," "temple," and army waging spiritual warfare. In this all, prayer is to be a priority. Paul models vital prayer and summons others of the church to pursue intimacy before God. He emphasizes an urgency to praise/thank God, intercede to fulfill spiritual needs, and revel in declaring God's bounties of grace. Clearly the Lord has opened intimate access to Himself, and He gives godly aspects of fruit as relevant issues of prayer, and key words/phrases that can stoke prayer. Ephesians also urges believers to pray against spiritual foes, and to pray in all things, even to be considerate to keep intercessors updated on how God answers. The church should rise to lay hold of its potential in the Lord's throne room.*

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### Introduction

Commentators on the Ephesian letter often note Paul's special emphases on the church. Paul spotlights those whose faith is in God by vivid analogies. The church is Christ's spiritual *body*, His *building* as a temple, His *bride*, and His *batallion* of soldiers.

God endows believers with astounding riches.<sup>1</sup> The Father has lavished on them "every spiritual blessing" (1:3).<sup>2</sup> From this outset, onward, the message

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<sup>1</sup> Riches fill God's treasure vault in 1:7, "the riches of His grace"; cf. 1:18, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"; 2:4, God "rich in mercy"; 2:7, "the surpassing riches of His grace"; 3:8, "the unfathomable riches of Christ"; 3:16, "the riches of His glory"; cf. Rom 2:4; Phil 4:19.

touts ways in which God has made His people incredibly wealthy. Treasures of grace spring from Him who is "rich in mercy" (2:4). Believers' spiritual capital skyrockets far higher than all material assets. Think of mind-boggling funds in the U. S. Federal Treasury. Imagine astonishing bank accounts of the world's billionaires. All these pale in significance with salvation's riches now and eternally.

Ruth Paxson, a missionary to China, put ink to paper to describe the benefits of God's people. On furlough, Ruth arose at 4 a.m. to stake out a vigil on the lip of the Grand Canyon. As she meditated on Ephesians, the canyon's awe-inspiring depth and magnitude nearly snatched her breath away. The rising sun's rays kissed rock strata far down in the chasm and brightened colors from the lower parts and up to her. Ruth felt the inrush of thoughts. These led her to write a book on Ephesians which she called, "the Grand Canyon of the Scriptures." This sub-title was based on the fissure's vast reaches, then by analogy the el dorado of riches God has given those He chose to salvation. Many would drench their spirits in Paxson's devotional entitled *The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian*.<sup>3</sup>

Here is the Ephesian bonanza, a spiritual "Comstock Lode" of unmatched resources. Believers' breaths quicken at the amazing blessings. The letter sees them as God's elect ones, sons, those His own Son purchased with His blood, the redeemed, and the forgiven. Other descriptions are that God has raised them spiritually from death in sin to life in Christ,<sup>4</sup> put His Holy Spirit within them as His seal that guarantees their security eternally.<sup>5</sup> He has destined them, as His heirs, to bask in His kindnesses now and forever.<sup>6</sup> They are people He has caught away to a marvelous hope, fitted to praise Him, gifted to serve

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<sup>2</sup> The "heavenlies" (a plural word) makes good sense whether rendered as "heavenly places," or "riches" in a heavenly venue (cf. n. 1) or "things/realities" or "plans" in that realm (i.e., of God's "eternal purpose," 3:11; cf. 1:10; 2:7). Evidence best points to a heavenly location. Paul in 1:10 contrasts "things upon the earth" with "things upon the heavens." Christ was resurrected to be seated "at His [God's] right hand" (1:20); God sees believers "seated . . . with Him" there (2:6), in the realm where "the rulers and authorities" are (3:10; 6:12). And Christ's ascent was to "far above all the heavens," in contrast to being, in His first advent descent, "in the lower parts of the earth," i.e. in His tomb in parts "lower than the earth's surface," or else "lower parts [in contrast to the heavens] which are the earth" itself (4:9).

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian: Ephesians, The Grand Canyon of the Scripture* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1938; reprint, 1989). Cf. Introduction, 11–17, and various references after this; also Lewis S. Chafer, thirty-three blessings God confers upon each person when He is initially saved (*Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1984, "The Riches of Divine Grace") II:135–148). In this writer's early Christian growth, these books gave their warmth as truly yet more crucially than the old wood ranch stove that was cherry red on top against the winters' chill.

<sup>4</sup> Eph 2:5–6.

<sup>5</sup> 1:13–14; cf. 4:30; 2 Cor 5:5.

<sup>6</sup> Eph 2:7.

this Lord and fellow believers,<sup>7</sup> and to reach out to others who still are far off, without hope. God has set these believers apart to be His very own possession, to showcase His fullness individually or in marriage and the home.<sup>8</sup> He has enlisted them as soldiers arrayed in the armor that He supplies.<sup>9</sup> He has pitted them in battle, clashing with Satan and other evil foes which march under the black banner of the prince of darkness.

Prayer stands out in about twenty-five percent of the letter's verses. It makes withdrawals from the believers' bank as "spiritual billionaires."<sup>10</sup> Speaking to God occurs in at least thirty-nine of the 155 verses. Paul even surges to prayer in its aspect of intercession<sup>11</sup> as quickly as his second verse. His next breath, still in prayer (1:3), exults as he is awestruck at God's own infinite majesty as the Blessed One.<sup>12</sup> God, out of His absolute, unlimited perfection, has

<sup>7</sup> 4:7–16.

<sup>8</sup> 4:1–5:33: Paul portrays the believers' lives by the analogy "walk," i.e. live as *God's workmanship/masterpiece* (2:10) in contrast to the earlier, unsaved walk after impulses of Satan (2:1–3; cf. 4:17–19; 5:8a), or a present vulnerability to him (4:27); or the unsaved state of being "dead," 5:14; walk in *unity* (4:1–16), in *holiness* of a new life distinct from the old life (4:17–32), in *love* that is in contrast to lusts (5:1–7), in *light* that shines conspicuously against the darkness (5:8–14), in *carefulness* of wisdom devoted to doing God's will (5:15–17), in the *Spirit* (5:18–33), in *obedience* (6:1–9), and in soldiers' *warfare* (6:10–20). These concepts are all different ways to picture what is true at the same time, the one, godly life; in some degree an authentic walk exhibits all of these and grows (cf. 4:15).

<sup>9</sup> 6:10–17.

<sup>10</sup> More detail on each Ephesians prayer passage is in James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition of Prayer in the Bible*. 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, Libronix, 2008); www.logos.com/rosscup; the same material is in Jim Rosscup, *Exposition on Prayer*, 4 vols. in print, hardback (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International Publishers, 2011); also Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998): 224–46; the latter is also in *The Master's Seminary Journal*, vol. 6 (1995); in "Prayer's Strategic Role" cf. lists at the end on aspects of armor that relate to prayer (Eph 6), thirty-six aspects of godly fruit in the epistle about which to pray, the consistency of spiritual values in John 13–17 and Eph 6:10–20, and facets of praying in the Spirit. On the church's ministry in preaching (Eph 6:19–20), cf. Rosscup, "The Priority of Prayer in Preaching," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 2 (1991), which also appears in Richard Mayhue and Robert Thomas, gen. eds., *The Master's Perspective on Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002): 157–80.

<sup>11</sup> The main aspects (parts; emphases) in prayer, none that ever rates as more important than any other in the Bible itself (cf. Dick Eastman, *The Hour that Changes the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2002). Another part is oaths (pledge commitments), etc. Those of the church can find examples in how to turn every part of Ephesians into prayer in some vital aspect in ways akin to F. B. Meyer's provocative examples from throughout Scripture in *Daily Prayers* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, reprint, 2007). This veritable gold mine gives touching words to God that the Bible inspires for every day of the year.

<sup>12</sup> This in essence sees God as due men's praise because He is the fountainhead of blessing. He is blessed (*eulogētos*) within Himself, the Blessed One (Blessor) as the absolute, infinite fullness of blessing, the God who blesses. From Him, out of His vast watershed fullness, all His streams of living water flow (1:23; 4:10; cf. Ps 1:1–3). T. K. Abbott recognizes that Paul is in awe of God not as one on whom he pronounces blessing, but the One who in His own wealth is



poured the watershed of His kindnesses to those He claims as His own. Paul's prayer mode goes on to dwell in praise for the work of the Father (v. 6), the Son (v. 12), and the Spirit (v. 14).<sup>13</sup> Instantly after that, in 1:15–23, Paul is also in God's throne room, here again lifting up intercessory pleadings. His quest is that believers realize, in practical "shoe leather," dividends of their wealth. And soon, in 3:14–21, the apostle is caught up in a third intercessory pleading. His vigil in this case is a high-stakes passion for the answering God to help the saints close with the practical implications of God's endowment.

Direct communion with the Lord in these six chapters is a fitting comeback to God's spiritual riches. A wonderful nearness belongs to believers "in Him," in Christ. Some form of this phrase "in Christ" is a repeated focus in chapter 1 (vv. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13), and in the epistle overall the boon occurs twenty-seven times. A powerful conviction fastens its grip on Paul. It is this: inclusion in God's family makes possible an intimacy of fellowship with God. Prayer is a strategic channel of this communication.

### **The Church's Varied Experiences in Prayer**

So how should those of the church respond to riches that surpass all riches? How should they react to the potential that prayer can have with the God who answers?

In often sad actuality, the church's responses have run a gamut. Some believers have taken very seriously the opportunity to live all out in prayer. They make much of prayer, as does their pacesetter Paul. The church from its outset has had many extraordinary people of prayer. Look in, for example, on believers gathered to plead for the imprisoned Peter (Acts 12). Glimpse Epaphroditus, the stalwart at Colossae (Col 4:12–13; cf. 1:7). And mark those of Philippi insofar as they rallied to Paul's counsel, "in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil

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worthy as the absolutely complete One, who gives out blessing (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968)): The call to prayer is not to add a seventh piece of armor to the six in vv. 14–17; instead, prayer is the permeation in faith's appropriation of or gratitude for God's power to work in all of the parts (cf. v. 10) to make them effective as pleases Him (cf. 5:10). Prayer even is pertinent in its confession of sin so as to be in agreement with God, or in affirming realities back to God, such as "I know You love me," or "I love You." What supports prayer as relevant in this way? (1) A genitive (as "belt [that consists of] truth," etc.) occurs with each of the six parts of armor, but suddenly is absent with prayer; (2) no comparison occurs with prayer, as with a "belt," etc.; (3) Paul's comments about armor flow on immediately into the prayer; (4) prayer is to be "at all times," so it is obviously crucial at any time that each believer truly lives any aspect of the armor (cf. Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role").

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the Father/Son/Spirit co-equality as God in Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:18; 3:14–21; 4:3–6; 5:18–20; cf. 2 Cor 13:14. The Spirit is a person as shown, for example, in His intelligence to seal and His ability to be grieved (1:13–14; 4:30), and to reveal things to the prophets (3:5) and strengthen the saved (3:16).

4:6). How well do I remember the Saturday night prayer at the Gilcomston South Church on Union Street in Aberdeen, Scotland. I was there at times during doctoral studies in the nearby University of Aberdeen in the mid 1970s. People pleaded before the hearing Lord in passion that lighted in one a torch to be bold at the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). They expected the Almighty God to pour forth blessing. I felt the Holy Spirit grip me and burn His appeal in flame, “this is a fitting way to pray with others.”

But be warned by examples in the church which reduce prayer to a very small thing. Some pitifully impose the very service they do for God as a thick wall that blocks and distances them from prayer to this God. They justify their neglect with excuses. Their delusion is—too busy to pray. They do not pray beyond piddling snatches when on the run, in a pathetic shallowness. Many are the put-downs to prayer. “I never get the time.” “I do not know how.” “I do not get answers.” “God will do what He will do regardless.” “I have no place to be alone.” “I run dry in a few seconds.” “I just do not feel the need.” “I am a person of action, not words.” “Prayer is so boring.” “God knows my needs already.” “I give my money to the church; that seems enough.” On and on go the evasions. Still others knuckle under to habits that reduce prayer to selfish, greedy clutching. They focus only on their pathetic, small ambitions. They then feed on frustration as did readers that James rebukes, “you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your own lusts” (Jas 4:3).

So, by contrast, we gasp at the Ephesian riches. And, as in this “handbook for the church,” how important prayer ought to be—the Christian’s native breath!

How then shall we live? If we focus on how the church can pray as this one epistle floodlights the path, God supplies us with vivid guidance. The prayer life we then settle for is a matter of our choice. But be careful! Will we retire prayer to a pathetic piddling? Or will we raise earnest voices to God’s hearing ear and pursue after Him with all our hearts in everything? A Christian quipped, “anything—provided it be forward.” In Ephesians, the apt words are, “anything—provided it be upward!”

### **Paul’s Modeling for Prayer by the Church**

#### **Intercession**

The apostle himself showcases prayer as promptly as when only a step inside the epistle’s front door. Hear him in verse 2: “[I ask this] that grace and peace may be yours from God.” His vision prizes this spiritual capital from the providing Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer’s answers are no doubt also from God the Holy Spirit. He is co-equal to Father and Son, a person, for He can be grieved (4:30). And the prayers of believers are to be “in the Spirit” (2:18,

22; 6:18; cf. Jude 20).<sup>14</sup> Paul's immediate plea for grace seeks for God to stock believers with all they need in unmerited favor, in sufficiency of power, tempering, and toning that fosters their growth in Christ (cf. 4:12). Peace is also crucial in his beseeching. This is so that God's people will flourish with a composed serenity. Thus furnished, they then can be tranquil to cope with whatever they face. For their minds will be stayed on the Lord who keeps them in perfect peace (Isa 26:3; Phil 4:7).

### Praise

In 1:3 Paul prays in awe at God's exaltedness. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." In adoration he recognizes the absolute fountain head fullness of blessedness in God Himself (cf. n. 12). First Paul sees infinite perfection of sufficiency in the One who gives blessing out of bounty that is unlimited. He celebrates details of this in which God has begun His drama of redemption in vv. 4–14. Three steps sum this up. God the Father picked out the ones of His will for salvation (vv. 4–6); God the Son purchased them (vv. 7–12); and God the Holy Spirit is preserving them, eternally secure in salvation (vv. 13–14).

Observe how Paul ends each of the three spotlights on what members of the Godhead have done. He writes in vv. 6, 12, and 14 that the blessings God bestows are to redound "to the praise of His glory." Such praise can exult when redeemed ones magnify God for His unpacking of such riches; they exalt the Blessed One, the Giver, in prayer offered up.

### Intercession Again (1:15–23)

An article that I wrote in 1995 has detailed facets here and in Paul's second prayer, which is in 3:14–21 (cf. n. 10). At the moment, let it suffice to sum up the things the praying apostle prizes from God to shape believers after His heart. He asks things that show others who are saved what they too can ask of God for their fellow believers. He requests the Lord to deal out a spirit of wisdom for the saints to grasp in the most life-changing fashion things in the knowledge of Him. This he pleads that, by God's enabling, the believers' inner

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<sup>14</sup> Praying "in the Spirit" means "in the sphere of the Spirit", in sync with His mind (cf. 1 Cor 2:16), in what is fruit in His will (cf. Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9), in His bounty, in success His power enables, in submission to His purpose, in being toned to His values (moral standards), etc. In such prayer, believers have the Spirit's help to remedy their own weakness about "what" to pray (cf. Rom 8:26–27), His teaching (John 14:26), His leading (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18), His empowering in fullness by His might (Eph 5:18; cf. 3:16; 6:10), and the perspective that He prompts, etc. For the Spirit's aid to pray "according to God," in the norm/standard of His aim, in Romans 8:26–27, cf. J. E. Rosscup, "The Spirit's Intercession," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 10:1, Spring (1999), 139–62; E. A. Obeng, "The Reconciliation of Romans 8:26f. to New Testament Writings and Themes," *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 39:2 (1986), a summary in part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

capacity to grasp truths might have God's light flicked on so that they will know three things.<sup>15</sup>

The three requests are clear. First, prayer beseeches God to help believers know the hope related to His having called them. This is the present life-transforming expectancy, fused in continuity with the full, final realization of this that the Lord will give them in eternity to come. The latter is all the blessedness God will fulfill to them in their ultimate bounty (cf. 2:7).

Second, Paul implores God to help believers grasp the rich dividends of His glory that make up the inheritance He has in prospect for them. This inheritance of v. 18 is the prospect Paul has just twice mentioned (vv. 11, 14). It is the endowment which God has given in promise, now, and also keeps in store to fulfill to His saved ones in their final destiny. It is an eternal inheritance. It is to involve ultimate glorious welfare He will make good in perfection, beauty, and satisfaction for God and for them. No doubt God gives John even more detail in his picture of the New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1—22:5 (cf. 21:7). Paul briefly anticipates this consummate prospect in Gal 4:26 as “the Jerusalem which is above,” and the writer to the Hebrews is aware of it as the city for which Abraham looked (11:10), the lasting city yet to come (13:14).

Third, in Ephesians 1:19–23, Paul prays that believers will know God's power now, in life-shaping practical terms. This is of a surpassing greatness of might that God already put on display when He accomplished four phenomenal things for Christ. He raised Christ from the dead, seated Him in honor at His right hand in heaven, subjected all things under His control, and assigned Him headship over all issues that relate to the church (cf. Matt 28:19; Phil 2:10–11).

Before both of his longer prayers in Ephesians, Paul prays “for this reason” (1:15; 3:13). In both instances, God's lavished riches are reasons that ignite the prayer—reasons in 1:4–14 and 3:2–13. In the latter case, “for this reason” as early as 3:1 gets set for the prayer, then Paul launches into blessings that catapult into the prayer, adding to what he has said in chapters 1–2. In this way, he delays actually starting the prayer so that he first can recount in a parenthesis blessings relevant to it (3:2–13). This done, he ends the aside, repeats “for this reason” (v. 13), and finally launches right into the prayer.

#### Even More Intercession (3:14–21)

Paul's new prayer seeks for God to transmit a spiritual voltage of strength into believers in might by His Spirit. For the Spirit does spectacular things in His plan that the New Testament shows. He regenerates His own (John 3:1–7), indwells them (1 Cor 6:19–20; Eph 2:19–22), baptizes or identifies them

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<sup>15</sup> These three are rightly discerned in the Greek structure. Cf. Hoehner, p. 253; Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990)), 49; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1999), 134–38.

into Christ (1 Cor 12:13), fills them (Eph 5:18), teaches them (John 14:26), bestows gifts of service to them (1 Cor 12), and leads them (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18). They walk according to the Spirit (Rom 8:5), and in the Spirit (Gal 5:16–17, 25). They even have the Spirit's special help for what to pray (Rom 8:26–27), and whatever they do that pleases God (Eph 5:10) is “the fruit of the Spirit,” things the Spirit gives as His produce (Gal 5:22–23). The Spirit gives power to the saints when He fills them (Eph 3:16–19; 5:18; cf. on 5:18 later; and Rom 15:19).

Paul's intercession envisions a purpose for God's strengthening. This enabling is so that Christ may “dwell” in believers (Eph 3:16–17). Since Christ already resides in them from initial salvation on (2:19–22; Col 1:27), the point here, in harmony with this, is “may Christ be realized [in a practical, transforming sense] to dwell.”<sup>16</sup> Paul's plea is for Christ to assert His presence functionally in life-changing realities. This is by the difference that His acting at home in the believers is able to produce. He then will be, in effect, not only resident, but President (cf. Col 1:18).

Christ's asserting the provocative profit of His presence within is another way of saying “Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). This vital boon is as Paul said, “to me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21) and “it is God who works in you both to will and to energize for His good pleasure” (2:13). In Jesus' illustration such a benefit is when He, the vine, lives conspicuously in His branches and in their growth bears “fruit,” “more fruit,” and “much fruit” (John 15:1–11; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10).

Paul's prayer of Ephesians 3 leaps on to a further enrichment of Christ's in-living. It is that the saints become “rooted” firmly like an immovable tree, and “planted” like a building locked fast by a rock-solid foundation. This quality, in not budging, holds believers steady for a growth in love. And in this, Paul pleads to God that His people may grasp and know His love in its breadth and length and height and depth. The love's breadth can show up in their vision for evangelism and edification as the love can extend to all their situations, and to people wherever in all the world (Eph 2:11–22; cf. Matt 28:19f.). “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), for example as the witness for Christ in the Book of Acts went out to those in all the earth (Acts 1:8). In the love's length, it can endure throughout the present life (Ps 103:12) and eternally (Eph 2:7; cf. Ps 103:17; Rom 8:29–36). The love's height can rise in faith to all the magnitude of God's throne in heaven (Eph 1:20–21; cf. Ps 103:19), to which He will rapture believers so that they can worship Him eternally (1 Thess 4:13–18; Rev 22:4–5). The love's depth, as in Rom 11:33, allows it to extend all the

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<sup>16</sup> Hoehner, 481: “that Christ may ‘be at home in,’ that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in believers' lives. Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct” (cf. Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 2:16; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21; 2:13; 4:13; Col 3:4a). He can indwell not only in the surety of His presence, but in all the practical transformations He makes. In John 15:1–11, He can live in His own just as certainly as a vine by its life lives in its branches, bearing fruit (cf. Phil 1:11, “filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes through Jesus Christ . . .”).

way from God who gives it to saints on the earth (Eph 4:9–10a), and under the earth, wherever others need the Lord’s saving and edifying work.

Paul’s intercession presses on to an astounding potentiality. It pleads that in this love believers might be filled “to all the fullness of God.” This is not to God’s capacity, for God alone is God; only He has that infinite fullness of 1:2 (cf. Eph, His giving out of this in 1:23; 4:10; 5:18). The fullness to the believer is to his God-given, individual, unique human capacity (cf. Matt 25:15; Rom 12:3). This is as God wills for each differing son to be blessed in His supply (cf. 1 Pet 4:11). The fullness can show in any scenario of his present experience, or in his final capacity in the ultimate perfection to which God will bring each saint (Phil 3:12).

Two more assets can motivate us of the church in Paul’s modeling of intercessory prayer. These appear in 3:20–21. The first is God’s unlimited greatness to answer. His power is indescribable (Jer 32:17, 27). He is able to do things on a staggering scale. He is prepared to supply all that believers ask that pleases Him (cf. Eph 5:10; Col 1:10); able to work all that they can imagine; adequate to do above even this; capable to effect abundantly what yet is greater; resourceful to accomplish what is exceedingly abundantly beyond that; and mighty enough to do according to (or in the capacity of) His power that works in the saved. This power, the almighty ability of God (1:19; 6:10), can be made effectively life-changing in the saints by His Spirit (3:16; 5:18; cf. Rom 15:13; Col 1:29). This Spirit is also the One who empowered Christ, the God-man, in His ministry on earth (Luke 4:1, 14).

The second thing Paul highlights as he ends this prayer is God’s glory. His intercessory fervency is aggressive for God to get the glory in His church both now and for eternity (cf. Eph 1:6, 12, 14). And in John’s writing, this glory of believers giving all the credit to Him will even be eternally God’s in the New Jerusalem. For there, His bond-servants will ever worshipfully serve Him and look attentively on His face (Rev 22:4–5).

### **Paul’s Focus on Access into Prayer**

Two passages in Ephesians erect the sign, “open door to God.” Believers can enter right in to His cordiality (2:18; 3:12). God’s church, His sons and daughters, can profit from this immediacy; we can visit God often with hearts that, in Jesus’ terms, “ask” and “receive,” “seek” and “find,” and “knock” and “it [the door of God’s storehouse supply] shall be opened” by Him. For He is the answering host (cf. Matt 7:7–8; Eph 2:19), out of His unlimited treasures (Phil 4:19). God’s people can get their cue, then, in the two passages that assure this access.

## The Access in 2:18

Prayer, even when the word “prayer” itself is not here, is clear enough. Christ came to people in v. 17; they then come to Him in v. 18. Prayer is one boon in the chain of intimacies that draws us closer step by step in the privileges of 1:3. We, God’s people, are no longer strangers and aliens of 2:19 (outsiders) as in the unsaved days of 2:1–3, but are now fellow-citizens, insiders, as saints. Even more intimately we are the dear, inner members of God’s privileged, family household! Then, in vv. 21–22, believers have still a deeper contact with God. They are a dwelling (temple itself) of God Himself in the Spirit—this both individually and together. The Father is within, closer than their very skin (cf. 4:6). Colossians 1:27 even says Christ is in them, and Eph 2:18–22 that the Spirit is; and the Spirit is the seal of salvation’s security (1:13–14; 4:30) and the One who fills them (5:18; cf. 3:16–19).

At the same time, 2:18 in itself offers clues of impressive nearness. And, having such immediacy, we can pray. One clue is in “access,” a clear pass to enter into the very throne chamber of God to commune close-up with Him! As in Hebrews we can come boldly to His throne (4:16), go into His holy of holies by means of a new and living way Christ has opened wide to us (10:19–22). It is more breath-taking even than when an empire’s subject is ushered into interchange with his king, in his innermost cordiality. For here our entrance is to the infinite God, and we can draw near continually, repeatedly, at any time, as is evident in “we . . . have” such access (Eph 2:18), in the present, ongoing sense. Both Jewish and Gentile believers (vv. 11–16) can take heart at this intimacy, and come. The words “in one Spirit” also reflect our mutual possibility; all believers can bask in this. It is even apt to add that, as Paul sees it, believers, though humbled by our human weaknesses, have the special help of the Holy Spirit even for “what” they pray (Rom 8:26–27). And God the Host swings His door open (cf. Matt 7:7–11), endorsing our “praying . . . in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18; Jude 20).

Even these things are not all in 2:18. The words “to the Father” speak of an inspiring approach, right up close, face to face. And the overall context on being united in one body (2:11–22) focuses on a doorway into God’s cordial fellowship, a clearance into His presence. For its contrast is from “far off” when unsaved (v. 13) to “brought near” when saved as in 2:8–9. This is in sync with other Scripture, opening outright entrance to all the justified (Rom. 5:2), the forgiven (Eph. 1:7), those escorted near through Christ (1 Pet 3:18). And it is before “our Father . . . in heaven” (Matt 6:9), as sons and daughters (Matt 7:7–11; 2 Cor 6:18). Our prayer can draw close to God to plead our own needs (Phil 4:6, 19), as well as in requests to God in heart bonds for each other (Eph 6:18–20; cf. Acts 12:5–17; Jas 5:16).

In my college days, one of my upbeat memories is in being “a bump on a log” in a fireside circle. The scene was the Christian camp, Prescott Pines in the Arizona highlands. My Bible lay in my lap with a note pad I was filling. I was enthralled as a young man, Tom Stacy, vividly taught Ephesians, on being

near to God. I recall the song Stacy taught our hearts; how often I have hummed it over, and exulted at its thrill. Catesby Paget wrote it in the nineteenth century, and called it “A Mind at Perfect Peace with God.” Believers can exult with Paget as in his third and fourth of five stanzas:

So nigh, so very nigh to God,  
I cannot nearer be,  
For in the Person of His Son  
I am as near as He.

So dear, so very dear to God,  
More dear I cannot be,  
The love wherewith He loves the Son  
Such is His love to me.

Take stock. God’s seeing us near and dear beckons us to prayer passports into His throne room. That can stoke us to be magnetized to Him in prayer. This is far more than when a bee rushes to nectar deep within a flower, or a prospector penetrates to a prized vein of ore in a great gold rush.

#### The Access in 3:12

Paul revisits in essence the way in to God that he already has celebrated in 2:18. He simply says more about the access. Christians are caught away to God’s eternal purpose to form a blessed community of eternity (v. 11). The Father is carrying out this plan in Christ (v. 11). In His Son He has given His own a richness in two things; these Paul casts in the present tense. They are continuous. One is “boldness” in an open-faced, outright, audacious, opportune access; with it is an “entrance” in which those who come apart to God can expect a confident, upbeat, warming, sure and free welcome. Such a striking privilege to pray at any time and for any matter (cf. Phil 4:6; Heb 4:16) is our bounty “through faith in Him,” Christ. He is our usher into the throne scene and our Host there. We came to Him in our faith to be saved (2:8), and we can rejoice in continually coming by faith that He hears us (Matt 21:22; Jas 1:5–7). And Paul has scarcely told of the Christians’ astounding advantage of access (Eph 3:12) when he, in the context in vv. 14–21, says in effect, “come with me; enter right in to the throne presence with me.” Once there, in the inner chamber, he prays and we listen in to him interceding for us! At the same time we learn how we, too, can pray for other believers.

#### **Paul’s Counsel: Exude in Thankful Prayer**

Believers acclimated to the Scriptures can soon see that the Psalms build up and stock a vast, rich library of examples on praise/thanks to God. Case follows case to magnify God’s majesty and show His praying people a biblical



guide. We see how we can saturate life with exulting in and exalting the Lord. Hebrew words that translate into “praise” or “thanks” in English seem to convey virtually synonymous adoration.<sup>17</sup>

#### Prayer's Thanks in 5:4

We can sum up matters early in chapter 5 in a nutshell. Christ calls us, in the spirit of 4:32, to imitate Him (5:1). He walked in love, His life an offering and a sacrifice to God that distills a fragrant aroma (v. 2). In principle, this sacrificial spirit and scent are also for us. In contrast to this unselfish love is the stench of 5:3–7. One can fall into a debauch in ugly lust, in greedy grasping for things that titillate selfish impulse. This is in immoral, sexual fornication that gratifies cravings of the flesh. Paul is right to the point about this. In sharp distinction to squandering life away on the trash heap of empty loss, which, if it is an unsaved person's life, can finally plunge the soul into God's wrath (v. 7). This is a commitment not to titillation, but to thanks living voiced in thanksgiving; it is the way not of gratifying lust as in the former, unsaved days (2:1–2; 4:17–19, 22), but of gratitude to the Lord; not of angling for what will excite bodily glands, but of appreciating blessings God gives; not of glorying in bubbles of fleeting pleasure that mock as they flee away and burst forever, but of being glad in the things that deliver eternal pleasure and never pass away (Eph 6:8; cf. 1 John 2:15–17).

#### Prayer's Thanks in 5:20

As part of the life that the Spirit fills in v. 18, those of the church can have aspects of fruit that the filling with the Spirit showcases. How different these are from the things that can fill the fleshly lives of ungodly people. How contrasting they are to dark things of sin in 4:17–19 and 5:8–14, for lives in God's light (cf. v. 9) stand out against lives on bondage to sin's darkness. Paul's idea in 5:14 is, “Awake, sleeper, fly to Christ who saves, and Christ shall shine on you.” For with Him as the light, “you too will be children of light” (v. 8), and in this shine with the “fruit of light,” traits that in their nature are light (v. 9), that is in things of “goodness, righteousness, and truth.” The saved can walk carefully in a wise life as in v. 15, and steer clear of a foolish life. In v. 16, they

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<sup>17</sup> For a few among a vast plethora of examples, cf.: Pss 86:12; 92:1; 97:12; 100:4; 105:1; 106:1; 107:1; 111:1; 109:30; 116:12; 118:1; 136:1–26. In view of various Old Testament Hebrew words used interchangeably for the English terms “thanks” or “praise” in many psalms and individual verses, one can reasonably converge to an overall, unifying, common idea: exalting God in adoring credit, exultant and heartfelt appreciation, or honoring recognition. The words often interchange both for what God is and the works He does. This is true whether in the variable English translations “thanks” or “praise,” or similar renderings, e. g. “grateful,” “exalt,” “extol,” “exult in,” “magnify,” “glorify,” etc. The Psalter concludes with copious examples of what elicits praise in The Great Hallel [Hallelujah or praise section], Pss. 146–150.

can “buy up the opportunities” God’s gift of time grants them, even in days that are saturated with the luring enticement of evil. They need not go down that road. As in vv. 17–18, they can walk in God’s will, in the way in which the Spirit enables them, rather than a path of man’s willfulness, wantonness, worthlessness, and waste forever. And to cast the life of light in another description, they can be filled with the Spirit, not filled with spirits of hard drink in a lifestyle of a nature that has no saving quality,<sup>18</sup> but is utter and ruinous loss (cf. Rom 6:21; Eph 2:1–2; 5:3–7).

The life filled with the Spirit in v. 18 has no period at the end of the verse. This filling surges right on to show its products (vv. 19–21). The same life is depicted in a picture of its profusion, in “rivers of living water” (cf. John 7:37–39). Here in Ephesians 5:19–21 are the filling’s coordinate, attendant features, evident in its lush fruit (cf. v. 9). The Spirit can live in those of the church in five ways that Paul’s five participles express. These carry out the thrust of the main command, “be filled”; they broadcast how the Spirit’s filling becomes provocative in its beauties; these are in inter-personal relations of fellowship.<sup>19</sup> And what are the examples?

One is the Spirit-enabled ability to be speaking to one another in themes that reflect the values of God’s Word, and the life He gives (“Christ lives in me,” Gal 2:20). This is in “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” with fragrances that edify rather than efface.

Another example of the Spirit’s fruit is also in singing. In v. 19, the focus of singing is first in the multiplicity of expressions; now the idea is the melody that rings in the heart. Songs can express themes about God and His love of 5:2, that is, in His light of vv. 8–14. This is His way of living in eye-opened carefulness of wisdom in v. 15, His making time count in v. 16, His will in v. 17, or in other words His Spirit’s filling that is the enabling secret behind this in v. 18. One example among so very many in the church’s songs of the modern era is: “Channels only, blessed Master, but with all Thy wondrous power, flowing through us Thou canst use us, every day and every hour. How I praise Thee, blessed Master, that Thy love laid hold of me; Thou has saved and

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<sup>18</sup> *Asōtia* has the literal, core idea, “non-saving” in nature. Hoehner (700–01) cites its usage: “excess,” what is “incurable,” “shamelessness, dissipation, profligacy, debauchery,” “waste,” “a wild and undisciplined life,” citing Werner Foerster, “asotos, asotia” (*Theological Dictionary of New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 1, 507), a “dissolute life,” “without any restraint,” “a disorderly life resulting from the lack of self-control,” a life “void of discipline,” an “incorrigibility.”

<sup>19</sup> O’Brien is articulate: the five participles coordinate features that characterize the life, that is, the results that believers show forth when the Spirit fills (394), the fruit (cf. also John 15:1–11; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10). A different, yet consistent analogy in John 7:37–39, pictures the aspects as the Spirit’s outflow/overflow, even super flow in “rivers of living water” (cf. John 14:12b).

changed and filled me, that I might Thy channel be.”<sup>20</sup> How glorious and worthwhile to celebrate through life the treasury of songs on themes of God’s Word that the Book of Psalms suggests, and that hymn books share for us! Some of the most heart-growing touches of my life were in the times my dear wife Mildred plodded from her sick bed at the other end of the house to the living room next to my study. She struggled to the baby grand piano, and her fingers played across the keys. What rhapsodies lofted us up as on eagle’s wings (Isa 40:31)!

Yet a further outflow of the Spirit is closely akin to the last. A different participle puts it as “psalming” or “making melody” and this “with your heart to the Lord.” Of course in Ephesians the major emphasis is on the community, all the saved, those of God’s church,<sup>21</sup> however, each expression of the filling Spirit’s fruit can find outlet through each individual too.<sup>22</sup> This is at any time, and any place.

The fourth manifestation Paul mentions is in prayer, “always giving thanks for all things.” Thanks in 5:4 was in contrast to what is foul; in v. 20 it is in concord with what is fruit. Pouring forth thanks can be a habitual exulting in God (Phil 4:6). In Him we ever have things that can spread their incense in worship (cf. Ps 141:2). It was my privilege in a tribute book, *My Wife—Her Shining Life*, to devote the entire final chapter, to 154 reasons from our lifetimes that were catalysts of thanks to us.<sup>23</sup> I have often taken that handy list, and relished long times just offering matters of gratitude up freshly again to God. Will you, who also are of the church, think likewise of countless things to thank your God? Will you utter appreciation, as Andre Crouch did?

How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me,  
Things so undeserved that You did to prove Your love to me?  
The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude.  
All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe it all to You.  
To God be the glory, to God be the glory,

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<sup>20</sup> “Channels Only,” *Youth Favorites. Gospel Songs and Choruses*” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.) 126.

<sup>21</sup> Several clues reflect this as obvious: “saints,” 1:1; “you,” plural, 1:2, and “us,” 1:3–6, etc.; “sons,” 1:5; “speaking to one another,” 5:19, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Paul recognizes each believer as one, a distinct individual, just as he himself is (1:1–3, 15–16; 3:1–4, 7–8, 13–14; 4:1; 6:19–24, etc.). Paul is first, with integrity, an example of what he counsels others to be (1:1; 1:15; 3:1, 7, 8, 14; 4:1, 6:19–20, 21, 22; cf. 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1), then a sincere exhorter (as in “walk worthily,” i.e. in a practical life that corresponds in a way consistent with [lit., “has equal weight with”] the riches God has given, i.e. His spiritual endowment, Eph 4:1, etc.; the wealth in God’s bestowal is the prime focus in Chapters 1–3, then the walk in an appropriate, harmonious display of this in Chapters 4–6).

<sup>23</sup> Rosscup, *My Wife—Her Shining Life* (Private publication, 2010) www.GBIbooks.com, Grace Books International, The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, phone 818–909–5555.

To God be the glory for the things He has done.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the fifth fruit of the Spirit in this list (a collection shorter than Paul's nine in Galatians 5:22–23) is “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” God's people can show deference to other believers. This is in honoring their importance by giving a green light to their spiritual gifts, and submitting to their leadership, or sensitively giving way to their rights. Such tender gestures contrast with a self-focused, self-inflated, arrogant spirit that would sabotage others to clutch one's own advantage, or a put-down “better than thou” attitude that fails to respect their worth to God and to the church. We believers are to shine with Christ (as in v. 14), reflecting that the Spirit lives through us; we can act “in the fear of Christ.” In this we respect Christ's designs to work with and use others, each of whom has a gift, or gifts, and can minister to the church just as every joint in the physical body helps that body (Eph 4:15). We exalt Christ as we value the uniqueness He invests in others, and can treat them with a courteous awe as they are also dear to Christ Himself.

In this Spirit-filled life, observe how prayer stands out boldly in singing to God and in “giving thanks.” The church's saints are to pray “at all times in the Spirit” (6:18), the One who fills (5:18). The “all times” must include even when they are speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and being in subjection to others—and even a lot more!

But in his valuing of prayer for the church in Ephesians, Paul is not done.

### **Clues that Compel Intimacy with God**

Copious details in Ephesians are spiritual magnets to elicit seeking God closely, in spirit and in prayer. God's very purpose in redemption is that believers gravitate to His cordial presence, “before Him” (1:4). This will be true eternally in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:4–5), but it also is God's passion for them now, as in the Book of Hebrews' “let us draw near” (10:22). Other clues, as well, ought to attract the Lord's people: the key phrase of Ephesians, “in Him,” surely suggests closeness; “riches” God has given (1:2, 18; 3:8, 16) quite aptly inspire a drawing near to the Giver. Praise is a spiritually natural reflex to God's blessedness (1:3) out of which He has bestowed His redeeming grace (1:3, 6, 12, 14; 3:21). And the Father has raised Christ to His “own right hand” (1:20), then seated the saved there also with Him, so remarkably close (2:6).

“Brought near” also is electric with intimacy (1:13). So are being “fellow members of the spiritual “body” of Christ (3:6; 5:30), co-members within His very family household (2:19), and cleaving to the Lord as a husband does who rightly is intimate with his wife (5:31–32). Besides, God has become

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<sup>24</sup> André Crouch, *Hymns For the Family of God* (Nashville: Paragon Associates, Inc., 1976), 365–66.

close in indwelling His people (2:22), as the Father is in them (4:6), so are His Son (3:17), and the Spirit (2:22; 3:16). As the Lord of grace has dealt Himself so inwardly close, it is consistent that those of His very own possession should draw close to Him!

In light of these factors that pertain to closeness, how the church's people ought to draw near God in incessant fervor, as in prayers! Still another reality gives an urgent motive that should stir us of Christ's church to pray.

### **Paul's Call to Prayer in the Spiritual Battle**

All that Paul has said in the letter is obvious to those who read carefully up to his famous armor passage in 6:10–17. Then the prayer in 6:18–20 that closely links with the spiritual warfare is the largess of success to seek God's ability to fight while clad in all His armor.

Six parts of the armor unite. This outfitting is very accurate to that in ancient Greek and Roman soldiery as it was in the days Paul wrote the description.<sup>25</sup> So what armor equips Christians to do battle?

First is the belt of truth. Truth in God's Word is a practical urgency for each believer in battling versus slick and cunning foes. This is in details of the Word that strengthen his moral outlook with whatever is consistent with Christ as the crystal purity of truth (cf. John 14:6). This crucial armor includes any facet of truth that wards off insidious lies which oppose ways God would have His soldier brace up and stay steadfast (cf. 2 Cor 10:4–5).

Prayer in 6:18–20 right after the six portrayals of armor is not itself a seventh article of dress.<sup>26</sup> Still, prayer is strategic to permeate all parts of the armor with our Commander-in-Chief's power. Take truth, for example. The prayer is so that truth can win. Christ Himself tacitly wedded prayer with truth in His own prayer for His own (John 17:17): "set them apart in Your truth; your Word is truth." And Paul follows up the armor passage by prioritizing prayer to support His preaching the truth (Eph 6:19–20). He needs God's answers so that

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: Taylor and Walton, 1844). Cf. "Arma" that both Greek and Roman soldiers put on, p. 84, col. 1, and p. 85, col. 2; p. 85 cites Paul's list as accurate on all the essential parts, though Paul omits an analogy for the spear.

<sup>26</sup> The call to prayer (vv. 18–20) is not to add a seventh piece of armor to the six in vv. 14–17. Rather, prayer is the permeation in faith's appropriation of or gratitude for God's power (v. 10) that can work in all the parts. This makes the armor effective as pleases Him (5:10). Prayer even is pertinent in its confession of sin so as to be in agreement with God, or in its affirming realities back to God, such as "I know You love me," or "I love You." What supports prayer to be relevant in this connection? (1) A genitive, such as "the belt [that consists] of truth," etc., occurs with each of the six parts of the armor, but suddenly is not used with prayer; (2) no comparison occurs with prayer, as it does with "the belt of truth," and the other parts; (3) Paul's comments about armor flow on immediately into his reference to prayer; (4) prayer is to be "at all times," so it obviously is crucial at any time that each believer lives any aspect of the armor (cf. Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," which gives even eleven reasons, pp. 231–35).

he can deliver God's message in bold effectiveness. Thus he can speak truth without compromise by silence or by timidity that waters down the message.

Second is the breastplate of righteousness. God Himself, in Isaiah's book (59:17), is clothed with a breastplate and with a helmet. This principle, as well, is a life that Christ lives in believers, as He taught in the picture of a branch bearing fruit, fruit that issues from Himself the vine (John 15:4; cf. v. 8). Paul agrees in writing of Christ living through a believer (Gal 2:20; cf. Col 3:10). Righteousness in practical ways, just as truth also, is a crucial asset to stop things that are devilish, pitted against the right. And positively all that is in accord with God's righteous will forms a battle prowess by which the believer even surges forward through enemy ranks, snatching the victory. As Paul had just written (5:9), what is spiritually of the nature of light opposed to darkness is in the realm of "all goodness, righteousness, and truth." And so the battle armor, "the armor of light" (Rom 13:12), helps crucially in a stalwart defense to be a victor against the enemy; it also is necessary for an offensive thrust that gains ground in things pleasing to God (Eph 5:10; cf. 2 Cor 5:9; Col 1:10).

Some make a short-sighted claim that loses track of a natural, unified reality in fighting. This spin is that in the six pieces of armor in Ephesians 6, "the sword of the Spirit" is the only offensive weapon. But realistically, in spiritual struggles, just as in other fighting, every part of the gear is strategic both defensively and offensively. Take, for instance, soldiers in natural battles. Each aspect of their equipment is an asset crucial both to stand and ward off enemies and to forge ahead. The belt secures their clothing firmly, holding it in place, so that it does not hinder their struggle as they resist foes, but at the same time sets them free to gain over combatants and positively break forward (cf. Ps 18:29). The same is true as policemen use their belts, life vests, shoes, helmets, and guns. And football gear protects from blows by the other team as well as aiding a player to help his team bang their own position forward to score on the gridiron.

Other contexts in Ephesians show rather constantly that believers do both—the defensive and the offensive.<sup>27</sup> The all-around, two-way completeness is also true in New Testament passages that depict the image of warfare.<sup>28</sup>

The shoes shod with the "preparation of the gospel" are strategic too. Paul's point is probably that believers' need a God-given, sure-footed, bracing composure that such a gospel can supply in preparedness to represent God's message.<sup>29</sup> This solid leverage affords sufficiency to hold forth the gospel against counter slams that try to render it ineffective, and aggressively to herald it forth. For by the gospel others too are saved. Significantly, the gospel in

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<sup>27</sup> Eph 4:1–3; 4:15, 21–24, 25–32; 5:1–7, 8–14, 15–21. All focus on both defensive and offensive factors as these coordinate together in a crucial, unified, sensible balance.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Rom 13:11; 2 Cor 6:7; 10:3–5; 1 Tim 1:18–19; 6:11–16; 2 Tim 2:3–4.

<sup>29</sup> Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," 229.

Ephesians before 6:16 always is active, forward moving, and positive.<sup>30</sup> And even immediately after the warfare context the one writing it, Paul, requests prayer for his offensive thrust—to preach the gospel boldly. By this, even in heavy conflict, he will make a positive, forward-moving presentation which will have clout to lead others to the Savior (vv. 19–20). And, as he also prizes, prayer at the same time can implore God to defend him, a witness who is intact despite enemy devices (Rom 15:30–32; 2 Thess 3:1–2).

The “helmet of salvation” is a protective reality that salvation provides (cf. Ps 140:7). Christ can keep His soldiers safe, protected from sin and living by righteousness that He has given them. So in confidence that this holds true, the believers can be braced to stand their ground firmly against false ideas the devil and his hosts can use as strategies to shame, confuse or deride them. At the same time, the safety the helmet provides sets them at liberty also to press ahead confident in the security that is certain. They have firmness in that the Father picked them out (1:3–6), the Son purchased them (1:7–12), and the Spirit preserves them (1:13–14).

Prayer of 6:18 is vital to plead living that gains the victory by any part of the armor. The believer praying for himself, or believers praying for one another, relates quite aptly to salvation. How so? One urgency prayer can press is that assurance of salvation will be firm. Another needed prayer is that one will have boldness in his/her salvation, and a forthright witness of it. This is just as Paul in his example needs sufficiency by God answering others’ intercessions that he will preach forthrightly, not be cowed into a capitulating shyness (vv. 19–20).

Taking up “the shield of faith” is another utter necessity. With the shield believers can “quench all the destructive, fire-tipped missiles” that their enemies send blazing to sabotage them. Faith as a shield not only wards off attacks; at the same time it keeps God’s people upright, positive, to push on forward, to make surges that win against the world, the flesh, and the devil. In other parts of Ephesians, faith does things that work as in a good football game. Whether a team has the ball or does not, its strategic play can gain yardage toward the right goal line; Christians can advance aspects of God’s will that are victorious to glorify Him (5:17).

How, for example, does prayer relate to faith? Think of a few among the possibilities. As Paul himself hears of the believers’ faith and love, he prays in 1:15–23. His prayer seeks that their faith will be open to receive from God wisdom to live as pleases Him; this is in the enlightenment His Word can teach them of a life that can have fruitful potential (1:17). Prayer bids that the saints’ faith will grow as God’s light gives vision to their hearts to grasp what is the hope God has in store, the destiny He has called them to reach (1:18). Prayer seeks that their faith will be sharp to realize the riches God’s glory assigns to the inheritance He has destined for them (1:18). And prayer requests God to stretch

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<sup>30</sup> Eph 1:13; 3:6; cf. 2:17; 6:19–20.

their faith to act by the excelling might of power He can work in the ones who believe (1:20).

Prayer likewise is relevant for exercise in another example Paul gives in his own prayer (3:14–21). May God bestow to these who “fight the good fight” (1 Tim 6:12) a faith to receive strengthening with power through His Spirit in their inner beings (Eph 3:16). So may they act in faith that truly wins in the battle Paul anticipates in Eph 6:10–17, as they “walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). This is a success over feelings, whims, errant notions, or wilting fears that intimidate them to shrink back, feeling that they cannot win because the onslaught that they face is too formidable. Or as Paul’s prayer of chapter 3 further pleads, may Christ dwell in their hearts by faith, faith that acts in forthright success (v. 17). And prayer is apt that they will be able to perceive by a discerning faith what is the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ’s love (vv. 18–19). In the warfare, may they look to God in faith ready to be “filled up to all the fullness of God” (v. 19). This is the fullness in being strengthened with might by His Spirit in the person within (v. 16), or in other words the fullness that is a victor’s supply in being “filled with the Spirit” (5:18). In that same passage in chapter 3, as relevant in the warfare, prayer is cogent for faith to expect the possibilities in what God Almighty is able to do (3:20).

The China Inland Mission and the Wycliffe Bible Translators have used faith’s theme to inspire exploits. Their fight song has followed a version of words Charles Wesley wrote (1707–1788). A part of it is:

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone,  
Laughs at impossibilities,  
And cries it shall be done.

And this faith has been multiplied on so many battle fields that Scripture is bold to show. Moses believed the waters of the Red Sea would part and God would open a path (Exod 14). Jehoshaphat believed the Lord would find a way to defeat the armies bent upon attacking Jerusalem (2 Chron 20). Isaiah believed the shadow on the sundial would go backward—the impossible would happen (Isa 38).

Last in the six parts of the armor is “the sword of the Spirit.” The sword is the weapon the Spirit provides. With it He gives winning help as He fills and leads (cf. Eph 5:18; Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18). This sword pictures “the Word of God.” Just as the Psalms see the Word as vital against the enemy (Ps 17:4; 37:31), and Jesus used the Word as a sword to defeat the enemy, Satan, in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11), His spiritual sons (Eph. 1:5) now are to cut this way and that with this sword as they forge ahead.

And how does prayer permeate so that this aspect of the armor works? In many ways. A Christian can pray, or believers pray for one another (6:18). This can be effective in crying to God for the Spirit first to make us usable, then



to use us to make headway as God wills against those who defy us. Prayer can work in beseeching the Lord to bring truths of the Word to our minds and lips so that we will wage a good warfare. Prayer is strategic in pleading that God will drive the Word home to us in themes that help us prevail and say or do what will convict the unsaved also to be saved.

When young, unsaved, and profligate, George Mueller accepted a friend Beto's invitation to a Christian meeting. There Mueller saw an elderly man bow and pray to God. The Lord was working in the visitor's heart, drawing him as by a magnet (John 6:44). Mueller went home, deeply convicted about his own need of this God of prayer, and received the Savior! The rest fills out the history—his children's orphanages and his incredible modeling of faith, with "much fruit" that lasts forever (John 15:8, 16; 1 John 2:17).

And in the Ephesians context, how does prayer in vv. 18–20 fit with "be strong in the Lord" (v. 10) and having on all of the armor (vv. 14–17)? In another place this writer details eleven ways.<sup>31</sup> Suffice it to sum up here. (1) Praying to God (v. 18) follows hard on the armor passage (v. 17); the thought leaps quickly from panoply to prayer, from armor to asking. (2) Paul must mean that the prayer is vital for the armor since it is "all prayer," covering every need of battle about which saints can pray (cf. n. 11). (3) The prayer also is "at all times," again extending to any occasion one knows about (as Phil 4:6; cf. 1 Pet 5:7), and every moment of warfare. Prayer is (4) "with all perseverance and petition," relevant for all things that need steadfastness, touching anything, and here attitudes, acts and words to stand and go forward despite enemies. (5) Intercession is for "all the saints," so it potentially embraces every saved person one knows or hears is in need, and all that is pertinent in life for God. Surely this includes times in battle, and every facet of living to please Christ (cf. 5:10).

Paul, the pacesetter example of prayer for others (1:2–14, 15–23; 3:14–23; 6:23–24) here counts as critical the others' intercession in turn for him (6:19–20). Crucial in his preaching is a crystal clarity in bold speaking to set forth God's Word as he ought to present it. This is to fulfill the stewardship God entrusted in his case (3:8–11).

### **Paul's Follow up on Prayers' Answers**

How often in church prayer meetings, or other Christian exchanges of prayer concerns, items are not followed up publicly later. People share requests, but later nobody reports answers publicly.

Paul is an example here of a remedy. His policy is follow-up, not fold-up or fade out. In vv. 21–22, he wants believers who receive this epistle to "know" how things are with him. Paul mentions a form of the word "know" three times. Believers in his day who meditated on this epistle evidently in some degree knew his needs earlier, just as he has requested in vv. 19–20. On

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<sup>31</sup> Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," 231–35.

matters about which they already had prayed, here is a considerate update report. A member of his ministry team, Tychicus, “will make everything known to you.” He will in a personal visit brief the believers on the latest about matters. Paul suggests the quality of the update by his estimate of this friend. Tychicus is “the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.” With loving, trustworthy service for the Ephesians’ sakes, he will update them on concerns—sensibly, reliably, as honors the Lord. As to God’s answers to prayers, his strategic information will “comfort your hearts” (v. 22).

It is a timely help in a ministry for any in the church to get back to prayer supporters. Keep them posted. This zeal follows the example Paul gives. To neglect being specific this way may reflect a withering of gratitude for prayer help, poor sensitivity, and a “too busy,” selfish attitude (seek the prayers, but not take time to share with praying people God’s answers when they have devoted love on its knees). God forbid that Christians fall down at this point!

### **Paul’s Intercession at the End**

Peace, love, faith and grace are urgencies Paul pleads for God’s people in 6:23–24.

Two of these, grace and peace, now leap again into his prayer, just as when he began the letter (cf. on 1:2). His principle of repeatedly keeping hot his concern to boost “the brethren” is evident. The prayer shows he is aware that God’s “sons” (1:4–5) constantly need sufficiency that God’s grace accords (cf. 2 Cor 12:9), and the life-settling composure the Lord can supply.

Love, whether that of God the Father, His beloved Son, or by the Spirit in God’s people, has appeared fourteen times earlier in Ephesians. Love obviously is vital in a sensitive response to God’s own love (1:4–5; 2:4), to being in Christ “the Beloved One” (1:7), and the saints’ being firmed up in the Lord (3:17). It is a key in experiencing Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge (3:19), in a forbearing deference that is zealous for the benefit of each other (4:2), and in truth’s gestures that join expressions of spiritual gifts to spark mutual growth (4:15). Love is crucial in lives laid down for the sake of others as Christ’s sacrifice modeled (5:2), for example in a husband’s care lived all out sacrificially to bless his wife (v. 25). No wonder Paul intercedes for the practical advantages of love!

This love is “with faith.” As Paul once phrased it, “faith works through love” (Gal 5:6), that is, faith cuts its assets of blessing along its own refreshing channels where love floods forth. The love is what faith in God puts on display in benefits by His Word. This is in words, attitudes, and acts. In these the Lord’s power works the humanly impossible. All that such love can accomplish, as Paul has made evident, is what God can do when He answers prayer (3:20)!

### **Conclusion: A Call to the Church to Pray**

Prayer is a priority for those of the church. This is of high-noon clarity.

How then shall we live? How can the church surge forward, onward, and not in a stupor, a neglect, a half-hearted ministry if even that? How can it burst ahead if it is too busy (or not busy) side-tracked with other things, and pathetic in rating by its actions that prayer is a minor thing? If God has made prayer a crucial urgency, how can those of the church live if virtually writing it off to a pitiful level? How can we hear that we have desperate need to change, yet not change? How can we live with touting prayer as important but tolerating a hypocrisy that shouts, blatantly when the rubber meets the road, “we can take it or leave it”?

We accept God’s “every spiritual blessing” (1:3), such as being sons, heirs, redeemed, forgiven, members of the very bride of Christ and soldiers in His ranks. How, then, can we dismiss practically from our schedules prayers that seriously prize the face of God? How can we candidly belittle talks with God and bypass Him, the God of prayer, as if, in brutal reality, He is not worth our time? One church group of young couples and singles responded to a missionary’s question why they had not responded to her appeals in promises to pray for her. “Why, to us—prayer? That’s for the old blue hairs.”

The church does not need to settle for such a misguided dodge. God’s offer can awaken us like the crack of thunder if only we will rise up and insist to be men and women of God! Take Him seriously as the prayer-answering God, the mighty One who is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think” (3:20). Acclaim Him as the hearing, throne-room Lord of Eph 6:18–20. What is our answer to Him? When I was a boy the words came home, “Listen, my children, and you shall hear, of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.” But as to prayer, something far, far more important appeals for us to hear. You have just heard what God has said. Now comes the bottom line, What will you say—and show—by your actions that you heard as if your ears were on fire? The answer we should give comes down through centuries of biblical examples. I expounded more than a thousand passages on prayer in the Bible (cf. n. 10); the answer we ought to give mainly comes down from heaven; this answer can change our lives; this answer can set the church aflame.

Listen! Can you hear—hear what your answer and involvement should be? Can you hear the answer to the question, “What will I do, and what will I have the church do?” If you are listening you will hear what God says. Can you hear His thunder rumbling in the deepest conviction of your heart? Is this your answer?

**YES!**

## CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN PHILIPPIANS 3:3

Andrew V. Snider, Th.D.  
Professor of Theology  
The Master's Seminary

*The church should be looking more closely at the New Testament for instruction about corporate worship. If we come to understand the nature of the church, we will gain substantial insight into the character of her worship gatherings. Paul's definitive statement in Phil 3:3 concerning the identity of the church serves as a springboard for informing and enhancing Christian worship. A proper understanding of this text will highlight the importance of the "corporateness of worship" and show that worship is an activity that believers should do as a diverse unity.*

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### Introduction

A welcome development in evangelical theology during the past few decades is a revitalization of worship theology. More than sponsoring an academic exercise in biblical or dogmatic theology, many seminaries and Christian universities have created degree programs in worship—usually a hybrid of musical and theological training geared toward preparing students to be worship pastors.<sup>1</sup> There has been an explosion of biblical and practical literature on various aspects of worship. Among these, solid biblical theologies of worship have contributed much to this worship renewal movement.<sup>2</sup>

As one seeks to apply a biblical theology of worship, a tension one encounters is between worship considered on one hand as an individual attitude and lifestyle (being a living sacrifice and doing all to the glory of God) and on the other hand as an event and activity of the community of faith, the church

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<sup>1</sup> There is even an entire graduate school devoted to the study of worship: The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies ([www.iws.edu](http://www.iws.edu)). Note also the formation of the Biblical Worship section in the Evangelical Theological Society.

<sup>2</sup> See especially David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006).

gathered. Theological studies of worship have effectively drawn the conclusion that the emphasis in worship in the NT is on the offering of daily life as a sacrifice to God, with ritual as a whole deemphasized.<sup>3</sup> While there have also been theological and practical studies of corporate worship,<sup>4</sup> there is room for further refinement of our biblical theology of worship in this area.

My desire in this study is to emphasize the corporateness of worship, the fact that it is an activity that believers do as a diverse unity. Indeed, Christians are called to be living sacrifices individually, but worship life is not essentially individualistic: “This mode of ‘sacrificial living’ *coram deo* ought to characterize our daily lives, to be sure, but on the Lord’s Day there is a special sense in which believers are gathered together by God as the body of Christ in order to be drawn into God’s holy presence as ‘living sacrifices.’”<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the uniqueness of that gathering has been lost on many evangelicals, who often tend to treat the Sunday worship service as a program to be attended or a mere collocation of people who have gathered in the same room to be individual worshipers, rather than a corporate activity to be invested in as a collective unity. “One of the most easily overlooked aspects of common worship is that it begins with the gathering, in one place, of scattered Christians to be the church at worship. We usually treat the act of assembling as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ’s name is itself an important part of common [i.e., public] worship.”<sup>6</sup>

This gathering together constitutes a group of people as a unit—a microcosm of the church universal, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the household of God, the assembly (*ekklesia*) gathered together to worship. And nearly every possible element of that worship is debated in some way. One key element of this debate is the tendency to assume that the NT has little to say about the elements and order of corporate worship. Because there is no post-Pentecost Pentateuch to direct the church’s worship gatherings in every detail, the tendency is either to heavily emphasize freedom or to take significant cues from the OT. An example of the former is charismatic worship, where

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<sup>3</sup> For example, this (entirely correct) conclusion from Peterson: “When Christians become preoccupied with the notion of offering God acceptable worship in a congregational context and thus with the minutiae of church services, they need to be reminded that Paul’s focus was on the service of everyday life” (Peterson, *Engaging*, 187).

<sup>4</sup> Particularly works that help the church apply historically and biblically rich strategies for designing and executing corporate worship services. Among them are Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); and Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL: 2008) (theologically well-informed but practically targeted toward music leaders in particular).

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord’s Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 75–76.

<sup>6</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 29.

flexibility is highly valued, and the worship leader is understood to be the Holy Spirit himself, who “sensitizes worship with both freedom and order,” the results of which are “free, surprising, ‘Spirit-led.’”<sup>7</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are those whose perspective on worship structure is pervaded by Israelite worship under the Mosaic covenant. An example in this category is the “covenant renewal worship” concept of Jeffrey J. Meyers, who develops an order of worship largely reflective of the cultic order of Mosaic sacrifices.<sup>8</sup>

Both of these perspectives contribute something to a robust biblical theology of worship—the desire on one hand to ensure that Christian worship is fully Trinitarian, and on the other hand to reflect a pattern of approach to the living God that is seen broadly throughout redemptive history.<sup>9</sup> However, it seems appropriate also that the church be concerned to read the NT carefully for all that it can contribute to the fullness of the church’s worship. In what follows it is assumed that if we come to understand the nature of the church, we will gain substantial insight into the character of her worship gatherings. For this study, Paul’s definitive statement in Phil 3:3 concerning the identity of the church will serve as a springboard for the discussion and an example of what it might look like to read the NT specifically for the purpose of informing and enhancing Christian worship.<sup>10</sup>

### “We Are the Circumcision”

The beginning of chapter 3 marks a turning point in the epistle to the Philippians. While it may be an overstatement to call 3:1–21 “The Great Digression,”<sup>11</sup> it is abundantly clear that Paul’s tone changes to one of warning and stern exhortation in 3:2. His warning is concerning those he calls “the dogs...the evil-workers...the mutilators of the flesh.”<sup>12</sup> Paul’s language is stark,

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<sup>7</sup> Don Williams, “Charismatic Worship,” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 145, 147.

<sup>8</sup> Meyers, *The Lord’s Service*, 73–88.

<sup>9</sup> For which also see Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, chapters 1–9.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest that there is another level of meaning in the biblical text related to worship – i.e. a “liturgical sense.” Rather, the point to be developed here is that the way the NT itself speaks of worship provides a rationale by which one expects that there will be implications for worship when the meaning of the text is understood, believed, and applied.

<sup>11</sup> R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 53, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in English will be from the English Standard Version.

stern, and staccato. In addition to the threefold use of *blepete*, “each noun has the definite article and begins with k-.”<sup>13</sup>

Clues in the subsequent context indicate that Paul is warning his readers about the Judaizers—those Jewish followers of Jesus who were entering into local churches and insisting that they must add Mosaic law-keeping to faith in Christ for salvation.<sup>14</sup> On this basis, he uses language that a Jew might apply derisively to Gentiles: dogs, evildoers. To these Paul adds the “bitterly ironic” third term, *katomē*,<sup>15</sup> or mutilation, which is a wordplay on the subsequent use of *peritomē*, circumcision, in v. 3. Enhancing his negative portrayal of the opponents in question, Paul uses this paronomasia to indicate that they are not members of the true people of God (in either a Mosaic or New Covenant economy). On the contrary, “the boast of these opponents [physical circumcision and lawkeeping] is overturned by using a word that links literal circumcision with those pagan cuttings of the body which were forbidden by the law of Israel. . . Circumcision, their greatest source of pride, is interpreted by the apostle as a sure sign that they have no part in God’s people at all.”<sup>16</sup>

Paul goes on to state in strong contrast, “for we are the circumcision.” In direct opposition to the “mutilation,” (*katomē*), he says, we are the circumcision (*peritomē*), the true people of God. Because the opponents at hand emphasized the rite of physical circumcision as a necessary part of salvation, Paul uses the similar-sounding *peritomē*, which, “(as a collective noun) points to the covenant people who stand under God’s promises, the one true people of God.”<sup>17</sup> They are “the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials” (NET). Each of these will be discussed in what follows.

The point to be emphasized for the present discussion is this: it is important to Paul to show that there is a boundary between the church and those outside it, and he goes to some rhetorical length to insist that the false teachers in question are outside the true people of God. The relevance to the present discussion follows immediately in v. 3 with Paul’s characterization of the true people of God as worshipers.

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<sup>13</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 352.

<sup>14</sup> See O’Brien, 26–35 for a summary of the debate over the identity of the opponents here in Philippians 3. Whatever their precise affiliation, it seems necessary to conclude based on Paul’s strong words in vv. 18–20 that the opponents were false teachers who promulgated a false gospel.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 358. “For the true circumcision is of the spirit and not of the letter, inward, and situated in the heart, not visible according to the flesh” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. XXI (n.d.; reprint.: Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 88.

### “The Ones Who Worship”

Having drawn the sharp contrast between the false teachers and those who were a part of God’s people, Paul makes a threefold definitive statement about the people of God. Each of the three parts is a participial phrase which gives a characteristic of those who are members of *hē peritomē*, “describing how they actually live and behave.”<sup>18</sup>

The first of these participial descriptions is “those who worship by the Spirit of God” (*hoi pneumati theou latreuontes*). Here the substantive use of the present active participle of *latreuō* indicates that Paul sees this activity as an essential characteristic of the people of God—an attribute that makes them uniquely identifiable as *hē peritomē*.

The use of *latreuō* here is significant and merits some discussion. The more common NT word for worship, *proskuneō*, with its emphasis on the physical bowing or prostrating oneself before an “object [that] is always something—truly or supposedly—divine”<sup>19</sup> is restricted in its usage to the Gospels and Revelation. Paul, like the other NT epistolary writers, prefers the companion word *latreuō*, meaning “to serve” in the sense of “carrying out of religious duties, esp. of a cultic nature, by human beings.”<sup>20</sup>

The LXX sets the stage for the NT understanding in that it employs *latreuō* for *‘abad* when a religious meaning of the latter is intended, i.e., when it refers to “the service of God by the whole people and by the individual, both outwardly in the cultus and inwardly in the heart.”<sup>21</sup> It is to be emphasized that this service is not merely the outward observance of ritual. “It goes much deeper and involves the demand for right disposition of the heart and the demonstration of this in the whole of religious and moral conduct.”<sup>22</sup>

This emphasis on worship as heart-based service to God is carried forward into the NT, where it “denotes actions that are always evaluated positively when God is the grammatical object and negatively with reference to

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<sup>18</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 360.

<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Greeven, “προσκυνεω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964–76), 6:763. Hereafter, TDNT.

<sup>20</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 586. Hereafter, BDAG.

<sup>21</sup> K. Hess, “λατρεύω,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols., ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 3:550. Hereafter, NIDNTT. Cf. H. Strathmann, “λατρεύω,” in TDNT, 4:60. Otherwise the LXX renders *‘abad* as *douleuō* (*Ibid.*, 4:62).

<sup>22</sup> Strathmann, “λατρεύω,” 4:61.



any other object.”<sup>23</sup> This is perhaps illustrated best in Jesus’ deployment of Deut 6:13 in defense against the temptation of Satan: “Be gone Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship [*proskunēseis*] the Lord your God and him only shall you serve [*latreuseis*]’” (Matt 4:10, cf. Rom 1:25).

In what is possibly the most famous use of *latreuō* in the Pauline corpus, the follower of Jesus is entreated to give up his life entirely as a sacrifice that is “alive, holy, and pleasing to God,” an act and life—perspective that Paul calls the believer’s “reasonable service of worship (*logikēn latreian*).”<sup>24</sup> Also, Paul uses *latreuō* twice to characterize himself broadly: “God, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son” (Rom 1:9); and “God, whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience.”<sup>25</sup> The characterization in Phil 3:3 of true believers in general as *latreuontes*, then, is consistent for Paul—serving God in the *latreuō* sense involves a commitment of the heart that characterizes the whole life. As a Christian, one is a servant-worshiper of the true God.<sup>26</sup>

Paul then refers to this worshipful serving as worship that is done “by the Spirit of God.”<sup>27</sup> Clearly there is an echo here of Jesus’ statement to the Samaritan woman at the well, that the worshipers the Father seeks are those who worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–4). As a result, some see here in Paul’s statement essentially the same content as Jesus’ point in John 4: that true worship is “out of the fullness of the supernatural life they enjoy (‘in spirit’), and on the basis of God’s incarnate Self-Expression, Christ Jesus himself, through whom God’s person and will are finally and ultimately disclosed (‘in

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<sup>23</sup> Karen Jobes, “Distinguishing the Meaning of Greek Verbs in the Semantic Domain for Worship,” in *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, rev. ed., Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 203.

<sup>24</sup> For a concise summary of the debate over the meaning of *logikēn* here, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 644–45. Whether one translates it as “reasonable/rational” or “spiritual/*pneumatikos*,” the emphasis found in the use of *latreian* will be the same.

<sup>25</sup> Luke attributes similar usage to Paul during the latter’s public testimonies in Acts 24:24 and 27:23.

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews, the other epistle that makes use of *latreuō* (6x), also supports this emphasis, although with the cultic emphasis appropriate to that epistle’s theme of connecting the work of Christ with the OT sacrificial system. The result for the believer is that the blood of Christ will “purify our conscience from dead works to serve (*latreuein*) the living God” (9:14).

<sup>27</sup> The reading “worship God in the Spirit” (NKJV) is unlikely since *latreuō* takes a dative direct object. The best text, *hoi pneumatī theou latreuontes*, is an absolute use of *latreuō*, which indicates that the divine subject is implied, and *pneumatī theou* is instrumental dative—a more likely rendering for Paul than “who worship the Spirit of God” (see O’Brien, *Philippians*, 346; cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998], 547).

truth’).”<sup>28</sup> But we must let Paul speak from his own context in the letter to Philippi, summarized well by O’Brien:

Those who are in Christ Jesus are part of the new order ushered in by his coming (2 Cor. 5:17), the new age of salvation. They have the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:8–9), and his presence, following his outpouring by the exalted Lord Jesus (Acts 2:33–36), is a sign of this new age. This same Spirit is the initiator who enables Christians to serve and please God, in a service of a comprehensive kind that includes not simply prayer or worship in a formal sense but the whole of life.<sup>29</sup>

While it is best to see Jesus’ words in John 4 as a reference to worship apart from geographical restrictions, Paul’s point here in Philippians 3 must be more than merely that true worship is “wholly from the heart, and is not hampered by physical constraints.”<sup>30</sup> Paul’s language is more specific (*pneumati theou*), and his situation in redemptive history is post-Pentecost (as summarized by O’Brien above), so it is reasonable to see here a reference to the Holy Spirit as the enabler of true worship in and among the true people of God. So Paul’s meaning in the use of “those who worship by the Spirit of God” should be seen, not as just the same point Jesus was making, but as a development of its implications for the church. Paul’s words certainly include the Lord’s point about worship being independent of physical, geographical, and cultic constraints, but go beyond them to imply *how* true worship can be thus location- and-ritual-independent: it is worship that is enabled, energized, and focused by the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, Paul’s first identity-marker of the true people of God—a characteristic that sets them apart from those who are not—is Spirit-driven worship. There is valuable insight here for the character and content of corporate Christian worship: first, when the church gathers to worship we gather as servant-worshippers of God who come together to submit to our Lord and honor Him as He deserves. It is incumbent upon the leaders of such an assembly to promote this attitude by example, instruction, and careful execution of the leadership of a worship service. Second, if true worship is enabled by and

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<sup>28</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 225–26. See, e.g., William Hendrickson, “Philippians,” in *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 152; J. B. Lightfoot, *Philippians* The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 159; Calvin, *Philippians*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 361.

<sup>30</sup> Hendrickson, *Philippians*, 152.

<sup>31</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 128.

infused with the Holy Spirit, corporate worship gatherings must be planned and lead with the express intent to display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and further form such fruit in the worshipers (How can worship be “by/in the Spirit of God” if it does not strive to display and inspire love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?). Finally, because the Spirit of God is also the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9), whose role is to exalt Christ, the Christian worship gathering will be an event that is dominated by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christian worship, then, is to be Christ-centered, gospel-centered, and Trinitarian, showing and developing in God’s people the fruit of a Spirit-dependent, Spirit-enlivened walk.

### “The Ones Who Boast in Jesus”

While the first of the three identity-markers in Phil 3:3 is most directly relevant to the present discussion of corporate Christian worship, the other two are closely related and so also provide some insight into the character of worship. Paul’s second identity-marker of the true people of God develops logically out of the first: those who worship in the Spirit of God (i.e., the Spirit of Christ) are those who “glory in Christ Jesus.”

Here we encounter a favorite word of Paul: *kauchaomai* (“glory”), meaning simply to boast or take pride in something.<sup>32</sup> Of thirty-seven occurrences in the NT, thirty-five are in the Pauline letters. The *kauchaomai* word family includes two related verb forms (with prefixes *en-* and *kata-*), which occur only five times total, and the nouns *kauchēma* and *kauchēsis* (eleven occurrences each). “Apart, however, from 5 instances in Jas. and one in Heb., words of this group are found only in the Pauline writings.”<sup>33</sup>

Paul’s talk of boasting sometimes refers to rejoicing or exulting: in hope as well as suffering (Rom 5:2–3), and in God because he has reconciled us to himself in Christ (Rom 5:11). But more often, Paul’s sense of *kauchaomai* is simply that of boasting. Of course, to boast in oneself is sinful and a denial of obvious divine realities: “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7). Indeed, the OT perspective on self-boasting is equally dim: “It is not simply a casual fault, but the basic attitude of the foolish and ungodly man (Pss 52:1 [LXX 51:3]; 94:4 [93:3]), for in it one sees the person who stands on his own feet and does not depend on God.”<sup>34</sup>

So Paul is most reluctant to boast in anything he has accomplished. Seventeen of the Pauline occurrences of *kauchaomai* and six uses of *kauchēsis* are in 2 Corinthians 10–12, where Paul is forced to defend the authenticity of his

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<sup>32</sup> BDAG, 536.

<sup>33</sup> H-C. Hahn, “καύχημα,” in NIDNTT, 1:228.

<sup>34</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 361; cf. Rudolf Bultmann, “καυχόμαι,” in TDNT, 3:646–47.

apostolic authority. Paul considers this boasting foolish (11:16–21), and keeps his boast strictly within proper boundaries (10:13). For Paul’s boast is not in what he himself has done, but what God has accomplished through Paul’s weaknesses. In fact, it is of his weaknesses that he prefers to boast (11:30), because it is in those weaknesses that the power of Christ is manifested (12:9). Indeed, it is in this context that Paul’s ethic of boasting is summarized in his quotation of Jer 23:23: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (10:17; cf. 1 Cor 1:31).

In his letter to the Galatian churches, in a context similar to Phil 3:3 where some were demanding physical circumcision in the churches, Paul pinpoints the cross of Christ as the object of his boasting: “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). In sum, Paul’s “theology of boasting” is a way of emphasizing that anything good arising from his life actually comes from Christ. R.P. Martin summarizes this well: “Our ‘boasting’ is not in ourselves, which is the essence of sin, but in Another whose arm alone has brought salvation and on whom we rest in utter confidence and self-distrust. It is an attitude which deflates pride, especially in our religious virtues and attainments, and exalts the sovereign grace of God, and His matchless gift on which we have no claim.”<sup>35</sup>

So in Phil 3:3 Paul characterizes the true people of God, in contrast to those who are not, as “those who boast in Christ Jesus.” The boasting that Paul attributed to himself in other contexts he applies here to believers in general. In fact, it is a basic mark of Christian identity to boast of Christ and His cross. This presents a timely application to corporate Christian worship—it is a gathering of those whose only true basis for boasting is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their identity is found in Him, all good that they experience arises from Him, and their claim to be acceptable to God can be substantiated only in what Christ has done on their behalf. Therefore, the Christian worship gathering must be a time that is explicitly designed and overtly conducted in such a way as to make much of Jesus Christ and not of ourselves. Because Christ-boasting is a key element of Christian identity, it should have a prominent presence in a Christian theology and praxis of worship.

### **“The Ones Who Do Not Trust in Self”**

The third and final identity-marker in Paul’s brief statement in Phil 3:3 builds on the previous characteristic of boasting in Christ. Paul says that true people of God are those who “do not put confidence in the flesh” (*ouk en sarki pepoithotes*).

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<sup>35</sup> Martin, *Philippians*, 139.

This phrase is so closely related to the previous one that some take it to be a restatement of or expansion on boasting in Christ Jesus. In addition to the logical progression from “boasting in Christ” to “not putting confidence in the flesh,” O’Brien sees a chiasmic arrangement in the second and third participial phrases and so concludes that the third is a “negative restatement of the preceding.”<sup>36</sup> However, due to the straightforward arrangement of three participial phrases in a row, with the second and third each connected by *kai* to the previous, along with a discernible conceptual progression from the second to the third, it seems better to see a third but related identity-marker.<sup>37</sup>

The word “flesh” (*sarx*) is another prolific Pauline term, but its range of meaning is quite broad and flexible, as a partial list of examples will show:<sup>38</sup>

“so that no [flesh] might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 1:29)

“for by works of the law no [flesh] will be justified” (Rom 3:20)

“for not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals” (1 Cor 15:39)

“if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me” (Phil 1:22)

“those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8)

The last two examples demonstrate the flexibility of this term for Paul—in one context he refers to living life in the flesh as a good thing, in another context it is impossible to please God “in the flesh.” Sometimes, then, Paul uses *sarx* to refer simply to human beings or human (even animal) corporeality, while in other cases it refers to the principle of sin that resides within humans and with which believers struggle even though its power has been broken. A few occurrences refer more specifically to humans from the reference point of their genealogy (Rom 1:3) and biological kinship (Rom 9:3).

But sometimes *sarx* “can be used also generally in reference to what is human” such as the inadequate wisdom of humans (1 Cor 1:16, cf. 2:6).<sup>39</sup> It is in this category that Paul is using “flesh” in Phil 3:3—the human achievements, even religious ones, that people depend on for favor with God. The strongest evidence for this interpretation comes in vv. 4–6. Paul repeats the phrase in verse 4: “though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh,” and then he lists the religious qualifications he has in mind with the use of *sarx*: his Jewish descent and previous status as an enthusiastic Pharisee. The specific act of circumcision is probably in view due to its presence in the context (*katatomē*, *peritomē*, and “circumcised on the eighth day” in v. 5), but it is reasonable to

<sup>36</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 362–3; cf. Hendrickson, *Philippians*, 153.

<sup>37</sup> As, e.g., Melick, *Philippians*, 128; Calvin, *Philippians*, 89.

<sup>38</sup> For a helpful discussion of the Pauline concept of “flesh,” see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 140–46.

<sup>39</sup> H. Seebass, “Flesh,” in NIDNTT, 1:676.

conclude that Paul is including anything on which people rely (*pepoithotes*, perf ptc of *peithō*) to achieve membership in the true people of God.<sup>40</sup>

So the third identity-marker of the true people of God is their complete lack of trust in human credentials in light of their sole boast in Christ. This principle is well-established in evangelical theology as it applies to evangelizing unbelievers and discipling believers. As one of the basic characteristics of Christian identity, though, it can also make a contribution to a theology of corporate worship. Because human beings can come into God's presence only on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the experience of corporate worship must be planned and executed such that the worshipers can regularly express their dependence on God and their distrust of self.

Existing as they do in an entertainment-oriented culture, Western evangelical churches are constantly tempted to appeal to attendees on the basis of human accomplishments such as excellent music, impressive facilities, diverse programming, and charismatic personalities. The assumption seems to be that people are worshipping if they are enjoying themselves. An entertainment-oriented worship service is an example of placing confidence in the flesh and can easily involve boasting in something other than the person and work of Christ Jesus. But Christian worship must be characterized by a self-conscious rejection of reliance on human achievement and qualifications, for those who are true worshipers are those who boast only in Christ Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

Reading Phil 3:3 in its context and with an eye toward applying Paul's meaning to corporate worship has yielded some basic yet insightful fruit for the benefit of the church's corporate worship. First, the people of God are servant-worshipers, those who seek to give of themselves in service to a gracious God. Therefore, a worship service should be oriented toward self-giving for the sake of God and others. Second, God's people are those who boast in Jesus. Therefore, a worship service should be oriented toward exalting the person and work of Christ and celebrating what He has accomplished on our behalf. This leads to the third characteristic of the people of God, a complete distrust in self. In light of this, a worship service should never depend for its success on merely human factors such as personalities, talents, and facilities.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 364. The NET rendering seems to capture the idea with "do not rely on human credentials" if Paul is referring to "everything that is apart from Christ" (Calvin, *Philippians*, 89).

<sup>41</sup> Of course, none of this is to say that excellence in planning and execution of the events in a worship service is unimportant. Humble worshipers should boast in Christ with the greatest enthusiasm and highest excellence they can achieve given their particular circumstances.

The implications for pastoral ministry here are significant. Since corporate worship is a matter of the heart (the gathered are indeed “living sacrifices” on an individual basis), the planning and conducting of a worship service is very much a pastoral matter. It cannot be delegated to musicians or producers who are not essentially pastoral in their approach—seeking to lead the assembly of servant-worshippers to give humbly of themselves to the Savior who has given himself for them.<sup>42</sup>

I will venture one modest suggestion based on this study of Phil 3:3 for the sake of corporate worship. One example of how worship can serve as an expression of Christian identity in a corporate setting is through corporate confession, an element of worship services that is now relatively rare in evangelical churches. The renewal of interest in the history and theology of worship among evangelicals has produced some helpful explorations of this valuable opportunity for corporate worship.<sup>43</sup> While all the actions of corporate worship are opportunities for the enactment of the church’s identity as the true people of God, corporate confession provides an especially poignant moment for servant-worshippers to boast in Christ and express (and experience) their utter dependence on Him. In short, corporate confession is a chance for the church to embody its identity in a worship setting.

Finally, since there seems to be a tendency to rely heavily on the OT for insight into the church’s corporate worship, I have attempted to exemplify a way of reading and applying the NT so as to show that it has much to offer that will enhance the worship of God’s people. Since the NT presents worship as a matter of the whole life of the Christian, and since worship is an essential marker of Christian identity, it is appropriate to read the whole NT in light of this emphasis on pervasive worship. The result, hopefully, will be an increasingly vibrant, diverse, redemptive, and transformative corporate worship life among the gathered saints.

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<sup>42</sup> Indeed, one of the contributions of the worship renewal movement in general is that evangelical churches are increasingly realizing that worship and music are not identical but that the latter is one of several means to accomplish the former.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, chap. 15 (with historical and theological background throughout chaps. 1–9).

## AUTHENTIC SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Richard L. Mayhue, Th.D.  
Executive Vice President and Dean  
Professor of Theology and Pastoral Ministry  
The Master's Seminary

*The church needs to purge strong, natural leadership (SNL) from her ranks and pursue strong, spiritual leadership (SSL). Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, and 1 Tim 3:1–7, 10 each teach the same four core qualities of leadership that are empowered by God's Spirit, not man's flesh. These four include sufficiency, submissiveness, spirituality, and steadfastness. The greatest leader ever to lead in human history, the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly exemplified all four. In spite of their ancient origin, these four basic leadership traits have not changed since the OT days of Israel and NT beginnings of the church because God's character has not changed and the nature of spiritual leadership remains the same.*

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This apocryphal letter highlights the challenging task of recognizing genuine leadership:

Thank you for sending the resumes of the twelve men you picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken a battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer but have also arranged personal interviews for each one of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. It is the staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you're undertaking. They do not have the team concept. Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a skeptical attitude that would tend to undermine morale. Matthew has been blacklisted by the Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale. One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He's a man of ability and resourcefulness. He meets people well and has a keen business mind and contacts in high places. He is highly



motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man.

Sincerely,  
Jordan Management Consultants

While fictitious, but humorous, this obviously contrived letter brilliantly illustrates the challenge facing all church ministries—How does one recognize true spiritual leaders and distinguish them from non-spiritual leaders? The Jordan Management Consultants employed human reason at the expense of divine revelation in developing their criteria to do so. As a result, they spotted the strong, natural leader (SNL) and rejected what turned out to eventually be the group of strong, spiritual leaders (SSL).

Os Guinness captures this tragic pattern displayed in the church over the past three centuries. What marked the 19th and 20th century churches also defines the 21st.

Needless to say, distortions of the ministry are not new. In 1886, *Nation* magazine reported “Indeed, so far has the church caught the spirit of the age, so far has it become a business enterprise, that the chief test of ministerial success is now the ability to ‘build up’ a church. Executive, managerial abilities are now more in demand than those which used to be considered the highest in a clergyman.”

Yet another study in 1986 showed that the differences in expectations between liberals and evangelicals had almost disappeared, that secular expectations grew while the spiritual shrunk, and that the profile was largely dominated by two sets of considerations – those therapeutic and managerial.

(Concerning) a well-known Christian magazine that is designed for pastors and deals with the problems of leadership in the churches, a survey of the magazine showed that over the course of time, the magazine had examined almost every conceivable church problem in its pages. Yet, believe it or not, less than one percent of the articles had any reference to Scripture at all, or any serious theological component. In the form of the imperialistic genius of managerial and therapeutic insights, galloping secularization left theology in the dust.<sup>1</sup>

These recent statistics regarding pastoral leadership confirm the reality that there are many bogus, counterfeit leaders filling spiritual leadership roles,

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<sup>1</sup> Os Guinness, “Church Growth—Success at What Price?” *Coram Deo*, 16, no. 4 (April 1992): 51.

and they are bound to ultimately fail and severely damage Christ's church in the process.

- 23 percent of all current pastors in the United States have been fired or forced to resign in the past.
- 45 percent of the pastors who were fired in one denomination left the ministry altogether.
- 34 percent of all pastors presently serve congregations that forced their previous pastor to resign.
- The average pastoral career lasts only fourteen years—less than half of what it was not long ago.
- 25 percent of the churches in one survey reported conflict in the previous five years that was serious enough to have a lasting impact on congregational life.
- 1,500 pastors leave their assignments every month in the United States because of conflict, burnout, or moral failure.<sup>2</sup>

I once asked a group of pastors to define “spiritual leadership.” One man quickly responded with, “Knowing where you are going and getting people to follow.” He seemed a little irritated when I continued to probe for a better answer. His response focused exclusively on “leadership” and ignored the “spiritual” aspect. That is a common mistake when seeking leadership in the church. A better definition would be, “*Knowing God's will, walking in it, and effectively soliciting others to follow*” (2 Tim 2:2).

In the business world, SNL normally means success. However, a strong, natural leader in the church would be a disaster if he is not controlled by God's Spirit. This article points to the distinguishing features that contrast leadership in general with “spiritual leadership” as biblically outlined.

Just as there are a few primary colors; the Bible speaks of four primary leadership qualities. These are the RED'S, BLUE'S and YELLOW'S of spiritual leadership. Every man being considered for a leadership role in the church should be evaluated on the basis of these four spiritual qualities, *not* on his success in the marketplace alone.

The church desperately needs strong, spiritual leaders or SSL's which could also stand for strong, supernatural leaders or strong, servant leaders. God has given the church several significant passages in both the Old and New Testaments which all agree on these four fundamental qualities that identify true spiritual leadership and expose as counterfeit any other kind of leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> John H. Redman, “The Statistics Are Shocking!” *Ministry Matters* (September 2003): 1.

### **Strong Natural Leadership (SNL)**

Most churches and Christian ministries take the mistaken approach of looking at four attractive but insufficient outward qualities to identify spiritual leadership. No wonder the experience proves counterproductive, the statistics so alarming, and the anecdotes so frightening. We need to examine men as God does—with primary regard to their internal qualities, not the external. When selecting a king for Israel, God so instructed Samuel (1 Sam 16:7):

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

#### Highly Motivated

No one of the disciples reached the level of Peter who proclaimed his willingness to go both to prison and to death for Christ's sake (Luke 22:33). Yet, hours later he denied Christ three times (Luke 22:54–62). Temporary motivation alone will fail in the end.

#### Externally Pleasing

Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin and the son of Kish, who was a mighty man of valor, proved to be more handsome and taller than any of the people of Israel (1 Sam 9:2). Yet, God finally rejected Saul from being king over (1 Sam 15:26) Israel because he failed to obey God's orders (1 Sam 15:11). Outward appearance alone did not win the day.

#### Knowledgeable

Balaam, God's prophet, possessed direct revelation from the Lord that Israel was to be blessed, not cursed as they journeyed through Moab enroute to the Promise Land (Num 22–24). Yet Balaam taught Balak, King of Moab, how to bring God's curse on the Israelites (Rev 2:14). It is not what one knows alone that attracts God's favor.

#### Available

John Mark, son of Mary in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), had been selected to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5). Being available, he went. But he did not remain very long, having abandoned them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Thus, John Mark

being available but not steadfast on the first journey did not qualify for the second one with Paul (Acts 15:36–38).

In the larger scheme of things, Peter and John Mark later succeeded in spiritual leadership. Neither Balaam nor Saul ever did. So, failure need not be fatal in leadership, but may if other dimensions emerge. If then being (1) highly motivated, (2) externally pleasing, (3) knowledgeable, and/or (4) available alone will not qualify a person for true spiritual leadership, what will?

### **Strong Spiritual Leadership (SSL)**

God has designed a far superior plan for fruitful spiritual leadership. The Divine blueprint involves (1) inward qualities, not just external features, (2) a regular pattern of life, not inconsistent behavior, (3) righteous motives and action, not inappropriate motivations and activities, and (4) fruitful outcomes, not empty efforts.

Not surprisingly, these core attributes can be found in both the Old Testament and the New. This study will examine Exod 18:21, Acts 6:3, and 1 Tim 3:1–7, 10, where each text extols the same basic properties.

#### Exodus 18:21

The context that surrounds this key verse focuses on Moses' struggle to lead the Jews beyond Egypt to the Promised Land. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, observed that Israel's leader was on the road to failure with his do-it-all style of leading (18:17–18).

So he proposes a threefold solution. First, intercede with prayer on behalf of the people (18:19). Second, teach the people God's statutes regarding their walk and work (18:19–20). Third, choose qualified leaders with whom to share the work load (18:21). Four basic qualities are outlined in v. 21. Should Moses embrace these instructions, implement this plan, and delegate these tasks (18:22), then fruitfulness would follow (18:23).

#### *Sufficient*

These men must first be "able," i.e. gifted and capable. This same Hebrew word is used of Ruth by Boaz in characterizing her as "a woman of excellence" (Ruth 3:10). The Proverbs 31 wife earned the reputation of being an "excellent wife" (Prov 31:10).

Paul's final letter to Timothy strikes the same chord (2 Tim 2:2):

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Sufficiency goes beyond mere motivation and adds to ability/skill with excellence. The point is this—not one without the other, but together they accomplish God's mission through men in extraordinary ways. Take Peter for example. When he was motivated (Luke 22:33), but without sufficient giftedness, he failed (Luke 22:54–62). But after God enabled him at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–11), Peter served God's purposes with notable results (Acts 2:14–42).

### *Submitted*

These leaders also needed to “fear God.” How is this quality deserved? By observing how they relate to God's Word. The Pharisees and scribes received a scathing rebuke from Christ (Mark 7:1–23) because they (1) neglected the commandment of God (7:8), (2) set aside the commandment of God in favor of their own tradition (7:9), and (3) invalidated the Word of God with their tradition. They feared neither God nor man and, as such, were not submitted to the authority and will of God (Luke 18:2, 4).

In this case, the internal quality is authenticated or invalidated by outward behavior. The internal quality of fearing God must be teamed with an outward submission. Saul had the externals (1 Sam 9:2), but not the internal. By comparison, David is described by God as, “A man after My heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22).

### *Spiritual*

Able and fearing God heads the list of four. Next comes “men of truth.” They will be trustworthy if they are committed to God's truth (Prov 3:3–4).

Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.

Here, knowledge of God's truth combines with character that lives out God's truth resulting in extraordinary results. Balaam had knowledge (Num 22–24), but no committed character to obey it (Rev 2:14). Thus, he failed. On the other hand, when Zaccheus gained sacred knowledge (Luke 19:1–6, 9–10) by salvation, he immediately responded beyond what God asked (Luke 19:8).

### *Steadfast*

Jethro described the fourth and final quality as “those who hate dishonest gain.” This might be the only quality that is not immediately obvious. It seems to go beyond “honest” to include the time of testing to ensure the “hate of dishonest gain” Which assures of a steadfast, habitual quality.

Paul speaks about “faithful” men in 2 Tim 2:2. Elsewhere he refers to men who must *first* be “tested” (1 Tim 3:10). Strong, spiritual leadership needs to be time-tested in order to validate its availability.

John Mark had been available (early-to-mid AD 40s) but not tested when he failed (late AD 40s) in Acts 13:13 and 15:38 early in Paul’s first missionary journey. But this was not a final failure for John Mark. Although we do not know the details, over the next 10–15 years, John Mark overcame his less-than-acceptable behavior in Acts 13.

He was discipled by Barnabas (Acts 15:37, 39) and Peter (1 Pet 5:13) in the late 40s and early 50s. By the mid-to-late 50s, Mark wrote his gospel (with Peter’s input). In the early 60s, Paul commended him (Col 4:10; Phlm 24) and in the mid-to-late 60s, both Paul (2 Tim 4:11) and Peter (1 Pet 5:13) spoke of him in glowing terms. When John Mark was both time-tested and available for service, he then proved useful for Christ’s sake.

So, a strong spiritual leader must be sufficient, submitted, spiritual, and steadfast. Note that he must be all four at one time. Anything less meant he was not yet qualified.

Did Moses heed Jethro’s counsel? According to Exod 18:24–27 he did. Decades later (the 40th year) Moses recalls that he did (Deut 1:9–18). Interestingly, if we follow the historical narrative, Moses chose able men (Exod 18:25, sufficient), discerning men (Deut 1:13, submitted), wise men (Deut 1:13, spiritual), and experienced men (Deut 1:13, steadfast).

#### Acts 6:3

Fast forward fifteen centuries and God’s main focus has transitioned from Israel to the church. In her infancy, the church (especially the apostles) faced similar leadership challenges as had Moses. Interestingly, the apostles took an almost identical approach, almost as if they were consulting Jethro’s ancient words of wisdom. They needed to delegate responsibility to additional men who possessed the identical core qualities that distinguished Moses’ handpicked, expanded leadership group.

#### *Sufficient*

These new leaders were those whom the apostles could “put in charge of this task.” In other words, they were to be able and equipped to handle the opportunity.

#### *Submitted*

They were to be “full of the Spirit.” In other words they were to be submitted as God-fearing believers.

*Spiritual*

They were to be “full of wisdom.” In other words they were to be spiritual men, men of truth and therefore trustworthy to carry out their assigned responsibilities.

*Steadfast*

They were to be “of good reputation.” In other words, they were to be time-tested.

Someone might wonder why, after 1,500 years, these qualifying traits had not changed or been upgraded. The answer is that they did not need to be changed because the character of God had not changed and the nature of spiritual leadership remained the same.

1 Timothy 3:1–7, 10<sup>3</sup>

Did these initial qualities at the church’s beginning continue as she matured? As expected, three decades later they had not changed in their core qualities, although Paul had added more explicit detail to their basic descriptions.

*Sufficient*

Elders were to be spiritually able (1 Tim 3:4–5):

He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?).

*Submitted*

Elders were to be submitted, i.e., willing to do God’s will (1 Tim 3:1):

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.

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<sup>3</sup> For additional details consult Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1958), 121–36; George W. Knight, III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 331–47; John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 91–121.

*Spiritual*

Elders were to be spiritual as exemplified by godly character (1 Tim 3:2–3):

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

*Steadfast*

Elders were to be time-tested, proven habitual in carrying out their leadership tasks (1 Tim 3:6–7, 10).

**Superlative Leadership**

Without question and without peer, the Lord Jesus Christ proved to be the superlative, only perfect leader in all of human history. If the consistency of core spiritual leadership qualities in the OT and NT are as unchangeable as they seem to be, then it would be expected that Christ exemplified all four.

Sufficient

Christ was gifted and able to carry out the Messianic ministry (Matt 9:28–30):

When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” Then He touched their eyes, saying, “It shall be done to you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: “See that no one knows about this!”

Submitted

Christ was willing to do all of God’s will (Matt 26:39):

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”



Spiritual

Christ was spiritual in that He was grounded in the truth and wisdom of Scripture (Luke 2:52):

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Steadfast

Christ was the authentic, time-tested Savior (Matt 4:1–11):

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you’; and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

### Summary<sup>4</sup>

Primary Qualities	Exod 18:21	Acts 6:3	1 Tim 3:1-7, 10	Christ	Secondary Qualities
SUFFICIENT “Gifted”	able men	whom we may put in charge	3:4-5, 7	Matt 9:28-30	MOTIVATED
SUBMITTED “Godly”	who fear God	full of the Spirit	3:1	Matt 26:39	EXTERNALLY PLEASING
SPIRITUAL “Grounded in Scripture”	men of truth	full of wisdom	3:2-3	Luke 2:52	KNOWLEDGEABLE
STEADFAST “Genuine”	who hate dishonest gain	good reputation	3:6-7, 10	Matt 4:1-11	AVAILABLE

### So What?

Since the four core qualities of strong, spiritual leadership proved to be identical for Israel, the early church, the later church, and Christ, what does that mean for the twenty-first century church and her leaders? It means that:

1. SSL qualities still have not changed.
2. God still expects SSL qualities to be the standard.
3. SNL qualities are not to be substituted for strong spiritual leadership traits.
4. SSL qualities are to test you as an individual leader.
5. SSL qualities are to test current leaders.
6. SSL qualities are to test potential future leaders.
7. SSL qualities raise significant questions such as:
  - a. Who and/or what makes the primary difference between an SNL and SSL?
  - b. What is your definition of “spiritual leadership”?
  - c. What will be the ultimate result with a group of SSL’s leading?
  - d. How would you evaluate yourself in regard to the four primary qualities of strong spiritual leadership?

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<sup>4</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Exodus,” in EBC, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:414 alludes to the OT and NT parallels.

### **Starting Point**

This was Dr. A.W. Tozer's conviction about proper motivation towards spiritual leadership.

A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation. Such were Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets. I think there was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day, but was drafted by the Holy Spirit for the task, and commissioned by the Lord of the Church to fill a position he had little heart for. I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. The true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage, but will be humble, gentle, self-sacrificing and altogether as ready to follow as to lead, when the Spirit makes it clear that a wiser and more gifted man than himself has appeared.<sup>5</sup>

Now, if someone were to ask you to define "spiritual leadership," how would you answer?

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted by J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, rev.ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 39.

## EVANGELIZING THE COMMUNITY

Alex Montoya, D.D.  
Professor of Pastoral Ministry  
The Masters Seminary

*As the church strives to fulfill the Great Commission of taking the gospel to the world, it must not fail its mission to the local community. For the church to effectively evangelize the community, it must be reminded of its mission, it must re-examine its message, it must have the right motives for evangelism, and it must use appropriate methods for evangelism. The Great Commission is all encompassing, beginning with our communities and extending to the ends of the earth. Failure at the home front is not an option.*

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The world's population is rapidly approaching seven billion inhabitants. The church's mandate is to reach these seven billion people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of these billions live outside the perimeter of the American church, and thus the church has been keenly focused on missions and reaching cross-culturally to the regions beyond. Personal and financial resources are devoted in great measure to foreign missions, and rightfully so.

Yet in the midst of the clarion call to world evangelization, there remains the continual challenge to reach the communities in which the mother church is located. The Great Commission as found in Acts 1:8 states: "And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." The implication here is that evangelism should start with the people next door, with our communities. But with its emphasis upon "the remotest part of the earth" the church in the Western world is in danger of neglecting its own "Jerusalem." This is evident by the stagnation or decline of the Western church.

Even in America, the evangelical church has not kept pace with the growing population. There remains a desperate need for the church to be about the business of evangelizing its own community, communities which in many instances are changing demographically. Our communities are changing, growing older, and becoming ethnically diverse and pluralistic in religious outlook. In a seemingly post-Christian world, the church is becoming increasingly isolated and irrelevant. Time tested methods and practices of doing church no longer work. Yet the greater danger is the general apathy that has engulfed the average church in its mandate to evangelize the community.

The fact remains that the average church in America is not growing.

Most have reached a plateau or are in decline. The root cause for this decline is not always easy to identify. What becomes evident, however, is that many churches do not involve themselves in evangelism. Some churches have reacted against the idea of evangelism as the ongoing work of the church. Any discussion on church growth provokes a reaction from many leaders as a misguided emphasis on “nickels and noses” as the measure of church life. The reaction is so profound that many pride themselves in doing no evangelism, in making no effort at church growth with the result that the churches are languishing if not on the verge of death. Gary McIntosh reminds us of the true definition of church growth: “Originally the term church growth was coined to reference the results that could be expected from faithful disciple making. A congregation that wins people to Christ, assimilates the new converts in the local body, and then teaches them all that Christ commanded can expect to see church growth—numerical and spiritual”<sup>1</sup>

Every pastor and church leader should be concerned about the growth of the church on the home front, without neglecting our obligation to the lost in the other parts of the world. We need to pay close attention to the state of the church at home and its goal to reach its community for Christ. Even Charles Spurgeon criticized those in his day who made no effort to examine the loss of growth in their own assemblies. Spurgeon said,

I am not among those who decry statistics, nor do I consider that they are productive of all manner of evil; for they do much good if they are accurate, and if men use them lawfully. It is a good thing for people to see the nakedness of the land through statistics of decrease, that they may be driven on their knees before the Lord to seek prosperity; and, on the other hand, if it is by no means an evil thing for workers to be encouraged by having some account of results set before them. I should be very sorry if the practice of adding up, and deducting, and giving in the net result were to be abandoned, for it must be right to know our numerical condition.<sup>2</sup>

The evangelical church is also plagued by approaches to evangelism which prove ineffective in reaching our communities. There is a need to examine the methods that we use to see if they still are useful in evangelism, or if the church needs to alter or acquire different and more effective means of evangelism. Some churches call for decisions, but do not make disciples. Others target large audiences in an effort to have large numbers but they do not produce real believers. Then there is the perverted practice in America, being

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<sup>1</sup> Gary McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 17.

transported to other parts of the world, of simply attracting the believers from other churches with well-produced worship services and programs. Transferring Christians from one church to another is not church growth.

In order for the church to effectively evangelize the community, it must be reminded of its mission, it must re-examine its message, it must have the right motives for evangelism, and it must use appropriate methods for evangelism. The Great Commission is all encompassing, beginning with our communities and extending to the ends of the earth. Failure at the home front is not an option.

### **The Mission of the Church: The Priority of Evangelizing the Community**

We can rightly say that *the mission of the church is to preach the gospel of Christ to all peoples in the power of the Holy Spirit beginning with our local communities and extending to the ends of the earth* (see Acts 1:8).

#### A Singular Mission: Preach the Gospel

It is well understood by now that missions is not the supreme purpose of the church; promoting the glory of God is the church's overarching purpose. Evangelism exists because worshipers do not. Hence we are given the command to go out and make disciples of all the nations. That is by means of the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). The apostles taught the early church that the proclamation of the gospel was the main mission; all else was secondary (Acts 6:1–4).

#### A Supreme Mission: Commanded by Our Lord

Evangelism in many circles is seen as an optional task, only to be done if one has spare time and money. Some read the Great Commission as a “Great Suggestion” uttered by our Lord. Examine the average pastor's daily schedule and you will notice quickly that very little of his time is devoted to doing personal evangelism or in leading his church in some evangelistic effort. Not only is this pathetic in light of his church's decline, but also it is stark disobedience to a command uttered by our Lord in more than one instance. John Seamands reminds us,

Missions constitute the primary work of the Church, the work for which the Church was commissioned by the Lord. The missionary movement is not simply a desirable thing for the Church to carry forward, but it is its chief and most important undertaking. It is the

reason for the existence of the Church and should be made a controlling purpose in the life of the members.<sup>3</sup>

We dare not be disobedient to the commission.

#### An All-Encompassing Mission: Everyone Is to Do It

There are some who see the Great Commission as an apostolic commission, that is, something to be carried out exclusively by the apostles of the first century. Others teach that evangelism should be done by those who have the “gift of evangelism,” which they say is usually around ten percent of the church membership. Still others insist that we ought never make anyone feel guilty about evangelism and that only those who have a natural disposition to share should do so. All this flies in the face of Scripture, which insists that the command is given to the church, and thus implies that every believer should be involved in evangelism of some sort. In his book, *The Heart of Evangelism*, Jerram Barrs asserts, “From this brief study of a few passages in Acts it is clear that the apostles and the whole church understood that the command to reach out with the gospel was not for the apostles only but was for the entire church of that day. It was also a command not only for that day, but for everyday in the life of the generations of believers to come.”<sup>4</sup>

#### A God-Empowered Mission: In the Power of the Spirit

The opening chapter of Acts reveals a number of foundational principles for the church. First, the church was to focus on its establishment rather than the Lord's restoration of the kingdom. It was also told to wait for the special endowment of the Spirit of God before embarking on the greatest task of all time. Such a Great Commission requires great empowerment. Evangelism is not a human effort; it is a divine activity and hence demands divine empowerment. Effective evangelism can only be done when it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers. The Spirit leads. The Spirit draws. The Spirit regenerates. And the Spirit places into the church. Hence, the average believer is more than capable of becoming an effective witness to his community.

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<sup>3</sup> John T. Seamands, *The Supreme Task of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2001), 37.

### An Extensive Mission: To the Ends of the Earth (to Every Creature)

A soft drink company has the goal of placing a bottle of its drink in the hands of every human being on this planet. The church also has the same goal—that every human being hear the gospel at least once in his or her lifetime. The same goes for the people of our community. The church is there to be a witness to every resident of that community. We are not authorized to market the church to a particular niche in society, or to be exclusive in our witnessing. We are to see that every citizen in our community hears the gospel and is provided with an opportunity to place faith in the saving message. Our motto needs to be—if it looks human, evangelize it.

### The Message of the Church

The lack of effective evangelism in the local church can often be traced to the anemic message preached by the average congregation. The gospel that is preached by these churches does not contain enough redemptive content to save a soul from eternal damnation. The true message of salvation is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, as related to us in Rom 1:16–17. Spurgeon reminds us: “To try to win a soul for Christ by keeping that soul in ignorance of any truth, is contrary to the mind of the Spirit; and to endeavour to save men by mere claptrap, or excitement, or oratorical display, is as foolish as to hope to hold an angel with bird-lime, or lure a star with music. The best attraction is the gospel in its purity. The weapon with which the Lord conquers men is the truth as it is in Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

John MacArthur asserts,

But the gospel is not a message that can be capsulated, abridged, and shrink-wrapped, then offered as a generic remedy for every kind of sinner. Ignorant sinners need to be instructed about who God is and why He has the right to demand their obedience. Self-righteous sinners need to have their sin exposed by the demands of God’s law. Careless sinners need to be confronted with the reality of God’s impending judgment. Fearful sinners need to hear that God in His mercy has provided a way of deliverance. All sinners must understand how utterly holy God is. They must comprehend the basic truths of Christ’s sacrificial death and the triumph of His resurrection. They need to be confronted with God’s demand that they turn from their sin to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 152.



Among the key elements of the message of the church which needs to be proclaimed to its community are the following:

The Gospel Is about the Uniqueness of Christ (Acts 2:22–36)

The gospel is about declaring the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, who is both Creator and Savior of the world. He died for sins, and was raised from the dead, is also ascended to the right hand of the Father, and will return again to judge both the living and the dead.

The Gospel Is about the Universal Perdition of Mankind (Acts 2:40)

The gospel is about declaring the universal need for salvation that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), that man is so utterly ruined and that no one is excluded from the sentence of condemnation.

The Gospel Is about the Atoning Work of Christ for Mankind (Acts 4:12; 10:43)

It is about the vicarious death of Christ for mankind, the only payment of the sins of the world through the atoning work of Christ. There is no other means by which mankind can be saved from sin apart from the death of Christ. Christ is the only way of salvation (John 14:6).

The Gospel Is about the Eternal Consequences of Sin (Acts 17:30–31)

It declares man to be guilty of eternal damnation due to man's sin, and if man chooses to reject the provision made in Christ for sin, there is no hope for man, but a certain expectation of judgment and eternal damnation. MacArthur warns: “Hell is physical pain, loneliness, darkness that accentuates fear, regret, separation from God, and the absence of a second chance. God sends us as His ambassadors to beg people to be reconciled to Him. Do not be misled; the reality of hell is essential to preaching the gospel message.”<sup>7</sup>

The Gospel Is about Repentance and Faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; 20:21)

It demands that man repent from sin, and trust in Christ's atoning work for the salvation from sin and damnation. Repentance means to turn from sin and to turn to Christ in saving faith. A gospel that does not demand change and produces no transformation is no gospel at all.

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, *Evangelism*, 116.

The Gospel Is about a Clear Call to Union with Christ and with His Church (Acts 2:38–42)

It expects man to place his faith in Christ and thus be brought into union with the living Christ, and to express that faith through the waters of baptism and visible union with the visible church, the Body of Christ. This is why effective evangelism results in church growth, both numerical and spiritual growth.

The evangelical church in America needs to re-examine its message in light of its effectiveness in reaching the community for Christ. It may have abandoned its biblical message for a set of programs or rituals that ensure a crowd but do not really produce a church; it attracts seekers but does not produce converts to Christ.

### **The Motives for Evangelizing the Community**

Whenever the church is awakened to the need to evangelize its community, it must be careful that it is engaging the task with the right motives. In some cases the church is awakened to its need because it needs more money, or there is a need to fund larger buildings or programs. Sometimes even the social needs of the community become the driving reason for evangelism. As noble as this can be, it should not be the main motive for reaching our community for Christ. Impure motives or less than lofty motives will soon affect our zeal for the lost. Our declining churches should point us to the lack of effectiveness in reaching our communities, but they should not point us to a self-promoting attitude in evangelism. What should our motives be?

Evangelism is to be done out of a love for Christ (2 Cor 5:14ff). Our great love for Christ is the greatest motivation for obedience. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Often, guilt becomes the great motivator in evangelism, which proves to be short lived. But if love for Christ becomes our great motive for evangelism, then zeal for Christ should never wane. The early church was moved by the great love of Christ. Michael Green writes,

There can be little doubt that the main motive for evangelism was a theological one. These men did not spread their message because it was advisable for them to do so, nor because it was the socially responsible thing to do. They did not do it primarily for humanitarian or agathistic utilitarian reasons. They did it because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ. The discovery that the ultimate force in the universe was love, and that this love had stopped to the very nadir of self-abasement for human good, had an effect on those who believed it which nothing could remove.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 236.

Other reasons for evangelism include a deep compassion for the lost (2 Cor 5:11ff and Acts 20:19, 31). The idea that people are lost and on their way to destruction should prompt us to share the good news of salvation to our neighbors. Both our Lord and the apostle Paul wept over the souls of men. We should do no less. In addition, we should evangelize because of the truth of the gospel. We preach a message of eternal truth (Acts 4:19–20; 1 John 1:1–4). It is the veracity of the message that impels us to preach it. The apostle Paul also reminds us that we are under obligation to evangelize (1 Cor 9:16–17; Acts 26:15–23). The preaching of the gospel is a stewardship entrusted to us. We dare not be poor stewards of this grand design for the souls of mankind.

If these are the grand motives that prompt the church to evangelize its community, then we can expect God to bless these efforts, as He did in the early church. Armed with the correct motives, our zeal for the lost should never wane. Lesser motives are used for more temporal goals; the loftier motives produce eternal results.

### **The Methods for Evangelizing the Community**

Although the message never changes, methods do. Indeed, in an ever-changing world, the church needs to remain vigilant and creative in its efforts to reach the hearts of people with the gospel. The church is always in search of proven methods that result in effective evangelism. A close examination of the New Testament will reveal some proven methods used then that are still being used today to reach our communities for Christ. Then there are new methods which have arisen in our modern technological age and which have had some success. Let's examine some of these.

#### **New Testament Methods**

A causal reading of the Book of Acts reveals various means by which the early church sought to evangelize its world. Most of these had some success in producing disciples and can be modified in some way to become effective tools today.

##### *Temple Evangelism*

The Book of Acts reveals that the early disciples preached the gospel in the temple where many religious people were gathered, and they did so with much success (Acts 5:42). They also made use of the synagogues and places of prayer (Acts 13:14; 16:13). The implication is that wherever people are gathered to address God is a place to start preaching the gospel. Although the church worship time is primarily an hour devoted to believers, in the modern era it is also the time when many unbelievers go to church. Hence, it is only natural to use the worship services and Sunday gatherings to preach the gospel to the

unbelievers. Even the New Testament church was careful to acknowledge the unbeliever in their midst (see 1 Cor 14:23–24).

### *House to House*

Acts 5:42 relates how the early Christians preached the gospel in the homes. This could either refer to house meetings, or door-to-door evangelism. In any case, it involved believers purposely targeting the homes of people as a means of presenting Christ to the lost (Acts 20:20 and compare with 10:24ff.). Although door-to-door evangelism is sometimes impossible to do in our segregated and gated communities, the use of homes as a means of sharing Christ is very promising. Evangelistic home Bible studies are a great evangelistic tool among people who know one another. In addition, we must never abandon the door-to-door approach as a last resort. Every merchant knows that this is also their last resort in selling their products and services.

### *Public Preaching*

According to Acts 20:20 and the opening chapters of Acts, we see the early Christians engaged in what we call “open air” preaching. People accustomed to a public exchange of ideas can be clearly addressed in open air preaching. Many today yearn for the days of Whitefield and Wesley when the open air approach was used effectively. Such days may be in the past for many communities, but the church must be prepared to avail itself of this approach if the occasion arises.

### *Personal Evangelism*

There is no doubt that much evangelism in the early church was done one to one (Acts 7:1; 8:26ff; 11:19–21). The classic case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch provides a glimpse into the personal work of the early evangelists. People in our churches need to be taught the art of personal evangelism. Many believers cannot evangelize because they have not been taught to do so. Churches need to establish evangelism classes to teach believers how to evangelize their neighbors.

### *Public Forums*

The encounter of Paul with the Athenians provides a glimpse into the great opening that public forums provide for the preaching of the gospel (Acts 17:22ff). Most communities have public places where speeches can be made, where ideas can be shared, where presentations can be made to the public. Churches need to learn how to address their communities through these public forums.

### *Jails and Schools*

The early Christians made use of imprisonments as an avenue for sharing the gospel (Acts 16:23ff; 28:30–31). In short, a Christian who preaches in prison has a captive audience. The church today often makes good use of

prison ministries, of going to prisons for the sake of presenting the gospel. Many prisons welcome this type of activity. Also, the public schools can become places for sharing the faith (Acts 19:9–10). The church at Ephesus made good use of school buildings for the spread of the gospel. Our secular universities are great forums for this type of interchange of ideas. Many schools allow for the use of their facilities for religious purposes and can be put to good use for gospel preaching.

The early church also made use of the printed page for evangelistic purposes (see John 20:30–31; Acts 1:1), along with banquets (Mathew 9:10ff). As with Christ, the early church used benevolent activities to create receptive hearts to the gospel (cp. Acts 3:1ff). Hence, any effort to alleviate the hurts of the community can be used as an opportunity for the spread of the Gospel.

### Contemporary Methods

The danger when reviewing the methods used in the New Testament is that we may read the contents as being prescriptive rather than descriptive. The New Testament shows us what the early church used with great success. It suggests that we can do the same. However, it does not limit us to those methods alone. We have freedom to use other means by which we can present the gospel to our world today. Some means exist today which were not even dreamed of in the early church. The church has a plethora of modern means of technology such as films, CDs, television, radio, telephone, the internet and all its forms of e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Some make good use of the Christian school movement, coffee houses, sports evangelism, and even Christian counseling centers.

The church must always stay fluid in its approach to evangelism. It must never compromise the message to make the church acceptable in the community. The message never changes, but methods do. Our approach to evangelism should be to find a way for our community to hear the glorious gospel of our Savior. If our methods fail in helping us communicate the gospel, we must look for other more effective means.

### Conclusion

The church's mandate to evangelism begins in "Jerusalem," that is, in the city in which the church is located. We must seek to win our community to Christ by whatever means and methods are at our disposal. Disobedience is not an option. Let us consider further, for the sake of these souls, that failure is also not an option.

## REACHING THE WORLD: GOD’S GLOBAL AGENDA

Irvin A. Busenitz, Th.D.  
Vice President for Academic Administration  
Professor of Bible and Old Testament  
The Master’s Seminary

*Scripture is clear that God eternally purposed to offer His gift of salvation to all the peoples of the world. The Hebrew Scriptures exhort God’s redeemed people to declare His mercy and grace. Likewise, the New Testament outlines a similar responsibility for God’s church. As a result of God’s redemptive work, His redeemed people are given the privileged position of being His emissaries. Reaching the world through evangelism involves passion, prayer, and proclamation through the power of God’s Holy Spirit and Word.*

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### Introduction

Cover to cover, the Bible is a missionary story. From the *proto-evangelium* (Gen 3:15) to the creation of the new heavens and earth (Rev 21–22), God is about the business of “reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Remarkably, God has ordained that His former but now redeemed enemies should shoulder the responsibility of heralding this incredible offer of amnesty. That was Christ’s closing charge—to go and make disciples (Matt 28:18–20). The clarion call to reach the world is fueled and driven by this mandate from the greatest missionary of all time—One who was sent by His Father to open the door of reconciliation to “whoever will call on the name of the Lord” (Rom 10:13).

In some respects, never in the history of mankind has this charge been easier to carry out. The world has become small and continues to shrink at an incredible rate. In a matter of hours, one can travel to any of the world’s 200+ countries. Population centers have become concentrated, with one third of the world’s population now living in only two countries. The impact of the Tower of Babel has been minimized dramatically, with language barriers increasingly neutralized by influences from the West. Computer programs now permit people to translate from one language to another simply with the stroke of a key. Electronic communications enable the masses to communicate around the world almost instantaneously.

At the same time, however, the world is expanding exponentially. Worldwide population is now estimated to be 7 billion, growing at a rate of a billion people every decade. With this population explosion has come a remarkable shift—a shift away from the bastion of Christianity in Europe and America to Asia and the southern hemisphere. Yale University professor Lamin Sanneh describes this new phenomenon. He writes:

With unflagging momentum, Christianity has become, or is fast becoming, the principal religion of the peoples of the world. Primal societies that once stood well outside the main orbit of the faith have become major centers of Christian impact...We seem to be in the middle of massive cultural shifts and realignments...<sup>1</sup>

Mark Noll, in his book, *The New Shape of World Christianity*, reiterates this phenomenon, adding that on any given Sunday, “more Christian believers attend church in China than in all of so-called ‘Christian Europe.’”<sup>2</sup>

This global shift is due, in part, to a growing apathy and, in some cases, apostasy in the West. The western church, it seems, has fallen prey to the seduction of prosperity (Deut 31:20) and the cultural syncretism that afflicted the ancient nation of Israel (Amos 5:25–26; Acts 7:42–43). It is not unlike the Church at Ephesus, who valiantly stood for the truth all-the-while allowing other “loves” to woo them away from giving preeminence to their first love (Rev 2:4). Although we would adamantly disdain the health and wealth gospel, the West has intentionally or unintentionally bought into it, causing mission work to be negatively impacted. A “health and wealth” mentality does not send missionaries. Instead, it creates “a deep mission-forgetfulness within the church.”<sup>3</sup>

While this is disconcerting and disturbing, there is, on the other hand, much for which to be thankful. The missionary efforts of the past two centuries have borne fruit. New centers of Christianity are rising out of the ash heap of darkness, extending the influence of the gospel to places previously unreached. As promised, God’s Word has not returned void. And, while the wealthy West can and does invest financially in the work of these new major centers of Christianity (and thus soothe its conscience for no longer investing with manpower), that nevertheless does not abrogate or alleviate the divine

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<sup>1</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xix.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Kline, “Is God Missionary? Augustine and the Divine Missions” *Princeton Theological Review* (Spring 2010), XVI:1:32. Wilbert Shenk agrees, arguing that present-day “Christendom...may be characterized as *church without mission*.” *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1995), 35; italics his.

exhortations for a more personal, individual investment. In his book, *Let the Nations be Glad*, John Piper exhorts: “The fundamental task of world missions remains the same—as it has for two thousand years... Declaring his glory—the glory of grace in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus—is the great task among all the unreached peoples of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

### God's Eternal Purpose

The foundation of any endeavor, whether secular or religious, human or divine, is bound up in the purpose given to that endeavor by its creator. No place is that more evident than in the eternal purpose God established for His creation. Discerning God's global agenda as revealed in Scripture depends upon and commences with a true understanding of God Himself. Beginning with the genesis of human history and God's self-revelation, the very essence and being of God's nature exudes the reality and foundation of His mission. To understand this is to begin to grasp a crucial aspect of the nature of God and His overarching purpose in this world.

From the opening chapters of Genesis, the reality of Romans 3:11—“There is none who seeks for God”—stands in stark contrast to God's insatiable pursuit of man. The ongoing revelation of man as one who flees from and even disdains the presence of God (e.g. Gen 3:7–8; 4:16) is repeatedly contrasted by God's pursuit of man (e.g. Gen 3:8–9; 4:9; 12:1–3; Acts 7:2; 9:1–9) and His intervention on man's behalf (e.g. Gen 3:21, 22–24; 4:15; 6:1–9:17; 11:1–9). While mankind throughout history has been bent on self-destruction (e.g. Gen 4:8, 23–24; 6:5, 11), God, beginning with the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, repeatedly declares His intent to save and redeem.

Though God's design to seek and to save the lost is first evidenced and initiated in the Old Testament, it is not reserved for Israel alone. Yes, it is true that beginning with the Fall there is a very specific focus on God's creation of a people through whom He would announce and prepare His action-plan of redemption and reconciliation. But the scope of this plan was never limited exclusively to the biological descendants of Abraham. Quite the contrary! The writers of the New Testament, and especially Paul “the apostle to the Gentiles,” exuberantly announce that the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ extends beyond the Jewish people to include the Gentiles too.<sup>5</sup>

The universal scope of this divine intention is accentuated in the major events of Christ's earthly life. The incarnation is about reaching the world; it

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Andreas J. Kostenberger & Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 25 and Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 257–72.



was a *missionary* event (Matt 1:21; Luke 2:10). The Messiah's death and resurrection is about extending His kingdom to all nations (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor 5:19–21). His final instructions to His disciples just prior to His ascension were exhortations to take this Good News to the ends of earth (Matt 28:16–20; Acts 1:8). The life of Christ reflects the emphasis of the Scriptures—from cover to cover, it is consumed with God's global missionary agenda.

The door of God's redemptive action-plan was cracked ajar ever-so-slightly in the *protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15), in the sacrificial provision of clothing to cover the first sin and sinners (Gen 3:21), and in the saving of Noah and his family in the Ark (Gen 6–9). But it is the divine promise to Abram (Gen 12:1–3) that begins to open the door more widely, unveiling something more than a scant key-hole perspective. In bold relief, the LORD announces, "In you will all the families<sup>6</sup> of the earth be blessed" (12:3). When this divine promise is later ratified at the unilateral, covenant-cutting ceremony (Gen 15), God's promise to the entirety of mankind not only provided unequivocal surety for Abram's physical offspring but it was also codified unconditionally for his seed (Rom 4:11–12, 16–17; 11:11ff; Acts 10:34–36)—including both Jews and Gentiles. "God's intention to bless him, his seed and all peoples of the world is a reassertion of his original purpose for humankind."<sup>7</sup>

The Pentateuch does not stand alone in revealing glimpses of God's redemptive plan and its extension to all peoples. The Psalms and the prophets sprinkle the theme throughout the Old Testament. The psalmist declares: "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and they shall glorify Your name" (86:9; also cf. Pss 22:27; 66:4; 67:1–2). The prophets exuberantly join in the chorus as well. Isaiah records: "I will also make you a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6b; also cf. Isa 60:3; 45:22; 52:10). Jeremiah (1:5, 10; 3:17) continues the refrain. Jonah is sent by God to preach repentance to Nineveh (3:10–4:2). Nebuchadnezzar responded to the testimony of Daniel and his three friends (Dan 4:34–37). God's redemptive plan brought good news of great joy for *all* people (Luke 2:10).

Thus, while the Old Testament gives significant focus to God's creation of a covenant-bearing, covenant-witnessing people through whom He would announce and prepare His plan of redemption, one should not lose sight of the fact that His plan of redemption from the beginning includes an invitation to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3), e.g. people from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9–10). "The fact remains that the goal of the Old Testament was to see both Jews and Gentiles come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah who was to come. Anything less than this goal was a misunderstanding

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<sup>6</sup> In context, the mention of "families" would include the nations of Genesis 10.

<sup>7</sup> Kostenberger and O'Brien, 30–31. The promise of this worldwide extension is reiterated to the patriarchs that followed (Gen 26:2–4; 28:13–14).

and an attenuation of the plan of God. God's eternal plan was to provide salvation for all peoples...<sup>8</sup>

### God's Ethnic Priority

As noted above, the Scriptures, both Old and New, declare with perspicuity the divine purpose of God—His redemptive plan is intended for all people. He is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). To implement this sovereign design, God devised and charted an arrangement whereby He would bring this phenomenal transaction to fruition, a plan that would astound the world (1 Cor 1:18–31). The offer to all would come through the family of one. One family would be given priority—the family of Abraham.<sup>9</sup>

#### Priority of Birthright

This ethnic priority is evidenced in a number of ways, the first being the priority of birthright. In ancient times, the firstborn child was dedicated to God (Exod 22:29) and entitled to a double share of the family inheritance (Deut 21:17). That Israel as a nation was to be the recipient of this birthright is unveiled in the account of God's covenant with Abram.<sup>10</sup> Although this covenant clearly reveals, albeit in seminal form, God's eternal purpose to make His salvation available to all the families of the earth, it also unmistakably attests to the fact that it would be through Abram's seed—“*In you* will all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3; emphasis mine). God ordained that His offer of redemption would come through His chosen people Israel. They would be the channel of His blessing to the world.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Kaiser, 9. He notes that the table of nations in Gen 10–11 is “far from being a nationalistic section that favored the Jews. It is one of the most universalistic sections of the Bible, ending with a list in Genesis 10 of seventy nations—the very ‘families’ and ‘all peoples’ that were to receive the blessing from God through Abraham and his collective seed in Genesis 12:3.” Kaiser is quick to add that “The expression ‘all peoples’ did not mean that every person on earth would universally believe in the Messiah, but that every ethnic group would receive this blessing of God's grace and the joy of participating in worshiping and serving Him” (8).

<sup>10</sup> There is little doubt that Israel was the recipient of this birthright. The rights and privileges prescribed for the firstborn in each Jewish home (cf. Gen 37:22; 43:33; Deut 21:15–17) were extended by God to the nation as a whole (Exod 4:22). Isa 61:7 and Zech 9:12 leave no doubt that a double portion of blessing is promised for her nationally in the future when, having returned to the land (cf. Joel 2:21–3:21), Messiah's spirit of grace and supplication is poured out on the house of David and Israel drinks from the fountain of salvation opened for her (Zech 12:10–13:1).

<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures reveal numerous attempts by Abraham and his descendants to choose an alternative plan, an action that would have derailed this integral part of God's design (e.g. Gen 15:2; 16:2; 17:18; cp. 25:23 with 27:4; Numbers 25). Each attempt is decisively rebuffed by

## Priority of Privilege

A second evidence of ethnic priority is evidenced in Israel's priority of privilege. Such is not surprising, since priority inevitably results in privilege. She was given a unique place of honor in all of history. She was the only one "chosen among all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). The Psalmist exults: "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and his ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation" (147:19–20a). She was the one "to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ..." (Rom 9:4–5). They had been adopted (Ezek 16:6, 8) and were endowed with fame and fortune (Ezek 16:10–14). They were given unequalled access to the God of the universe with the Shekinah glory dwelling in their midst (Exod 40:34–35; Zech 2:5). Because of their heritage and ancestry, they were beloved by God (Rom 11:28) and made the channel through whom the Messiah would come. In every way, they were truly the "apple of His eye" (Zech 2:8; cf. Hos 11:8–11; Ps 105:15).

Furthermore, she was the first to be entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2).<sup>12</sup> The children of Israel were the custodians and guardians of His self-disclosure, given to them as a divine trust.<sup>13</sup> As John Murray observes, "When we think of what, above all else, was the Jew's privilege as an abiding possession it was his entrustment with the Word of God."<sup>14</sup>

## Priority of Responsibility

Responsibilities are always concomitant with privilege and status. And Israel realized that. Her very own constitution, the Mosaic Covenant, stipulated

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God and reveals His unequivocal intentionality. Each episode is answered with elevated definitude. Note the growing specificity from "in you" (Gen 12:3) to "your own body" and "your seed" (Gen 15:4–5) to "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac" (Gen 17:15–21).

<sup>12</sup> Numerous interpretations have been suggested for the meaning of "oracles," including entire OT & NT, the Decalogue, or OT promises. However, given its usage in the LXX and the NT, it seems best to understand it as designating the totality of the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8* in *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary*, ed. by Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 182; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), I:92-93; and James Denny, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 603.

<sup>13</sup> The leaders of Israel were very cognizant of the privileges given to them (Deut 4:8; Ps 147:19–20).

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *Romans*, I: 93. E. H. Gifford adds: "Over and above their share in the general promise, the Jews had a great and special advantage in having this trust committed to them. For the trust...was further accompanied by special and peculiar promises given to the Jews as a nation, that they should themselves be heirs of the promised salvation" *Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 82.

the rights and responsibilities that accrued to the firstborn—expectations that firstborn sons were to perform for their parents and siblings (Deut 21:15–17). But they also knew that their standing among the nations of the world was not without obligations; it came with significant spiritual duties. Scripture reveals two of these responsibilities most prominently.

*A Priest to the Nations—Representing the Nations before God*

In the first of these responsibilities, Israel was to be a priest to the nations. More than 500 years after Abraham, God met Moses on Mt. Sinai to delineate the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant/treaty not only reaffirmed His redemptive initiative that He made with Abraham, but it also spelled out the priority His chosen people would have in its implementation. The preamble to this theocratic constitution (Exod 19:4–6) specified that Israel was to be “a kingdom of priests.” As a nation, Israel was to fulfill a mediatorial function, representing other nations to God and serving others.<sup>15</sup> She would be “a people comprised wholly of priests, a people that will occupy among humanity the place fulfilled by the priests within each nation.”<sup>16</sup>

From the very outset, both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants reveal that God's eternal design was not restricted to the house of Israel; rather, it was international in scope. How else would she be able to carry out God's intention to bless all the nations of the earth? How else could she perform her role as a priest to the nations unless God's redemptive grace would extend to other, non-Israelite families of the earth (Isa 2:1–4; 55:5; 60:6; 66:16; Jer 12:15–16; Zech 8:20–23; 14:16)?<sup>17</sup>

*A Light to the Nations—Representing God before the Nations*

Not only was she ordained to be a priest to the nations, but Israel was also created to declare the excellencies of God's greatness and lovingkindness to the nations—something other nations could not do. “Other nations can give no witness for their own impotent deities, but Israel has so much to declare; for the Lord's wonderful works have been done before her and on her behalf.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kaiser, 22. Later he comments: “All were to be agents of God's blessing to all on earth. Nothing could be clearer from the missionary and ministry call issued in Exodus 19:4–6” (24).

<sup>16</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 227. John Mackay agrees: “Israel was not so much to be a kingdom with priests, as a kingdom which as a whole was to function in a priestly role vis-à-vis the rest of the world.” *Exodus* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 328.

<sup>17</sup> The explicit statements of God's international expectations and intentions in the very covenants themselves make it difficult to comprehend the level of national exclusivity later practiced by some of Israel's spiritual leaders (cf. Jonah 1:2–3; 4:1–2; Acts 10:34–35; 11:1–18).

<sup>18</sup> G. W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *EBC*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 260.

During his sojourn in Canaan, Abraham erected altars and made proclamation in the name of the LORD (Gen 12:8; 21:33). David gave thanks and sang praises to the LORD among the nations (Ps 57:9; 108:3). Jonah was sent to Nineveh expressly to declare God's righteousness (Jon 1:2) and, as a result of Nineveh's repentance, for God to reveal His mercy and lovingkindness toward the Gentile nation (Jon 3:10–4:2). At the dedication of the temple, Solomon exhorts his people to live righteously "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You..." (1 Kgs 8:43).

Jesus exhorted them to be like a city set on a hill (Matt 5:14–16), where it can be seen by all and provide an undeniable witness of God's great acts (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8). Every Jew knew of this divine expectation and obligation (cf. Ps 18:49). They viewed themselves as a guide to the blind and as "a light to those who are in darkness" (Rom 2:19). "That has always been God's intention for His people. He gives them light not only for their own spiritual benefit but also for the spiritual benefit of the rest of the world, before whom they are His witnesses."<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Israel was to be a forerunner of the Coming One, One who would be "A light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Isaiah prophesied seven centuries earlier that the nations would come to behold the light of His glorious presence (Isa 9:2). In the Suffering Servant songs (Isa 42, 49, 50, 53), this Israelite *par excellence* would become "a light to the nations" (Isa 42:6; 49:6; cf. 60:1, 3). Paul reiterated this in his defense before Agrippa, noting "that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23).<sup>20</sup>

Apparently, such missionary activity was occurring in the Second Temple era. Kaiser notes that "[t]his is why Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 in his attempt to convince the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia that it had been God's intent all along to extend his blessings of redemption to the Gentiles."<sup>21</sup> Such missionary engagement, birthed in early Jewish history, apparently was being undertaken in Jesus' day. In Matt 23:15, Jesus remarks: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte..."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John MacArthur, *Romans 1–8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 154.

<sup>20</sup> This motif was a theme in the early church as well. Paul, for example, exhorts the Philippians to live "above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15; also cf. Acts 13:47; 26:18; 1 Pet 2:9; Col 1:12–13).

<sup>21</sup> Kaiser, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Others disagree. Kostenberger and O'Brien, for example, contend: "This common assertion, however, is unsatisfactory both exegetically and theologically. To contend that Israel had a missionary task and should have engaged in mission as we understand it today goes beyond the evidence. There is no suggestion in the Old Testament that Israel should have engaged in 'cross-

## Priority of Chronology/Methodology

The apostle Paul exclaims that the gospel of Christ “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16; cf. 2:9, 10; emphasis mine). While the gospel is for all, on the same terms without distinction, yet there is a stated prerogative—“to the Jew first.” Historically, Jesus instructed the twelve disciples to “go to the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6), focusing His evangelistic efforts on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24). Even after being rejected by His own people, He nevertheless instructed His followers to begin their missionary endeavors in Jerusalem and Judea before launching out into Samaria and the remote parts of the world (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

Israel's rejection of the Messiah at His first advent did not abrogate or alter this priority; her position of priority remained (Rom 3:1–2; 9:4–5). God's love for His people was unconditional, and although they had turned from Him, He was unwilling to reject them permanently (Rom 11:2). Thus God sent His Son as “a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers” (Rom 15:8).<sup>23</sup> Israel was God's specially chosen people through whom He would announce and prepare His action-plan for reconciling the world to Himself. Thus, they were “given the first opportunity to receive the Lord Jesus, both during His ministry (John 1:11) and in the Christian era (Acts 1:8; 3:26).”<sup>24</sup>

But when the apostle Paul employs the phrase, “to the Jew first,” does he mean something more than a historical chronology? In evangelism, must the gospel be presented to the Jew first?<sup>25</sup> Some suggest this phrase connotes only

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cultural' or foreign mission” (35). Later they add: “By the time of the New Testament, there appears to have been little thought of an active reaching out in order to seek ‘proselytes’” (36).

It is true that Scripture recounts situations where an anti-mission, “us only” mentality was prominent among Israel (cf. Jonah, *et. al.*). However, if that is deemed to be the preeminent perspective among First and Second Temple Judaism, Matt 23:15 seems to suggest otherwise. Michael Bird suggests that this verse is full of “hyperbolic invective” and thus “cannot be used as evidence of Jewish missionary activity” (*Crossing Over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010], 67). He admits “that *περιπατω* (“I cross”) implies a sense of itinerancy and the same word is used in Matt 4:23 and 9:35 of Jesus' own mission activity” (67). Nevertheless, he does not believe that is a valid understanding. Rather, he suggests it refers to Pharisees' efforts to convert Jews to their brand of Pharisaism (68) or to their efforts to “recruit God-fearers into the cause of Jewish resistance to the Roman Empire” (69).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (MacDill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing, 1958), 48 for a list of reasons as to why this chronological priority was important.

<sup>24</sup> E. F. Harrison, “Romans,” in EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 19.

<sup>25</sup> The NT use of “first” (*πρωτον* [*prōton*]) does not provide closure in this discussion. *Πρωτον* (*prōton*) occurs more than <sup>60</sup> times, with a range of emphases that includes a spatial sense, a

the historical, believing that Paul is merely reflecting on God's choice of Israel through whom the Gospel would come into the world. In other words, he is not setting forth an evangelistic protocol. E. F. Harrison embraces this understanding. He contends: "It is a case of historical priority, not essential priority..."<sup>26</sup> James Denney elaborates, adding that "the Gospel is for all, the same Gospel and on the same terms, but without prejudice to the historical prerogative of the Jew."<sup>27</sup>

Others disagree, contending that Paul's use of *πρωτον* (*prōton*) requires an essential "priority rather than a sequential order of events."<sup>28</sup> They argue that because the phrase is ensconced in the theological context of Rom 1–11<sup>29</sup> (in comparison to something *historical*, such as the narratives of the Gospels or Acts), something more than merely a historical, sequential perspective is intended. Wayne Brindle observes: "The promise of the gospel has a special applicability to Israel. Romans 9–11 is sufficient to show this. Paul presented Jesus not only as the Savior of the world, but also as Israel's Messiah."<sup>30</sup>

Douglas Moo agrees:

[T]he promises of God realized in the gospel are "first of all" for the Jew. To Israel the promises were first given, and to the Jews they still particularly apply. Without in any way subtracting from the equal

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precedence/sequential sense, a hierarchal sense, and an "above all" sense (Wilhelm Michaelis, "πρωτος" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich; trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1968), 865–70.

<sup>26</sup> Harrison, 19. In reference to the same phrase in Romans 2:9, S. Lewis Johnson draws a similar conclusion ("The Gospel That Paul Preached," *BSac* [October-December 1971], 128: 332), as does William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 61. William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938) points to the use of *πρωτον* (*prōton*) in Rom 1:8 for support (21–22). W. H. Griffith Thomas adds: "We must always remember that it invariably means precedence, not preference" (*Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1966], 61). Also cf. John Calvin, *The Epistles to the Romans*, in Calvin's Commentaries, trans. by John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 19:83.

<sup>27</sup> Denney, *Romans*, 589.

<sup>28</sup> Mitch Glaser, *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Darrell Bock & Mitch Glaser, eds. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 16. C. E. B. Cranfield concurs: "At the same time, 'first' indicates that there is a certain priority of the Jew" (*Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985], 20).

<sup>29</sup> Romans, especially chapters 9–11, was written in part to counteract the rumors that Paul had totally abandoned the Jews and that the rejection of Christ had broken God's covenant promises with them. Cf. J. C. Beker, "The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *The Romans Debate*, ed. by Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 328.

<sup>30</sup> Wayne A. Brindle, "'To the Jew First': Rhetoric, Strategy, History, or Theology?" *BSac* (April–June, 2002), 159:226.

access that all people now have to the gospel, then, Paul insists that the gospel, 'promised beforehand...in the holy Scriptures' (1:2), has a special relevance to the Jew.<sup>31</sup>

Paul's use of the same terminology in Romans 2:9–10<sup>32</sup> suggests that something more than mere precedence is in view. When 2:9 speaks of judgment to the Jew first, it is difficult to see how historical, chronological precedence can be deduced. And, if 2:9 is broader than just the historical, then 2:10 is expected to reflect that as well. "As the word of the promise has gone 'first' to the Jew, so does punishment for failure to respond to that word go 'first' to the Jew.... Paul insists that their priority be applied equally to both."<sup>33</sup>

The language used by Paul suggests that the Jewish people were a priority not only in the historical sense. "Paul's strategy, 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek,' has its roots in the divine plan for the role of Israel as revealed in the OT."<sup>34</sup> Henry Alford adds: "πρῶτον is not *first* in order of time, but principally (compare ch. ii. 9), spoken of *national precedence*... Not that the Jew has any *preference* under the gospel; only he *inherits*, and has *precedence*."<sup>35</sup>

To illustrate this, Mitch Glaser points to Matt 6:33, where πρῶτον (*prōton*) is also used:

The kingdom of God should always be sought as a priority in our lives, even as we seek other things. In a similar way, reaching Jewish people with the gospel must be a priority for all who know Jesus as their Savior. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, focused his ministry on reaching non-Jews with the gospel message. But this did not lessen his concern for the salvation of Jewish people.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Moo, *Romans 1–8*, WEC, 64.

<sup>32</sup> "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

<sup>33</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996) 139. Brindle adds: "The Jews have priority in both salvation promises and in judgment for their disobedience" (233).

<sup>34</sup> J. Julius Scott, "Gentiles and the Ministry of Jesus: Further Observations on Matt 10:5–6; 15:21–28," *JETS* (June 1990), 33:169.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1865), 2:319; emphasis his.

<sup>36</sup> Mitch Glaser, 16. Also cf. John Murray, *Romans*, 28.



Paul followed this practice by going first to the Jews, claiming that “it was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first” (πρῶτον [*prōton*]; Acts 13:46; emphasis mine). Paul’s argument in Romans 11 hinges on the fact that the Gospel belonged to the Jew first and that Gentiles were to acknowledge that.<sup>37</sup>

The priority of the Jew must not be lost in our endeavor to reach the world. Paul’s mention of “to the Jew first” is given not only to reflect Christ’s instructions to His disciples or to explain Paul’s own chronological practice. Nor is he demanding that the gospel be given to the Jew first as a principle of methodology. Rather, as was noted earlier, “to the Jew first” must be understood from a theological perspective. “Christ’s mission to fulfill God’s covenants with Israel has theological priority.”<sup>38</sup> It is a perspective that must pervade our missions perspective, as Cranfield explains: “Paul’s personal declaration is a pointer, often unheeded, to the Church’s continuing duty seriously and wholeheartedly to desire, and earnestly and faithfully to pray for, the salvation of the still unbelieving Jews.”<sup>39</sup> Salvation has been made available to all through the seed of Abraham and therefore Gentiles who have been grafted in should, with unceasing gratitude, strategically seek the salvation of those through whom this great gift has come. Though Israel has ethnically rejected her Messiah, God has not terminated His covenant promises with the Jews—as Romans 9–11 so clearly reveal. God’s plan for His covenant people remains unfinished. He has not abandoned His desire for them to be saved. And neither should we!

### **God’s Effectual Plan**

The Scripture is abundantly clear; God eternally purposed to offer His gift of salvation to all the peoples of the world (2 Pet 3:9). The Hebrew Scriptures exhort God’s redeemed people to declare His mercy and grace<sup>40</sup> (e.g. Ps 96:3; 107:1–2; 146:10–12). From the very beginning, human instrumentality was a central feature of His plan for reaching the world.

The New Testament outlines a similar responsibility. As a result of God’s redemptive work, His redeemed are given the privileged position of being

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Seifrid observes: “The apostle intends for Gentiles to look backward not only to Abraham and his faith, but also to Jerusalem and to recognize our present indebtedness to them” (“‘For the Jew First’: Paul’s *Nota Bene* for his Gentile Readers,” *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Darrell Bock & Mitch Glaser, eds. [Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008] 31). Earlier he notes: “The root is not dependent on us; we are dependent on the root (Rom 11:18)” (27).

<sup>38</sup> Brindle, 233.

<sup>39</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 251.

<sup>40</sup> Often translated “lovingkindness,” the Hebrew term *hesed* is frequently used of God’s acts of grace.

His emissaries. Paul's words to the Corinthians make this abundantly clear: "Now these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us..." (2 Cor 5:18, 20). It is clear that the redeemed of both Testaments are called upon to herald His redemptive offer. It is part of God's effectual plan.

While man occupies a place of honor and preeminence in this plan for reaching the world, he is not the only one assigned this responsibility. In addition to the human component, there are other elements that provide significant substructures to the redemptive overtures God makes to mankind.

### Evidences

Though general revelation is limited in its role, Scripture reveals that it does have a place in reaching the world. God, in executing His sovereign plan of redemption, planted witnesses of His divine character and being into the physical creation of the universe. For example, the psalmist exclaims that the heavens incessantly declare the glory of God (Ps 19). Paul elaborates further: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). The powerful force of this non-verbal communication must not be undersold. God's divine attributes, power, and nature are "clearly seen" and even "understood." Charles Hodge writes: "God therefore has never left himself without a witness. His existence and perfections have ever been so manifested that his rational creatures are bound to acknowledge and worship him as the true and only God."<sup>41</sup>

The physical creation points vividly to a creator, designer, sustainer and grace-giver. John MacArthur observes: "God's divine nature of kindness and graciousness is reflected, as Paul told the Lystrans, in the 'rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness' (Acts 14:17)."<sup>42</sup> John Murray adds: "From the things which are perceptible to the senses cognition of these invisible perfections is derived, and that thus a clear apprehension of God's perfections may be gained from his observable handiwork. Phenomena disclose the *noumena* of God's transcendent perfection and specific divinity."<sup>43</sup>

It is not the universe only that reveals the divine; the innermost being of the human heart testifies to that as well. Paul declares that man's conscience

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<sup>41</sup> Charles A. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1909; reprint, 1983) 37.

<sup>42</sup> John MacArthur, *Romans*, 79. Hendriksen explains it as an "exhibition of God's power, wisdom and goodness in the created universe" (*Romans*, 80).

<sup>43</sup> Murray, 40.

bears witness (Rom 2:15). Solomon records that God has planted eternity into the human heart (Eccl 3:11). The very presence of this impulse declares the existence of the Eternal One and is intended by Him to lead mankind to understand that, if he is to lay hold of it, it will have to be by means outside himself.

The same is true during Jesus' earthly ministry, where His miracles were designed to attest to His deity. In John 5:36, He says: "The very works that I do testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me." Later He adds: "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves" (John 14:11). At the close of his Gospel, John remarks that the signs Jesus performed were recorded "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).<sup>44</sup>

Evidences, such as the physical creation, mankind's innate knowledge of God's existence, and the miraculous possess evangelistic value and purpose. Though inadequate in and of themselves to generate saving faith, they are instruments used by the Spirit of God to evoke faith. They are designed by God to be a part of His plan for reaching the world.

### Example

Another paramount element in the task of reaching the world is the power of a godly, exemplary life. Closely related to the purpose and value of evidences, the life of the believer is to reflect the reality of Christ's redemptive work. Jesus exhorts His listeners to "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Elders are instructed to "have a good reputation with those outside the church" (1 Tim 3:7). Peter admonishes wives to live in such a way before unbelieving husbands so that "they may be won without a word" (1 Pet 3:1-2).

Godly living provides powerful ammunition in every missionary's arsenal. A life of holiness makes the gospel visible, not just audible. Purity cleanses the human vessel, making it useful as an instrument in the hands of the Spirit.<sup>45</sup> Thus Paul exhorts the Philippians to "prove yourselves blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (2:15). Anything

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<sup>44</sup> Even non-miraculous circumstances, such as the man born blind (John 9:1-3) or David's slaying of Goliath (1 Sam 17:46), are divinely orchestrated to demonstrate God's eternal power and divine nature and to eventuate in His glory.

<sup>45</sup> As Isaiah vividly illustrates, his sinful condition made him utterly useless (6:5-8) as God's missionary herald. In the vision of Ezekiel, the prophet was exhorted to eat the scroll, thereby picturing God's requirement to live according to His word and speak His message to the Israelites (2:8-3:4, 10).

that would dim their light or disfigure their (and by extension our) witness must be eradicated.<sup>46</sup>

That is the essence of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ..., written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:2–3). These words were on the heart of Annie Johnson Flint when she penned this poem:

We are the only Bibles the careless world will read  
 We are the sinner's gospel, We are the scoffer's creed.  
 We are the Lord's last message Given in deed and word;  
 What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?<sup>47</sup>

The power of godliness in the life of the Christian cannot be overstated. In any missionary endeavor, it becomes the mortar between the bricks of God's Word. As D. L. Moody so aptly remarked, "A holy life will produce the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns; they just shine."<sup>48</sup>

### Evangelism

A third, and most obvious, element of reaching the world is evangelism (*ευαγγελιον* [*euangelion*])—"to announce Good News." The spectacle of God's creation, the incredible miracles of Jesus' earthly ministry, the holy life of a believer—all testify to the power of God. But they do not generate redemption or produce reconciliation between God and man. Rather, it is the Word of the cross that is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor 1:18). It is the Word that is the divine catalyst in the regenerative work of the Spirit (John 16:13; 2 Pet 16–21). But the act of proclamation does not begin with preaching. Rather, reaching the world with the gospel must first spring out of a heart of passion.

### *Passion*

The necessity of having a passion for those who languish in spiritual darkness is first revealed in the nature and character of God. As noted earlier, unredeemed man does not seek God. Yet God has an unending desire for all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). He passionately pursues mankind, not wishing that

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<sup>46</sup> That is David's point in Psalm 19. Having noted how physical creation (1–6) and special revelation (7–11) both testify with perfection the revelations of God, he sees the imperfections of his own life and cries out for mercy and forgiveness (12–14; cf. Ps 51; 1 Pet 2:12).

<sup>47</sup> Annie Johnson Flint, "The World's Bible," *Home Missions Monthly* 22 (January 1918), 3:66.

<sup>48</sup> William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (New York: Revell, 1900), 368.

any should perish (2 Pet 3:9).<sup>49</sup> This is so incredibly foreign to other religions and so unique to Christianity. His passion was so strong that He was pleased to crush His own Son at Calvary (Isa 53:10). It was this same passion that motivated Christ to die for us—while we were “sinners” and “enemies” (Rom 5:8, 10). To have a heart after God’s own heart is to have a compassion for the lost.

This same passion is put on display in the life of Paul. In Romans 9–11, the apostle Paul opens his treatise on the history and future of his people with an impassioned description of his desire for Israel’s salvation. Noting the “great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart,” this apostle to the Gentiles makes a most incredible declaration: “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:2–3).<sup>50</sup> His expression is hyperbolic, for he knew his salvation was secure (Rom 8:38–39); but the passion of his heart was genuine (Rom 9:1).<sup>51</sup>

Following one of the greatest passages on the sovereignty of God in salvation (Rom 9:6–33), the apostle continues in Rom 10:1, reiterating his strong desire for Israel’s salvation. Although regarded as a traitor (Acts 22:22; 25:24), Paul wanted his countrymen to know that he was not their enemy.<sup>52</sup> Nor did his understanding of the sovereignty of God in bringing people to salvation undermine his immense yearning and passionate pleading for his kinsmen.<sup>53</sup> It was this passion that drove Paul to endure beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, hunger, and thirst (2 Cor 11:23–27). Paul, following the lead of his Savior (Luke 19:41; 13:34–5; cf. Phil 2:5–8), is a prime example that any

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<sup>49</sup> The passion of the Father is reflected in Jesus’ parable of the banquet (Luke 14:16–24) where, after some invited guests turned down the invitation, the slaves were exhorted to invite still others and to persuasively urge them to attend.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Moses’ similar perspective in Exod 32:32. John Phillips adds: “Paul’s soul-winning passion for men, especially for his own countrymen, was such that he could actually, soberly, honestly say that he would be willing to go to hell and be eternally damned, if that were possible, if by so doing it would lead his kinsmen to a saving knowledge of their Messiah” *Exploring Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 145.

<sup>51</sup> The LXX employs the same term to describe the Messiah’s earthly ministry in Isa 53:4.

<sup>52</sup> “From the position of an intensely bigoted devotee of Judaism, he had been transformed into a servant of Christ, whose intensest [*sic*] desire was for the salvation of his brethren” (Griffith Thomas, *Romans*, 246).

<sup>53</sup> Connecting 10:1 with chapter 9, Murray keenly notes: “Here we have a lesson of profound import. In the preceding chapter the emphasis is upon the sovereign and determinative will of God in the differentiation that exists among men.... But this differentiation is God’s action and prerogative, not man’s. And, because so, our attitude to men is not to be governed by God’s secret counsel concerning them. It is this lesson and the distinction involved that are so eloquently inscribed on the apostle’s passion for the salvation of his kinsmen. We violate the order of human thought and trespass the boundary between God’s prerogative and man’s when the truth of God’s sovereign counsel constrains despair or abandonment of concern for the eternal interests of men” (*Romans*, 47).

proclamation of the gospel without a passion for the lost has little impact. Thus the preaching of the good news must be fueled by an overflowing passion for setting captives free (cf. Isa 61:1).<sup>54</sup>

### *Prayer*

In all missionary endeavors, prayer follows closely on the heels of passion. Every spiritual desire and pursuit must eventuate in prayer.<sup>55</sup> Where there is no prayer, it is doubtful that there is any passion. Knowing this, Paul adds intercessory prayer to his treatise on proclaiming the gospel (Rom 10:1). Because of his intense passion and desire, he is driven to his knees in prayer for the salvation of his kinsmen.

In John 15:16, Jesus inextricably connects prayer with missionary endeavors: “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.” In Eph 6:10–18, the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” is wielded by prayer.<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere, Paul reiterates this vital link between prayer and evangelism. His exhortations in 1 Timothy 2—“that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men” (vv 1–2) and for “men in every place to pray” (2:8)—provide contextual bookends to his desire for all men to come to saving faith (2:4–7).<sup>57</sup>

Prayer throughout the epistles is a precursor to and catalyst for effectively reaching the world. Prayer, like passion, is not missions; rather, it is antecedent to and rudimentary to the work of missions. A. B. Simpson understood this relationship between prayer and passion: “Put in my heart the woe; put in my feet the go.”<sup>58</sup> Prayer wraps the passion and desire of the missionary's heart within the full acknowledgement that God is sovereign in salvation. As Piper notes: “We really are totally ineffective as missionaries in

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<sup>54</sup> Piper adds: “Missions is not a recruitment project for God's labor force. It is a liberation project from the heavy burdens and hard yokes of other gods (Matt. 11:28–30)” (*Let the Nations be Glad*, 55).

<sup>55</sup> “*Deesis* (prayer) conveys the idea of pleading and entreaty, of persistent petition to God” (MacArthur, *Romans 1–8*, 57).

<sup>56</sup> Verse 18 does not begin a new sentence. It begins with the preposition *διὰ*, showing the vital connection with the believer's armor. “Prayer is not merely another godly weapon, as important as those weapons are.... Prayer is the very spiritual air that the soldier of Christ breathes. It is the all-pervasive strategy in which warfare is fought” John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 376–77). Piper adds: “Prayer is communication with headquarters by which the weapons of war are deployed according to the will of God” (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, 69).

<sup>57</sup> The same connection is made in Col 4:2.

<sup>58</sup> Wentworth Pike, *Principles of Effective Prayer* (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1983), 177.

ourselves.... So, he [God] promises to do for us and through us what we can't do in and of ourselves."<sup>59</sup>

### *Proclamation*

While passion and prayer are foundational to any effective gospel outreach, they are only forerunners. Any missionary endeavor requires proclamation, the preaching of the Word. The very mention of the concept connotes instrumentality. That is Paul's point in Romans 10. In a series of rhetorical questions, he lays out the essence of biblical missions: "How then will they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14–15a).

Proclamation begins with a herald, someone who is sent on a mission to deliver a message.<sup>60</sup> Being sent is an essential element of biblical missions. The apostle John, writing to Gaius regarding missionaries who had visited his church, admonishes him: "You will do well to *send them on their way* in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from Gentiles. Therefore we *ought* to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 6–8; emphasis mine). Steller observes: "This phrase, 'to send on one's way,' occurs nine times in the New Testament,<sup>61</sup> and each one occurs in a missionary context."<sup>62</sup> Sending is not only a church's obligation; it is the life-blood of every healthy church and foundational to fulfilling the Great Commission.

The apostle Paul was fully cognizant of that fact. From the day of his conversion (Acts 9), he understood the obligation of the one who is sent to deliver the message. He realized that people will not hear without a preacher. That is why the apostle Paul was so driven to preach the gospel. He knew that the powerful message of holy living and the impact of miraculous deeds was inadequate to save. He knew that all of creation incessantly declares the glory and attributes of God, but that such knowledge was inadequate to save; it was

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<sup>59</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> The Old Testament recounts how many of the Hebrew prophets were called and commissioned, such as Moses (Exod 3–4), Samuel (1 Sam 3), Isaiah (Isa 6), Jeremiah (Jer 1), and Ezekiel (Ezek 1–3). The experience of John the Baptist (Luke 1:13–17) and Paul and Barnabas was similar (Acts 13:1–4). Quite appropriately, the NT term for apostle (αποστολλος [*apostolos*]) means "sent one." At other times, God's servants were "sent out" without a formal "call" as the result of judgment, persecution and scattering (cf. Acts 8:4, 5; 11:19–21), including Daniel or Aquila and Priscilla. Conversely, false prophets are often described as lacking a divine commission (Jer 14:14, 15; 23:21; 28:15; Ezek 13:6).

<sup>61</sup> Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 16:6, 11; 2 Cor 1:16; Titus 3:13; 3 John 6.

<sup>62</sup> Tom Steller, "Afterword: The Supremacy of God in Going and Sending," in *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 262.

only able to condemn.<sup>63</sup> Thus Paul cries out, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).<sup>64</sup> He was driven to preach because he knew the proclamation of the Good News was the only means to salvation (1 Cor 1:16–21). Without following through on this divine mandate, Paul stood under God’s judgment.<sup>65</sup>

## God’s Exclusive Power

### The Scriptures

Scripture leaves no doubt as to the source of power for salvation. It is centered in the Word of the cross. First Corinthians 1:18 so explicitly states: “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Because man is incapable of changing himself (Isa 29:13–14), regeneration can come only through the power of God’s Word.

Reaching the world with the gospel requires that the missionary exude a tenacious, unshakable confidence in God’s Word. Carl F. H. Henry has rightly observed: “No Christian movement can impact society if its leaders are ignorant of or continually undermining the veracity of and applicability of its charter documents.”<sup>66</sup> Any attempt to accomplish the Great Commission without an unequivocal and irrevocable commitment to announce God’s instructions and message is to violate the divine trust and responsibility given to the messenger. It is destined to utter failure.<sup>67</sup>

The words of the psalmist reinforce the divine power for salvation inherent in the Scriptures. Among the six descriptions of the sufficiency of God’s Word, David begins: “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul”

<sup>63</sup> Commenting on Rom 1:20, Moo observes: “That Paul teaches the reality of a revelation of God in nature to all people, this text makes clear. But it is equally obvious that this revelation is universally rejected, as people turn from knowledge of God to gods of their own making (cf. vv.22ff.)” (Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 101). Piper adds: “Natural revelation is not getting through. Honor and thanks to God are not welling up in the hearts of the peoples when they see his glory manifest in nature.... That’s why missions is necessary” (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, 230).

<sup>64</sup> Paul’s sense of obligation and urgency was not unlike Jeremiah’s (Jer 20:9).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 301.

<sup>66</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, “The Renewal of Theological Education,” *Vocatio* (Summer 1989), 4.

<sup>67</sup> The account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) vividly illustrates the power and preeminence of the Word—“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 19:31). Jesus’ description of the missionary endeavors of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:15) also reinforces this profound, unique role assigned to the Word.



(Ps 19:7a). Only the Word is capable of converting and transforming the soul; it is the only means through which conversion can take place.<sup>68</sup>

### The Spirit

The second source of power in missions is derived from the Holy Spirit. He is the catalyst, infusing the preached Word with divine power. Nowhere is that truth more evident than in Eph 6:17, where the “sword of the Spirit” is identified as “the word of God.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Paul’s use of the Greek word *ρημα* (*rhema*) instead of his usual *λογος* (*logos*) suggests that this power of the Spirit extends not just to the written Word but also to the proclamation of the Word as well. Peter O’Brien explains:

This sword of the Spirit is identified with “the word of God,” a term which in Paul often signifies the gospel. However, he normally uses *logos* (“word”) instead of *rhema*, which appears here. The two terms are often interchangeable, but the latter tends to emphasize the word as spoken or proclaimed (as in 5:26). If this distinction holds here, then Paul is referring to the gospel (cf. Rom 10:17), but stressing the actual speaking forth of the message, which is given its penetration and power by the Spirit.<sup>70</sup>

That the Word of God and the Spirit of God go hand in hand is reiterated in John 16:13: “But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for *He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak*” (emphasis mine). The Word and the Holy Spirit are inextricably linked. Consequently, the Word of God without the Spirit of God is powerless, and the Spirit of God without the Word of God is speechless! The two always work in concert with one another.<sup>71</sup>

With the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, the missionary’s arsenal is fully supplied. Nothing else is needed for the task of reaching the world. The missionary is endowed with everything that Christ had during His earthly ministry. Empowered with the Word and the Spirit, the believer has been granted “everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge

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<sup>68</sup> And remarkably, it comes with a guarantee—it will not return empty (Isa 55:10–11).

<sup>69</sup> As Peter O’Brien argues, the phrase, “of the Spirit,” is best understood as a genitive of source, “indicating that the Spirit makes the sword powerful and effective, giving to it its cutting edge (cf. Heb. 4:12)” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999] 481–82).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.

<sup>71</sup> The role of the Spirit in regeneration is also evidenced elsewhere in the NT (e.g. Gal 3:3; Titus 3:5; John 3:5; 6:63; 16:8).

of him" (2 Pet 1:3). Like an arrow launched from a strong hand bears within itself the strength of the archer long after it has left the bow, the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit, will never fail to hit its mark; it is promised perpetual vitality.<sup>72</sup> It cannot be defeated (Isa 40:8). "Any victory that is being won today either at home or abroad is the result of the wielding of this sword."<sup>73</sup>

### *God's End Product*

As crucial as an impassioned heart for the salvation of the enemies of the cross might be, there is an even greater motivation that must undergird this desire to bring the Good News to the world. The whole purpose of creation is to put the glory of God on display. Al Mohler asserts: "The most important dimension of any vision for world missions is a passion to glorify God.... The impulse of the missionary conviction is drawn from the assurance that God saves sinners, and that He is glorifying Himself by creating a new people through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>74</sup>

Worship must be the foundation and supreme crown of any missionary endeavor—to see God's glory put on display, most notably in the redemption of mankind. It is the epitome of missions, the capstone of God's global agenda. Reaching the world attains its ultimate triumph in bringing God glory and worshiping Him. As Piper notes, "When every knee bows at the name of Jesus, it will be 'to the glory of God the Father' (Phil 2:10–11)."<sup>75</sup> Redemption's inaugural purpose and final achievement is that we should be "to the praise of His glory" (Eph 1:6, 12, 14).

### **Conclusion—God's Every-Person Plea**

The central element of Christianity is the proclamation of the gospel. Preaching the Good News is the critical component of the Great Commission and sits at the very core of the every believer's responsibility. Unless the gospel is shared verbally, it is impossible "to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to prisoners" (Isa 61:1). Serving as an ambassador of reconciliation (2

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<sup>72</sup> S. R. Hirsch, *The Psalms* (New York: Scribner's Publishing, 1966), 388.

<sup>73</sup> William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 280.

<sup>74</sup> In AlbertMohler.com Blog, <http://albertmohler.com/2009/07/30/christian-missions-in-the-third-millennium/> (accessed on 1 February 2011), 1.

<sup>75</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 58. Later, commenting on Rom 2:24, he observes: "Missions exists because *worship* doesn't. The ultimate issues addressed by missions is that God's glory is dishonored among the peoples of the world.... The infinite, all-glorious Creator of the universe, by whom and for whom all things exist—who holds every person's life in being at every moment (Acts 17:25)—is disregarded, disbelieved, disobeyed, and dishonored among the peoples of the world. That is the ultimate reason for missions" (230, 231).

Cor 5:18–19) in God's kingdom requires proclaiming the Good News to those who reside in the kingdom of darkness.

But the freedom to carry out this mandate is not always granted. Fearing terrorist retaliation, governments around the world are increasingly restricting this central feature and obligation of the Christian faith. In numerous countries, even those outside the Islamic world, public evangelism is strictly forbidden. In Greece, for example, any attempt to proselytize is met with arrest and imprisonment. Being instrumental in someone's conversion is a capital crime. Jordan trumpets its freedom of worship, but does not permit its own Muslim Background Believers, including those from any other country, to attend the local evangelical seminary. Russia's parliament has made attempts recently to pass legislation that would restrict evangelism outside the walls of the church.<sup>76</sup>

And America may not be far behind! A growing chorus of individuals in American government, including our President and Secretary of State, has begun substituting the phrase "freedom of worship" for "freedom of religion." At first blush, this change of terminology may seem innocuous. It is not! "Freedom of worship" restricts one's religious activities to the church building, whereas the "freedom of religion" allows for the public proclamation and evangelism. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, "the new language signals concrete policy implications for religious freedom because *freedom of worship* is 'a much narrower view' of religious liberties."<sup>77</sup> Public preaching and open-air evangelism is protected by the principles of the First Amendment. But this is much more than a First Amendment, freedom of speech issue. This is a biblical issue! Freedom to publicly declare God's Word is at stake.

The apostle Paul remarked: "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," to which Doug Moo insightfully adds:

It is vital if we are to understand Paul's gospel and his urgency in preaching it to realize that natural revelation leads not to salvation but to the demonstration that God's condemnation is just: people are "without excuse." That verdict stands over the people we meet every day just as much as over the people Paul rubbed shoulders with in the

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<sup>76</sup> UN Declaration of Human Rights Article 18 "protects 'teaching, practice, worship and observance,' but overtly and explicitly fails to protect public preaching. The UN's 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance uses the same approach on matters of religion. Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms allows evangelism to be banned to protect 'public order'" (Craig L. Parshall, "Tampering with Freedom of Religion," *Israel My Glory* [November/December 2010], 31).

<sup>77</sup> Parshall, 27 (emphasis his).

first century, and our urgency in communicating the gospel should be as great as Paul's.<sup>78</sup>

The public proclamation of the gospel is in the DNA of Christ's mandate to every believer. Reaching the world is dependent on it. The Great Commission cannot be obeyed without it.

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isa 6:8).

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<sup>78</sup> Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 101.

## COUNSELING THE FAINTHEARTED

John D. Street, D.Min.  
Chair, MABC Graduate Program  
Professor of Pastoral Counseling  
The Master's College

*Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd and Wonderful Counselor. As part of His ministry He came to heal the broken-hearted. Likewise, those who are His shepherds are to minister to the fainthearted. This involves faithful pulpit preaching and one-on-one interaction with those suffering from the effects of a fallen world.*

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A look at the greatness of our Savior God provides a necessary perspective for biblical help for fainthearted Christians. Isaiah prophesies about the Messiah in Isa 9:6: “For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest upon His shoulders; and His name will be called *Wonderful Counselor*, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” From Isa 11:1, the prophet announces: “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from His roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, *the spirit of counsel* and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” Again, Isaiah describes our Lord in 28:29: “This also comes from the Lord of hosts, *who has made His counsel wonderful* and His wisdom great.” Who can forget that classic passage in Isa 40:10: “Behold the Lord your God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. *Like a shepherd He will tend His flock*, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes”? No wonder the apostle Peter entreats:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, *shepherd the flock of God among you*, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; not yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when *the Chief Shepherd* appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet 5:1–4).

If you are going to be a pastor who practices caring, loving counsel, you need to be like your Savior. You are not going to just preach from the pulpit. You are going to work with people; you are going to exposit the Word of God on a one-on-one basis and help them with serious problems. Of course, pastoral counseling is more than just confronting sin; you must also be proficient in comforting those who suffer physically and emotionally—those with substantial difficulties like the lonely widow in your congregation who deeply grieves the loss of her beloved husband; the brutalized wife who was beaten, punched, and battered by her drunken husband; the girl in your youth group who was raped by a gang of boys at her school; the Christian man in your church who fears being fired for uncovering dishonest practices in the company; the middle-aged single mom who suffers from severe depression and has to hold down two jobs and raise three teenagers because her husband ran off with another woman; or the Christian couple who fears their unsaved parents will report them to the authorities for spanking their children. These are true-to-life scenarios that will require an undershepherd who is willing to tenderly counsel his flock. As a minister of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, you too will be called upon to shepherd God's people through similar life experiences.

It is precisely here that well-learned theology and biblical languages become most valuable assets as you seek to minister the Word to the downtrodden and fainthearted. I remember when I was in seminary getting really excited about what I was learning in classes, the books I was reading, and papers I was writing. I would come home to my wife and say, "Hey, I've just got to share this with you. Listen to this!" She very patiently listened as I read to her, and at the end of it she would always smile and say, "That is really good, John, but what does that mean in terms of everyday life?" "Uh ... I don't know; let me work on that a little bit." How *does* that change my practical walk with Christ? Good question!

The focus of our study is 1 Thess 5:12–15. Here the apostle Paul mentions the importance of ministry to the "fainthearted":

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

Notice three imperative clauses (verse 14); especially the middle clause, "encourage the fainthearted." Four specific questions will help us understand how we are to fulfill Paul's command toward those who are fainthearted. These questions are: Who are the fainthearted? Who are the counselors? What are the causes? What is the counsel?

### Who Are the Fainthearted?

The etymological root idea of the word for “fainthearted” means to be little or puny of soul (*oligopsuchos*), when a person is little-souled or puny-souled. There is something constricting the soul that is causing it to be small. Such a person has only a small amount of room for faith, or trust, and as a result, they lack courage. They lack fortitude of soul. This is a characteristic of a melancholy heart. Historically, what is today typically labeled “depression,” Christians of earlier times referred to as sloth; in the Middle Ages it became called melancholia. “Melancholia, which has been described since antiquity, corresponds to this form. Among some patients there are also manic phases with symptoms opposite to those of depression (the manic–depressives).”<sup>1</sup> The word appears in the New Testament only in 1 Thess 5:14. It is translated “fainthearted” in the NASB, NKJV, ESV, and the NRSV. It is translated “timid” in the NIV, and in the NLT, “discouraged.” So it seems that the more common translation and preferred term is “fainthearted” and understandably so because it has a broader semantic range than the other terms “timid” and “discouraged,” although it includes those latter concepts. The word appears in the Septuagint in both verb and noun form, carrying the nuances of despondent, cross, patient, and exhausted.<sup>2</sup> It describes the person who has a limited, or a severely limited or diminished, motivation or capacity to achieve a particular goal. Now that diminished motivation can be caused by fear; it could be caused by overwhelming grief due to a loss, significant despondency or depression. Augustine believed such a fainthearted person needed careful care and understanding even though the source of his problem was not biological (i.e. nature) but personal sin. He clarifies, “It is therefore not nature, but vice; and therefore it is said to the good who are growing in grace, and living in this pilgrimage by faith, ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.’ In like manner it is said elsewhere, ‘Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.’”<sup>3</sup> A small-souled Christian will give up easily because they have a severely limited capacity to handle the hardships of life and will need the careful, caring help of another believer.

The three descriptions of people in verse 14 (“unruly,” “fainthearted,” “weak”) should not be thought of as merely categorizing three distinct types of people. A more comprehensive and potentially helpful analysis views this text as

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<sup>1</sup> Günter Hole, “Depression,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds., Erwin Fahlbusch, Jan Milič, John Mbiti, Jaroslav Pelikan, and Lukas Vischer (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999), 1:809.

<sup>2</sup> It is used in the LXX translation of Proverbs 14:29 to express the Hebrew “short of spirit.” Other LXX references are Proverbs 18:14; Isaiah 25:5; 35:4; 54:6; 57:15.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 15.6, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series. ed. Phillip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:287.

descriptive of one of three possible ways any one individual can be at any particular time in their life. At one point a person can be unruly, at another fainthearted, another weak. During the counseling process there are points at which your counselee will need admonition if they are unruly; they may need encouragement if they are fainthearted; sometimes they will need help if they are weak. So to be a good counselor you must do more than exegete the Scripture well; you have to exegete people well. You must be wise with people, understanding where they are coming from. That was one of the areas that I was most weak in when I graduated from seminary. I think that I was fairly well trained in biblical languages and theology and historical theology. But when it came to working with people with real problems I was sorely deficient.

The term that is used for “fainthearted” is a general term that resists the narrow definition of modern psychiatric labels,<sup>4</sup> but it does describe a person with a low motivation in fulfilling certain God-given responsibilities due to laziness or fear. That is the reason some Bible versions translate this word as “timid.” “The word translated *timid* not only refers to those who are nervous in personal contacts, but to people who are easily frightened.”<sup>5</sup> For example, a Christian wife may say to you, “I don’t want to go home to my husband. He is so angry with me all the time!” You may have a man in your congregation say, “I don’t want to be married to her any longer. She is such a controlling and critical person. I am tired of it! Do you realize what I have to put up with?”

Little-souled Christians lack motivation to move forward. It is much like training your child to ride a two-wheeled bike. The child is really afraid to ride without training wheels, or without you holding onto the back of the bike. Such a person is fainthearted. They are tentative. They are fearful. They find it hard to move forward because there is not a lot of room in their soul to trust God, not a lot of room for faith. Further, this person feels or even fears that their physical resources are insufficient to complete the task or face the trouble, which in and of itself from a theological standpoint is a lie that they believe. Because of this false assumption, their reluctance forces them to play it safe and sometimes to actually withdraw into a protective shell. They don’t want to take any risks. They believe that if they did, there would be a miserable consequence and they are not willing to risk that. They are timid or fainthearted. This could also include people who may have lost heart, are discouraged, despondent, depressed, fearful, anxious, and cowardly. Maybe they have already suffered

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<sup>4</sup> American Psychiatric Association classification of mood and anxiety disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*: “Major Depressive Disorder,” “Dysthymic Disorder,” also “Depressive Disorder Not Otherwise Specified,” “Bipolar I Disorder,” “Bipolar II Disorder,” “Cyclothymic Disorder,” “Postpartum Onset,” “Anxiety disorders such as “Panic Attacks,” “Agoraphobia,” “Social Phobia,” “Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder,” “Post-traumatic Stress Disorder,” “Acute Stress Disorder,” “Generalized Anxiety Disorder,” etc. (American Psychiatric Publishers, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 119.



some type of physical or emotional pain or a loss for a sustained period of time that has resulted in some kind of physiological downturn of severe depression or despondency.

Such faintheartedness and spiritual weakness may grow out of tragedy such as is found in this following true account. A missionary's wife, while living with her family in Brazil, was backing her car from the garage to go run errands. The family's house was situated on a hill and the front yard of that house sloped right down onto the driveway. Unbeknownst to her, their two-year-old toddler had escaped the house and slipped down the slope onto the driveway. The child was crushed under the wheels of the car and died instantly. After a tragedy like that, the trauma and grief are so severe that it is rare when the marriage survives, even among Christian couples. There does not seem to be much motivation to go on. And that is what it is like to be a fainthearted person.

### Who Are the Counselors?

Who are the ones called to help? Observing the text will answer this question. First of all, this admonition is directed to the brethren (plural), indicating the Christians in the church at Thessalonica. He is not referring to the pastors; he is not referring to the elders in the church at this particular point. He is referring to the general congregation. This is an appeal to all the believers. "This pastoral responsibility is not placed solely in the hands of the leadership but delegated to all the members of the church. Although the leaders played an important role within the congregation (v. 12), the task of maintaining the well-being of the Christian community did not fall to them exclusively. The members of the church shared a mutual responsibility to help one another for their building up in the faith (cf. 5.11; Eph 4.16). The type of help extended to others was to respond to the particular needs of each."<sup>6</sup> The spiritual help and encouragement of counseling was not intended to be some kind of specialized clinical practice with certain more educated members in the early church;<sup>7</sup> it was to be a part of the very fabric of the fellowship that occurred among the people of God as they ministered the Word of God to one another. Christians were supposed to use their theology to help one another; the very pinnacle of helping one another has to do with practical theology.

Second, this congregation was composed of a large number of God-fearing Greeks: a number of leading women (Acts 17:4), probably upper-class

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<sup>6</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 252.

<sup>7</sup> Contemporary clinical practices in the church have produced a certain Gnostic mentality among modern Christians. It is a mentality that believes that only people who have advanced academic degrees in psychotherapy are qualified to work with hurting Christians. This was not the belief or practice of the early church.

men and their wives, the wives of leaders, and many who turned from their idols to serve the living and true God. The apostle Paul admonishes each of them to practice caring counsel with one another.

Third, notice that in the immediate preceding verses 12 and 13, the apostle discussed how the congregation should support the pastors as they worked hard to minister among them. So it is very obvious that within the context that it was the elders and pastors who would set the example of care and then turn around and train the congregation how to be more effective in providing this kind of help. In verse 14, the apostle admonishes them how they should be treating one another including the idea of encouraging one another.

Here are three counseling considerations:

First, it is clear from verses 12 and 13 that the leaders must be foremost in instruction and admonishment because the oversight had been given in ministering to the congregation. Paul actually admonishes the congregation to follow them, to imitate what they do, to esteem them highly because they bring the Word of God to them.

Second, his oversight includes the public (pulpit) ministry of the word, but it also includes the private or personal (counseling) ministry of the Word because this is exactly the tone the apostle Paul set throughout his ministry. Acts 17 provides some of the context and background of 1 Thessalonians, but just a few chapters later in Acts 20 Paul speaks to the elders at Ephesus. This is his farewell address to them, and it is a tearful farewell because he had built such an intimate relationship with them on an individual level. Paul reminds them in verse 20, "How did I not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable, and teaching you publically [public ministry of Word] and from house to house [private ministry of Word]." In verse 31 he says, "Remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." So his ministry of the Word of God was not just a pulpit ministry; it was a private ministry of the Word of God. To each one of them he ministered the gospel and the Word, and he did so with tears. He was vitally involved in their individual lives, sometimes admonishing, sometimes encouraging, sometimes helping. He is essentially admonishing the elders at Ephesus, "Hey, follow my lead, imitate what I did in the ministry because I am not coming back, this is the last time you are going to see me on this earth. Since I am not coming back, what should you do with the church? You can't rely upon me any longer, so you as elders need to do as I did among the flock." Paul makes a strong statement that will become a key to the future ministry of the church. In much the same way, Paul wants the Thessalonians to follow his example of both the public ministry and the private ministry of the Word of God. The public preaching ministry is vital to the congregation's spiritual growth and strength, with consistent, solid exposition that admonishes the congregation. But also there needs to be a private exposition of God's Word where individual people who are struggling are helped. Paul did so with tears, which is very consistent with what he wrote to the church at Rome in Romans 12, "Rejoice with those who rejoice

and mourn with those who mourn.” As people we have the capacity to be able to do that with television programs, theatrical presentations, and books.

When is the last time you saw a theatrical presentation or read a book and were overjoyed with what you read or with what you saw, and it brought you to tears? In seminary several years ago, I read through *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, and the tears just flowed for what Christians have gone through for their faith in Jesus Christ. We have the capacity to do that with books and we have the capacity to do it with others. Clearly, Christians are supposed to do that with one another. Paul says night and day I “admonished” (*noutheton*) you, each one of you with tears. You will know that you are ministering the Word personally when their sorrows bring you to tears, when their joys bring you to rejoice. You will know you are living where they are. So did Paul.

This brings us to a third counseling observation. The responsibility to counsel the fainthearted is not limited to pastors or overseers. Paul admonishes the entire congregation to minister this way to one another. “It is noteworthy that Paul here urges the church in general (note the repetition of “brothers” in v. 14) and not just the leaders to care for the rest of the congregation.”<sup>8</sup> The overseers are to set the example for the flock. “The office of the Presbyters was to watch over the particular church in which they ministered, in all that regarded its external order and internal purity; they were to instruct the ignorant, to exhort the faithful, to confute the gainsayers, to ‘warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, to be patient towards all.’”<sup>9</sup> In like manner, the church was to follow their leadership. The question is: What is your congregation going to see from you and your ministry of the Word of God? Will it be from the pulpit alone? Furthermore, the teaching ministry of the pastor is not simply limited to helping people with personal and interpersonal problems, but includes training *them to help others* with personal and interpersonal problems in the congregation while using the Word of God. Your job is not just to do the counseling. You are not the hired hit man of the congregation who is supposed to handle all the counseling. Rather you must set the example by counseling *and* teaching them to do the same. You must train them with one another. I always felt that as a pastor I was trying to work myself out of a counseling job. In fact, in the last few years, within the church I was rarely counseling. We had so many well-trained people working with difficult counseling problems that we would have numerous Sunday school classrooms full of people counseling. They were all members of the congregation counseling with each other and sometimes helping with those outside of the church. They saved the most difficult counseling situations for me. But even then I had some of our elders observe those tough cases so that they would gain

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<sup>8</sup> I Howard Marshall, “1 Thessalonians,” in *New Bible Commentary*, eds. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, G. J. Wenham, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1284.

<sup>9</sup> William John Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul.*, new ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 1:511–12.

insight into handling the Word of God with people who were hurting. So I eventually got to the point where I worked myself out of a counseling job.

### **What Are the Causes?**

Let us make some textual conclusions about what caused Paul's original admonition. He wrote to encourage those being persecuted, especially by the local Jews (Acts 17). In fact, Acts 16:6–18:5 gives the whole background of the founding of the church of Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke were a part of that missionary party that first preached the gospel there. They preached in the synagogue and several converts came to Christ, including a man named Jason. Later they were welcomed into Jason's home. There was also a man by the name of Spartacus who subsequently traveled with Paul and was jailed with him. All of these were converts that occurred in this particular encounter of the establishment of the church in Thessalonica. But their biggest response came from the fringe of Gentile God-fearers who attended the synagogue. They were the most numerous converts. It appears Gentile God-fearers made up the majority of the congregation. They knew the God of Israel, but they did not come face to face with the Messiah of Israel until Paul and his companions came along, and only then did they bow their knee and repent to Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Furthermore, this church needed to be warned about moral purity and not yielding to sexual immorality since a large number were converted out of a sensual Gentile background. This church was mostly comprised of former pagans. Another important factor was the brevity of the missionaries' first visit. They had to cut their visit short because there were a number of Jewish militants that rose up in Thessalonica who drove Paul and his team out of town. Consequently, their instruction on living a pure Christian life was incomplete. Paul wrote First Thessalonians to supplement what they had been taught.

Thirdly, they had to be admonished to not give up their care for one another or in attending to their own business and living a peaceable life. It is obvious when you read 4:9–12 and the proceeding text. Paul and his missionary companions did not have sufficient time to model how they should care for one another. So he details his instructions for one-on-one care in this epistle.

Fourth, the flock needed hope because some of them had died and those who remained were confused about the return of Jesus Christ. Paul proceeds to discuss this in 4:13–18. It is clear that not only was there persecution coming from outside the church, but there is a hint in 5:15 that there were some tempted to do evil against other members of the flock. We get a clear picture of a church with internal troubles. As a result, some of the members were fearful and this was not just due to persecution outside the church, but there seemed to be some who desired to do evil to others within the church. So what we can learn from this historical context that will help Christians minister to hurting Christians?

First of all, relentless physical suffering and persecution can be a real cause for despondency, fear, and depression. We are blessed that we live in a

society and culture that is tolerant of our Christian worship. This may not always be the case. But there are still individuals in our church who are suffering under the heavy handedness of others—senior abuse, spousal abuse, child abuse, employee abuse, and more. They are all in that broad category, fainthearted or timid. It is important for you as a pastor to be aware and be ready to help those kinds of people.

Second, under the constant pressure of sexual temptation, a Christian may feel weak, powerless, and discouraged with low resistance. Persistent sexual temptation can wear a person down to the point that they no longer have any motivation to resist. So Paul encourages them that God is at work in terms of their sanctification. He is using this temptation so that they will grow strong in their walk of holiness. They, too, can be weak and fainthearted. They are afraid they cannot refuse the nagging lust of sexual temptation.

Third, it is possible for some Christians to experience paralyzing guilt when they have not fulfilled their own responsibilities but instead have meddled in the affairs of others and have actually done other Christians harm. Maybe they have even harmed another in their congregation. There are going to be people in your ministry who have never dealt properly with unresolved guilt. They are full of regret and it prevents them from moving forward in their Christian life. You have to be ready to identify them and assist them.

Fourth, grief over the loss of a loved one can cause great despondency and a “what’s the use” type of attitude concerning life and its future. One of the professors at The Master’s Seminary has written a wonderful book on hope. Nathan Busenitz’s *Living a Life of Hope* is tremendous help to those who hurt from loss.<sup>10</sup> I use it all the time in counseling grief and general hopelessness. Part of the ministry of hope is seen in the promise of the second coming of Christ. Paul instructs the Christians at Thessalonica that they need to encourage one another with this news. Hopeless grief is an extremely powerful emotion that will rob people of the desire to go on. Fainthearted people need comfort.

And then there are those who feel powerless and fearful dealing with a person who has violated their trust. These are people in positions of authority who have grievously abused others. This seems to have been true of influential synagogue officials in Thessalonica who wanted to persecute the church and drive it out of existence. In other cases it could have been powerful people within the church itself. When a person in authority has violated the trust of another by abusing them that is the vilest kind of evil! That is when senior abuse occurs, or spousal abuse, or even child abuse. In Dante Alighieri’s epic poem, *Divine Comedy*, the first cantica, *Inferno*, Dante describes a medieval version of hell with nine concentric circles. It is not a biblical description. But it is interesting to note that the one of the darkest centers of hell is reserved for

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<sup>10</sup> Nathan Busenitz, *Living a Life of Hope: Stay Focused on What Really Matters* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2003).

those who have betrayed trust. They have abused others who had trusted them. The darkest part of hell is reserved for them. The darkest, hottest center of hell is for those who were placed in positions of authority over other people but betrayed that trust. This shows how seriously even medieval people took the issue of the misuse of authority. From a biblical perspective, you can see a similar outcry in Scripture against those who abuse and neglect widows and orphans. Judgment awaits those who have the power and ability to help such ones as these, and yet are found guilty of violating the trust of these helpless ones. Strong judgment is against these leaders (cf. Zech 7:8–14). As a pastor it is critical to be prepared to minister to those whose trust has been betrayed—to those weakened by the evil done to them within the church. Christians need to assist one another when serious trust has been violated. This is a job the church must take more seriously.

### **What is the Counsel?**

Ministry to the fainthearted should come in the form of encouraging, cheering up, refreshing up, and consoling them with the Word and the gospel. *Paramathuomi* is the term that is used here in 1 Thess 5:14, and it carries the idea to cheer up, to refresh, to console. It really has a very broad semantic range as well. It involves giving another person motivation to move on, to fulfill a goal. In fact it is used in John 11:19 and 31 as well to speak of the Jews who sought to comfort Mary and Martha after the death of their brother. So it is obvious in the first century that this particular term is used to speak of those who are especially grieving. You will encounter this many, many times in your ministry as you stand by the bed of a loved one in your church who is slipping into eternity. You will have the distinct privilege to walk them into heaven—that is a good thing. But then you have to help the family, friends, and extended relatives that are present, grieving their loss. That is our word—*paramathomi*. In 1 Thess 2:11 this word describes the Apostle Paul as one exhorting, encouraging, and imploring. In other words, Paul set himself as an example to follow in terms of this encouragement for the elders and the members of the church. In essence he said, “I did this when I was among you. It’s up to you do the same thing.” A very practical meaning of this term is to come close to someone’s side and speak in a friendly manner; to speak in a way to come around someone to do what ought to be done, to encourage them, to strengthen them, to comfort them. This is what the believers should have been doing in terms of fulfilling their responsibility that they currently had very little motivation to do. Paul was encouraging them to be faithful, to get back in the fight, to not withdraw. They were to trust Christ even more. And this is what you will do as well—encourage faithfulness and help the down-trodden.

### Counseling Conclusions

When a member is experiencing severe grief or depression they will describe themselves as numb and without feeling. They do not feel anything that would be sufficient to motivate them to do anything worthwhile. In other words, they are describing the fact that their soul feels dead. I know some of men have talked with me about their own lives—talked about the struggles they had with depression in the past. They feel totally numb. Their soul feels dead, lifeless. Robert Burton describes it this way in the 1600s: If there is a hell upon the earth it is to be found in a melancholy heart. That is a good description. If there is a hell on earth it is to be found in a depressed heart. Fainthearted people will often be fearful, and there will be an aura of hopelessness. They will try to convince you that there is no hope in trying to help them. Charles Spurgeon recounted after one of his bouts of depression: “I could weep by the hour like a child and yet I knew not what I wept for.” Here is a man of deep passion and feeling. He struggled with depression many times in his ministry. If you take a further look into church history, some of the greatest men of church history struggled. If you read Augustine you will see the difficulties that he went through. Fast forward to Luther and you will read about his struggles and the despondency that overcame him. One time as he sat in a dark room his wife came in dressed in mourning clothes, a black veil and a black dress. He turned around and said to her, “Who died?” And she said, “You haven’t heard?” He said, “No, who died?” She said, “God did.” He said, “God didn’t die!” And his wife said to him, “You are acting like He did.” What a great wife!

I want to suggest to you that if those great men of God had psychotropic drugs in their times, we wouldn’t even know who they were today. Why? Because I think some of those men had to go through those dark, dark times and deep valleys of ministry in order to understand the provision and help of Christ. Then they could talk about it with passion! Instead of numbing themselves with psychotropic drugs, they were able to feel the deep waters of a troubled soul, and then turn around and minister God’s Word with new insight and encouragement. We wouldn’t even know those great men of the faith. It is obvious that Spurgeon was a great man of faith in Christ, and yet there were valleys in his life where he experienced smallness of soul.

The question always comes up: “How do you know if this problem is biological? How do you know?” Maybe there is a physiological problem going on that really caused this. I am compelled to address this question here because it always comes up in my classes. If you are working with someone in your congregation who persists in depression, you need to counsel them to have a medical checkup. They may need a checkup for these reasons: if there is rapid onset of severe or fearful panics of depression, then they need a medical checkup. If there is a lack of significant loss or traumatic event and yet they are still slipping into smallness of soul. If there is extreme fluctuation of emotion—when moodiness, fear or depression is not typical, and yet the complaints persist. If there are sensory accusatory hallucinations or inexplicable delusions.

If the person is of advanced age, or perhaps there is consistency in trying to follow a biblical lifestyle but symptoms still persist. If there is a use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs that have depressive side effects, then this person needs to see a medical doctor. Not a psychiatrist—a medical doctor. The real problems, not supposed psychological problems, need to be treated.

#### The Grace of the Gospel

Strengthen the fainthearted in the faith by recalling the grace of the gospel that both saves and sustains the Christian through the worst of times. It is the gospel that *both saves them and sustains them*. When you have people living at the foot of the cross they are able to look up and remember the Savior hanging there, and they say to themselves, “I should be hanging there but I am not.” This changes their whole perspective on life, no matter what it is they are going through.

#### The Mercy and Love of Christ

Show them the mercy and the love of Christ and as you do, seek to understand their suffering and pain. Paul did that and he was able to do that with tears. Encourage their faith with the sovereign care of the Lord for His people. Paul does that again in 1 Thess 4:13–18. In fact he talks about the second coming in vivid terms and in verse 18 he entreats them to comfort one another with those words. And in 5:11 he further appeals to them to “encourage one another and build one another up just as you are always doing.” So, men, encourage their faith in the sovereign care of our Lord for His people. He will come again, and He will set every injustice right, every one.

#### Persevere in Your Pastoral Care

You must not give up on the fainthearted. I implore you, as Paul did, to persevere in your pastoral care. Be patient with everyone (5:14). One pastoral counselor said this, “The typical pattern for those who help is that they begin with the spurt of loving and encouraging energy almost as if their enthusiasm and comfort will revive the person who is depressed; but when they see that their words and deeds go underappreciated or at least are ineffective, they begin to back away.” Sometimes those who try to comfort others notice that the depression becomes contagious. They begin to feel depressed after spending the afternoon with the fainthearted! Paul no doubt experienced some of that in his ministry, because he charged the believers to be patient with everybody, and especially the fainthearted who try to convince you there is no hope. And it’s not true! Praise God—there is help for the fainthearted!



## **CARING FOR THE NEEDY: HOW MINISTRY TO THE POOR REFLECTS THE GOSPEL**

Mark A. Tatlock, Ed.D.  
Executive Vice-President and Provost  
The Master's College

*How does the expression of compassion and mercy towards the poor relate to the gospel? After reflecting on this question initially, it would not seem to require much consideration that Christians, those who have been recipients of God's extensive compassion and mercy, should demonstrate these same characteristics towards their fellow man. In doing so, we provide an example of the greater spiritual reality of God's heart and His willingness to extend mercy and compassion in redemption. Unfortunately, for the contemporary evangelical church, great debate has arisen as to the legitimacy of mercy ministries as a part of the church's witness.*

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### **The Purpose of God in Salvation**

But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet 2:9–12).<sup>1</sup>

First Peter 2:9–12 reminds us that God's purpose for the church in the world is to advance the gospel. His purpose for Israel was to represent Him before the Gentile nations of the earth. The Old Testament clearly puts on

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English citations of Scripture are from the NASB.

display the redemptive plan of God. The church is appointed by God to realize His plan of gospel advancement. Notice how Peter describes the purpose of the church to glorify God in advancing the gospel. He applies the same mission given to Israel after being freed from slavery, to the church as, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.” The church has been called out for the same purpose to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Peter on this occasion repeats the statement made to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, described in Exod 19:5–6. The children of Israel waited for Moses to ascend the hill to meet with God. Having been freed from slavery and now anticipating their future entrance into the promised land, their expectation was for God to provide a statement of purpose and promise. God provides Moses with such a statement. The mission God declared for the nation is that they would fulfill their new calling by functioning as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

God had a purpose in calling the nation Israel out of slavery. He explains His purpose by saying to them that they were to function collectively in a priestly capacity. The job description of a priest is to function as a mediator between sinful man and a holy God. A priest “facilitates reconciliation with God.” God provided the Israelites with an illustration of their national role when He selected the tribe of Levi from among the other eleven Israelite tribes (Num 3:5–12), assigning this tribe the responsibility to function as priests. As the Levites were called out to serve these tribes as priests, so too were the Jewish people called out to serve other nations in a priestly role. By nationality as Israelites, they collectively bore the responsibility to function in a priestly role.

The tabernacle and its priestly system was a grand illustration of what God intended for the nation of Israel. What is important to note is that priests could not fulfill their assigned role if they were unsanctified or unholy. So too, the nation of Israel would be ineffective if they were not characterized by holiness.

Isaiah clearly describes the nation of Israel as being appointed by God to extend salvation to the Gentile nations, stating that they would be “a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6; 42:6; 51:4). This is consistent not only with the mission statement given in Exodus 19, but also with the covenant God made with Abraham, that “through him, all the families of the earth would be blessed” (Gen 12:1–3). Paul explains in Gal 3:14 that this *blessing* was salvation. Salvation extended first to the Jews and through them extended to the Gentiles as well (Acts 13:47).

This mission is affirmed in the gospels following the advent of Christ. Described within the immediate context of the nativity, Simeon affirms this at the dedication of Christ in the temple in Luke 2:30–32:

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have

prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

Christ, on several occasions, illustrated that the scope of redemption extended to Gentiles, none more clearly than in His final commission to His disciples. His Jewish disciples were sent to teach and baptize those from every nation. How could they draw Gentiles to worship and glorify Jehovah, if they lived in a manner that violated God's standard and presented a compromised picture of His character?

In light of this understanding of the necessity of holiness for the fulfillment of priestly responsibility, the wrath and judgment of God upon the Israelites for embracing idolatry can be recognized as a failure to fulfill their calling. Sanctification and witness are directly linked in the mission given to Israel. Peter is making this application to the church in 1 Pet 2:9–12. On this occasion, under the new covenant, he is saying the church has the responsibility as a called-out people to function in a priestly role. This is not a designation afforded to just a select group of Christians. It is a corporate responsibility.

### **The Purpose of God in Sanctification**

The election of Israel, far from meaning the rejection of the other nations of the world, was the very means of salvation of the nations. Election was not a call to privilege, but a choosing for service. As such, the priestly character of the nation of Israel came into view almost from the beginning of her existence as a nation. The people were to be God's ministers, his preachers, his prophets to their own nation as well as to the other nations.<sup>2</sup>

Exodus 19:5–6 clearly states that a necessary relationship exists between the role of priest and the responsibility to holiness. A priest could not effectively function as one who reconciles sinners to a holy God, without himself living in a manner that reflected the holy character of God. Immediately following the giving of this mission statement to the nation of Israel, the law is given (Exodus 20). The law was provided to serve as a standard for holiness in order for the nation to achieve their God-given purpose. Paul tells us that the law is a tutor (Gal 3:24; Rom 3:19; 7:12; 1 Tim 1:8), and reveals to us our sinful nature. Yet, it is more than that. The law serves the practical purpose of equipping the nation with a standard of God's nature and character. It serves as their guide as to how they should conduct themselves before the pagan nations of the world and points to the holiness of God himself. Therefore, sanctification is directly linked to witness.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 22.

R. Kent Hughes in his book *Set Apart*, says it well. He states,

God's plan for Israel was a global plan. They understood that the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant was to set apart Israel to live according to the standards of God, to put on display the very nature and character of the one true God before pagan and lost nations, so that they could also be blessed.<sup>3</sup>

The advancement of God's redemptive plan and His purposes in salvation are intrinsically related to God's purposes in sanctification. Holiness serves a greater purpose than just personal benefit. Holiness is the opportunity to put on display the character and nature of God in this fallen world.

Believers need to understand that their sanctification is directly related to the effectiveness of our witness in this world. Sanctification is living as a reconciled image bearer. Man was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Man was created with the capacity to reflect the communicable attributes of God; His mercy, His compassion, His justice, His love, His commitment to truth, the way that He grants forgiveness, the way that He makes peace with sinful man. Man was made to bear witness to the Creator, but because of the Fall his ability to live in a holy manner was compromised. It is these very attributes that God Himself refers in response to Moses' appeal for God to relent from His wrath following the Israelites' immediate return to idolatry in Exod 34:6–7.

And Jehovah passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.

Man no longer lived to glorify God and to love Him but exchanged the truth for a lie and worshiped the creation instead of the creator (Rom 1:24–26). Man chose to worship himself. Created to express God's love, man now seeks to love and seek his best interest above God and others, and in so doing makes enemies of his neighbor. This is why the law became necessary to illustrate the nature of godliness. This is why Christ chose to cite the Old Testament summation of the law (Deut 6:5), "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37–40)<sup>4</sup>. Because of the Fall, man could no

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 19.

<sup>4</sup> See also Rom 13:8–10; Gal 3:10; and Jas 2:10.

longer fulfill his responsibility to bring God glory by putting on display His character. The gospel provides a means for us to be reconciled to God, and provides the regenerating work of the Spirit in perfecting us. As reconciled image bearers we can once again put on display the character of God in this world. This is the work and purpose of sanctification in our lives.

### **The Compassion of God**

It is important to consider these preliminary principles in order to reach a proper understanding of why the church is called to serve the needy. The church finds its proper motivation in functioning as God's witness when it realizes that its fulfillment is found in manifesting godliness, holiness, mercy and compassion to those who are in need.

This church was a congregation of Jewish converts to Christianity formed on the day of Pentecost. Within this church were Jewish men of the *diaspora*, representing every existing nation within the Roman Empire. They heard the gospel in their own tongue and came to faith, many of them continued in Jerusalem (Acts 2). These displaced converts, as well as the multitudes that made up the congregation, composed of a great number of unemployed and impoverished. In Acts 6:2, the appointment of deacons occurred following the complaints of these Hellenist Jewish converts that their widows were not being cared for by the church leaders. This is also the church that Paul carried a financial gift to from the church of Antioch (1 Cor 16:1–2; 2 Cor 8:2–4; Gal 2:9–10), intended to help meet the material needs of the many poor in their midst.

With that in mind, James exhorts his congregation (Jas 2:1–7):

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

James goes on to shepherd them by saying,

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love our neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment (2:8–13).

This is a fascinating passage of Scripture. It holds a clear exhortation to put on display the character and nature of God as most evidenced in the work of redemption. James writes (2:5), “Did not God choose the poor of this world?” This is a reference to His redeeming work in their lives. The aorist tense here of *exelaxato* is the same used by Paul in 1 Cor 1:27. The word “chose” reminds us that this is an act of God determined in eternity past. The reference here is consistent with the meaning of election as expressed in Eph 1:4–5.

James is making a very intentional reference to this same electing work of God as he focuses on a particular demographic in order to illustrate in physical terms what God is accomplishing among the spiritually impoverished. It is parabolic, just as Christ illustrated the kingdom by using familiar and understandable pictures. In James’ consideration, the church’s care for the poor illustrates for others how those who are considered undeserving receive the mercy of God in salvation. Paul conveys this same understanding in 1 Cor 1:6–29:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.

God demonstrates His love towards those things that are considered unworthy, ignoble, inferior. Though referring to the poor’s physical circumstances, the allusion to an unbelievers’ spiritual condition is clear. This is why James is greatly concerned for the behavior of Christians showing favoritism and partiality to the rich person and despising, ignoring, and neglecting those who are poor. The materially poor are illustrative of every

man's spiritual condition. What the church does in its particular work for the materially poor puts on display what God does in His particular work for the spiritually poor. Failure to care for the needy compromises a picture of this spiritual truth and exposes the church to fair accusations of hypocrisy. Christ illustrated this principle in Matthew 18. The slave, who had been forgiven an unpayable debt, unjustly exacts payment from his fellow slave. Roberts affirms this paradox, "If we worship God, who is father and who loves His creature, while we ourselves are heartless and merciless, we should be able ourselves to see that there is something incongruous in our worship."<sup>5</sup>

The principle is clearly summarized in verse 33, "Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" The "just as" principle is consistent within Old Testament and New Testament and teaches that those who are followers and children of the true God should act in a manner that is consistent with their Father.

For I am the Lord *your* God; *consecrate yourselves* therefore, and *be holy, for I am holy* . . . For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be *your* God; *you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy* (Lev 11:44–45).

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us" (Eph 5:1).

God's choice of the poor does not mean that all the poor will be saved. That is not the teaching of this text, but it does assure that their poverty does not place them at a spiritual disadvantage in comparison to the rich. His choice does not imply any merit in their poverty; in fact, the opposite is true. It is a picture of a lack of any merit to deserve His grace and His mercy. His choice indicates that the poor are in a better position than the rich to understand God's saving purpose and to be drawn to Him. They are uniquely positioned to be first responders to the wonderful message of hope preached in the gospel.

Christ on several occasions made a comparison between the rich and their neglect of His message in response to His teaching, acknowledging that the poor man is illustrative of the redeemed. Consider the account in Luke 12 of the rich man who tore down his barns to build greater ones. The rich man is judged because he is consumed with his wealth and does not recognize his dependence and his need upon God himself. It is a picture of his spiritual condition. This is seen as well in the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. One man, Lazarus—a poor man who went through this life begging from the table of the rich man, is the one who now sits at the table of the King. Christ consistently

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<sup>5</sup> J.W. Roberts, *A Commentary on the General Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, n.d.), 82.

uses these references to the rich and poor to illustrate our spiritual condition and what awaits those who possess genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Who Are the Needy?**

James qualifies the poor as “of this world” (v. 5). This is a direct reference to those who walk on this planet as human beings and are, in the economy of this world, impoverished. The poor are those who are very conscious of their material needs and are often reduced to begging for mercy or for help. The poor are those lacking earthly possessions in the world’s estimation. D. Edmond Hiebert in his commentary on this text makes this observation:

In Jewish thinking the term “the poor” became closely associated with the pious. It was in this class that godliness had maintained itself. Perhaps James thought of the economic status of the majority of the church members. This close association of poor with pious may have been in his mind. He well knew that God never tired in selecting the materially poor in being rich in spiritual forms. Church history demonstrates that comparatively more poor people than rich have responded to the Gospel. Why is this true? What differs between a rich and poor person’s world view? Primarily it comes down to the issue of self-sufficiency. The poor individual has no pretense to imagine that they can be sufficient in caring and meeting all of their needs. The rich person can suffer under this illusion, and therefore convince themselves that they need no assistance from a fellow human being and no assistance from God himself. The poor person has been stripped of any possible façade or means to deceive himself in this regard.<sup>6</sup>

Because the dependency and hopelessness of the poor cannot be masked by possessions, power, or prestige, they long for a better life in a better world. It is the poor who are more prone to recognize the picture of their condition in the message of the gospel. Not just physically but also spiritually.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew *ani* or *dalai* have their correspondents in the Greek. The word here in James is *ptokos*, and is the word used most often in the New Testament to refer to the poor. Its usage intends to convey one who is utterly helpless, defenseless, in need of provision and protection. The second word used throughout the New Testament with regard to the poor is *penichros*. This word emphasizes a complete dependence and reliance upon another’s good will for life-sustaining resources.

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<sup>6</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 157.



The spiritually impoverished condition of the unredeemed is clearly described by these same terms. The unredeemed are utterly dependent upon God's grace and His mercy. It is the message of Eph 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." The unredeemed can do nothing through personal accomplishment, to earn the merit and favor of God. So it is that the individual who is materially poor in this world's economy is someone who understands the principle of being dependent upon another for life-sustaining resources. If someone does not intervene on their behalf they will die. They are that broken; they are that dependent; they have nothing to offer; they cannot care for themselves. Someone must demonstrate compassion towards them or they will die.

What makes the poor more prone to consider the message of the gospel? Church and missions history illustrate that a greater number of conversions and responses to the gospel are evidenced among the materially poor. Why is this the case? It is the individual who is in crisis that is most prone to ask eternal questions such as, "Is there a God?" "What is the purpose of life?" "What will happen when I die?" The poor have no resources to minimize the effects of the Fall, and therefore are faced daily with the realities of life and death. Christians who understand this recognize that the poor of this world are most open to a message of hope, forgiveness, peace, and promise of eternity spent with God. They are under no pretense that they possess the capacity to merit redemption.

### **God's Promise to the Needy**

God chose the poor of this world to be "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him." Given here are two expressions of spiritual wealth. The first "rich in faith" regards their condition in this present life. The world may view them as poor, but God views His chosen as rich *in faith*. Their material poverty and their spiritual riches coincide. Their present wealth consists of their salvation and all of the blessings that accompany it. The irony is the poorer they are the greater the faith they can possess to rely on God fully for provision of their physical needs. The person who has absolutely nothing has the capacity to express the greatest measure of faith. The more needy and impoverished a person is, the more they look to their heavenly Father to meet their needs. The capacity for faith is directly proportionate to their poverty.

James refers to this as "a blessed condition" stating that they will be "heirs of the kingdom." This second expression of their spiritual wealth is a reference to their future, eschatological life. The poor look expectantly to their future inheritance as heirs of the kingdom.

Paul uses the same language of inherited riches,

For the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for “whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:12–13).

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us (Eph 1:7).

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8).

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19).

Hiebert again on this text says, “The poor’s heirship, being heirs in the kingdom, was not a sudden thought, but a long premeditated gift. A fact that, in and of itself, should have made the Jerusalem church see the high worth of every believer.”<sup>7</sup>

James qualifies these individuals as those “who love him.” We see this same phrase used for genuine believers in 1:12:

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Those who are being redeemed are those who love Christ. The promise of receiving the *crown of life* and the promise to be *heirs of the kingdom* are synonymous expressions in the book of James. Both relate to the believer’s eschatological future and the benefit of salvation. A love of God is evidence and fruit of authentic salvation, but it should be noted that it is not the cause of salvation. First John 4:19 expresses clearly the causal effect of God’s active, merciful work towards us. His love inaugurates regeneration, resulting in a diminished love and worship of the creation, rightly restoring the creation order of love first for God. Recognition of the underserved nature of His atoning work fosters within us a richer and deeper affection for himself (Eph 3:17).

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<sup>7</sup> Hiebert, 158–159.

### **The Hypocrisy for the Church When It Neglects the Needy**

James again exhorts his congregation in 2:6–7: “but you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?”

James uses a very strongly worded statement, warning believers that they have chosen to act in a way that lacks integrity. If a believer has received the mercy and compassion of God himself, which was displayed in the gospel, and yet he does not have the capacity to reflect that mercy and compassion to his brother or neighbor in need, that is utter hypocrisy. How can we be quick to beg the mercy of God and then behave the opposite of those values?

Romans 5:8 tells us that “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” When the sinner’s good deeds are no more valuable than filthy rags, Christ lavished His love on us by going to the cross and dying on our behalf. A sinner is incapable of reciprocity, meaning that grace alone was the standard modeled to those who are spiritually impoverished. James’ exhortation exposes the members of His church as disregarding the poor man and behaving in a fashion diametrically opposed to how God acts. You ignore the poor man and make him sit in the back because you can’t gain anything from him. You bring the rich man to the front; you give him the best seats, and you honor him because you know he is rich. And there is an expectation in your heart that you will receive something from him.

If God applied this same standard to men, then no one would be saved. James is saying that we have the opportunity to put on display the wonderful love of Christ as best displayed in His work on the cross on our behalf when we reach out a hand of help to the person who cannot reciprocate. It is the purest expression of godly mercy.

These good deeds are the self-denying fruits of the Spirit expressed in the believer’s life. There are actions that convey genuine self denial and love for God and others and work to validate our claim to be the children of God. A life of self-denial and service has significant implications for the unbelieving world. John urged that by our love the world would see the authenticity of the church’s claim to be redeemed and transformed (1 John). Is it no wonder that unbelievers, when observing the church, see us as self-interested, seeking the same ideologies of personal success, materialism, and self-serving accumulation of possessions as they do instead of seeing the practice of sharing, giving, and seeking the benefit of their neighbor? We are rightly guilty of their conclusion that we and our faith are no different than the claims of other religions. In Jas 2:14–17 the correlation of salvation based on genuine faith is illustrated by describing ministry to the poor as the hallmark of authentic faith.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in

peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Why does James do so? Because it is when ministering to the poor the radical transformation of faith in a believer's life is most accurately represented.

Those in the Jerusalem church should have realized that of the two visitors, they were most like the poor man. This, in turn, should have created empathy for the poor man's condition. In addition, the poor man was the most likely prospect as a convert. Their actions betrayed their pride and failure to remember the reality of their own spiritual poverty. Living in light of the gospel should remind us daily that there is nothing we can do to earn or merit God's grace and that the gospel requires us to recognize our spiritual poverty.

### **The Example of Christ**

A commitment to model mercy and compassion is demonstrated by Christ himself in His incarnation. He was the perfect image bearer, evidencing the nature of God in human form (John 14:9). Christ did not only proclaim the kingdom, He illustrated kingdom truths. His choice of miracles reveals His intentionality in showing His disciples how the practical ministry of healing and helping those in need complemented the message of the gospel. Of the many miracles He could have chosen to validate His deity, it is astounding that the majority of His miracles were acts that addressed the needs of the poor. He thus modeled the compassion, mercy, grace, and justice of God. He cared for the lame, the sick, the blind, and reached out to Gentile foreigners such as Samaritans, cared for the prostitute, the thief, and the tax collector. He invited them to receive God's undeserved mercy and forgiveness of their sins. Matthew 9:35–38 punctuates this truth by showing that while Christ's public ministry involved healing and serving the poor, He affirmed their physical poverty which reflected their greater spiritual poverty.

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Christ saw the physical brokenness and need of the people as symptomatic of their greater spiritual poverty. This profoundly moved Him to plead with the Father to send gospel workers to address this spiritual famine.

### **The Law of Liberty: Freedom to Love Like God Loves**

The prior context of this passage affords a greater understanding of God's perspective of the poor. Jas 1:25 states:

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

What is the "law of liberty"? Paul explains in Galatians 5 that believers are no longer slaves to sin. Formerly, they did not possess the ability to make a choice to love others, sin being their master. Paul explains in Galatians 5 that believers are not to use their liberty for seeking their own benefit. As a person who has been set free from being a slave to their own self interest, they can now live just like our Lord and Savior, to be imitators of Him, to reflect His character and nature. And in so doing, receive the capacity to love like He loves. Believers have volitional freedom to love God and love our neighbor which we did not possess prior to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

The theme of the poor reoccurs multiple times in the book of James, the earliest reference being Jas 1:26–27. It is here we see an allusion to a well understood motif which occurs throughout the Old Testament and which was imbedded within the Law. James' audience, being primarily Jewish converts to Christianity, had a deeper appreciation for what James was saying when he summarized genuine Christianity with two familiar but rarely understood phrases. It is a curious thing for James to be able to summarily describe those who are authentic disciples and ambassadors for the kingdom as he does in verse 27:

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

One is tempted to ask, "How can you reduce the entirety of the Christian experience down to those two things—visiting orphans and keeping oneself unstained by the world?" It is clear that keeping oneself unstained from the world focuses on the believer's willingness to be holy, as God is holy. Consecration requires that we are set apart for the purposes of God and that living according to the values of the kingdom versus the values of this sin affected society is the calling of all believers. As children are to reflect the character of their father, so the children of God are to reflect the character of God. This is inherent in the admonitions of Paul to be imitators of God (Eph 5:1).

### **The Expanded Motif of the Poor in the Old Testament**

Careful study reveals that this Jewish audience would have understood James' reference to widows and orphans as a kind of shorthand for the well known teaching of the Old Testament on the poor. The Jewish audience only needed to hear the words "widows and orphans" to be reminded of God's voice throughout their own history. God has always instructed the nation of Israel to demonstrate His character of mercy to those at risk. In the Old Testament, God's compassionate identity as the merciful defender and provider of those who are vulnerable emerges. The reference to widows and orphans would have included, in the Jewish mind, the foreigner or alien, the sick (lame and blind), as well as the prisoner.

So Jas 1:27, for the believer, is a twofold statement describing both the love and holiness of God. Both working in perfect combination and expected to become characteristic of those who have made it their ambition to be called the children of God. With this understanding, a study of the biblical motif of the poor leads to an awareness of how exhaustively and comprehensively the theme of the poor is used in Scripture as a means to illustrate and understand the very character of God. By way of Old Testament examples, God is known as a defender and provider for the poor.

He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Deut 10:18–19).

For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, "You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land" (Deut 15:11).

You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow (Deut 24:17–20).

Embedded in the Law were instructions for the Israelites to display God's merciful nature to each of these demographics. In doing so, they illustrated how God shows mercy to those who were spiritually orphans, widows, foreigners, sick, blind, and imprisoned. As they lived in the counter-cultural manner they provided a stark contrast to the nature of pagan deities, and

the cultures informed by idolatrous worldviews. All secular worldviews create a culture that marginalizes the poor, and this was true of the pagan cultures that surrounded Israel.

In addition to the clear admonitions prescribed in the Law, this same expectation is evidenced in the Psalms and prophets.

The LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked (Ps 146:9).

While the prophetic text of Isa 61:1, looking forward to Christ, says this:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.

#### *The Widow*

The widow, who is by covenant united with her husband at marriage, finds herself left alone. Christ, promising to never leave or forsake His Bride, provides the church with an opportunity to model His promise when they embrace and care for the widow. This is a picture of assurance in the perseverance of the saints who are beneficiaries of the gospel. As the church cares for the widow it illustrates the greater truth that God will never forsake His people, even though the effects of sin have separated a wife from her husband.

#### *The Orphan or Fatherless*

The orphan most clearly reflects our vulnerable pre-salvation position, defenseless and without the loving care of a protective father. In redemption we are adopted into the family of God. In Eph 1:5, Paul uses the language of adoption to refer to our spiritual condition. Those who are adopted are those who are fellow heirs of Christ based on the doctrine of adoption. The identity of the church is formed by this doctrine; brothers and sisters with Christ being the firstborn, the begotten of God. We are the adopted children of God. We are joint heirs, and on and on the list goes. This is the language of the church and it refers to our spiritual condition as orphans and adopted by God into His family.

#### *The Alien or Foreigner*

The alien or foreigner best illustrates our separation from God, and represents that the gospel is both welcoming in nature and multicultural in scope. In Eph 2:19, Paul says,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household.

We are not simply now pilgrims, Phil 3:20 tells us, but we are citizens of heaven.

*The Sick and Blind*

The sick, whether lame or blind, are clear analogies of our need for healing and restoration. The language of the New Testament utilizes both conditions as references to our being called to walk worthy (Eph 4:1). Ephesians 1:18 reminds us that in the coming of the gospel our eyes have been opened to the truth.

*The Prisoner*

It is the prisoner who most accurately portrays our bondage to sin and the wonderful freedom from the law of sin which imprisons us.

And having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life (Rom 6:18–22).

Within every category of the poor we see the tragic spiritual condition mankind is in without the intervening love of God. These serve as specific illustration of the transforming work of the gospel.

<i>Categories of the Poor</i>	<i>The Poor as Redemptive Analogy</i>	<i>Text</i>
Widow	The bride of Christ	Eph 5:22–33
Orphan	The adoption of believers to be fellow heirs with Christ, Abba Father	Eph 1:5
Alien/Immigrant	No longer strangers and aliens to God's kingdom, but fellow citizens with the saints	Eph 2:19
	Pilgrims on earth, citizens of Heaven	Phil 3:20
Prisoner	Prisoner of the law of sin	Rom 7:23
Sick/Blind	"That their eyes might be opened"	Eph 1:18



### Conclusion

James is saying to the church, “How dare you neglect the poor? How dare you rob the world of this wonderful and beautiful illustrative picture of what is afforded to us in salvation? It is the greatest of hypocrisies.”

The Hebrew and Greek words translated “compassion” (*raham, oikteiro*) in both the Old and New Testaments bear the following nuances: “to be merciful, have pity, to suffer with another, to be moved in your most inward parts, show loving-kindness, to bear another’s burden, suffering with.”

It is the same exact set of words used to describe God’s great work of salvation. The images portrayed in Scripture of the poor are the same images which describe our spiritual condition without Christ. The same set of words used in Scripture to describing our involvement with the poor are the same sets of words used in Scripture to describe how God loves and saves us. When you hear God’s work of atonement on our behalf motivated out of mercy and loving-kindness, you are hearing the same exact motivation for believers to reach out to the poor. We demonstrate God’s compassionate heart in salvation when we move into the lives of the needy. We become living parables of a greater spiritual reality.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS ON THE SUBJECT OF “CHRIST’S CHURCH”

Compiled by Dennis M. Swanson, D.Min.  
Director of the Seminary Library  
The Master’s Seminary

The 2011 Faculty Chapel Lecture Series at The Master’s Seminary carried the theme of “Christ’s Church” as the seminary celebrated its 25th year of preparing men for ministry to serve Christ in His church around the world. The lectures contained the spectrum of material from worship to evangelism, from leadership to prayer, from preaching to counseling.

This bibliography is certainly not designed to be an exhaustive reference of all things pertaining to the church and ministry, but suggestive in the areas that it does cover. This listing draws on the research of the authors and their own contributions from the literature. In reality, all of the articles that have appeared in previous issues of this journal have been for the purpose of strengthening the church and assisting those who minister, but one section of this bibliography is dedicated specifically to previous *MSJ* articles that deal with the subjects of this lecture series. All of those articles are available in full text from the Seminary web page at [www.tms.edu/JournalIntro.aspx](http://www.tms.edu/JournalIntro.aspx). Particular resources to note are the four volumes in the recent *John MacArthur’s Pastor’s Library* series:

John MacArthur and The Master’s Seminary Faculty, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

John MacArthur and The Master’s Seminary Faculty, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

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John MacArthur and The Pastors and Missionaries of Grace Community Church, *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011.

The body of this bibliography has five sections: (1) Reference Works; (2) Monographs and Multi-Author Works; (3) Journal and Periodical Literature; (4) Unpublished and Online Resources; and (5) Prior Articles from *The Master’s Seminary Journal*.

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## REVIEWS

Gary M. Burge. *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010. 153 pp. \$21.99 (paper).  
Reviewed by Michael J. Vlach, Professor of Theology.

Gary M. Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, offers a critical response to what he calls “Holy Land theology” that affirms territorial and national significance to Israel. The list of Christian Zionist offenders according to Burge includes the usual suspects—Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, John Hagee, etc. To his credit Burge sticks mostly to biblical issues and avoids name calling and characterizations that often have permeated recent works of this nature.

Burge’s main point is that issues like land, temple, Jerusalem, and Israel, which are prominent themes in the Old Testament, are reinterpreted and fulfilled in Jesus who transcends the physical and national implications expected by the Jews in biblical times. Thus, Christian Zionists who miss this and affirm present and future significance to national Israel and the holy land are misguided. According to Burge, placing significance on Israel’s land and territory means “to regress utterly in a most miserable way” (107).

The sections Burge focuses mostly on are John, Acts, Gal 3–4, Rom 4, Rom 9, Hebrews, and Revelation. It is in these sections that Burge sees a replacement and reinterpretation of the traditional Jewish hope for Israel, land, temple, and Jerusalem. If one accepts Burge’s general assumptions of God’s spiritual purposes and his hermeneutic of reinterpretation and replacement then his conclusions have an internal consistency. But it is on these two foundational issues that this reviewer disagrees and finds the book’s fatal flaws.

First, Burge appears to operate from Spiritual Vision Model assumptions in which physical and national matters are viewed as lesser things that need to give way to greater spiritual realities. For example, Burge says, “Hebrews says that our ‘homeland’ has changed. It is not on the earth” (101). He also argues that Jesus’ words in John 15 mean that “*Jesus spiritualizes the land*” (56) (*italics in the original*). Burge is resistant to the idea that God’s future purposes could involve the nation Israel (60–61). While Burge insists that he (and the Bible) is not promoting an entire Greek dualism (107), which is true, such spiritualizing of key themes occurs repeatedly.

Significantly, Burge appears to positively affirm the ideas of Philo, the Jewish theologian who allegorized and reinterpreted Israel’s land promises. According to Burge, Philo held “*That land is reinterpreted as the knowledge*

*and wisdom of God*" (22) (italics in the original). Under the influence of Philo (and Josephus) "we see that Judaism's 'Land Theology' has been entirely redefined. And it will be a redefinition that will deeply influence the formation of Christian thinking in the New Testament" (24). It seems that Burge is viewing the alleged influence of Philo on the New Testament as a positive development. But this reviewer wonders how Philo, who adopted a radical allegorizing approach and operated in the philosophical tradition of Plato, could be a positive influence. Plus, this reviewer challenges the idea that Philo's ideas actually influenced the New Testament writers.

Second, in regard to hermeneutics, Burge operates under the view that Jesus and the New Testament writers "reinterpreted" Jewish expectations. For example he says, "Jesus and his followers reinterpreted the promises that came to those in his kingdom" (35). Burge also places much emphasis on "replacement" language: "In the Fourth Gospel, the land is subsumed within John's theology of Christological replacement/fulfillment" (57). This reviewer counted at least four other times that "replacement" terminology was used in Burge's chapter dealing with the Gospel of John.

In sum, this reviewer rejects the conclusions of Burge simply because the New Testament seems to affirm the very things that Burge claims it is reinterpreting or replacing. The New Testament reaffirms the restoration of national Israel (Matt 19:28; 23:37-39; Acts 1:6; Rom 11:26), the deliverance of Jerusalem (Luke 21:24), and a future "temple of God" (2 Thess 2:4). Even in a state of disobedience, the covenants, promises, and temple service still belong to Israel (Rom 9:4-5). Thus, the New Testament does not reinterpret and replace the Old Testament revelation, it affirms it.

The conclusions of *Jesus and the Land* cannot be recommended. But this book has value in that it is a concise delineation of a non-dispensational approach that operates from Spiritual Vision Model assumptions and a hermeneutic of reinterpretation and replacement.

Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins. *King and Messiah as Son of God : Divine, Human and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 261 pp. \$28.00 (paper).  
Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, retired Professor of Theology, *The Master's Seminary*.

Originally consisting of six chapters, this book came into the light of day as *The Speaker's Lectures* at Oxford University, May 2006. Subsequently two chapters were added, giving four chapters to each author. Although it is not this reviewer's practice to read the conclusion first, it was done in this instance, because something just didn't fit after a quick preliminary perusal of the book.

This book concentrates on the question of the divinity of the messiah (xi). Far from being a simple question with an easy answer, the subject matter is considered complicated. The introduction does signal that the source of information may not be only the Scriptures but also other literature and

influences of other ancient Near Eastern nations. After noting the titles of recent works on messiahship, Collins sketches out the sources of the divinity of the messiah: (1) rooted in the royal ideology of ancient Judah, (2) influenced by Egyptian kingship mythology, and then (3) qualified by the Deuteronomists and the prophets. This idea of the divinity of messiah remained embedded in texts that became part of the OT canon (xi). Collins remarks that it is not possible to study the development of Christology without acknowledging the Jewish context in which its roots were to be found. The Egyptian king was not rated as being a god incarnate, but someone vested with a divine office. Undoubtedly, the Pharaoh was taken to be different from the ordinary. A significant point to make, though, is that evidence of cultic veneration of kings in Judea is lacking. Psalm 2 has been influenced by Egyptian and Assyrian sources, although it was not all that clear what these influences were in the psalm itself (10–14). Psalm 110 also gets Collins' attention. The focus of the discussion was upon Egyptian influence and in particular the textual corruption at v. 3b. Little or no comment is made of the opening words of Psalm 110. It and Psalm 2 are then summarized as being Jerusalem enthronement ceremonies. Little was said about the deity of the Messiah from either of the two psalms. It was mentioned a page or so earlier that Ps 45:6 is where the king is addressed as God (15). Since the divinity of the messiah is the goal of this book, it is sort of strange that they are not given much of a profile.

Since Deuteronomist ideas are accepted, differences in the dating of the prophetic corpus will occur, and early messianism will also be viewed as coming later in history (25–47). The ease with which a straightforward understanding of the Isaianic text is not always taken that way is demonstrable—note the following: 1) Hezekiah is the promised Immanuel, the child of Isa 9:6, despite the chronological problems this may cause, 2) Isa 6:18 presupposes more than one child, with the Immanuel already born, 3) the present form of the passages is later than Isaiah's time—no proof put forward, 4) the word for virgin (65) does not mean that, 5) the child could have been born of Hezekiah, 6) not sufficient indication in LXX of Isaiah that Immanuel is to be identified as the Messiah, 7) the Assyrian context of Isa 7 is acknowledged, the prophecy could have referred plausibly to a son of a king but not necessarily to a future ruler!? 8) this prophecy refers to the enthronement of Hezekiah and not to a birth. It is strange to propose Hezekiah as the one to whom the “for unto us a child is given...” applies (40–41). Collins' evaluative remark on accession to the throne, “While the argument is not entirely conclusive, it is persuasive and it has been widely accepted” exemplifies how interpretive options are formulated.

Here is Collins' closing observation to this chapter on kingship in Deuteronomistic and prophetic literature: “I would argue, then, that in the heyday of the monarchy the king in Jerusalem was conceived in mythological terms as the son of God, in a way that was influenced by Egyptian tradition but less emphatic in the presentation” (47).

Undoubtedly, four hundred years in Egypt would have had some impact upon the thinking and the culture of Israel even though they were

separated from the Egyptians geographically. Was Collins anticipating that his readers would be able to point out the influences of Egypt on the nation of Israel?

Chapter Three treats quite thoroughly the Son of God in the Hellenistic period. In twenty-six pages (48–74), Collins conducts the reader on an historical tour through this important part of those periods when Scripture was being given.

Adela Yarbro Collins then brings her contribution into play. She opens Chapter 5 by reference to William Wrede who in 1901 argued that the earthly activities of Jesus were unmessianic. It was only after His resurrection that His followers conceived of Christ as messiah. No critique is offered on the unmessianic conclusion. One must ask why this is so. It seems as though any theory will do. So whatever is a viable theory to one person is unacceptable to another. “The Synoptic Sayings Source (Q) and Paul.” The fact that Jesus coming down from heaven is not mentioned specifically in the critical reconstruction of this Sayings Source is offset by it being implied in several other sayings. Adela then cites three instances, giving only Q cross-references, of the Son of Man coming at an unexpected time, the Son of Man will be like the lightning flashes, and Son of Man coming analogous to the Flood of Noah’s day. These are well-known passages putting the Son of Man’s second coming in the *eschaton*. Does the lack of the term “heaven” point to an implication only of His coming from that realm? Where else would He have come from? However, Adela does clearly accept the fact of the Son of Man being identified with the son of man in Daniel 7 (103–04). On one page mention is made of the Son of God enacting deliverance from wrath in 1 Thessalonians. She concludes that at the time of God’s wrath at His coming, Jesus will deliver from imminent wrath by raising and by transforming faithful saints (104–05). If there was any further interest in the eschatological setting, it was precluded from the discussion.

The concluding reassessment given on the Pauline concept of pre-existence in Chapter 5 occurs at the end of Chapter 6. The final words of this draft are a “Reassessment of the Pre-existence of the Messiah in Paul’s Letters” (147).

Her husband had written the previous chapter showing how Paul adapted and elaborated the tradition that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God (123), and that Luke, like Mark, combined both prophetic and royal traits in their portrait of the Messiah. The vocabulary, however, used in discussing passages of Scripture sounded less than certain and far more reflective of parallel concepts in other non-Hebrew literature and cultures. Divine revelation, inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility appeared not to have deserved any comment. Also, the OT is not what the Hebrews were thinking as they developed their own worldview, but was God telling them what they were to be thinking. Of course, one cannot offer a definitive statement of everything read, but guesswork is manifested otherwise. Words such as: “suggests, probably, apparently, possibly, seems, it could have....” The concise survey of selected Son of Man references in Matthew are noted for emphasizing Him as

eschatological judge and as one having a kingdom. The chapter includes discussion of the derivation of the Son of Man sayings—derived either from a Semitic idiom or from Daniel 7 and the Aramaic text. A ten-page summary of the different writers on the Semitic Idiom view since the late 1800s follows. A show of complete agreement by these writers is not forthcoming; they had a hard time agreeing fully with each other (164–65).

“So how then did Jesus become a god?” asks Adela, as the opening line of the section “Conclusion: Early Worship of Jesus?” She dubs as plausible the theory that Jesus spoke of one like the son of man in Daniel as the coming Messiah. Further, some of His followers after His crucifixion had visions of Jesus raised from the dead and exalted to heaven. They enlisted the help of Daniel 7 and Palm 110 in the service of their misunderstanding. The coming one would act as God’s agent in ruling, judging, and defending God’s people. Now, if Jesus had taken over God’s function as king, warrior, and judge at the End, then one must look to Hellenistic cults when the deity of Christ would perhaps have been perceived primarily in functional terms [174.] This opened the doors to speculations of pre-existence. Such a notion intensifies the divine status. Apparently, pre-existence is not acceptable, and apparently, too, one must look to the Hellenistic cults which would exercise influence over the interpretation. The cultural environment allowed for human beings to be elevated to a level of worship as gods, not always after death. Given the practices of the imperial cults, it is not surprising that Jesus was viewed as a god who would be worshiped rather than the emperor [174].

To put the biblical record of Jesus on a par with Hellenistic cults is a gross distortion of that record, notwithstanding some apparent parallel. The factuality of Christ’s pre-existence, incarnation, God becoming man, thus yielding the God-Man really cannot be denied nor redefined so as to be more palatable to the thinking of the scholar’s mind. None of these phenomena can be construed as fitting in with pagan religious notions and explanation.

The final chapter is “Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man in the Gospel and Revelation of John.” Adela disagrees with the proposal that John’s Gospel is the only document in the NT in which the deity and incarnation of Jesus are unequivocally proclaimed, for example the third clause of the prologue could be translated “the word was a god” in place of “the word was God.” If that was so, she asks, then what of the Christological controversies in the early church. Whether or not Jesus was viewed as wisdom or as logos, created or eternal, the prologue implies that He was a pre-existent figure who became incarnate, and that could only mean pre-existence. Hear the passing assessment of the prologue by Collins: “the editor or author who composed the prologue elaborates a bit more, yet in a brief, ambiguous, and poetic way,” but she had just said a few lines earlier that “as we have seen, the prologue explicitly identifies Jesus Christ, that is Jesus as the messiah” [181]. Then she inserts into the text a dialectical twist, stating that it doesn’t matter whether or not Jesus was viewed as wisdom or as logos, as created or eternal, the prologue implies that He was a pre-existent figure who became incarnate [178]. So, to whom does the

text refer? Another Logos or a god instead of the God? [182]. Quite obviously, some scholars have difficulty in accepting the factuality of the biblical text.

Now, how does one wrap-up a look at the book which essentially did not accord the Scriptures *the* predominant place in its studies. It may be useful in an OTI or NTI course or a seminar in OT or NT studies to see how those who accept historical criticism have had their hermeneutics negatively influenced. Proceed with caution.

Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears. *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008. 335 pp. \$21.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Cliff McManis, TMS alumnus and Associate Professor of Theology, The Cornerstone Seminary.

Mark Driscoll is the high-profile and controversial pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, and co-founder of Acts 29 Church Planting Network (249). Gerry Breshears is the lesser-known preaching elder at Grace Community Church in Gresham, Oregon, and professor of theology at Western Seminary in Portland (12). This duo collaborates here to write a book on practical ecclesiology (9), what they call the “*being*” and “the *well-being* of the church” (37). They have also co-authored books on Christology, *Vintage Jesus* (2007), soteriology, *Death by Love* (2008), and theology, *Doctrine* (2010), all by Crossway. This book constitutes gleanings from the lessons learned by Driscoll who began pastoral ministry in 1996 (12) as a young, inexperienced twenty-five year old (243). Driscoll is the speaking voice throughout the book, while Breshears helped with conceptual underpinnings and editing (11).

The book has twelve chapters and is composed thematically of three main emphases: (1) foundations of the church (chapters 1–5); (2) church life (chapters 6–8); and (3) the purpose of the church (chapters 9–12). The book concludes with an appendix (311), which amounts to the church covenant of Mars Hill Church. This is followed up with a subject index (317–25) and a Scripture index (326–35).

All twelve chapter titles are questions, the first one being “What is the Christian Life?” This first chapter is foundational for the rest of the book, as it champions the incarnation of Christ, (affirming His full deity as the God-Man), His empowerment by the Spirit, His death on the cross for sin (which was a “*penal substitution*”) (20), His resurrection, Pentecost, the saving gospel and sanctified living. For Driscoll, a theology of the church begins and ends with who Jesus is and what He accomplished (28).

Chapters Two through Four are on defining what a church is, church leadership and biblical preaching, respectively. He defines the church positively by distilling a theology of it from the book of Acts, and negatively by contrasting the true definition of what a church is with counterfeits including Catholicism (41–45), the church-growth movement (52), the emerging church (53), and seeker churches (56). Driscoll attributes his resultant working

definition of the New Testament church to the seasoned theological precision of Breshears, and is delineated in part as follows:

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord...organize under qualified leadership, gather...for preaching and worship, observe...baptism and Communion...are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission...for God's glory and their joy (38).

Chapter Three answers the question, "Who is supposed to lead a church?" Driscoll's answer is, "a plurality of biblically qualified elders." An elder is also called a pastor, overseer or bishop (69). Driscoll calls himself a "soft complementarian" (67), rejecting egalitarianism as well as conservative complementarianism. Thus he endorses female deacons, and says women should be permitted to attend seminary (67).

In Chapter Four Driscoll extols preaching as the primary and priority ministry of the church, every other ministry being supplemental. Jesus is the model preacher. In the local church, only elders should preach from the pulpit. The preacher's arsenal should include expository, textual, topical and narrative sermons on a rotating basis. This chapter bleeds with some idiosyncratic oddities that were troubling for this reviewer. For example, Driscoll ill-defines the different kinds of preaching. He anemically defines expository preaching as, "simply going through a book of the Bible verse by verse" (92). But going through a book verse by verse does not guarantee that the preaching will be expository. He goes on to define textual preaching as going through only a portion of a Bible book instead of the whole book, which Driscoll says amounts to expository preaching.

For Driscoll, textual preaching and expository preaching are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, for the faithful and informed preacher, all textual preaching is to be expository, for true expository preaching is explaining the true meaning of any given text of Scripture. Another strange oddity is when Driscoll recommends that pastors learn from and mimic stand-up (worldly) comedians like Chris Rock to improve delivery (105). Such a suggestion directly undermines the time-honored doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, implying that the countless models of God-fearing, Spirit-empowered preachers from the Old Testament prophets, to the apostles and Jesus Himself are not adequate models to follow for modern-day preachers to be effective. Another egregious and alarming foible is when Driscoll unjustifiably accuses his Christian readers of having more interest in looking for pornography in his book on the church than wanting to understand what the Bible says about the priorities of biblical preaching (91). And finally, in an attempt to be humorous, Driscoll demeans a fellow preacher by referring to a graphic depiction of a deviant and shameful act of sexual lewdness (95). This is in sheer violation of Scripture which says "it is disgraceful to even speak of the things which are done by them in secret" (Eph 5:12).



Chapters Six through Eight discuss church life, addressing the topics of unity, church discipline and corporate love. In Chapter Six he defines unity and then gives nine reasons for division in the local church, including heresy, pride and legalism. The next chapter on church discipline is practical and quite helpful, as it draws on the principles given in Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, Galatians 6 and other pertinent passages. Chapter Eight addresses biblical love which the church is to live by after the perfect model of love displayed among the three persons of the Trinity.

The last four chapters address methodology of ministry and the purpose of the church, and as a result are the most controversial chapters in the book. Chapter Nine answers the question, "What is a missional church" and proves to be the weakest chapter of all due to Driscoll's exegetical shortcomings, theological ineptitude, compromised ecclesiological presuppositions and his seemingly inescapable desire to be relevant, hip and couth. He attempts to define "missional" and then show why truly biblical churches are missional. Ironically throughout the book Driscoll calls modern-day Christians to abandon Christian jargon, or "pious talk" (228), in order to be relevant to non-Christians (222), yet wields his own religious lexicon of made up nuanced buzz words and phrases that come right out of emerging, liberal and other aberrant theologies; words like: missional (16), incarnationally (20), contextualization (228), glocal (233), authentic (233), cultural transformation (289) and others. He even eschews the word "God," writing it off as "vague" and meaningless (222). One wonders how it is possible to be a faithful teacher of Scriptures like John 14:1, where Jesus said, "Believe in God, believe also in Me," while holding to such a fabricated replacement hermeneutic.

He struggles to define a "missional" church in a way that shows it is distinct from non-missional churches. For example he says that missional churches are biblical, preach repentance, evangelize, love people, train missionaries, believe in prayer, do not love the world and disciple others. Contrary to his argument, these principles are not novel or innovative, nor are they the sole marks of being missional. They are marks of historic biblical Christianity. The one attribute he uses to describe being missional that is modern is "contextualization." For Driscoll, this is the goal of transforming cities, nations (169) and the culture (239). He writes, "the missional church seeks the welfare of the...sinful culture" (239). This idea of transforming and reconstructing society and the culture of the world is nothing more than repackaged theonomy. Jesus came to save individual sinners (Luke 5:32), not transform the culture (Luke 10:13). If Jesus' goal was to eradicate poverty, then He failed (John 12:8). He goes on to say that true missional pastors engage the culture by watching as much TV as possible, using three TiVo's (225), own homes and lots of real estate in the community, and should plant gardens in their yards and eat their own produce (235). He gives no Bible verses for this flurry of imperatives.

In Chapter Ten Driscoll credits having multiple church sites with video-sermons as the catalyst for having the fastest growing church in America

(249). He hopes to keep growing the Mars Hill phenomenon until it becomes “a national and international church” (252). Chapter Eleven addresses the efficacy of modern technology in the local church. Here he recommends that pastors be like “a late night talk-show host” if they truly want to be effective in the modern era (278). In the last chapter Driscoll tells how to “transform the world.” How does the church transform the world? Neither through the gospel of Jesus Christ, nor through individuals being saved and getting renewed hearts, but rather through the ideology of sociologist Davison Hunter (290).

In conclusion, *Vintage Church* is an enigma, much like the pastor who wrote it. The deluge of schizophrenic statements throughout the book is baffling. On the one hand Driscoll says Spurgeon is his hero (100), yet the surly sarcasm with which he writes (91, 95, 243) betrays the gracious, profound and reverent style of Spurgeon. In one sentence he spurns church-growth (52) and seeker types, yet on another page he gives homage to Rick Warren as a model to emulate in preaching (90). In the beginning of his book he disparages all things emerging (52), but in the last four chapters he propagates the misguided missional contextualization of Lesslie Newbigin (218). Throughout the book he preaches love, unity and tolerance for all people (195), yet repeatedly maligns Christians who are fundamentalists (105), hyper-Calvinists (229), conservatives (243), and dispensationalists (289). He boasts that Jesus is the answer to everything, yet when it comes to transforming the world we must rely on the ideology of Peter Berger (291). He says we need to be submissive to Scripture in everything (11), yet we cannot use “pious” biblical words and concepts that will make non-Christians feel unwelcome (228).

In the end this book is bitter-sweet. Sweet in that it offers helpful biblical summaries of topics covering church leadership, preaching, the ordinances and church discipline. Bitter in its occasional lowbrow vernacular, spotty sarcastic tone, and compromised scriptural fidelity when it comes to a true definition of biblical missions, evangelism and discipleship.

Bart D. Ehrman. *Forged: Writing in God's Name, Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*. San Francisco: Harper One, 2011. x + 306 pp. \$26.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Director of the Seminary Library

Bart D. Ehrman is the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Ehrman's early education was evangelical, studying at Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. He then went to Princeton and studied under Bruce M. Metzger, one of the foremost New Testament scholars of the 20th century. He compares the educational quality of Princeton to that of his previous schools saying that Princeton, “stresses critical scholarship rather than uncritical dogmatism” (116). He became Metzger's protégé and came alongside him to co-author the fourth edition of *The Text of the New Testament: It's Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (Oxford Press, 2005). In the introductory chapter Ehrman describes

his path from believing in an inerrant and inspired Scripture to his conclusion that, “the Bible not only contains untruths or accidental mistakes. It also contains what almost anyone today would call lies” (5).

This is a river that Ehrman has been floating down for some time with his previous works, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford, 2005) and *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (Harper One, 2007), being other bends in the river. In short, Ehrman believes that the “Christianity” that exists today is simply the version that “won” from the multiple competing versions, and that the New Testament we possess today is the compilation of sacred books that supported the “winner.” In that process the New Testament books were developed by the “winners,” with books that favored the particular doctrines and practices retained, while those which did not were discarded.

Ehrman states that he has been investigating and researching forgery in the ancient world with a goal to writing a scholarly monograph on that subject as it relates to the New Testament. He states that, “this book is not that scholarly monograph” (10) but rather a popular work for the “general reader, who on some level is, like me, interested in the truth” (11). This seems a reverse of the more acceptable procedure, developing the detailed and thoroughly researched arguments at a “scholarly level,” and then distilling those thoughts into a more accessible version; as he did with the publishing of *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford, 2003) then following it with *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (Oxford, 2004).

Ehrman clearly details the purpose of this book,

I want to inform my readers about an important ancient literary phenomenon. I want to correct mistakes that other scholars have made in discussing that phenomenon. I want readers to think more deeply about the role of lies and deception in the history of the Christian religion. I want to show the irony in the fact that lies and deceptions have historically been used to establish the “truth.” I want my readers to see that there may be forgeries in the New Testament (170–71).

His thesis is twofold: (1) Except for six of the Pauline Epistles (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon) all of the New Testament is a forgery; it was created by individuals for their own purposes and usurped the name of an apostle or other notable figure as the author to give the forgery credibility; and (2) that such forgeries were not viewed favorably in the ancient world, that “even though it was widely practiced, it was also widely condemned and treated as a form of lying” (36). However, even those books that the author believes to be actually written by Paul are not entirely “pure” with the prohibitions to women speaking in the assembly (1 Cor 14:34–35) being inserted later at the same time the forged Pastoral Epistles were created (244–45).

It is the concept of “forgery” that is central to the book. In the past, while denying the traditional authorship of the New Testament, some advanced the concept of the “Pious Forger” to explain that the New Testament retained ethical and religious value, despite the fact books were not written by whom it was claimed. Paul, for instance, may not have written the Pastoral Epistles, but they represented “Pauline thought” and were written and attributed to him in an honest manner (cf. 118). Ehrman, convincingly in this reviewer’s opinion, shows that “ancient authors who discuss the practice condemned it and considered it a form of lying and deceit. Forgers who were caught were reprimanded or punished even more severely” (40). Ehrman states in his conclusion:

In sum, there were numerous ways to lie in and through the literature in antiquity, and some Christians took advantage of the full panoply in their efforts to promote their view of the faith. It may seem odd to modern readers, or even counterintuitive, that a religion that built its reputation on possessing the truth had members who attempted to disseminate their understanding of the truth through deceptive means. But that is precisely what happened. The use of deception to promote truth may well be considered one of the most unsettling ironies of the early Christian tradition (250).

Some of Ehrman’s underlying assumptions for applying the label of forgery to the bulk of the New Testament are certainly questionable. He asserts that the apostles, for the most part, were incapable of writing the New Testament because they were illiterate (8, 71–77, 198). “One [problem about those who forged the New Testament] involves a reality that early Christians may not have taken into account, but that scholars today are keenly aware of. Most of the apostles were illiterate and could not in fact write” (8). He then spends an entire section (43–77) in a discussion of the “clear evidence” that the apostle Peter could not have written the two epistles that bear his name, citing oddly enough, as he believes Acts is a forgery, the passage in 4:13. This is an old canard which has been refuted thoroughly in various venues (see C. K. Barrett, *Acts*, 1:232; and Krauss, “Uneducated, Ignorant, and Even Illiterate” *NTS* 45:3, 439–49).

The bulk of Ehrman’s argument lies in comparing ancient Christian extra-biblical literature to the New Testament. He demonstrates the real problems with these books, such as the *Gospel of Peter* (52–60), *The Letters of Paul and Seneca* (90–92), etc., and then attempts to show how New Testament books supposedly have the same problems; ergo they must also be forgeries. The work is terribly repetitive in places (see the discussion of Clement of Rome, 20, 62, 190, 222; for virtually identical wording). There is little flow and regardless of the chapter divisions, virtually no organization. This results in a literary device where the authors point is repeated over and over in seemingly new ways, when frankly he is actually saying nothing new or adding to his discussion.

The value in this work is that Ehrman makes a compelling case for what “forgery” really is and how it was negatively viewed in the ancient era. This book is also important because it demonstrates where New Testament scholarship, in its most skeptical stream, has gone and continues to flow. Given the wide publicity this work received it is likely to be a subject of discussion in local churches.

However, all the *ad populum* appeals to “scholars” and “recent scholarship” aside, Ehrman presents no new objections or evidence in this work regarding the nature and composition the New Testament that have not been answered, and decisively so, in multiple works of New Testament introduction previously (e.g. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [InterVarsity, 1990]; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Zondervan, 2005]; and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Doubleday, 1995] as just a few examples).

D. A. Carson, commenting of Ehrman's *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford Press, 2004), stated, “the author is far too impressed with his own skepticism” (*New Testament Commentary Survey* [Baker, 2007], 40). This is an entirely apt summation and most certainly applicable to *Forged*.

John Goldingay. *Old Testament Theology, Volume 3: Israel's Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009. 912 pp. \$45.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Volume three of Goldingay's *Old Testament Theology* (see the review of the first two volumes in *MSJ* 20, no. 1 [Spring 2009]: 103–6) examines Israel's life as she should have lived it, not as she actually conducted herself (13). Therefore, the volume represents the author's detailed and systematic presentation of OT ethics. He argues that ethics and theology depend on one another (15). Doctrine must be praxis, or, as he puts it, “Doctrine needs to be singable; songs need to be believable” (16)—a concept to which church worship leaders would do well to give attention.

While the author emphasizes the role of Scripture in spirituality, his view of the biblical text is not conservative. For example, he rejects Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (34) and when he deals with the issue of the *prescriptive* vs. *descriptive* nature of the biblical text, Goldingay appears to caution against believing in the authority of Scripture (580–81). For him, Scripture merely presents a variety of “ways of looking at an issue (for instance, by telling us various sorts of stories) so that we can imagine working with them or can dream of others” (581).

Following an “Introduction” (13–50) establishing a threefold organization of First Testament theology and the First Testament as the source for a systematic theology, Goldingay divides the volume into three parts: “Living with God” (51–322), “Living with One Another” (323–582), and “Living with Ourselves” (583–831).

The first part divides the topic of “Living with God” into two major categories: “Submission and Celebration” (53–190) and “Prayer and Thanksgiving” (191–322). The author identifies and examines nearly all of the major OT terms and phrases describing life with God under the first category. “Obeying Yhwh” (53–75) includes deferring to and acknowledging Yahweh, as well as walking in His way, following Him, living in the light of His deliverance, responding in covenant, keeping commitment, and loving and delighting in Him. In addition, heeding the Torah, prophecy, and warnings require attention. “Revering Yhwh” (75–99) carries the reader into an analysis of fear itself and its comparison with awe and wonder. Goldingay also touches upon reverence for Yahweh as it relates to openness, honor, respect, joy and relaxedness, diffidence, and the mystery of disobedience. Contrasting fear of humans with fear of God continues the conversation, which moves on to discussing the relationship of fear and confidence, fear and comfort, and an acceptance of Yahweh’s vision.

Following “Obeying Yhwh” and “Revering Yhwh,” the volume turns to “Trusting Yhwh” (99–116, containing comparisons of trust with such things as hope, expectancy, waiting, risk, composure, and silence), “Serving Yhwh” (116–34, discussing the nature of OT worship), “Giving to Yhwh” (134–51, including an examination of the various levitical offerings), “Sojourning with Yhwh” (151–72, involving a description of the various feasts of Israel), and “Praising Yhwh” (172–90, touching upon, among other topics, music and singing).

Goldingay distributes the second category (“Prayer and Thanksgiving”) under the headings of “Communication” (191–209), “Protest” (209–30), “Plea” (231–53), “Confidence” (253–67), “Intercession” (267–87), “Penitence” (287–308), and “Thanksgiving” (308–22). Under each of these headings, a number of related topics systematically address the major issues related to the topic. Running heads on each page of the volume help the reader keep track of the topics under each category (e.g., “2.3 Trusting Yhwh” and “3.3 Plea”)—the first number is the chapter number.

The second part of the volume (“Family and Community”) draws the reader into some of the major issues of OT interpretation, theological thinking, and ethical application. Goldingay seems to associate exegesis with radical views such as theonomy and other “isms,” such as “conservationism, evangelicalism, feminism, fundamentalism, vegetarianism, Calvinism, pacifism, Anglicanism” (329–31). In his section on “Marriage” (350–83), he covers a wide range of sub-topics like gender roles, romance, sex, faithfulness, divorce, and homosexuality. With regard to the last, Goldingay’s parting comment asks whether homosexuality should be understood “in the context of the pain of human experience in the world” due to sinfulness (383). Under the topic of “Family” (383–420), his discourse includes children, worship, education, work, and land. “Community” (420–58) gets into neighborliness, friendship, lending, respect for property, market forces, tolerance, conflict, restitution, murder, and justice. Goldingay addresses the matter of turning the other cheek by pointing

out that the believer ought to turn the other cheek, but the legal community should still discipline the attacker for the sake of victim, community, and even the attacker (447). "Servanthood" (458–76) deals with the topic of slavery.

Consideration of city, nation, and kingdom occupy the author in Chapter 5 (477–582), which involves Goldingay's treatment of politics from the viewpoint of the First Testament. He identifies national "defense" as a euphemism (548) and war as an inevitable result of statehood (550). Interestingly, the author exhibits a bit of anti-Americanism when he attributes inherent belligerence to the character of the United States as a nation and declares that it "should not trust its own judgment" (557). His discussion of war extends over thirty-five pages (548–82) and includes a fairly full examination of the annihilation of the Canaanites.

The third part of the volume ("Living with Ourselves") takes up "Spirituality and Character" (585–707) and "Leaders and Servants" (708–831). Godlikeness, holiness and purity, life and death, time and stuff, wisdom, speech, suffering, and transformation fill out the areas in which the OT describes what spirituality looks like in life. Although Goldingay declares that "The First Testament does not believe in moral growth but in conversion" (707), unfortunately he does not provide any discourse on OT conversion. His final chapter commences with a discussion of the theology of servant-leadership (708–31) then examines the roles of kings (732–46), ministers (746–59), prophets (759–92), poets, visionaries, and actors (792–811), and victims (811–31).

As Goldingay brings his "Conclusion" to a close (832–39), he offers his own "Decalogue" for selective or even partial obedience (839). The only one that seems at odds with an OT worldview is his fifth: "Keep out of department stores and shopping malls (beware the Internet too)." However, the reader must remember that Goldingay associates the Tenth Commandment regarding covetousness with shopping:

The Decalogue's stance strikes at the heart of Western economies, whose functioning depends on covetousness, the habit of going shopping, the desire to acquire "stuff," the attitude the West has propagated elsewhere in encouraging globalization. In the West, dominated by commercialism, the indicator of being the church lies in refusal to go shopping. (650)

The volume closes with an extensive "Bibliography" (840–72), an "Author Index" (873–81), a limited and less helpful "Subject Index" that too often follows the structure of the volume's headings (882–94; e.g., "Scripture, function of," 891, misleads the reader, since it deals only with the use of Scripture by advocates of various views on war), and a "Scripture Index" (895–912).

This volume might be the most valuable and useful of all three volumes in Goldingay's *Old Testament Theology* because of the significant contribution

it makes to the identification and discussion of OT ethics. Despite its occasional problems and eccentricities, every evangelical interested in biblical ethics will find practical insights within its pages—as well as a challenge to respond to some tough questions.

Peter J. Leithart. *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 373 pp., \$22.00 (paper). Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, TMAI, Samara, Russia.

Peter J. Leithart is a professor of theology at New Saint Andrews College and pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Moscow, Idaho. He has written on a variety of subjects, ranging from Old Testament and New Testament commentaries to biographies on people such as Jane Austen and Fyodor Dostoevsky. He has also written on theological issues such as baptism and historical issues such as the fall of Communism.

Leithart has four major goals in *Defending Constantine*. First, he presents a biography to “summarize some results of the newer scholarship for a wider audience to provide a fairly detailed, fairly popular, and fairly fair account of Constantine’s life and work” (10). This biography has an apologetic tone, defending many mischaracterizations of Constantine. Second, shifting from apologetics to polemics, the author provides a corrective to the popular understanding of Constantine. Third, “Constantinianism,” as defined by pacifists such as John Howard Yoder, is examined and critiqued. Fourth, the author considers various applications to contemporary politics from the life of Constantine. Considering the author’s affiliation with New Saint Andrews College, his being a signatory to the “Federalist Vision,” and the endorsement from Douglas Wilson, the reader senses the theonomist direction of the book when the author, in the inception of his work, writes, “Constantine provides in many respects a model for Christian political practice” (11).

The biographical sections will be most helpful to readers considering the sincerity of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity. The ideological and religious contrasts between Constantine and previous emperors provide a vivid picture for how life can change through religious experience. Namely, any belief system that undermined sacrifice, undermined Rome by welcoming the displeasure of the gods, and was punishable by torture and death. The author memorably summarizes the Roman opposition to Christianity on this count, “. . . the tortures resemble sacrificial procedures: human beings were flayed and dismembered and burned like animals offered to the gods. One way or another, the Romans said, Christians would offer to the gods” (25). Establishing this paranoid superstition, the author describes the importance Constantine’s decision to abandon the gods for Christianity (even to blazon its symbol on the shield of his soldiers),



A superstitious/religious Constantine would be disinclined to insult the gods by changing the standards of his army on the eve of a major battle. Roman army standards were religious objects, venerated by the troops and often credited with talismanic powers, as indeed the *labarum* eventually was. Changing standards announced a change of loyalty from one divine patron to another. Constantine would not have changed the standards without powerful justification . . . ." (73–74).

Constantine's refusal to sacrifice to Jupiter upon his return to Rome also indicated the significance of the emperor's spiritual experience at the battle for Milvan Bridge. Further evidence of Constantine's conversion is demonstrated through monument inscriptions, senatorial proclamations, coinage inscriptions, architecture, art, his opposition to paganism and Christian heresies, the prohibition of gladiator games ("The shows were as basic to Rome as sacrifice. Rome was the arena, and the arena was Rome. What would the empire be without it" [196]), adjustment of punishment for crimes, establishment of churches, institution of laws protecting the weak, memorials to martyrs, elevation of Christians to positions of power, his deathbed vow, etc. The author recognizes, however, that pagan symbols never completely disappeared from Rome, but Leithart attributes their presence to political inspiration, being "metaphors rather than realities" (76).

Constantine's role in the Council of Nicaea has gained interest since the ahistorical account of the council in Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*. Addressing the common objection that Constantine desired the unity of the Church solely for the benefit of the Empire, Leithart posits that "Constantine's argument was directly theological. Divisions in the church displease the one God whose church it is, and God in his anger might well, Constantine thought, take his vengeance not only on the church but on the emperor himself" (84). It is difficult to reconstruct many of the details of Nicaea, but the author defends Constantine from claims of being overbearing. The author concludes,

Constantine did not dominate the council. He did not formulate the final creed, nor did he sign off on it—being, again, an unbaptized nonbishop. It is difficult, however, to believe that the bishops could have come to such a thoroughgoing conclusion without his political skill and strength of personality" (170).

Although "missional," "evangelistic," and "church planter" are not concepts that most would attribute to Constantine (at the risk of being labeled a panegyrist), Leithart provides details of Constantine's life that warrant his use of these images. "Constantine was not just a Christian; he was a missional Christian" (88; cf. 111). This is the interesting, forgotten history of Constantine that many will find captivating and thought provoking. A variety of primary sources demonstrate that Constantine was concerned with converting pagans, ensuring Christianity of a good reputation among unbelievers, providing copies

of the Bible, preaching the Scriptures (even personally), and protecting Christians throughout the Empire (cf. his “evangelistic” letter to Shapur I on behalf of suffering Christians, intact with an “alter call” [247]).

If Constantine was a Christian, what is to be said of his continued devotion to the sun god, as well as his murderous activities? Identifying the Milvan Bridge vision with a “sun halo” (“a circular rainbow formed when ice crystals in the atmosphere refract sunlight” [78]) accounts for his faithfulness to the sun god, but what of his involvement in the deaths of his son Crispus, his wife Fausta, Licenius, and Licenius’ son? The author provides plausible explanations for each death, showing that some would involve just punishment under Roman law, one involved accidental death, and one involved suicide. Although these are viable options, Leithart concedes, “Constantine was less brutal than some emperors, but one does not have to be a pacifist to notice unpleasant resemblances between Christian Constantine’s career and that of any of a dozen pagan emperors” (237). Summarizing his perception of the emperor, Leithart writes, “Flawed, no doubt; sometimes inconsistent with his stated ethic, certainly; an infant in faith. Yet a Christian” (96).

Despite providing us with a helpful history with many interesting details, Leithart overstates his case in some instances. For example, when he asserts that “the empire’s devotion to the church was one of the causes for its eventual decline” (291), he does not discuss any of the significant facts which actually led to the fall of Rome. He simply states, “Baptized Rome found that it could join with baptized *barbaria*, since Jesus had broken down the dividing wall” (292). The Arianism of these barbarians (namely of their leader Alaric) is absent in this discussion and would severely hinder such unity. Readers may also be unconvinced of the author’s claim that Constantine’s Christianity “subverted the empire” because “people of goodwill decided that maintaining justice, peace and civilized life did not require the maintenance of the Roman empire” (293). Again, the author does not treat the political realities leading to Alaric’s invasion of 410. Also as a matter of confusion, the reader is left wondering what eschatological system Eusebius promoted because Leithart denies that Eusebius supported an earthly political kingdom; yet, he asserts that Augustine wrote *The City of God* to combat the Eusebian notion of an earthly political kingdom (179, 284). Surprisingly, the author did not treat Eusebius’ “Oration in Praise of Constantine,” which illustrates Eusebius’ understanding of the eschatological significance of Constantine’s rule (4.3, 5.1).

The final chapters contain Leithart’s most trenchant critique of Yoder. Of primary importance are the questions of “Constantinianism” (“the premise ‘that one nation or people or government can represent God’s cause ...’” [253]), that Constantinianism made Christians comfortable with the world, and that Constantinianism resulted in Christians abandoning the pacifism that dominated the early church. Here, and throughout the book, Leithart provides convincing arguments that Yoder commits historical mistakes in order to make his pacifistic point (see his chapter, “Pacifist Church?”). It is hard to disagree with Leithart that Yoder’s “claims are, as historical claims, sometimes questionable,

sometimes oversimplified to the point of being misleading, sometimes one-sided, sometimes simply wrong” (254).

Despite the strength of his historical argument, Leithart's theological alternative may fall victim to the same verdict he pronounces against Yoder. In his final chapter, Leithart confesses, “My main interest in this project has been theological . . . . My historical portrait has implied a political theology” (306). Sympathizers of Yoder will find Leithart's theological critique of pacifism to be simplistic, lacking interaction with alternative views. In particular, the author does not discuss issues of continuity and discontinuity between the testaments; instead, Leithart simply states, “unless one follows an almost Marcionite contrast of Old and New, the Old Testament remains normative for Christians” (335). Although he never explicitly names his eschatological system, Leithart's postmillennial views are exposed by his view of the baptism of nations:

This is the ‘baptism’ that I refer to, a moment in history, or a period of history, when a people, nation or empire receives the gospel of the victory of Jesus and is blown by the Spirit from the world of sacrifice, purity, temples, and sacred space and is transferred into a new religio-socio-political world. It is a baptism out of the world of the *stoicheia*, which, at least for Gentiles, involved the worship of ‘not-gods,’ into a world without sacrifice, a world after the end of sacrifice . . . . Baptisms have continued since and will continue until the nations . . . are made disciples” (326–27).

He also holds a Preterist view of Revelation (280). As a further description of the coming of the kingdom, Leithart writes,

Yoder is wrong, and that we can escape apocalypse. But this can only happen on certain conditions: only through reevangelization, only through the revival of a purified Constantinianism, only by the formation of a Christically centered politics, only through fresh public confession that Jesus' city is the model city, his blood the only expiating blood, his sacrifice the sacrifice that ends sacrifice. An apocalypse can be averted only if modern civilization, like Rome, humbles itself and is willing to come forward to be baptized” (342).

Although many will not agree with Leithart's theological conclusions, one should not ignore his historical contributions. In general, the book is well written, although the narrative is choppy at times. It is well documented, but it is overly dependent upon secondary sources. It is engaging, but the depth of scholarship and research is not consistent. Leithart has attempted to cover too many historical and theological issues in this book to excel at any one of them, but the overall treatment of Constantine serves as a helpful corrective and is, therefore, commendatory.

Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008. xxiv + 967 pp. \$50.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (DOTWPW) continues IVP's superb *Dictionary of the Old Testament* series, which started with *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by David W. Baker (2003). For DOTWPW, 92 contributors present 143 entries covering almost everything someone might want to know about Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ruth, and Esther, as well as the Book of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. As in the other volumes, front and back materials enable readers to get the most out of the volume: "How to Use This Dictionary" (ix-x), "Abbreviations" (xi-xx), "Transliteration of Hebrew" (xx), "Contributors" (xxi-xxiv), "Scripture Index" (942-59), "Subject Index" (960-66), and "Articles Index" (967). Cross-references enable serial reading of connected topics as well as pertinent entries in companion volumes in the IVP Dictionary series.

Bibliographies concluding the individual entries vary in length and detail. Those supplied for biblical book entries (e.g., "Ecclesiastes 1: Book of," 121-32, by Peter Enns) divide the sources into two sections: "Commentaries" and "Studies" (131-32). Charts and tables like the following visualize significant information: "Panofsky's Method of Image Analysis" (310), "Structure of Job" (334), "The Triangle of Claims" (for the Book of Job, 340), "Individual Lament" (387), "Corporate Lament" (390), "Structure of Sumerian City Laments" (412), "The Plot Structure of the Book of Ruth" (678), "Comparison with Egyptian Love Lyrics" (for the Song of Solomon, 744), and "Qumran Psalm Manuscripts" (798). More charts would enhance the volume's impact. A few figures also appear in the volume (e.g., "Late Bronze Age seal from Tell el-Far ah [sic]," 312; "Mid-eighth century seal: unprovenanced," 312; "Kassite cylinder-seal," 622; "Bethsaida stela," 623).

A large number of significant entries make this volume an extremely valuable reference work. For example, entries on poetic elements and devices usually provide definitions, classifications, examples, discussions, and bibliographies that help dictionary users access the best of information gleaned from a wide range of key sources ("Acrostic," "Ambiguity," "Chiasm," "Ellipsis," "Imagery," "Inclusio," "Merism," "Meter," "Parallelism," "Personification," "Refrain," "Sound Patterns," "Stanza, Strophe," and "Wordplay"). In "Chiasm" (54-57) Paul B. Overland identifies four suspicious scenarios that might be involved in over-detection of chiasm (55). Walter L. McConnell presents a balanced discussion of the issues involved with meter in biblical Hebrew poetry ("Meter," 472-76). Joel M. LeMon and Brent A. Strawn contribute an informative entry regarding recent debates over the identification, classification, and use of parallelism in Hebrew poetry ("Parallelism," 502-15). A less informative entry ("Sound Patterns" by Tremper Longman III, 770-72),

however, suffers from brevity, especially in the discussions of assonance, alliteration, and onomatopoeia, as well as a weak bibliography.

Frederick J. Mabie's "Chaos and Death" (41–54) takes a biblically conservative and historically sensitive look at biblical references to chaos as well as ANE chaos myths. He develops their implications for biblical interpretation and theology, especially as related to death. Mabie, a TMS graduate, also contributes the entry on "Destruction" (99–102). Along the same basic lines of approach as Mabie's treatment of "Chaos and Death," Michael S. Heiser examines the "Divine Council" (112–16) in the Bible and in ANE literature. One of his carefully reasoned insights involves identifying the "viceregent slot in the Israelite [concept of] council" with the second person of the Godhead (114). Assessing the character and actions of Esther, Elaine A. Phillips ("Esther 6: Person," 188–93) offers three major observations indicating Esther's deficiency as a role model (190). Unfortunately, neither Phillips nor Karen H. Jobes ("Esther 1: Book of," 160–70) list John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *Esther: The Triumph of God's Sovereignty*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Moody, 1979), who offers a superb treatment of both the historical background and theological significance of the Book of Esther. John H. Walton ("Job 1: Book of," 333–46) identifies what he claims to be four Israelite features in Job (344). However, all four are subjective in nature and pale in comparison to the internal evidence for the patriarchal period (see, among others, Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* [Baker, 2005], 22–23). "Psalms 4: Titles" by Dale A. Brueggeman stands out as one of the very few works on the Psalms to actually give serious consideration to J. W. Thirtle's theory in Thirtle's *The Titles of the Psalms: Their Nature and Meaning* (Henry Frowde, 1904) and Bruce K. Waltke's excellent article, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 538–96. Most recent commentaries fail to adequately handle this issue, ignoring Thirtle and dismissing Waltke.

David G. Firth ("Asaph and Sons of Korah," 24–27) rightly identifies the "sons of Korah" as descendants of the Korah of Numbers 16, but omits reference to 26:11 which reveals that the earth did not swallow up the children of Korah (26). In "Ecclesiastes 1: Book of," (121–32), Peter Enns argues (quite weakly, in this reviewer's opinion) that explanations for Solomonic authorship "have the ring of desperation" (123; also, 122). The bibliography for "Imprecation" (by Brent A. Strawn, 319–20) omits three key evangelical resources: James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons from the Imprecatory Psalms* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991); John N. Day, *Crying for Justice: What the Psalms Teach Us About Mercy and Vengeance in an Age of Terrorism* (Kregel, 2005); and J. Carl Laney, "A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138, no. 549 (January 1981): 35–45.

Finally, readers should pay particular attention to three outstanding contributions this reviewer feels compelled to mention: Daniel I. Block, "Ruth 1: Book of," (672–87); Paul D. Wegner, "Text, Textual Criticism" (794–805); and Daniel J. Estes, "Wisdom and Biblical Theology" (853–58). It is difficult to

limit oneself to mentioning these three, since so many of the entries display research and writing excellence combined with keen insight and careful reasoning. Besides those cited in this review, a number of the 92 contributors make the use and purchase of the volume imperative: Craig C. Broyles, C. Hassell Bullock, Duane A. Garrett, James M. Hamilton, Richard S. Hess, Ted A. Hildebrandt, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Kenneth A. Kitchen, Alan R. Millard, Cynthia L. Miller, John N. Oswalt, Tiberius Rata, Willem A. VanGemeren, and Edwin M. Yamauchi.

James McKeown. *Genesis*. Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008. ix + 398 pp. \$25.00 (paper).  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

This volume represents the first book published by James McKeown who serves as Vice-Principal of Belfast Bible College and Lecturer in Old Testament in the Institute of Theology at Queen's College, Belfast. His doctoral dissertation presented at Queen's University of Belfast (1991) was "A Study of the Main Unifying Themes in the Hebrew Text of the Book of Genesis." With T. C. Mitchell, McKeown co-authored the "Altar" entry in *The New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (IVP, 1996), 26–27. He also contributed an essay ("A Theological Approach," 48–60) to *Make the Old Testament Live: From Curriculum to Classroom*, eds. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Eerdmans, 1998). More recently, he wrote two entries in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (IVP, 2003): "Blessings and Curses," 83–87 and "Land, Fertility, Famine," 487–91.

The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary series (J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew, eds.) combines theological exegesis and theological reflection in a paragraph-by-paragraph commentary on the biblical text. This commentary apportions its materials as follows: "Introduction" (1–17), "Commentary" (10–193), "Theological Horizons of Genesis" (195–375), "Bibliography" (376–84), "Index of Names" (385–86), and "Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Writings" (387–98). Commentators contributing to this series represent a variety of theological traditions and perceptions regarding the work of theology and theological hermeneutics. The series focuses primarily on students, pastors, and other Christian leaders who are engaged in theological interpretation of Scripture.

McKeown begins his "Introduction" with an agnostic approach to Genesis—"We are not told anywhere in the Bible who wrote it, nor are we given any clues about the date when it was completed" (1). He also denies any single plot for the book, since it contains a number of stories with their own plots (1). He adopts a two-part structure with chapters 1–11 and 12–50 (2), as compared to the three-part structure strongly supported by Tremper Longman III in *How to Read Genesis* (IVP, 2005; 99–100). When it comes to rhetorical characteristics of Genesis, McKeown identifies repetition as the most widely used device (3–4). In the section discussing "Reader Expectations" (4–7), he deals briefly and

incompletely with the tension between science and Scripture regarding creation and the Noachic flood. However, he does return for a little more detailed examination of these topics in the theological section of the volume (see below).

Noting the demise of the Documentary Hypothesis (7), McKeown summarizes five of its arguments against Mosaic authorship and concludes that the authorship of Genesis is still an open question (8). Interestingly, he chooses to focus on the exilic and post-exilic readers (“because this avoids most objections about the date of authorship,” 10) in a consideration of how the ancient readers approached Genesis and how the book would have affected them. This exilic standpoint comes out again and again throughout the commentary (e.g., 38, 52, 63).

Comparison of Genesis with other ancient Near Eastern literature reveals that the book “leaves not a vestige of mythical language or thought” (14). McKeown suggests that Genesis was written with the intent of refuting the Babylonian creation account (14). However, he also observes that the OT account “has little in common with these myths” (17)—including the chaos monster (Tehom) myth.

The commentary section of this volume treats the text concisely and paragraph-by-paragraph. McKeown cites the Hebrew when it contributes significantly to the discussion of meaning, as with *רִאֵה אֱלֹהִים*, *rūah ʾēlōhīm*, in 1:2 (21) and *לֶךְ-לֶכָּא*, *lek-lēkā*, in 12:1 (75). A number of interpretative observations will enlighten readers. For example, the issue of light in 1:3–5 must take into account that “God is the real source of light” (21) and a study of the person of Noah should recognize his depiction as the forerunner of Moses (65). Readers will learn much from the commentary section, but must read it with care. McKeown’s primary contextualization involves showing “how Genesis would have encouraged exilic and postexilic readers” (10). Such an approach not only neglects a more thorough examination of the issues of authorship and date, but also ignores the impact of Genesis intertextually even within the Pentateuch itself and within the historical setting of both the wilderness wanderings and the conquest of Canaan.

The commentary often lacks substance. For example, the author identifies a variety of translation problems by citing representative English versions, but fails to specify the problem, offer the best solution, or to present evidence supporting the best solution (see 97, 125–26, 143–44). McKeown appears to avoid mention of homosexuality in both the polemic of 2:18–25 (34) and the description of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah in 19:1–11 (106–7). A lack of adequate discussion hampers his discussion of the extent of the Noachic flood (58). In one particularly misleading statement (“no personal names are found in the pre-Mosaic period compounded with Yahweh or with the abbreviated form Yah,” 359), he ignores the names Abijah (1 Chron 2:16; cp. Gen 38:29–30; 46:12), Ahijah (1 Chron 2:25), and Azariah (1 Chron 2:8) occurring as much as 400 years before Moses. One must keep in mind that those names occur only in the genealogy of Judah, because it is the only tribal line of interest to the Chronicler’s focus on the Davidic dynasty and Davidic covenant.

Many more names might have existed with the theophoric element of *-jah* or *-iah* in other tribal lines.

The primary contribution of *Genesis* comes in the theological portion of the volume. McKeown begins with the “Theological Message of the Book” (195–294), continues with “Genesis and Theology Today” (294–349), and concludes with “Genesis and Biblical Theology” (349–75). The first of these three sections covers the main themes of Genesis (descendants, blessing, and land). In an extensive discussion of “seed,” the author indicates that the use of contrasting descendants in Genesis leads to a highlighting of Judah, so that there “can be little doubt that one of the goals of the book of Genesis is to anticipate the Davidic kingdom” (216). McKeown apparently rejects the messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15 (38–39, 204–5) in favor of a “chosen line” interpretation with a minimum of exegetical analysis. However, he also indicates that the line of descent from the promised seed will restore “peaceful relations with God” (254)—which most theologians would identify with Messiah’s accomplishments.

In his discussion of creationism and science (263–69, 294–317), the author concludes, “It is hoped that the above discussion is fair to all sides in this debate and that the material will help the reader to understand the main issues and make an informed decision for themselves” (317). He does discuss a variety of viewpoints in this subject area and mentions a number of pros and cons for each one. The claim of fairness, however, might be questioned due to the fact that he sometimes utilizes outdated and abandoned arguments as though they still represent current viewpoints (e.g., the appearance of age theory and canopy theory for creationists, 298, 300). The smorgasbord type of approach leaves readers without any direction. Pastors, students, and laymen seeking a Genesis commentary that presents carefully reasoned argumentation guiding them to a recommended solution will not find this volume helpful—it might even prove frustrating. On the other hand, the volume will aid those who wish to gain a grasp of the content and flow of Genesis, together with its major theological themes.

Christopher W. Morgan. *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God’s People*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010. 218 pp. \$17.99 (paper).  
Reviewed by Paul W. Felix, Associate Professor of New Testament.

Is it possible for a NT letter to have a theology that is worth exploring in a full-length book, when that canonical work says nothing about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Should a writer examine the theological teachings of a five-chapter NT epistle which has been called an “epistle of straw” by the Protestant reformer Martin Luther? Are the words of Martin Dibelius, “James has no theology,” to be ignored in the pursuit of determining the theological message of this letter? Christopher W. Morgan, Professor of Theology and Associate Dean of the School of Christian Ministries at California Baptist University in Riverside, California, answers with a resounding “Yes!” He is no



stranger to the letter of James, having previously coauthored with B. Dale Ellenburg the commentary: *James: Wisdom for the Community* (2008). With his current work, Morgan adds his voice to those of several recent biblical commentators (Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell, *James*; Dan McCartney, *James*; Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*) who advocate a robust theology of James. The essence of his work is: "While relying upon careful exegesis and being informed by systematic theology, this volume is a work in biblical theology and therefore seeks to connect the dots of the particular texts in the epistle of James and show its primary message" (xvi).

In the opening chapter, "James in Context," the author explores the historical and literary context of James. The matters of authorship, date, recipients, language and style, form, and structure are adequately dealt with. The next chapter, "Influences on James's Thought," identifies the primary literary sources of this letter as the Old Testament and the teachings/sayings of Jesus. The third chapter, "James's Pastoral Burden," focuses on the core of the message of James which is to offer the readers "wisdom for consistency in the community" (40).

The heart of *A Theology of James* is chapters 4 through 11. Chapters Four through Nine give attention to the following major themes: wisdom (47–54), consistency (55–64), suffering (65–76), the poor (77–94), words (95–114), and God's word and law (115–27). The typical approach of the writer for these chapters is to first identify the major principles that support the theme and second to unpack each principle by examining the underlying passage in James in light of the sources of James and its contribution to the theme. In Chapter 10 ("James and Paul"), the author weighs in on the well-known apparent conflict between James's words that a person is "justified by works" (2:24) and Paul's words that one is "justified by faith" (Rom 3:28). Chapter 11, "A Sketch of James's Theology" (an interesting title in light of the title of the book), provides the particulars of the theology of James using the following categories: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Humanity and Sin, Salvation and the Christian Life, the Church, Last Things. Since Scripture was dealt with as a theme in Chapter 9, it is not included as one of the categories.

The concluding chapters of this book are "Theology at Work" (Chapter 12) and "James for the Twenty-first-Century Church" (Chapter 13). It is Morgan's contention that the exhortations of James are rooted in theology and that the theology presented in James is pastorally applied (169). The timely message that today's church needs to be aware of in light of the theology of James is truth is to be viewed holistically, Christianity brings a reversal of values, covenant faithfulness is important, and most significant of all, the view of the church as presented by the brother of Jesus.

*A Theology of James* is a well-written work that dispels the mistaken idea that James does not have a theology. The intended audience of this book (college seniors, thoughtful lay readers, seminarians, or pastors) and also the series (*Explorations in Biblical Theology*) will be convinced that this five-chapter canonical book has a robust biblical theology. Some of Morgan's

interpretations and conclusions are questionable, although they do fall within the realm of responsible exegesis (i.e., the rich in 1:10–11 as unbelievers; 3:13–18 continuing the argument in 3:1–12 concerning those seeking to be teachers; etc.). At times, one wishes the author had given more exegetical insight into the meaning of phrases and verses (i.e., “the perfect law of liberty” in 1:25; interpretive challenges of 5:14–15; etc.).

Early in the book the author acknowledges that *A Theology of James* uses portions of material from his commentary on James (xi). This is an understatement! Only three chapters, 9, 12, and 13, are substantially new. The other chapters are found in a more concise form or in total in the commentary. The forty-two page fifteenth chapter of the commentary *James* entitled “Theology of James” forms the heart of the book being reviewed. Ideally, the two books should be combined. The advantage of this format is one could easily consult the commentary to determine the basis of the conclusions that were reached by Morgan on scholarly debates in James. Yet, despite this limitation, the reviewer commends this volume to those interested in an important work on the theological message of the practical epistle of James.

Ken Ramey. *Expository Listening*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2010. 127 pp. \$11.99 (softbound). Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Many people who attend church have a set-in-stone mindset that “It is the preacher’s job to preach.” This is accurate to a degree, and not only to preach but to preach the Word accurately and in season and out of season (2 Tim 4). God will hold every preacher and teacher accountable by Him for the biblical truthfulness—or lack thereof—of his sermons. Ken Ramey, a graduate of The Master’s Seminary and the pastor-teacher of Lakeside Bible Church in Montgomery, Texas, argues that the Bible presents this as a much more joint venture between the preacher and the congregation. *Expository Listening* was written primarily with the congregation in mind and not simply to the preacher of the Word.

The book is easy to read and contains some profound quotes from some of the expositors of older and recent times. An ample bibliography for those who want additional reading is included at the end of this book.

Sadly, part of the reason for such a book comes forth from the times in which we live, where many deem the Word and its authoritative preaching to be outdated and irrelevant, as Ramey points out:

The church growth movement that boomed during the eighties and nineties concluded that preaching is an outdated form of communication in our technically advanced, media-savvy society. Surveys found that most listeners were interested only in hearing amusing and inspiring messages that addressed the practical problems they face in life . . . In the last few years, the Emergent Church

Movement has undermined biblical preaching even further by declaring that people no longer recognize the authority of propositional truth or the authority of the preacher. Consequently, preachers must be less authoritative, add more dialogue—swap out biblical confrontation for mere conversation. In fact, some in the movement have gone so far as to hold that the traditional form of preaching characterized by bold declaration is detrimental to the church (5–6).

Fortunately, God strongly disagrees with the above paragraph. *Expository Listening* repeatedly develops and traces many of the verses in Scripture that give the simple and repeated commands to “Hear the Word of the Lord!” Of course, included throughout the multiple times that God calls people to hear His Word is in the truest sense of “hear and obey,” or “hear and take warning.” It is very much an active and on-going call to be implementing by one’s lifestyle the Word that will be heard (James 1:23, 25), with eternal consequences for either doing so in obedience or ignoring it and refusing to submit to it. Often the invitation to hear the Word of the Lord is an invitation to repent (either on the personal or national basis); often it is a warning to repent followed by the consequences of not heeding God’s Word; sometimes it is a rebuke to scoffers; often it is encouragement for the discouraged faithful. But as Isa 55:8–11 clearly shows, God’s Word does not return void without accomplishing all His purposes.

Thus, the listening to God’s Word is not only important but takes a trained and cultivated mind (or ear). Ramey calls for developing a four-step “biblical audiology” (10–22) that will train the listeners of God’s Word to receive more out of the process. Using the example of Jesus’ “Parable of the Soils” reminds us that there is one message but four different responses to the Word by the soils; not everyone is on the same reception level when the Word goes forth. Ramey’s point is well taken and should be helpful for expositors in that soils can change. The preacher’s responsibility is to be faithful in delivering the Word; God is the one who brings about the results that He intends.

*Expository Listening* challenges the listeners to prepare during the week to hear the Word of God, instead of merely showing up on Sunday, as many people do. Aspects of this preparation include a call to prayer, reducing media intake, and spending time with God and the Bible. In short, it is a call to active discipleship that will show itself in this area. The love of God’s Word—or the avoidance of it—will be eventually seen in whether these steps are implemented on a personal or group basis or not. The book contains a “Quick Reference List” of specific things people who take their walks seriously and want to be in the Word of God can do before the sermon, during it, and after it (111–15). Also, each chapter ends with three study or discussion questions for an individual or a group. The final part of each chapter is a brief prayer in asking God to help one implement what has been taught in each chapter. Throughout the book the overriding theme of eternity weaves itself from chapter to chapter as God will even ultimately use some of the messages that people had rejected, when they

stand before Him in judgment. Serious indeed is both the calling to preach the Word and the calling to hear the Word of the Lord.

*Expository Listening* could be used in several different ways. For those doing a church plant, it may be a good book to go through with the potential leadership before studying it as an entire church. It could also be a good Wednesday night study or a Sunday night series. The book could be a helpful Sunday school course for a number of weeks from the youth on up. The concepts within the book are not too difficult for youth to handle, and they may very well be brought under conviction by the very Word of God as to the seriousness of hearing—and heeding—God’s Word. This would be a tremendous blessing in and of itself. *Expository Listening* could also be a useful Bible study for either a men’s or women’s group.

Michael J. Vlach. *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010. 224 pp. \$19.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Mike Vlach has written a detailed and very persuasive book addressing the repeated question over the centuries as to whether the church has replaced Israel, especially as it relates to eschatological matters. “At the heart of the controversy is the question, Does the church replace, supersede, or fulfill the nation Israel in God’s plan, or will Israel be saved and restored with a unique identity and role?” (1) Vlach documents his findings with copious footnotes, which is fitting since he traces the origin and development of the three various forms of replacement theology, referred to throughout the work as “supersessionism.” He argues: “One hermeneutical topic looms especially large—how the NT applies OT passages that speak of Israel’s future. As will be shown, one’s hermeneutical assumptions will largely determine where one lands on the relationship between Israel and the church” (ibid).

Vlach begins with an introduction to supersessionism, which he argues is a better-suited term than “replacement theology”:

Supersessionism, therefore, appears to be based on two core beliefs: (1) the nation Israel has somehow completed or forfeited its status as the people of God and will never again possess a unique role or function apart from the church, and (2) the church is now the true Israel and has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God” (12).

He further delineates between some of the variations within supersessionism.

Part two of the book traces the origin, development, and progression of supersessionism. Vlach explains,

Three factors contributed to the appearance of supersessionism in the early church: (1) the increasing Gentile composition of the early church, (2) the church's perception of the destructions of Jerusalem in AD 70 and 135, and (3) a hermeneutical approach that allowed the church to appropriate Israel's promises to itself. Together these factors contributed to the belief that the church had permanently replaced Israel as God's people (28–29).

He also notes that within this theological camp some are nonetheless looking for a future salvation of the Jewish people including, surprisingly perhaps, Augustine (45–47). In tracing the development of supersessionism up through modern times, Vlach argues that the Holocaust and the modern state of Israel have caused many to reevaluate their position (68–72). Chapter 7, "Supersessionism in the Modern Era," presents one of the most surprising elements within the book, showing the gradual decline of supersessionism in recent times and strong trend, by many, away from this concept. The author supports this observation with quotes from Roman Catholics and Presbyterian groups who are looking for God to work in the nation of Israel in the future (70–71). This section concludes with a summary of supersessionism in church history (75–76).

Part three deals with the hermeneutics of supersessionism. Vlach warns against two extremes that need to be avoided when approach biblical passages. First, assuming the NT always deals with the OT in a straightforward, literal manner, and second, concluding that since NT writers sometimes quote or appeal to OT passages in ways that appear less than literal, then we should not expect any literal fulfillment of OT promises and covenants to Israel (92–93). This contains a very helpful section on this controversial matter of how the NT should influence how the OT should be read (or vice versa).

The final division deals with "Supersessionism and Theological Arguments." Vlach details five primary arguments supersessionists use to support their theological position. In chapter 13, "Evaluating the Theological Arguments for Supersessionism," Vlach offers reasonable rebuttals to the controversial (for some) verses that people use to show that God is done with the nation of Israel, including such passages as Matt 21:43; Gal 3:7, 29 and 6:16; Rom 9:6; 1 Peter 2:9–10; Eph 2:11–22; and Rom 11:16b–24. The concluding chapters are the rationale for the restoration of national Israel including "God's Future Plan for the Nations," and "A Case for the Restoration of National Israel."

Vlach concludes with this assessment: "The primary error of supersessionism is this: *In their desire to emphasize the unity in salvation that Jews and Gentiles have experienced, supersessionists have mistakenly concluded that such unity excludes a special role for Israel in the future*" (204, emphasis his). In agreeing with Ronald Diprose's work *Israel and the Church* (Paternoster, 2004), he states,

“[Diprose] correctly pointed out that on their own merit certain texts ‘may be . . . compatible with *replacement theology*.’ But he also states, ‘They do not require it.’ This is a key distinction. There is an important difference between saying that some texts may be consistent with supersessionism and asserting that certain texts demand supersessionism” (205).

While this book perhaps will not persuade any diehard supersessionists, it will give strong support for the dispensational eschatology and perhaps convince those who are “on the fence” about this indispensable topic that affects how virtually every book in the Bible is to be understood.

*Has the Church Replaced Israel?* would be a most helpful eschatology textbook in a seminary or college, but it also will be very persuasive for those who hold to a literal understanding of the prophetic passages regarding Israel but may not know how to articulate this position or give good answers for friends who are supersessionists. Vlach’s work would also be a wonderful resource for “the educated layman” or student who wanted to dig deeper into this ongoing controversy, if for no other reason that Vlach does such a superb job in clearly laying out “who believes what” and the reasons for their positions. If this book were to be used in a Sunday school or small group, I would recommend it for an advanced college group or that the teacher would walk a less-trained group slowly through this material.

I highly recommend *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* for those who want to get deeper into the Word and who are looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.