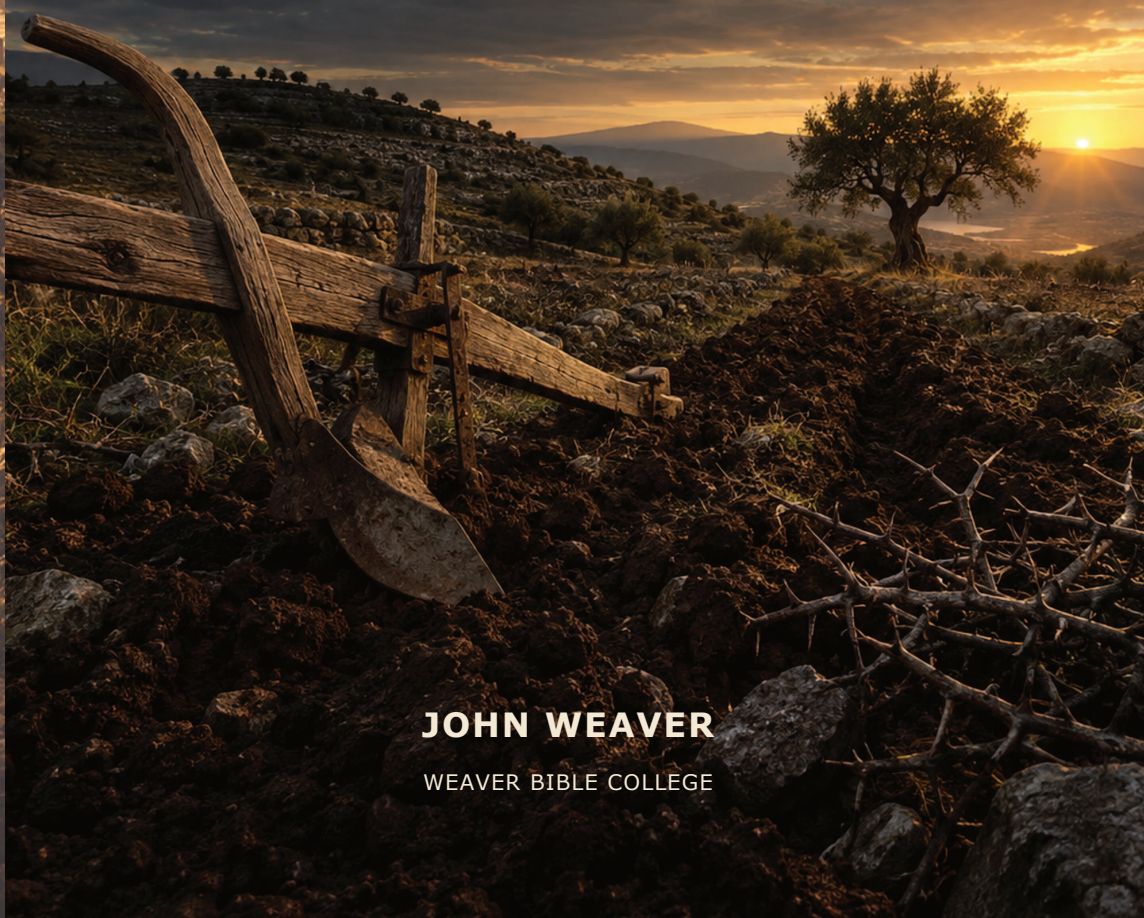
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"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105

Genesis: Creation, Fall, and Dominion



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

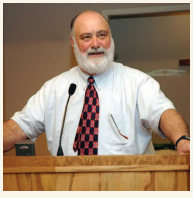
By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

PSALM 33:6

Creation, the fall, and the call to obedience provide the setting for these related messages. John Weaver examines the contrast between commandment and desire, the scope of Christian responsibility, and God's preservation of His people. The collection connects Old Testament examples with the believer's continuing duty to hear and obey Scripture.

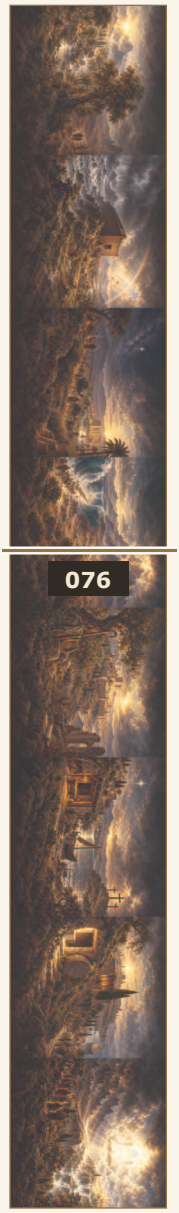
“We persevere in repentance and faith only because He enables us by His preservation.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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Genesis: Creation, Fall, and Dominion

Old Testament Studies

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

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Genesis: Creation, Fall, and Dominion

John Weaver

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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Corrected review edition - October 4, 2026. Repeated full sermons have been consolidated; chapter numbers, contents, indexes, and study-guide reading ranges follow this corrected edition. Original transcript variants remain preserved in the editorial archive. Final editorial and publisher approval is still required.

Contents

Chapter 1: Should A Christian Sing the Battle Hymn? 7

Should a Christian Sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic? 7

Introduction: The Question and Biblical Foundation 7

The Power of Songs to Teach Doctrine and History 8

The Authoress: Julia Ward Howe's Unbelief 9

Howe's Abolitionism and Views on Race 11

The Context of the Poem 11

Context of the Hymn's Writing 13

Analysis of the Hymn's Stanzas 16

Applications and Conclusion 21

Chapter 2: David's Designation of Praise 25

Introduction and Review of Psalm 18 25

God's Grace: The Shield of Salvation 26

God's Preservation: Upheld by His Right Hand 30

God's Condescension: Gentleness Making Great 35

God's Benevolence: Enlarged Steps 38

Applications: Designating Praise and Obedience 39

Chapter 3: The Voice of God 41

Introduction: God Speaks 42

The Manner of God's Voice 43

God's Voice in Written and Living Word 44

Christ the Door and Good Shepherd 46

The Sheepfold and the Shepherd's Voice 47

Christ's Flock Given by the Father 48

His Sheep Hear and Follow; Others Do Not 49

The Sheep Follow the Shepherd Alone 52

God Has Spoken 55

Applications: Hearing and Following Christ 56

Chapter 4: Do Thorns Bother You? 59
Introduction to the Thorny Ground Hearer 59
Thorns Are Distracting 60
The Nature of Thorns: Distracting, Disturbing, and Deadly 60
The Seed Fell Among Thorns: Pre-existing Sins 64
Identifying the Thorns from Matthew, Mark, and Luke 65
The Thorn of the Cares of This World 66
The Thorn of the Deceitfulness of Riches 70
The Thorns of Lust for Other Things and Pleasures of This Life 72
The Thorny Ground Hearer is Unsaved 73
Applications: Dealing with Sin, Neglect, and Repentance 74
Chapter 5: The Present Truth 77
Introduction: Peter's Concern for Remembrance 77
The Necessity of Repeated Truth 77
Christ's Example of Repetition 79
The Danger of Letting Truth Slip 79
The Meaning of 'Established' 80
Blessings of Being Established (Psalm 112) 80
The Danger of Double-Mindedness 81
Defining 'Present Truth' 81
What Present Truth Is Not 82
Progressive Revelation in Scripture 83
Progressive Illumination Today 87
Application: Receiving the Present Truth 89
What Real Preaching Is 92
Receiving the Present Truth 94
Chapter 6: The Scope of Christian Obedience 97
Introduction: The Scope of Obedience 97
Argument from the Lesser to the Greater 98
The Necessity of Recognizing God's Sovereignty 99

Obedience as a Sovereignly Dictated Order of Life 100
The Fall: From Commandment-Oriented to Feeling-Oriented Life 102
Historical Examples of Feeling-Oriented Disobedience 104
The Two Main Hindrances to Obedience: Feelings and Desires 108
The Scope of Christian Obedience 108
Ezekiel's Exemplary Obedience in Devastating Circumstances 109
Application: Our Failures and the Call to Total Obedience 112
Conclusion: Restoration to a Commandment-Oriented Life in Christ 113
Chapter 7: Hanged on Your Own Gallows 115
How to Get Hanged on Your Own Gallows 115
Introduction: The Flesh's Desire to Play God 116
The Serpent's Temptation and Man's Self-Exaltation 116
The Tyranny of Self-Worship 117
Haman: The Agagite and Amalekite Flesh 118
The Flesh Attacks the Weak and Defies God 121
Haman's Pride and Wrath Against Mordecai 123
The Flesh's Self-Destruction: Hanged on His Own Gallows 128
Application: Put on Christ and Mortify the Flesh 129
Chapter 8: Biblical Humility 133
Introduction: The Misunderstanding of Humility 133
The World's Pride vs. Biblical Humility 134
Advantages of True Humility 135
The Two Greatest Examples of Humility 136
Humility Is a State of Mind 138
Humility Is a State of Dependence upon God 141
Humility and Blessing 145
Humility Is a State of Blessing 145
Application: The Need for a Servant's Heart 147
Topical Index 151
Scripture Index 155
Study Guide Link 163

CHAPTER 1

Should A Christian Sing the Battle Hymn?

April 30, 2006

Should a Christian Sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic?

Introduction: The Question and Biblical Foundation

The Word of God says in Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Then a parallel passage is found in Colossians 3:16, where the Word of God says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

The message is entitled, "Should a Christian Sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic?" I suppose the correct question to ask would be this: Should a Christian or a Southerner sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic?

In Ephesians 5:19, we read about psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. You read that same division in Colossians 3:16. Let me point out that the division between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is an actuality, a reference to the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms itself, that Old Testament book, is divided into psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Thus, when the Word of God speaks of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, it is not merely using three unrelated expressions; it is referring to an actual division found in the book of Psalms.

There is no hymn, no matter how beautiful, that is on a par with those psalms, because those psalms are indeed the inspired Word of God. They are the only divinely inspired psalms, hymns, and songs that we have.

The Power of Songs to Teach Doctrine and History

Our ignorance and our lack of understanding on these issues increase as the years go by. In fact, we tend to forget that which we really have known in times past. Do you realize that one of the problems we face today is that there are so many things to think about and so many things to do? Who in the world would want to waste their time thinking about a hymn, a song, or a poem that was written 140 years ago? Well, let me point out the fact that what we have forgotten is that doctrine may be taught with songs. Whether that song is good or bad, or whether the doctrine is good or bad, you can always teach doctrine with songs. Songs can likewise teach history, whether it is true or untrue, with a song.

I never will forget running into a little girl one time. She was probably about four or five years old. The little kid was on the street, and she was singing, “When you’re out of Schlitz, you’re out of beer.” And I thought, What? Well, it was just a catchy tune, and it caught her. Then Alice and I were at Mule Day in Georgia, and we saw this little kid in a stroller, about three years old, singing, “Outback, Steakhouse, Outback,” over and over. That was all he was saying. So, you can teach things with songs, and sooner or later, people come to accept them.

Now, in order to understand the Battle Hymn of the Republic, you have to understand the context of that song. The context of the

Battle Hymn of the Republic involves the northern view of power, the centralization of government, the extermination of the South, the righteousness of the Northerners in committing genocide, and enforcing their religious and cultural views upon the South. When Reconstruction occurred under the Radical Republican Congress and was enforced by military rule, many Northerners rushed to the South to garner their spoils, and they brought with them their religion, their culture, and their song.

Let me point it out very graphically. In times past, no Christian and no self-respecting Southerner would ever sing or stand while the Battle Hymn of the Republic was being sung. Today, however, that hymn is sung in a multitude of churches on every patriotic day, and unhappily, it is even sung in Southern churches. Christians themselves sing it. In reality, the Battle Hymn is not a hymn. By definition, a hymn is a song that incorporates biblical truth and especially celebrates the doctrine of God. We have many such hymns, like Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

"And Can It Be That I Should Gain an Interest in My Savior's Love?" How about "How Firm a Foundation" and "Like a River Glorious"? These are all hymns that celebrate the deity, greatness, and majesty of God. But "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was not written by a Christian, nor does it express the Christian faith. It takes truth out of context and applies that truth, and it has a very sinister and wicked origin.

The Authoress: Julia Ward Howe's Unbelief

Let us begin by considering the authoress. Most of you know that "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written by Julia Ward Howe. She was the wife of Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, a prominent physician who was also a socialist, a Unitarian, and a member of the Secret Six. Her husband belonged to that treasonous group known as the Secret Six. They were wealthy men who sought to foment and start the war of Northern Aggression by inciting a slave rebellion in the South. These were the men who sponsored John Brown, giving him money and all kinds of aid.

As a Unitarian, Julia Ward Howe would certainly claim to be a Christian, yet she denied the cardinal doctrines of the Christian

faith. She denied the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ. She denied the inspiration of the Bible and many other biblical truths. Julia Ward Howe believed the Unitarian doctrine that man is characteristically good and can redeem himself by his own merits, without the need of a savior. She rejected a multitude of biblical truths, including the doctrine of literal hell. She said, "I threw away once and forever the thought of that terrible hell which appears to me impossible."

Her reason for rejecting hell was that it appeared irrational, unreasonable, and impossible to her. For a Unitarian, rationalism—their own thinking—is the standard, not the Word of God. Thus, she denied the doctrine of a real, literal hell.

Moreover, she explicitly refuted the claims of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said in John 14, verse 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Thus, Jesus Christ said explicitly that he is the only way of salvation and the only way to the Father. Listen to the words of Julia Ward Howe: "Having rejected the exclusive doctrine that made Christianity, and special forms of it, the only way of spiritual redemption, I now accept the belief that not only Christians, but that all human beings, no matter what their religion, are capable of redemption. Christianity was but one of God's plans for bringing all humanity to a state of ultimate perfection." By her own statements, Julia Ward Howe made it exceedingly clear that she believed Jesus Christ was not the exclusive way to the Father, and that there were a multitude of ways by which individuals might be converted.

She said, "Not until the Civil War did I officially join the Unitarian Church and accept the fact that Christ was merely a good teacher with no higher claim to preeminence in wisdom, goodness, and power than many other men." Julia Ward Howe believed that Jesus Christ was no better than any other man, and that his wisdom and righteousness were no more than those of other men. He was merely a man. She did not believe that he was God, and she certainly did not believe that he was the God-man.

Julia Ward Howe also preached in Unitarian churches and was an ardent abolitionist. She became a celebrated author in the North and supported the radical abolitionist movement. She was a social

reformer and basically an American socialist and communist. She often preached in Unitarian and Universalist churches and continued in the Church of the Disciples, led by her old friend and pastor, James Freeman Clarke, often speaking in his pulpit.

Howe's Abolitionism and Views on Race

Beginning in 1873, she hosted an annual gathering of women ministers and, in the 1870s, helped to found what is known as the Free Religious Association. Julia Ward Howe and her husband, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, were not simply abolitionists; they were what were known as disunion abolitionists.

The Context of the Poem

As disunion abolitionists, what they wanted to do was tear apart our confederated republic, destroy our constitutional republic, and remake the United States according to their own radical political, cultural, and religious ideas. History records some of the success of their treason.

While being ardent abolitionists, Julia Ward Howe, along with those of her ilk, in reality hated and despised the black race. You would think that abolitionists would have high regards for black people, but Julia Ward Howe wrote, "The ideal Negro would be one refined by white culture and elevated by white blood." She also wrote that "the Negro among Negroes is coarse, grinning, flat-footed, thick-skulled creature, ugly as Caliban, lazy as the laziest brutes, chiefly ambitious to be of no use to any of the world, and he must go to school to the white race, and his discipline must be long and laborious."

She held a very low estimate of all blacks. Who was Julia Ward Howe? She was a socialist, a communist, a reformer, an abolitionist, and a Unitarian. She believed that man could be reformed, regenerated, transfigured, and elevated by government. Like Abraham Lincoln, she held to the centralization of power in the hands of the government, and basically she was anti-Christian. Although the battle hymn employs biblical allusions and illustrations, it is in no way a biblical or a Christian song. The

authoress, then, was an outright unbeliever and a despiser of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, consider the context of the writing of this poem. Before the immediate context, remember the remote context. Whenever you are studying Scripture, you always want to look at a verse in its immediate context—the paragraph above or below it, or simply the paragraph in which the verse occurs. The remote context may include one chapter, several chapters, or the entire book. Everything has a remote context and an immediate context as well. Pastor Charles Jennings gives a very succinct definition of the remote context, and he says this.

During this time in American history, the South was quite different in many ways from the North. The South was more agrarian and rural, while the North was more industrialized and urban. The South advocated the traditional interpretation of the constitutional principles of our Founding Fathers concerning states' rights and local governmental control, as opposed to the Northern Republican Party view of centralized governmental powers. The people of the South were more traditional in maintaining their culture, dating back to their Celtic ancestors, whereas the North was rapidly losing its radical and cultural traditions through the influx of more liberal ideas of equalitarianism. The educational institutions of the South were more conservative in thought and practice, as opposed to the northern concepts of universalism, humanism, deism, and rationalism that had crept into once great academic institutions such as Harvard and Yale. At this critical time in our history, the South was definitely more adamant in its stalwart defense of traditional Calvinistic Christianity, dating back to the early reformers, while the religious establishments of the North were accepting and promoting the fallacious, anti-biblical concepts of the more modernistic approach to such truths as the authenticity and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

There were so many differences between the North and the South—not just traditionally, but culturally, religiously, and economically. The people of the South were basically laid-back; the people of the North were never laid-back. I never will forget that I had an aunt and uncle who moved north to Toledo, Ohio, and stayed

there for years, until my uncle retired from the Chevrolet plant there. Then they moved back south. My aunt could not get over the fact that down south everyone waved. She said, “You know, up north, if someone waves at you, you run the other way.” But she said, “You can’t go down the street without fifteen or twenty people speaking to you or waving to you.” There was a great difference between the North and the South. Whatever differences you want to look at, I can assure you they were there, and they were great.

Context of the Hymn's Writing

The immediate context in which this battle hymn came to be written happened like this. In 1862, Samuel Gridley Howe and his wife, Julia Ward Howe, were invited to Washington by President Lincoln. The Howes visited a Union Army camp across from the Potomac, where they heard the men singing a song to the tune of “John Brown’s Body.” There happened to be two tunes to that song: one in which the North sang in celebration of John Brown and one in which the South sang in celebration of his death.

A clergyman who happened to be a friend and pastor of Julia Ward Howe, James Freeman Clarke, knew that Julia Ward was a poet. He asked her to write a song that would replace the words to “John Brown’s Body.” Here are Julia Ward Howe’s own words:

“I replied that I’d often wished to do so. In spite of the excitement of the day, I went to bed and slept as usual, but awoke the next morning in the gray of the early dawn, and to my astonishment found that the wished-for lines were arranging themselves in my brain. I lay quite still until the last verse had completed itself in my thoughts, then hastily arose, saying to myself, ‘I shall lose this if I do not write it down immediately.’ I searched for an old sheet of paper and an old stub of a pen, which I had had the night before, and began to scrawl the lines almost without looking, as I learned to do by often scratching down verses in the darkened room when my little children were sleeping. Having completed this, I lay down again and fell asleep, but not before feeling that something of importance had happened unto me.”

Julia Ward Howe had been asked to write this poem, and she says that she woke up with all these verses raising themselves in her brain and got up to write them down.

Mrs. Howe and her husband had become deeply involved in the antislavery movement during the 1840s and 1850s. They helped edit the Boston Commonwealth. In her zeal and desire for social reform, Mrs. Howe came to revere and respect one of the basest and vilest men who ever lived: the Kansas murderer and terrorist John Brown.

Mrs. Howe and John Brown mutually admired each other. She wrote that John Brown "was a Puritan of the Puritans," which she intended as a positive statement, and that "he was forceful, concentrated and self-contained." Brown, in a letter to a friend, described Mrs. Howe as "a defiant little woman" whose personality was "all flash and fire," qualities that appealed to him. Thus John Brown and Julia Ward Howe mutually respected and admired each other.

To show the extent of that admiration, Julia Ward Howe wrote a letter to her sister. She was in complete sympathy with Brown's viciousness and his plans to destroy the South. She wrote: "I've just been to church, Unitarian Church, and heard James Freeman Clarke, another Unitarian minister, preach about John Brown, whom God blessed and will bless. I am much too dull to write anything good about him, but shall say something at the end of my book on Cuba, whereupon I am at present correcting the proof sheets."

"I went to see his poor wife, who passed through here some days since. We shed tears together and embraced at parting. Poor soul! Brown's attempt I must judge insane, but the spirit heroic. I should be glad to be as sure of heaven as that old man may be." She then described him as "following right in the spirit and footsteps of the old martyrs, girding on his sword for the weak and oppressed."

She continued: "Listen, his death will be holy and glorious, the new saint awaiting martyrdom, and who, if he shall suffer execution, which he did, will make the gallows glorious like the cross of Jesus Christ." Julia Ward Howe said that the murderer and terrorist John Brown would make the gallows on which he was hanged as glorious

as the cross of Jesus Christ. After his infamous murdering rampage and attack on Harper's Ferry, when John Brown was condemned to die, Mrs. Howe again said that his death would be holy and glorious and that he would glorify the gallows as Jesus glorified the cross.

In her letter to her sister, Julia Ward Howe said, "I should be glad to be sure of heaven, as that old man may be." That old man, as Howe referred to him, was nothing less than a terrorist and a murderer. He, his sons, and his followers murdered innocent men and boys. John Brown massacred these men along Pottawatomie Creek, and he is sometimes referred to as Pottawatomie Brown.

His first three victims were James P. Doyle and his sons, Drury and William. The Doyles were Roman Catholics from Tennessee who had moved to Kansas to get away from slavery. They had never owned a slave, did not agree with slavery, and had nothing to do with slaves. But because they spoke with a southern drawl, or perhaps because they were Catholic, Brown marched them into a clearing, where he split their skulls open with a sword, and then their arms were hacked off. When Mrs. Doyle was later asked why her husband and sons had been so brutally murdered, she answered, "Just because we were southern people, I reckon."

Tim Manning makes a statement in his book concerning the Battle Hymn of the Republic, and I want you to think about how accurate it is. Remember Mrs. Doyle's answer: "Just because we were southerners, I reckon." Manning says, "Southerners are just about the only minority in the United States about whom it is permitted, even popular, to hate. There is no negative stereotype about Southerners that is still not permitted, even encouraged, by politicians, the press, and the entertainment media. Northern nativism is still strong in the North and racism against Southern whites is still politically correct in spite of its long and bloody history. There is nothing too evil anyone can say about the South and Southern history and culture."

That is basically the attitude of Hollywood, the media, and the establishment. Those Doyles were simply the first of John Brown's victims. Another victim was Allen Wilkinson, a recent settler from the South. He was executed while his wife and children watched in horror. William Sherman—not William Tecumseh Sherman,

unhappily—was also a victim of John Brown. His mutilated body was found floating in the creek, with his left hand hanging only by a narrow strand of skin. His skull was split open.

People who had given up their faith in the Bible and Christianity and embraced humanism and Unitarianism considered John Brown a national savior, performing the work of God, and placed him on the same footing as Jesus Christ. Newspapers of that day showed cartoons of John Brown hanging on a cross like Jesus, dying for the sins of us all. Julia Ward Howe wrote of the wonderful justice of John Brown's brutal massacres.

She included that in her hymn when she spoke of the terrible swift sword, which I will mention a little later. That terrible swift sword was old John Brown hacking to pieces mercilessly innocent men and boys. Incidentally, when John Brown made his raid at Harper's Ferry, the first man killed by John Brown himself was a free black. Heyward Shepherd was a porter for the B&O Railroad, and John Brown shot him in the back as he was running for his life. John Brown said he came to the South to free the slaves, yet the first man he murdered in the attack on Harper's Ferry was a free black.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic can only be understood within the framework of this transcendentalist Unitarian creed. It may use biblical imagery and allusions, but it is not biblical and it is not Christian. Let us consider the words of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Here is the first stanza:

Analysis of the Hymn's Stanzas

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on."

Mrs. Howe is applying the apocalyptic judgment mentioned in Isaiah and Revelation against the Confederated Republic. In this first stanza, she pictures the Union Army not only as the instrument that would cause southern blood to flow upon the earth, but also as the very expression of the word—the sword itself. You have to remember that the Unitarians believed evil could be rooted out of

man by governmental action. The South was evil. Therefore, the righteous northern government, with this terrible swift sword that John Brown began, would root out the evil Southerners and the evil in the South by destroying it and bringing Armageddon upon the South. She portrayed the Union Army as the coming of the glory of the Lord.

What were they doing? They were trampling out His vintage where the grapes of wrath were stored. Where are the grapes of wrath? In the South. They were going to trample out the southern people. The first stanza presents the northern army acting as Christ, destroying and stamping out the wicked South and destroying the Southern people because, according to their philosophy, the South deserved to be destroyed.

Isaiah 63 gives the image Julia Ward Howe uses. This is a picture of Christ destroying His enemies:

"Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength?"

"I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me, for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment."

"For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help, and I wondered that there was none to uphold. Therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth."

Here is a picture of Jesus Christ destroying His enemies. This is the passage that Julia Ward Howe took and applied to the Union Army destroying God's enemies. Just as Christ trampled out the winepress and the blood flowed, so the Union Army was going to destroy the Southern people and trample out the wickedness of the Southern people.

Tim Manning, in his book On the Battle Hymn, asks a very legitimate question: “What horrible crime had the South committed to warrant its extermination? The people of the South were guilty of wanting independence for a government of their own choosing. A pro-Christian, God-based government that safeguarded God-given human rights, individual liberty, and put strict limits on the powers of the shared central federal government. This was the type of government the Founders established in 1776, and the South was trying to preserve it as it had been given to them.”

That is basically why she decided the South deserved to be trampled out and destroyed. The first stanza pictures the Northern Army as Christ trampling out the enemies—the South and the Southern people—because they were wicked, ungodly, and deserving of judgment.

In the second stanza she writes: “I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps. They have built Him an altar in the evening dews and damps. I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps. His day is marching on.”

She said, “I have seen Him,” God. Where did she see God? “I have seen Him,” God, “in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps.” That was the Union Camp. To her, Lincoln’s 75,000 volunteers were the army of God, going forth to slaughter the evil resistors of social reform and progressive centralized government. She said they had built in Him an altar.

Stop and ask: What does that mean? “They have built Him an altar.” Does that refer to the stacked arms ready to be used against the southern people? She said, “I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps.” Were these the campfires of the northern soldiers, or perhaps the lamps in their tents? She said she had seen this in “His evening dews and damps.” What was she saying? Those tents, stacked arms, and that campfire were nothing less than the very altar to God Himself.

That is not only unbiblical, it is not only ridiculous; it is blasphemous. There is another thought that I could throw out. When she says that you can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps, it could also be an allusion to musket and cannon fire.

If you are going to be reading the sentence of judgment and destruction, where could you see it more plainly than in the instruments of death? How could anyone, as a Christian or Southerner, sing that is beyond me.

The third stanza is even worse. It is so unbiblical, so anti-Christ, so anti-Christian, and beyond belief. “I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel. As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal. Let the hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel, since God is marching on.” Now, wait a minute. These fixed bayonets and rows of cannon are God's gospel, she says. She has read “a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel,” and then says, “As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal. Let the hero, born of woman” do this.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 3 and look at verse 15 for a moment. I want you to see the allusion that she is referring to. In Genesis 3:15, you have what is known as the Protevangelium. “Prote” means first or one, and “Evangelium” means the gospel. So what you have in Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of the Messiah.

Genesis 3:15 contains the very first promise of the Messiah: God says to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” That Messiah will be born of a woman and will bruise the serpent’s head.

What does Julia Ward Howe do? She takes that verse out of context. Instead of the hero being born of woman referring to Christ, she applies it to the Union soldiers. Then she says, “As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal.” Who were the contemners? The southern people. In other words, we were the ones who were guilty; we were holding God in contempt.

I am not making this up. “I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel. As ye deal with my contemners,” that is, as you judge and destroy the South, “so with you my grace shall deal.” In other words, God will bless and give grace to the northern army as they destroy the South. Julia Ward Howe’s theology and philosophy

was the same philosophy held by the Roman Catholic Church during the Crusades.

You earn salvation by killing the infidels. We were the infidels. Listen: “As ye deal with my contemners,” that is, as you destroy them, as you judge them, “so with you my grace shall deal.” Then she says to the northern army that “the hero, born of woman,” that’s them, “crush the serpent with his heel,” that’s us. She takes this passage, which refers to Jesus Christ, and applies it to the Union Army. She says that we are the serpent’s seed, and we’re the ones who need to be crushed, destroyed, and annihilated.

How can any Christian, and how can any southerner, sing that hymn? The fourth stanza returns to the idea of judgment:

“He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat. He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat. Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet! Our God is marching on.”

What does this fourth stanza call for? It calls for a full, final, and complete destruction of the South. No retreat: “He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat.”

She is saying that Abraham Lincoln sent out a call for 75,000 volunteers to destroy the South. The men who answered Lincoln’s call represented the judgment seat of Christ. In simple language, their response to Lincoln’s call for volunteers to deny eight million Southerners the right of self-government demonstrated whether they were for or against Christ. If you wanted to be on the right side, you were to be swift and jubilant: your feet should hurry with gladness and joy to join the Northern Army and crush the South. Destroy it.

Here is the fifth and final stanza: “In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, with a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me. As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, while God is marching on.” There is nothing biblical about this song. “In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea”—that sounds wonderful. But lilies do not grow in stables. Christ was born in a stable, in a manger. There were no lilies there.

Secondly, only those who are in Christ are transformed and will be ultimately transfigured. Only Jesus Christ was transfigured in this life, upon the Mount of Transfiguration. We as Christians, as believers, will not be "transfigured" until glorification.

Julia demonstrates her disbelief in Christ, His sufficiency, and His atonement by saying, "As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free." You cannot make anyone free. You cannot free people from their sins. Jesus Christ, in John 8:36, says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." What was Julia Ward Howe saying? Christ did not finish salvation; we must finish it. Government must do something. People must do something. Let us do what Christ did not do and could not do.

Applications and Conclusion

The Battle Hymn of the Republic is not biblical. It is not Christian.

When you hear it sung, first think about the five innocent men and boys that old John Brown murdered and hacked to pieces. Second, think about the 620,000 Americans, North and South, who died in that horrible war, which transformed America from a constitutional republic to a centralized bureaucracy. Think especially of the Southern men who gave their lives for Southern independence.

Secondly, listen carefully: Julia Ward Howe used God and used biblical imagery to rub salt in the wounds of Christians. One of our problems is this: American Christians have been so dumbed down, we cannot think. I try to say this often, as lovingly and kindly as I can, but we don't know our Bibles. We don't know our history. We don't know our heritage. When you allow an unbeliever to write a song denigrating Christ, denigrating His Word, denigrating His people, and then put that song in a church where Christians sing it heartily and lustily, it is beyond belief. Isn't it true that most of us, when we go to church and sing hymns, we never think about what we're saying? We say the words. She wrote a unbiblical, ungodly song, and Christians everywhere sing it.

The third application is this. The Battle Hymn has nothing to do with Christianity or God; it is a political, patriotic song about the

destruction of the South in religious terminology. Julia Ward Howe deliberately created the idea that the North was doing God's work. It paints a picture of God destroying His enemies in the South, thus elevating the North and her battle to a holy war against an unholy people. So Howe in her hymn portrays the South and its people as evil and the enemy of God. How can any Southerner sing that song? When you do see it, you're undoubtedly giving tacit approval and agreement with Mrs. Howe and her opinions. The inimitable Mark Twain saw the hypocrisy and the perversity of the Battle Hymn. Mark Twain wrote his own version of the Battle Hymn of the Republic to mock Julia Ward Howe.

Mark Twain's version presents one of the reasons for the war: "Mine eyes have seen the orgy of the launching of the sword. He is searching out the hoardings where the stranger's wealth is stored. He has loosed his fateful lightnings and with woe and death has scored. His lust is marching on.

"I have seen him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps. They have built him an altar in the eastern dews and damps. I have read his doomful mission in the dim and flaring lamps. His night is marching on. I have read his bandit gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel. As you deal with my pretensions, so with you my wrath shall deal.

"Let the faithless son of freedom," the North, "crush the patriot," the South, "with his heel. Lo, greed is marching on. We have legalized this trumpet, and are guarding her retreat. Greed is seeking out commercial souls before his judgment seat. O, be swift, you clods, be jubilant, my feet, our God is marching on. In a sort of slimy, harmonious greed, was born in yonder ditch, with a longing in his bosom for others' goods an itch."

"As Christ died to make men holy, let us die to make men rich. Our God is marching on." Mark Twain understood what General Smedley Butler understood. General Butler, a retired Marine from 1881 to 1940, wrote, "War is a racket." And I want you to think about what Mark Twain wrote, and let me read to you just the first three short paragraphs of General Butler's book. Mark Twain said it's about greed, it's about lust, it's about pride and power. Here's what General Butler wrote, "War is a racket. It always has been."

"It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to be to the majority of the people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about."

"It is conducted for the benefit of very few at the expense of the very many. Out of war, a few people make huge fortunes." What was he saying? The same thing that Mark Twain said. It's all about money. It's all about power.

Now, let me ask and answer a question. Should a Christian sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic? Should a Southerner sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic? The answer should be obvious. With such a perversion of history and such a perversion of the scripture, and with such narrow minded bigotry that is being portrayed against the South, I do not understand or see how any Christian or any southerner could either stand or sing.

That song is being sung against Christ, against the Bible, and against the South. It is a war song, a Yankee marching song, as they came to rape, loot, burn, and destroy—hardly an honorable thing to do.

Father, we are thankful today for Jesus Christ, for His Word, His truth, and His blessings. Teach us, Lord, to think in biblical and historical terms, and help us make application of Your Word to every area of our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

David's Designation of Praise

February 10, 2008

Introduction and Review of Psalm 18

Psalm 18, beginning there in verse 35, David says, "Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation, and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip."

In verse 1, we looked at David's determination when he said, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." Love consists of an attitude, affection, as well as action. If you have a biblical attitude, you will have biblical affection, and that will result in biblical action. We also saw the reason David said, "I will love thee, O Lord." In verses 1 and 2, David said the Lord is his rock, his fortress, his deliverer, his God, his strength, his buckler, the horn of his salvation, and his high tower.

In verses 3 through 6, we looked at David's distress. He pointed out that he was in great distress. Oftentimes, when we forget God, God backs each of us up against the wall where we can remember. David was in great distress, and he said in verse 6, "In my distress I

called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: and he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before his ears."

In verses 7 through 19, we looked at David's deliverer and saw how God made haste to help him after he cried unto God in prayer. In verses 20 through 28, we looked at David's deportment. If we want to be delivered by God, we need to act biblically, scripturally, and obediently. That is what David is saying in that section.

In verses 29 through 33, we looked at David's defense and how God was indeed his defense. He said in verse 29, "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." Verse 32 says, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." Last week, I dealt with verse 34 and entitled the message "Lord Teaches to Fight," for David said, "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms."

David's designation is really a designation of praise. David was indeed a mighty warrior, and according to Psalm 18:34, it was God who taught David to fight. Over and over in the psalm, David attributes all honor and glory to God. In verses 35 through 36, he specifically designates God as the author and source of all his blessings. David does not look to his skill, tactics, resourcefulness, or abilities. He looks beyond them and sees God; he proclaims that God is his all and in all.

In verse 35 he says, “Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation, and thy right hand hath holden me up, thy gentleness hath made me great, thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip.” From these two verses, we see four simple truths: God's grace—“Thou hast given me thy salvation”; God's preservation—“Thy right hand is holding me up”; God's condescension—“Thy gentleness has made me great”; and God's benevolence—“Thou hast enlarged my steps.” First, then, consider God's grace: “Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation.”

God's Grace: The Shield of Salvation

George Gilpin, writing in 1852 concerning Psalm 18, said: “We find this as existing between David and God, the delivered and the deliverer, beautifully pursued throughout this whole psalm. I will

love thee, O Lord, my strength. I will call upon thee, O Lord, who is worthy to be praised. He sent from above. He took me. He drew me out of many waters. Thou wilt light my candle. Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation. Thou hast girded me with strength unto battle. Thou hast given me the necks of mine enemies. Thou hast made me the head of the heathen."

It has been ingenuously argued that the existence of the "I" inevitably suggests the polar opposite, the "Thou," and that man's personality thus proves the personality of God. But be this as it may, David's perception of that personality is nowhere as intense as it is here.

He seems not only to see, but to feel and to touch the object of his gratitude and worship. What Gilpin is simply pointing out is that, in this psalm, there is a great intimacy expressed between David and God. When David says in verse 35, "Thou hast also given me the shield of my salvation," he is giving us a metaphor, and a metaphor which we should understand.

So we have to ask this question: How is God our shield of salvation?

Remember, I have already explained in this psalm the difference between a shield and a buckler. The word for shield here is the Hebrew word magen, which is the word for buckler. However, the shield defends only a small area of the human body, while with the buckler, the entire body can be hidden behind it. David is saying, "Thou hast given me the shield, the buckler of thy salvation"—something behind which my entire being can be hidden.

I also pointed out that the Hebrew word for salvation is Yeshua, and the Hebrew word for Jesus is Yeshua. The word Jesus literally means salvation. Therefore, when he says, "Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation," I want you to understand that, according to verse 35, David is emphasizing that God provides salvation. Notice what he says: "Thou hast also given me the shield of"—what is that next word?—"Thy salvation." It is God's salvation. Salvation did not originate with man.

Man does not initiate salvation. Salvation originated with God. When God revealed the tabernacle to Moses, God began with the

inside and went outward: He began with the Holy of Holies, proceeded to the holy place, and then the tent. But when Moses set it up, he set up the tent and then worked inward. Scripture is showing us that man's response to God is only because of God's grace, God's initiation, and God's origination. Everything is of God.

Do you remember when our Lord said that He is the Alpha and the Omega? The Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the Omega is the last. He is the beginning and the end. I submit to you, He is not only the beginning and the end, but also everything in between. Jonah said it like this: "Salvation is of the Lord."

Now, let me show you this from Scripture. David said, "Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation." If you will turn very quickly in your Bible, holding Psalm 18 to Genesis chapter 15, you will see the very first time the word shield occurs in the Bible. Genesis 15, and I want you to look at verse 1 and notice if you would please what is being said and by whom it is being said. So in Genesis 15 and verse 1, the Bible tells us this, Genesis 15 verse 1, "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Note, if you would, the word of the Lord came to Abram. In other words, Abram was not seeking God. God came to him. God was the originator. God was the initiator. God came to him and said, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield."

May I point out the fact that when God found Abraham originally, initially, where did God find him? In Ur of the Chaldees. Abram was an idolater, worshiping false gods. Abram was not seeking God. He was not looking for truth. No. God came to him and God revealed Himself to him and said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy father's house." So David said, "Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation." Since God is our shield, like the Bible says in Genesis 15 in verse 1, when He told Abram, "Fear not, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward," since God is our shield, it necessarily follows that God is our salvation.

Now, let me show you how that is used throughout Scripture. Look in Deuteronomy chapter 33 and verse 29. Deuteronomy 33 verse 29. Just a couple of passages. Deuteronomy 33, and look in verse 29. Deuteronomy 33 verse 29: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who

is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thine excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places." Note that: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord," and then he identifies the Lord as the shield of thy help. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Psalm 84 and look at verse 11. Psalm 84 and verse 11. Psalm 84 and verse 11. Here the Bible says, "For the Lord God is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory."

"No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Notice the Lord is the sun and shield, but notice in Him being our shield, it is God who gives us grace. It is God who gives us glory.

It is interesting how this word shield occurs in reference to God over and over in the Bible. Psalm 115: “O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great.” Why? Because He is our shield. Since He is our shield, He is our salvation. That is why, over and over, the Bible tells us that we are to trust in Him.

It is no wonder the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 and verse 16, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” What is the shield of faith? It is the shield of salvation which God gives. David said, “Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation.”

God’s shield of salvation not only speaks of our spiritual salvation, but also of temporal salvation. In the book of Philippians, Paul asked the Philippians to pray for him, and he said, “This shall also turn to my salvation.” Was Paul already saved? Yes, he was the mighty apostle, and he was already saved; but he was not speaking of spiritual, eternal salvation. Paul was in prison and was speaking of temporal salvation: “This will turn to my salvation.” In other words, he would be delivered from prison. When the Bible tells us that God is the shield of our salvation, it is God’s grace that not only saves us

spiritually and eternally; it is God's grace that saves us temporally, in time and in history, as well.

In Psalm 18:35, David says, "Thou hast also given me the shield of my salvation." Then he says, "Thy right hand hath holden me up." We have not only God's grace, but also God's preservation. We must consider the fact that it is God who preserves us until, in, and through His salvation.

God's Preservation: Upheld by His Right Hand

Let me ask you a series of questions. Think about this; do not answer out loud, but answer in your own mind. Why did you not die before you were saved? You could say, "Because of God's grace," and that is true. But it is also because of God's preservation. He allowed you to live until you were converted by His grace; He did not allow you to die until you heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ.

Why did you not die immediately after you were saved? The answer is because of God's preservation. God not only preserved you until you were saved; He has preserved you through His salvation. He has allowed you to live, serve Him, minister on Him, worship Him, and have all these things He has given you to richly enjoy. That is God's preservation. Now, why is it

That God allows you to live through last night, come here today, and listen to this message—what is the answer? God's preservation. Some folks did not live through last night. Some may be alive, but barely, and unable to hear the word of God. All I am trying to show you is God's preservation. David said in Psalm 18, "Thy right hand hath holden me up."

Now I want to show you how grace and preservation go together. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 3:3: "But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." Pay close attention to the phrase, "the lifter up of mine head."

Let me give you what old John Gill said about it. He wrote, "The Lord was the lifter up of David's head when he brought him to the throne and afterwards gave him victory over all of his enemies. For so the phrase of lifting up the head signifies"—and then he gives the scriptures—"and he was the lifter up of Christ's head when he raised

him from the dead and exalted him both with and at his right hand to be a prince and a savior and gave him a name which is above every name. And he is the lifter up of the heads of his people in conversion, when he raises them from a low estate and sets them among princes to inherit the throne of glory, and when he gives them comfort, peace, and joy, which causes them to lift up their heads, whereas in sorrow and mourning and distress the head is bowed down like a bulrush."

"And when He gives them boldness and confidence at the throne of grace, now, through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon them, so at the bar of judgment hereafter, through the righteousness of Christ put upon them, as they shall not be ashamed nor confounded, and He will be the lifter up of their heads in the resurrection morning, when they shall appear there with Christ in glory." How does God lift up our heads? Not just by giving us victory or saving us, but by allowing us not to be confounded or ashamed. Over and over in the book of Psalms, the Bible says, "He that trusteth in the Lord shall not be ashamed." Confusion belongs to those who do not trust the Lord. But those of us who trust in the Lord have confidence toward Him—in prayer and in death. Why? We belong to the Lord. He is the lifter up of our head.

Now, if you look back in Psalm 18, David says, "Thy right hand hath holden me up." Certainly, David was correct when he said in Psalm 5:12, "For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." God is going to bless us, He has blessed us, and He is going to comfort us. The plain, simple truth of the phrase "Thy right hand hath holden me up" is that God kept David from falling into the snares and mischief which he feared and which his enemies had designed for him.

When the Bible speaks of God's right hand holding us up, have you ever thought about how often the wicked wonder how Christians can endure what they endure? Think of those martyrs tied to stakes, wood piled around them and set on fire. As the flames licked up around them, they sang hymns and psalms and praised God as they died. Think of saints who have gone through some of the most extreme difficulties and were still able to praise God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said it like this: “Secret support is administered to us by the preserving grace of God, and at the same time, Providence kindly yields us manifest aids. We are such babes that we cannot stand alone. But when the Lord’s right hand upholds us, we’re like brazen pillars which cannot be moved.” And that’s true, folks. Obviously, in the context when David says, “Thy right hand hath holden me up,” he is teaching us that it is the power and the grace of God that preserves us and sustains us.

However, I want us to look at this phrase just a little more closely. I think you’re going to see something that might really encourage you. David said in verse 35, “And thy right hand hath holden me up.” I want to call your attention to the phrase “right hand.” Here is what I want you to do: follow me in a number of Scriptures. First, I want to show you some Scriptures that emphasize the right hand; then I am going to show you some Scriptures that explain it. Hold Psalm 18, but turn back to Psalm 16. Let us go through the Psalms very quickly and consider the emphasis upon the right hand.

In Psalm 16 and verse 11, David says, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Look in Psalm 17 and verse 7: “Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.” Notice, “O thou that savest by thy right hand.”

Now look in Psalm 48 and verse 10: “According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness.” Note that God saves by His right hand. His right hand is full of righteousness.

Look in Psalm 60 and verse 5: “That thy beloved may be delivered; save with thy right hand, and hear me.” Wow. Save with thy right hand. Psalm 63 and verse 8 says, “My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.” One last passage before I show you the meaning. In Psalm 73 and verse 23, David says, “Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.” Wow. God’s right hand saves. God’s right hand is righteous. God’s right hand is power. God’s right hand saves, and God’s right hand preserves. Had you ever wondered why there is so much emphasis in the Bible on the right hand?

We use this expression all of the time. I use it especially in reference to my grandson. Someone will say something concerning my grandson, and I usually put my arm around him and say, “Well, he’s my right hand man.” What’s your right-hand man? It’s someone whom you depend upon, someone who helps you, someone who supports you. You know the answer to this. It’s a very simple question.

When God raised Christ from the dead, where did He place Him? At His right hand. So you’ve heard of the right-hand man. This is very interesting, and I do not know whether you will remember it, but four or five years ago I preached two messages on this text. Look at Psalm 21 and verse 8. Here’s what God says: “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.” Wait a minute. “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.” Isn’t that unusual? Thine hand shall find out all your enemies, but your right hand is going to find out those who hate you.

Now look at Psalm 80 and verse 17. Watch this prayer: “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.” So now the right hand is not just a right hand. Now the right hand is the man. Now the right hand is the Son of Man whom thou madest strong for thyself.

Watch carefully. Psalm 110, verse 1, says, "The Lord"—that is, Jehovah, the Father—"said unto my Lord"—that is, Christ—"Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Skip down to verse 5. You want to know who the right hand is? "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head." Do you remember, "Thy hand shall find out thine enemies; thy right hand shall find out all those that hate thee"? Now he says that right hand is the son of man whom he made strong for himself, and that right hand is destroying the Father's enemies.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 118, beginning with verse 15. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. The right hand of the Lord

is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly." Psalm 110 is quoted so often in the New Testament. Here is what is quoted: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thy enemies thy footstool." When David said, "Thou hast holden me up by thy right hand," it is not simply the presence and power of God, although it is that.

David is being upheld by the Messiah, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to what John Gill said concerning the phrase, "Thou hast upheld me with thy right hand": "Christ may be said to be the right hand of God, being as dear to Him as His right hand, and being exalted at it, and because by Him He communicates all good things to His people, and with Him upholds and sustains them." Who is the right hand of God? None other than Jesus Christ. What David is saying is that it is actually Jesus Christ who preserves me.

Before leaving this point, look in your Bibles to the book of Jude, right before Revelation, that little book of Jude. Notice verse 1. It has only one chapter. "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and"—what?—"preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."

Who is it that preserves us? Jesus Christ. Who preserved David? God's right hand. Who is God's right hand? Jesus Christ.

Two verses that I have chosen, basically, as my life verses are Jude 24 and 25: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.” Note what he says: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling.” What does He do? He preserves you and presents you faultless. He preserves you that you may be presented before Him faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Certainly, we have David rejoicing, not just in God's salvation, but also in God's preservation. Jesus Christ is the right hand of God. Jesus Christ is the one who saves and delivers, protects and preserves us. The Apostle Paul hit the nail on the head when he said in 2 Timothy 4:18, “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil

work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Notice what he said: "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom." It is God's preservation that is the source of our perseverance. We persevere in repentance and faith only because He enables us by His preservation. If God did not preserve us, we would never persevere. We may persevere, stand strong, and stand true only because of His preservation.

Now look back to Psalm 18. David said in verse 35, "Thou hast given me the shield of my salvation." That's God's grace. "Thy right hand hath holden me up." That's God's preservation. Then he says, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." So now we have God's condescension.

God's Condescension: Gentleness Making Great

The word gentleness here is capable of several different translations. It is the Hebrew word anva, which is usually translated, and can accurately be translated, as gentleness, meekness, humility, and condescension. I chose the word condescension because I believe it includes all these other words.

Let me give you a quote by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon is discussing the phrase, "Thy gentleness hath made me great," and the different ways this word can be interpreted and translated: "There are several readings of this sentence. The word is capable of being translated 'by goodness have made me great.' David saw much of the benevolence in God's action towards him, and he gratefully ascribed all his greatness, not to his own goodness, but to the goodness of God. Or it could be read 'by Providence have made me great,' which is indeed nothing more than the goodness of God in action. Goodness is the bud of which Providence is the flower. Or goodness is a seed of which providence is the harvest. Some render it, 'thy help hath made me great.' But thy help is simply another word for providence, providence being the firm ally of all the saints, aiding them in their service to the Lord. Certain learned commentators tell us that the text means, 'thy humility hath made me great.'

“By condescension may perhaps serve as a comprehensive reading, combining the ideas which we have already mentioned as well as that of humility. It is God making himself little, which is the cause of our being made great. We are so little that if God should manifest his greatness without condescension, we should be trampled under his feet. But God, who must stoop to view the skies and bow to see what angels do, looks to the lowly and contrite and makes them great.

“While these are the translations which have been given to the Adopted Texts of the original, we find that there are other readings, so ‘my discipline,’ etc., ‘has increased me.’ But then he goes on to say, still the idea is the same. David ascribes all his goodness to the condescending goodness and graciousness of his Father in Heaven. Let us all feel this sentiment in our hearts and confess that whatever goodness or greatness God may have put upon us, we must cast our crowns at His feet and cry, ‘Thy gentleness, or thy condescension, or thy humility has made me great.’”

Let me show you what Spurgeon meant when he talks about God making Himself little. Certainly, we have a great God, and God has not necessarily reduced His being. That is not what he is talking about. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 113, beginning with verse 4:

"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens."

Now look what he says: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself"—or who condescends—"who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord."

Now look what he says: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself?" In other words, God is so great and so glorious and so majestic. It is a condescension on His part, a humiliation on His part, to even notice the earth and the skies and we who inhabit it. He humbled Himself to behold us. And what

does He do? He lifts us up out of the dunghill. He lifts up the poor. He lifts up the barren woman and blesses her with children. All of this is God's marvelous, gracious condescension.

Who is like unto the Lord? It is the marvelous condescension of God, His gracious humility, His wonderful goodness, that He stoops to pay attention to any of us. Ask yourself this question: Who am I that God should notice me? I'll tell you who you are. You were a sinner and you were wicked and deserving of damnation. But God, in His condescension, in His humility, humbled Himself to behold your estate and your condition.

And He sent His Son, Jesus Christ. Since we are talking about God's marvelous condescension—"Thy gentleness, thy meekness, thy humility, thy condescension has made me great," David says—I want you to see this marvelous condescension in Philippians chapter 2, beginning with verse 5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Who was Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ was and still is God. He is the eternal, immutable, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign God of heaven and earth. What did He do? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

In other words, He was not going to fight to maintain His station in glory. No, "but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." You are talking about condescension and humility. God the Father humbled Himself to see our need, and God the Son humbled Himself and left His glory to come as a man and as a servant to die. No wonder David said, "Thy gentleness, thy humility, thy goodness, thy condescension, have made me great."

We are what we are only by the grace of God, and we have what we have only by the grace of God. Whatever gifts, talents, or earthly possessions you have, God gave them to you. You need to say, "His gentleness, his humility, his condescension has made me great."

God's Benevolence: Enlarged Steps

Look back to Psalm 18, and now to verse 36. There is one last point: God's benevolence. David said, "Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip." When we talk about God's benevolence, we are talking about a type of God's love. God demonstrates His love to us in many ways. One of those ways is that He enlarges us. He blesses us. He brings us through and out of all our troubles.

You have to remember the context of this psalm. David was being hunted and persecuted, not only by Saul, but by numerous enemies as well. All of them wanted to kill him. Many times David was hungry and thirsty; many times he was in grave danger. God brought him out of all of it and brought him through it. I love what Spurgeon said about this verse: “A smooth pathway leading to a spacious possession and camping grounds has been open for David.”

“Instead of the threading, narrow mountain paths and hiding in the cracks and corners of caverns, he was able to traverse the plains and dwell under his own vine and his own fig tree. It is no small mercy,” said Spurgeon, “to be brought into full Christian liberty and enlargement, but it is a greater favor still to be enabled to walk worthily in such liberty and not be permitted to slip with our feet. To stand upon the rocks of affliction is the result of a gracious upholding, but that aid is quite as much as needed in the luxurious plains of prosperity.”

You need God’s preservation and God’s grace, not only in times of affliction, but in times of prosperity.

David said in Psalm 31:8, “And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.” In Psalm 118:5 he said, “I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place.” This large place is in contradiction to a straight, narrow place. When you are in a strait, in a fix, in a bind, when you are narrow and cannot move, you are being tormented, persecuted, and harassed. But when God opens and gives you a large place, that is different.

Proverbs 4:12 says, “When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.” In other

words, if we run obediently, our steps are not going to be straitened. We are going to run in a large place. Psalm 18:36 says, “Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip.” What David said there is exactly the same as what he said in verse 19: “He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.”

We should not only stand amazed at God's salvation; we should stand amazed at God's preservation, His condescension, and His benevolence to us. It should bother us and cause us to wonder that God should bless us. Look how full of sin we are, even in a sanctified state. Our prayer is tainted with sin, and our most holy actions are tainted with sins. We're still sinners, and yet God humbles Himself to bless us. In verses 35 and 36, David is designating God as the source of all his blessings and the one who is worthy of all praise.

Applications: Designating Praise and Obedience

David has indeed designated God as the source of his praise; therefore, he is going to give God worship and honor. I want you to see how specific David got, and how specific you and I should also get in giving God praise for what He has done for us, to us, and through us. In Psalm 103, beginning in verse 1, David says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." Not just my mouth now, but all that is within me—my heart, my affection, my everything I have. Bless the Lord. Why? "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Think of everything that God has done for you. You wives need to learn to thank God for that old smelly, snoring husband. At least you still have one; some women don't. That's a fact. And the men need to thank God for their wives, whether they're round, plump, or slender; it doesn't matter. Some men don't have them. We need to learn to thank God for our food, our families, our finances, and everything. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

Now, I want you to turn to one last passage because here is my second application. Although I can quote this verse, I want you to see it in black and white. Would it not be decorous on our part—would it not be wonderful—if each child of God designated a specific time each day to thank God for everything that God has done for us that day and throughout our lives? You say, "Now, Pastor, I really genuinely want to glorify God." If so, look at Psalm 50 and verse 23. Are you looking? Here it is. God says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God."

If you really want to give God glory, then give God praise for everything He has done in your life. Do it daily. He blesses you daily. He blesses you hourly. Do it daily. Do it hourly, every time God brings it to your mind. And if you want to see more of His blessings, what do you do?

Look at verse 23 again: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." If you want more blessings, live more obediently. That is simple enough. We need to learn to say with David, "Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation. Thy right hand has holden me up. Thy gentleness has made me great, and Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet slip not." Make sure you give God all the praise for everything in your life and your family.

Father, speak to our hearts. Help us, dear Lord, to love Thee and praise Thee. Help us remember the verse, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." You have let us live this day and given us breath, life, health, and strength. You have provided, protected, and preserved us, and we glorify Thy name. We give You praise and honor for all You have done for us. We humbly acknowledge that we are what we are only by the grace of God. In Jesus Christ's name, we ask Thee to accept our praise and thanksgiving. In His name we pray, Amen and Amen.

CHAPTER 3

The Voice of God

January 18, 2009

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Introduction: God Speaks

Scripture teaches us that God speaks. He is the divine person. Since He is a divine person, He has all the traits of personality. One of those traits is speech. Have you ever stopped to think about this?

How did the world come into existence? Listen to Psalm 33, verses 6 through 9: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done;

“He commanded, and it stood fast.” Note what the Bible keeps saying: “by the word of the LORD,” “by the breath of his mouth,” “he spake.” Hebrews 11:3 tells us, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” If you read Genesis chapter 1, you will find one phrase repeated over and over: “And God said.” Literally, God spoke the world into existence.

Interestingly, the very first time we find the word “voice” in the Bible is in Genesis 3:8, where God comes to Adam and Eve after they have sinned: “And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.” They heard the voice of God.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear the voice of God? I can assure you, it would be a major difference to hear the voice of God in grace and mercy rather than to hear the voice of God in anger and wrath. There are times when we truly want to hear the Word of God, or the voice of God, and there are times when sinners certainly do not want to hear that voice.

Scripture begins with the voice of God in Genesis 3, when God confronts Adam and Eve for their rebellion and sin. The last time we hear the word “voice” in reference to God is in Revelation 21:3: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

The Manner of God's Voice

When we think of the voice of God, we normally think of a great, booming voice that everyone can hear—like thunder rolling in heaven and God speaking. However, that is not necessarily always the case. Do you remember when Elijah had won the great tournament on Mount Carmel? Jezebel threatened him, and Elijah ran. He sat down under a juniper tree and said, “Lord, I'm the only one left.

“Just go ahead and kill me and get it over with.” And God says, “No, that’s not what’s going to happen.” God fed him with a raven and sent him to the mountain. When he heard this great earthquake, God was not in the earthquake. Then there was a fire, and God was not in the fire. In 1 Kings 19:12 we read, “And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.” Isn’t that interesting? God spoke in a still, small voice. Do you realize sometimes God speaks where only one individual can hear? Sometimes, although people are instructed, they still literally do not hear.

God can speak in numerous ways. Job 33:14 says, “For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.” Sometimes God speaks, and men really do not understand that it is God speaking. Now watch: “For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.” Isn’t that interesting—that sometimes God speaks to us when we are totally unconscious, in the sense that we do not even know God is speaking to us?

God puts things in our subconscious and in our minds, so that all of a sudden we wake up the next day and say, “You know, this is what needs to be done.” God has spoken to us, and we do not even realize it.

There is a good illustration in the Bible of when God speaks and only one person hears. In Acts 9, you will remember the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who of course became the Apostle Paul. After our Lord confronted him, he said, “And he trembling and astonished

said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." The men journeying with him "stood speechless, hearing a voice, or hearing a sound, but seeing no man." Saul arose from the earth, but when his eyes were opened he saw no man; they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

They heard sound, but they did not necessarily hear God speaking to them as the Apostle Paul did. Further on in the book of Acts, when the Apostle Paul gives his testimony, he again says that he is the only one who heard God speak. They may have heard a noise, but they did not hear when God spoke unto the Apostle Paul. For instance, he says, "But they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

So God may speak in a booming voice, or He may speak in a still small voice, or He may speak so that only one person hears, or just a few people hear. But the voice of God has been heard, and it shall continue to be heard. But let us ask ourselves this question: How in the world does God speak? How does God speak in such a way that He is heard? Let me ask it another way: How does a voice manifest itself?

God's Voice in Written and Living Word

The answer is in words. We only recognize a voice when someone speaks. We know that God has spoken because of His Word. When we hear the Word of God, we are hearing the voice of God.

Now, let me quote a verse that everyone knows, 2 Timothy 3, verse 16. Listen carefully. The Bible says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." When the Bible says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," the word "inspired" is the Greek word theopneustos, and it literally means "God-exhaled" or "God-breathed." So God literally breathed His Word out of His mouth.

We know that the Bible is the written Word of God. In John 1, verses 1–3, Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. Notice John 1, beginning with verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” So Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. In John 1, verse 14, we read, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Jesus Christ, the Living Word, has been made flesh.

Now look at verse 18: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Jesus Christ has declared God the Father. How did Christ declare God the Father? The word “declare” in John 1:18 means to declare, to unfold, and to reveal. How did Jesus Christ reveal the Father? Do you remember that passage in First Timothy 3:16, where the Word of God says, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh”? God was manifest in the flesh.

In John chapter 14, Jesus Christ said, “I go to the Father.” Philip answered, “Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” That will be sufficient: just show us the Father. In John 14, verse 9, Jesus Christ said to Philip, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?”

He said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” Jesus Christ, the Living Word, is indeed the voice of God.

Return to John chapter 10. God speaks, and God speaks with words. The written Word is His Scripture, but the Living Word is Jesus Christ. Verse 3 says, “To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice.” When the Bible tells us that the sheep hear the voice of Jesus Christ, it is another declaration that Jesus Christ is God. You must remember that God spoke powerfully in creation.

He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. "Let there be water," and there was water. "Let there be earth," and there was earth. In other words, God literally spoke the world into existence. God's voice has power, and God created life by His voice, by His word.

Jesus Christ, who is God, likewise creates life by His word. In John chapter 11, Lazarus had died, and Jesus told His disciples that He was going to awaken him out of his sleep. They thought He meant that Lazarus would recover, but Jesus told them plainly that he was dead. When He came to the tomb, Martha said, "Lord, he's been dead four days. By this time he stinketh." Our Lord said to her, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Then Jesus went to the tomb and said, "Lazarus, come forth." He that was bound with graveclothes came forth.

The Bible says in John 5:26, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ created the world. Jesus Christ is the living Word. When Jesus Christ speaks, He is the voice of God.

In John chapter 10, we learn that Christ is the door—in fact, the only door. He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." The only lawful, saving way into the sheepfold is through Jesus Christ. Anyone who denies, denounces, denigrates, and seeks to destroy Christ as the only door of salvation is a liar, a thief, and a robber.

Christ the Door and Good Shepherd

Isn't that simple? Isn't that what Christ said? Anyone who tries to get in any other way—if you've ever read Pilgrim's Progress, and if you haven't, I wish that you would—when Christian is on his way to the Celestial City, two men start climbing over the wall to get on the path with him. Of course, they are thieves, robbers, and liars, and they do not stay on the path for long. But Jesus Christ said He is indeed the door. He is not only the door; He is the good shepherd. The good shepherd does not flee when the wolf approaches. In fact, the good shepherd not only protects the sheep, but Scripture tells us He gives His life for the sheep.

Now, let me point something out. Look in verse 1 again: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." One of the problems that you and I have is that we know

nothing about sheep, and we know nothing about ancient traditions, especially in Palestine. We know enough to know that cowboys hate sheep. Do you know why cowboys hate sheep? Cows, when they eat grass, will just nip it off, but sheep will pull it up by the root and destroy the pasture. I once taught a young rancher in college who was from Colorado. He hated sheep and called them "ranch maggots"—the little white, fuzzy things.

When Lacy was little, we were out west traveling, and we passed a field of sheep. I said, "Well, there's some ranch maggots." A couple of hours later, we passed another field with sheep in it, and Lacy was going to repeat what I said. She said, "Well, look, there's a bunch of farm ticks right there." I said, "No, it's ranch maggots, sugar, not farm ticks."

But notice what he says in verse 1. Here is a sheepfold. Evidently, there are walls, and there is only one door.

The Sheepfold and the Shepherd's Voice

A.W. Pink gives this background: “In Palestine, which in the pastoral sections was infested with wild beasts, there was in each village a large sheepfold which was the common property of the native farmers. This sheepfold was protected by a wall sometimes of ten or twelve feet high. When night fell, a number of different shepherds would lead their flocks up to the door of the fold through which they passed, leaving them in the care of the porter while they went home and sought lodging. At the door, the porter lay on the ground through the night, ready to protect the sheep against thieves and robbers, or against wild animals which might scale the walls. In the morning, the different shepherds returned. The porter would allow each one to enter in through the door, calling by name the sheep which belonged to his flock. The sheep would respond to his voice, and he, the shepherd, would lead them out to pasture.”

In the lesson before us, this is what the Lord uses as a figure or proverb. The sheepfold was usually rather large, enclosed by walls, sometimes with brambles or thorns on top. There was only one way in and one way out, and the porter, who protected the sheep, slept in the doorway. No one could come in without getting over him. Nothing could come in. The only way anyone would usually try was

by climbing over the wall. If you climbed over the wall to get to the sheep, you were either a wild animal, a robber, or a thief.

It is important to note that shepherds gave names to their sheep. Every sheep not only recognized the voice of the shepherd; every sheep knew its own name. Even when the flocks were mingled together, the shepherd could quickly separate them and call out his own sheep, because every sheep recognized its name and the voice of the shepherd.

Remember now that Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the Chief Shepherd. Verse 3 says, "To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice:" now watch carefully, "and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out."

What can we learn from this verse? First, and very importantly, Christ does have a flock. Christ does have a people that have been given unto Him by the Father. John 17 is the high priestly prayer of our Lord, and in this prayer our Lord makes it exceedingly clear that there have been a people given unto Him by the Father. In fact, let us read verse 1 so that you can see it as the prayer: "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee."

Christ's Flock Given by the Father

Now watch verse 2: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Did the Father give a people or a flock to Christ? The answer is yes.

Notice again what our Lord says in verse 6: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." Twice in verse 6, our Lord says to the Father, "You've given me a group. You've given me a flock. You've given me a people."

Speaking of this same flock and this same people, He says in verse 9, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Again, our Lord says, "You've given me a people." And in verse 11, He continues, "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world,"

In John 17, Jesus Christ repeatedly says that the Father has given Him a people. In verse 24 He says, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” Over and over, Christ says that the Father has given Him a people, a flock. Very obviously, there are indeed some who have been given to Christ. In fact, Christ repeats this truth so often in Scripture that it is amazing we do not consider it, think about it, or believe it. But it is true.

Look back at John 6:37. After we have seen John 17—verses 2, 6, 9, 11, and 24—where our Lord says that the Father had given Him a people, notice what He says: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Isn’t that interesting? “All that the Father giveth me.” Has the Father given Christ a people? Yes. Has the Father given Christ a flock? The answer is yes.

Now go back to John 10. In verse 3 our Lord says, “To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” Note this: the sheep hear His voice. Others may not hear it, perceive it, understand it, or believe it, but His sheep most certainly do.

His Sheep Hear and Follow; Others Do Not

Our Heavenly Father calls His sheep by name. Listen carefully: with God the Father, we are not a number; we have a name. Even as you read through the Old Testament, God gives us the same truth. For instance, go back to Exodus 33 and look at verse 17. Hold John 10; we are not through there. Notice what God says.

Exodus 33:17 says, "And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name." I know thee by name.

Isaiah 43:1 says, "But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Notice what God says: "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Isaiah 45:3 says, "And I will give thee the treasures of

darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel." God calls His own by name.

Remember the Scripture says, "He calleth his own sheep by name, and they know him." Consider what happened in John chapter 20. Our Lord had been crucified and buried. It was the third day, and Mary came to the sepulchre, but He was not there. He was risen.

John 20:11 says, "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

The body was gone because Christ was risen. "And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." Jesus stood in His resurrected form, and she did not know who He was. She thought He was the gardener. But when He said, "Mary," she immediately said, "Master." His sheep know His voice.

He calls His own by name. In John 10:14, our Lord says the same truth again: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” Here is the first truth from John 10:3: the Father has given Christ a people. He has given Christ a flock, and they know His voice.

Here is the second truth, obvious by way of contrast: those who are not His sheep do not hear His voice, and He does not call them by name. I cannot call your dog by name because I do not know who your dog is or what his name is. I never named him. Probably, if I did call him, he would not recognize my voice anyhow. He would not obey me. Why? I am not his master.

The same is true with our Lord's sheep. They hear His voice and obey Him. But those who are not His sheep do not hear His voice and do not obey Him. In John 10:24, our Lord says it with His own lips: "Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

What did He say? "I'll tell you why you don't believe. I'll tell you why you don't hear me. You're not my sheep. You're not mine." Our Lord did not say this only in John 10. In John 8:47 He says, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." You do not hear because you are not of God. You do not hear my voice, believe me, or follow me because you are not my sheep.

"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him."

Notice that those who are not our Lord's sheep do not hear His voice. They do not obey Him, follow Him, or believe. On the one hand, our Lord has sheep; He has a flock; He is a shepherd. He said, "All my sheep hear my voice." On the other hand, those who are not His sheep do not hear His voice and do not believe in Him.

Let me tell you something. If you have not heard the voice of Jesus Christ, if you have not been called by name, if you do not believe in Him, hear Him, and obey Him, you should be concerned. You know what Peter said in 2 Peter 1:10? "Wherefore the rather,

brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." You better make sure you have been effectually called. You better make sure you have heard the voice of the Son of God. You better make sure that He's called you by name.

From John 10, verse 3 especially, we have gotten two truths so far. First, Christ has a people who have been given Him of the Father. Second, those who are not His do not hear Him, follow Him, or obey Him.

Now, here's a third truth. "To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." His sheep follow Him. He leads them, and they follow. They know His voice.

The Sheep Follow the Shepherd Alone

Shepherds always lead the flock. Sheep do not determine where they will graze, where they will eat, where they are going, or what they will do. It is the shepherd who determines everything. Sheep have one responsibility: to follow the shepherd. That is all they are required to do. The shepherd leads; the sheep follow.

Look in John 6. Jesus proclaims Himself the bread of life. He is the one who says that He is the bread of life. He came down from heaven that He might give life, and He says, “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.” Contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, this passage does not teach transubstantiation. Jesus is teaching that those genuinely saved by His grace live in Him, by Him, and through Him, and are nothing without Him. He is the true bread of life; as physical bread nourishes the body, He, the spiritual bread, nourishes the soul.

After Jesus taught that He was the bread of life, John 6:60 says, “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” In other words, “This is too difficult for us to swallow. We cannot believe this.” Notice that these were many of His disciples—that is, many of His professing disciples.

Verse 66 says, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” The teaching became difficult, and they said, “We cannot stomach this. We cannot believe this. We are not going to listen to this. We are not going to obey this. We are not going to follow this.”

First John 2:19 explains: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” After they said, “This is an hard saying; we cannot handle this,” look in verse 67.

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

The true sheep never leave the shepherd. The true sheep know who the shepherd is. They will not forsake their shepherd, and the shepherd will not forsake them. If you have been called by Jesus Christ, you will follow Jesus Christ. He said in Luke 6, verse 46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" If I am genuinely your Lord, you will obey me. If I am genuinely your shepherd, you will follow Me. He said in Matthew 16, verse 24, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." How do we know that we are really His sheep? We are following Him.

In John 12, verse 26, He says, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." The sheep have one responsibility: to follow the shepherd. They are going to follow that shepherd wherever He is. He may be without the camp. He may be in persecution. He may be hated, rejected, or despised. That is immaterial. The sheep are going where that shepherd is.

Hebrews 13, verse 13, says, "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." So when Christ is kicked out of the synagogues, where do we go? Where Christ is. When Christ is kicked out of the churches, where do we go? Where Christ is. When Christ is kicked out of government, where do we go? Where

Christ is. He is the shepherd; we follow the shepherd. "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me." Christ has been given a flock by the Father. His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. Those who are not His sheep do not hear Him, do not believe Him, and do not follow Him.

Let me show you a fourth truth. Look back in John 10. Those who do not follow Christ but follow a stranger are not His sheep. Notice verses 3, 4, and 5: “To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.” Now watch verse 5: “And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

Isn’t that amazing? Those who do not follow Christ but rather follow strangers do not belong to Christ. Our Lord makes it exceedingly plain that His sheep will not follow a stranger. They do not recognize the voice. His sheep are not going to run after some guru who denies the deity of Jesus Christ, some self-proclaimed prophet who denies the Word of God, or someone teaching that we are all going to be absorbed in the Milky Way. His sheep will not listen to a stranger. They will flee from him; they will run from him.

I read an illustration years ago about Harry Ironsides, who has been dead many years. An outright agnostic and infidel was speaking on a street corner before a great crowd. Ironsides observed a simple man listening intently to everything the agnostic said. Afterward, he asked him, “Well, the man was a great orator, wasn’t he?” The man agreed. Ironsides asked, “It was very convincing, wasn’t he?” Again, the man agreed. “I suppose you believe everything he said.” The man replied, “No, sir, I didn’t believe a word he said.” “But you were listening intently.” “Yes, I was. But something inside me kept saying, ‘Lies, lies, nothing but a pack of lies.’”

The sheep will not listen to a stranger. They know not the voice of a stranger. When anyone goes over and beyond the Word of God and Jesus Christ, he has gone too far.

In The Land and the Book, an old two-volume set written by Thompson, there is a short paragraph concerning the shepherd and

the sheep in Palestine. Concerning John 10, Thompson writes: "This is true to the letter. The sheep are so tame and so trained that they follow their shepherd with the utmost docility. He leads them forth from the fold or from their houses in the villages, just wherever he pleases. As there are many flocks in such a place as this, each one takes a different path, and it is his business to find pasture for them, the shepherd for the sheep. It is necessary, therefore, that they should be taught to follow and not to stray away into the unfenced fields of corn which lie so temptingly on either side.

"Anyone that thus wanders is sure to get into trouble. The shepherd calls sharply from time to time to remind them of his presence. They know his voice and follow on. But if a stranger calls, they stop short, lift up their heads in alarm, and if it is repeated, they turn and flee because they know not the voice of a stranger. This is not the fanciful costume of a parable. It is a simple fact. I have made the experiment repeatedly. The shepherd goes before, not merely to point out the way, but to see that it is practical and safe. He is armed in order to defend his charge, and in this instance he is very courageous. Many adventures with wild beasts occur, not unlike those accounted by David in those very mountains, for though there are no lions there now, there are wolves in abundance, and leopards and panthers exceedingly fierce, prowling about these wild wadis. They not infrequently attack the flock in the very presence of the shepherd, and he must be ready to do battle at a moment's warning. I have listened with great interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with these savage beasts. And when the thief and the robber come, as come they will, the faithful shepherd is offered to put his life in his hand to defend his flock."

God Has Spoken

I've known more than one case in which he's literally had to lay down his life in the contest. A poor faithful fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedouin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their swords and died among the sheep he was defending. The sheep follow him, and a stranger they will not follow. But they will flee from the voice of a stranger.

Applications: Hearing and Following Christ

The first application is this: God has spoken. Have you heard His voice? God has manifested His voice. Hebrews 1, verses 1 and 2, says: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Notice: God hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. Jesus Christ is the voice of God. Whoever will not hear Jesus Christ does not hear the voice of God. For Jesus Christ is God.

Here is the second application. In John 5:24–25, our Lord says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

Listen carefully. If you do not hear our Lord’s voice in regeneration unto life, you will not hear our Lord’s voice in resurrection unto life. Only they that hear shall live.

The third and final application is a comforting truth. John 10:4 says, “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.” Notice what the Scripture says: “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them.” We have no need to worry or to fear. Our Lord will never lead us except where He has gone and where He is. He is always there. He is always leading us. As He said in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” It is still true what our Lord said: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

Wherever He leads us, He’s already there. We have no reason to fear and no reason to doubt.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we do bow to Thee. We thank Thee and praise Thee, and we are thankful that Jesus Christ is indeed the voice of God. Thy Word is Thy voice, and we must hear both. We ask, Father, that Thou open our ears, that we may hear; open our minds, that we may understand and believe; and release our wills, that we may follow and obey. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Do Thorns Bother You?

February 24, 2013

Introduction to the Thorny Ground Hearer

Mark chapter four. And for those of you who are visiting here for the first time, I have been preaching a series and this is the third part in a four-part series. So, Joe, you have to listen to previous messages as well now. So Mark chapter four, this is a four-part series on the parable of the sower, and today we come to the thorny ground hearer. So the title of the message is "Do Thorns Bother You?" So look at Mark 4 and verse 7. Our Lord said, "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit." Now, if you'll skip down to verse 18 and you'll look at, you'll see our Lord's interpretation.

He said, "And these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." Now, we've talked previously about the two hearers previously, that is the wayside hearer and the stony-ground hearer. I told you the wayside hearer has another name. He's known as the hard-hearted hearer. And, of course, the stony-ground hearer

is known as the shallow-hearted hearer. And we found out that the wayside hearer is a negligent individual. He could care less about the Word of God. And the Bible says, Satan cometh immediately and stealeth away the Word. So he could care less about it.

It was easily stolen from him. The stony ground hearer was the man who had no root in himself. And when trials and tribulations and persecutions arose, immediately he was offended. And of course, he forsook the faith. And today we come to what we consider the thorny ground hearer.

Now the thorny ground hearer is sometimes referred to as a half-hearted hearer, and you're going to see just a little bit later why he is called a half-hearted hearer as well. Remember I told you that this entire parable is on hearing the Word of God and responses to the Word of God. So it could not only be called the parable of the sower, it could also be called the parable of the soils. So just like in our Lord's day, there are these four types of hearers. So in our day, there's four types of hearers. So every time the Word of God is preached, you will respond in one of these four ways. Everyone responds in one of these four ways. You're either a negligent hearer, like the wayside hearer, or you're a shallow-hearted hearer, the way the stony ground hearer was, or you're half-hearted hearer, the way the thorny ground hearer is, or you're a whole-hearted hearer, as the good ground hearer is. But before I show you the principles from the thorny ground hearer, I want to tell you a few things about thorns.

Thorns Are Distracting

The Nature of Thorns: Distracting, Disturbing, and Deadly

According to the Word of God, thorns are distracting. Genesis chapter 3 tells us that Adam was cursed for his disobedience. Notice the curse laid upon him, beginning with verse 17:

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, and sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the

herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return into the ground. For out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and in the dust shalt thou return."

Notice particularly that "thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth." Thorns are distracting in a number of ways. First, they keep us busy from the work which we need to do. Since the fall of man, thorns have been a nuisance and a distraction.

Have you ever noticed, those of you who garden, that your garden does not need special attention or special fertilizers to bring forth thorns and weeds? They simply grow and appear. The next time you are weeding your garden and pulling out thorns, thistles, and weeds, and your back begins to ache, blame Adam. It was Adam's original sin that caused these thorns and thistles.

The next time you are weeding your garden or walking through the woods and get a thorn in your finger, remember that it will distract you. It will distract you to the point that you stop and pick that thorn out. This week, Tripp and I were burning off some woods, and I was spreading the fire with a rake. As I went through, two thorns from a briar got in my finger. I had to stop and pick them out. They immediately hurt. Thorns are distractful. They will always stop you; sometimes, as I will point out later, they will stop you permanently.

When I was a boy, to show you how distracting thorns really are and can be, I had a good friend, and he and I decided we were going to go rabbit hunting. But back at that time, we did not use guns. In fact, we considered guns an unfair advantage to hunt these poor little helpless rabbits. So what we did was take a log chain about eighteen inches long, have a C-link on it where we could hold it in our hands, and run the rabbit down. We would outrun him, and as we went past him, we would hit him with the chain and either kill him or stun him so that we could get him.

We got tired of doing that because we were running all the time. And, by the way, it is possible to outrun a rabbit. I outran plenty of them when I was a boy. I could not do it today, I am sure, but I used to do it. We got tired of doing that and decided we needed a little

help. Since the pasture was kind of level anyhow, with a little downhill grade, we decided to use the car.

We would alternate: I would drive while Jimmy sat on the fender, and Jimmy would drive while I sat on the fender. When we saw a rabbit, we would go up to him and stop, letting the individual on the fender run and hit the rabbit. I happened to be on the fender. Jimmy was driving, and I saw a rabbit out of the corner of my eye and pointed over that way. He quickly turned the car toward the rabbit and sped up a little too much. He was almost on the rabbit.

He realized what he had done, and so he slammed on the brakes. Now, I do not know if you put two and two together. When I was sitting on the fender, headed downhill, and the person slammed on the brakes, it tended to throw my body into motion, and it tended to throw that body into motion very quickly. When I came off that fender, my feet were already two or three feet in front of my body. I was running as hard and as fast as I could. My body was basically trying to catch up with my feet. I passed that poor rabbit like he was sitting still. I mean, I was running so fast that I could not swing the chain. I could not do anything. All I could do was just try to maintain my balance. In front of me was a briar patch.

I really, genuinely wanted to stop, but I could not stop. I was not in control. I ran through that briar patch and was only able to stop on the other side. For the next hour, Jimmy and I took a great deal of pains in picking thorns out of my arms and legs. That so distracted me, I no longer wanted to hunt rabbits. In fact, the truth of the matter is, it distracted me so greatly that, as far as I remember, I have never been rabbit hunting since. I do not care anything about rabbit hunting, especially having picked those briars out all of that time. The truth of the matter is this: briars can be very distracting. Thorns can be very distracting.

Secondly, I want you to understand that thorns can also be disturbing. Occasionally, someone will get a thorn in a finger or some other part of the body and somehow miss it. Namely, it does not hurt right away. But give it a day or two, and the next thing you know, you are hurting. There is something very sore in your finger; you look down, and all of a sudden it is red, swollen, and perhaps there is a little white patch right around that thorn. The very first

thing that enters your mind is, How in the world did this happen? How did I miss something like this? But now the thorn is in there and it is infected, and it still has to be dug out even though it is surrounded by infection. Thorns are disturbing physically. Let me go on to point out, as I make the application, that they are also disturbing economically, familially, and spiritually. The Bible shows us something about a thorn-filled life.

Hopefully, you do not want such a life. Proverbs 15:19 says, "The way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain." The slothful man is living a life hedged up by thorns. Proverbs 22:5 says, "Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward, and he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them." The froward man has a life that is full of thorns and snares.

Isaiah 32:13 shows what the Scripture says concerning thorns. There is a whole lot more, but God says, “Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars, yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city.” So God is going to curse this disobedient people with briars and thorns. Jeremiah 12:13 says, “They have sown wheat, but they shall reap thorns. They have put themselves to pain, but they shall not profit and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the Lord.” Notice that they have sown wheat, but they are going to reap thorns.

Now, a life of thorns is certainly not one to be desired, and I have no desire to live a life that is constantly troubled by disturbances and being inundated with the fierce anger of God. Thorns, then, are distracting; they are disturbing; and, thirdly, thorns are deadly. Some thorns produce deadly effects, that is for sure. If someone does not die just from the poison of a thorn, you have to stop and think that there is such a thing as blood poisoning as well. Thorns can therefore bring death not only through their poison, but also through the effects that follow.

Additionally, understand that when God judges a nation, when God judges a society or a people, He often gives us the picture of that nation, city, or people being judged by thorns and briars. Isaiah 34:13 describes a people or a nation or a city upon which His curse is: “And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof, and it shall be a habitation of dragons and a

court for owls." In other words, God will thoroughly judge the people and judge the city until it is uninhabited, and thorns, nettles, and brambles grow there, as well as its being a habitation of dragons and of owls. Hosea 2:6 shows again how, in the judgment of God, He uses a picture of thorns and briars. God says this concerning that judgment.

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths." Have you ever tried to walk through thorns? It is very distressing. God said, "I'm going to hedge up their way with thorns."

The book of Hosea is against Israel because of her sins and wickednesses. God said He would judge her and hedge up her ways with thorns. Hosea 9:6 says, "For, lo, they are gone because of destruction. Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them. The pleasant places for their silver, nettles shall possess them, thorns shall be in their tabernacles." God said He would send them into captivity, and thorns and nettles would grow all around them.

In Nahum 1:10, God says, "For while they be folded together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." It is important to remember that our Lord is teaching us in the parable of the sower about hearing the Word of God. Here is the wayside hearer who did not hear scripturally; here is the stony ground hearer who did not hear scripturally; and likewise, here is the thorny ground hearer who did not hear scripturally.

In Mark 4:7, the Bible says, "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit." The very first thing that you need to understand about the thorny ground hearer is that the seed fell among thorns.

The Seed Fell Among Thorns: Pre-existing Sins

Why is that important? It teaches us that the thorns were already there. They were deeply rooted and already had possession of that part of the soil. The ground had not been prepared. The thorns had not been pulled up, dug up, chopped, or eradicated in any way. They

were already there and had already developed a root system. They were already alive and healthy when the seed fell among them.

Our Lord is drawing us a picture of someone who half-heartedly accepts the Word of God, yet has never truly dealt with the sins in his life. Here is a man who wants to be saved in his sins and not from his sins. He wants salvation because he wants to escape the judgment of God; but he does not want salvation to the point where he is willing to repent and turn from those things that God has condemned.

In Matthew 1:21, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, "And she shall bring forth a child and she shall call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins." Christ did not come to save us in our sins. He came to save us from our sins.

Salvation is not just, quote unquote, from hell. It is not from damnation. It is not from condemnation. Salvation is from sins, which ultimately send you to judgment, condemnation, and hell. Our Lord came to save us from our sins. Being saved from hell or judgment is a byproduct of being saved from your sins. If you are not saved from your sins, you are not saved from damnation, condemnation, or the judgment of God.

When our Lord was talking to those Pharisees in John chapter 8, He said, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” When our Lord emphasized that these people were lost, condemned, under the judgment and curse of God, and on their way to damnation, He did so by saying, “Ye shall die in your sins.” Dying in your sins is equivalent to facing eternal judgment and the fierce anger of a holy, righteous God.

It is thorns that prevent the word of God from taking root. The thorns already there had never been dealt with, and so those thorns overpower the seed that was sown. When they abound on every hand, it is impossible for the seed to take root.

Identifying the Thorns from Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Now, I want to show you this from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The parable of the sower occurs in each of these three books: Matthew

13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. I want to take the time to read these three passages and show you what the thorns are that our Lord is dealing with. In our Bibles, we go first to Matthew chapter 13, then to Mark 4, and then to Luke 8. In Matthew chapter 13, look at verse 22, because our Lord is now identifying these thorns. He is telling you what will cause you to be a half-hearted hearer: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.”

In Mark 4:18–19, our Lord interprets the parable and tells us what the thorns really are: “And these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.” In Luke 8:14, He says, “And they which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”

Our Lord lists these four thorns: the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lust for other things, and the pleasures of this life. It is these four thorns that will hinder you from receiving the Word of God in a beneficial manner. So let us take them one at a time. Our Lord gives us the first thorn, and that is the cares of this world.

Without answering out loud, think in your mind: What are the cares of this world? Before considering some of them, let us explain the words cares and world. Cares is the Greek word merimna, which literally is translated as care or anxiety. It means literally to be troubled with cares. It means to seek to provoke one's interests and to be anxious.

The Thorn of the Cares of This World

There are at least two different words in the Greek New Testament for world. Cosmos is the most frequent one, but aion is pretty frequent as well. Here the word is aion, and it is translated in our Bibles as world or age. So it refers more to a specific age or a period of time. When our Lord is speaking about the cares of this age or the cares of this period of time, He is talking about the present period of

time. There is not a person in this room that is carefully anxious about the problems and cares of a thousand years ago. To be honest, I am not anxious about the cares of a thousand years in the future. That which bothers us is the cares in this present life.

In other words, man by nature is concerned with the here and now, or, as some would say, the dirty now and now. Let me give you three passages from the Bible that explain the cares of this world, or the cares of this age. You will find that some of these cares are what you and I would call innocent things.

In each of these passages, it is the same essential Greek word every time. In Matthew chapter six, whenever you see the word thought, place in that word anxious cares, because it is exactly the same Greek word. In Matthew chapter six, beginning with verse 24, our Lord says:

"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore, I say to you, take no thought for your life." There is the word thought: take no anxious care for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them, are you not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, or by taking anxious care, can add one cubit unto a stature? And why take you thought, or anxious care, for raiment?

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, and they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Notice, wherefore if God so clothed the grass of the field, which is to-day here, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith. Therefore take no thought or anxious care, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For all of these things do the Gentiles seek after; your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all of these things."

He talked about taking thought over food, over raiment, and over things that you and I need all of the time. Yet you and I must plan and prepare to the best of our ability. On the other hand, he says that we are not to be overly anxious about these things, overly concerned, or worked up.

They're not to be the primary focus of your life. God knows we have to eat. You know you have to eat. I know I have to eat. But what our Lord is saying is very simple: we're not to be overly concerned with eating all of the time. Eating is not to control our lives. What we wear is not to control our lives. God knows that we have need of these things.

Everybody knows the story of Mary and Martha. Our Lord is there, and Martha says, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me." And Jesus answered and said unto her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, that is, you are anxiously careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Now what was Mary doing? Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ, worshipping Him, listening to Him, learning from Him. And what was Martha doing? She was busy cooking and getting everything ready for everybody to eat. She was overly burdened, overly cumbered about with much care: I've got to get this on. I've got to have it here at this particular time. And it's got to be this way. So Martha said, "Lord, make her help me." And what did our Lord say? Now, you're just too concerned about this.

We need to fellowship with each other, and we need to exercise biblical hospitality. If you come to our house and it's not perfect, guess what? We don't have a perfect house. We live in it, and it gets dirty from time to time. If you come to visit me and my house is dirty, I'm not going to say, "I can't have company right now until my wife cleans up the house." No, you come on in; you'll just have to understand that, hey, Henry's been there. Grandkids have been there.

Doggies have scattered their toys around the yard. Well, that's the way it is. And so our Lord is saying this to Martha: Everything does

not have to be perfect, Martha. The one thing is needful. Mary has chosen that good part, and it is not going to be taken away from her. If anybody in this room has a perfect house, raise your hand. Nobody—I didn't think so.

Look in Philippians chapter four and verse six. The Apostle Paul says, "Be careful for nothing," that is, do not be anxiously careful for anything, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Be careful for nothing. Be prayerful in everything and be thankful for anything. He admonishes us that we are not to be carefully anxious for anything. We are to pray and praise and petition and trust our Lord for anything and everything.

Here is the point concerning the thorn of the cares of this age: our Lord forbids us to place an inordinate amount of anxiety and worry over things that really do not matter or should not trouble us to that degree. None of us is going to starve if we do not get what we think is a suitable amount of food for today. In fact, some of us could do without for several days and probably be happy.

God knows that we must eat. He knows that we must wear clothes, and He knows that we have bills. He knows all of this. Yet there are so many people intent on making a living that they never live. They are consumed with the cares of this age. So many are engrossed in business that they believe their business is the most important thing in the world. It requires all their attention. They have no time for the Bible, preaching, church, prayer, or anything else. The cares of this world engulf them to the point that this is all they are about; they are absolutely consumed with it.

Look back in your Bibles to Luke chapter 14. We are still talking about the cares of this life. Here is a good illustration of how these cares can truly overcome us. Beginning with verse 16: “Then said he unto them, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” The supper is already fixed. “And he sent his servant at suppertime to them that were bidden, to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready.” Watch what happens. “And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said to him, I bought a piece of ground and must needs go and see it. I pray thee have me excused. Another said, I bought five yoke of oxen and I go to prove

them. I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I married a wife and therefore I cannot come." So the third one only had a legitimate excuse.

Who is going to buy a piece of ground without looking at it first? Who is going to buy five yoke of oxen without proving them, without knowing whether or not they are trained? If you want to buy some property without ever seeing it, I could sell you some. But when you saw it, you would want your money back. Nobody is going to do it.

Here is the whole thing: "I don't have time. I don't have time for Christ. I don't have time for preaching. I don't have time to go to church. I don't have time to read my Bible." I am consumed with this property that I have bought, these oxen, and my marriage and my wife. I do not have time for all of this.

That is the thorn of the cares of this life. It is an over-anxiousness about things that are lawful. Is it unlawful to buy property? No. Is it unlawful to have oxen? No. Is it unlawful to be married? No. But when those things consume your life to the point that you neglect the things of God, it is a thorn. It is the cares of this life.

The Thorn of the Deceitfulness of Riches

The second thorn that our Lord mentions is the thorn of the deceitfulness of riches. There are plenty of people who think that if they could simply be rich, everything would be well. But that is certainly not true. Riches bring their own problems. Once you have them, you have to struggle to keep them, and usually the more you have, the more you want. Have you ever noticed that?

I told you before about the rich farmer. He said he did not want to own the world; he just wanted to own all the property next to his property. Pretty soon, he would own everything. Many have observed that those who are rich are never satisfied. They always want more. Their lives are consumed with making money and increasing their wealth, and nothing comes between them and their wealth, not even salvation.

Some wealthy men have told me, "My hobby is making money. I love to make money." And that is exactly what they do. Many are like the rich young ruler in the Bible, who preferred his wealth over

salvation. There are many who prefer the comforts of this life to the comfort of the next life.

The Puritans used to have a saying: God oftentimes curses his enemies with riches. And that is true, because they end up trusting in their riches instead of Christ. I want you to understand that being wealthy has its own problems. First Timothy 6:9 says, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

In that light, look at verse 7: "For we brought nothing into this world. It is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." Do you realize that everything we amass in this life, when we die, we leave it?

It is kind of like the rich man who took all his money and hid it in the attic. He told his wife that when he died, he was going to take it with him; he was going to get it on the way up. When he died, she went up, and the money was still there. She said, "I knew he should have hid it in the basement." Well, the truth of the matter is, it does not matter where he puts it; it is going to still be there, because you take absolutely nothing with you.

Now look at First Timothy 6:17–19: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy, that they do good, and that they may be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Notice what God says: charge them that are rich in this life. I know that there are some rich Christians. But the Bible tells us that God gives riches for the use and benefit of His kingdom and His people. He does not give riches for selfish ends and designs. It has been accurately said that when a Christian gets rich, God either gains a fortune or loses a man.

God warns us not only about the cares of this life, but also about the deceitfulness of riches. I never will forget a fellow I knew a long time ago. His goal back then, in the 60s, was to be a millionaire so he could serve the Lord, go everywhere, and do whatever the Lord

wanted him to do. I told him, “You need to serve the Lord now. If he makes you a millionaire, wonderful. If he does not, that is wonderful, too. Just serve him.” There are the deceitfulness of riches.

The Thorns of Lust for Other Things and Pleasures of This Life

The third thorn that he mentions is the lust for other things. The word lust is very informative. It literally means to set your affection or desire upon something. The Greek word is epithumia. Thumia means a passion or burning desire, and epi is a preposition meaning upon. Your lust is whatever you set your desire or heart upon. When the Bible talks about the lust for other things, it is not necessarily referring to sexual sins, though it could include that.

It also refers to promotion, pride, praise, recognition, hobbies, work, or a host of other things. The Greek word for other things is loipoi, meaning the rest, residue, and remainder. Our Lord talked about the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. Now he talks about the lust for whatever is left—whatever remains, whatever the residue is after you deal with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches.

I've known people consumed by sports, hunting, and fishing, and I love to hunt and fish. But it is not my burning passion. During hunting season, when I get so many meetings and preaching opportunities, God is testing me as to whether I want to preach or hunt. I am on the side of preaching. Your hobby can be the lust of other things. Some people are so sports oriented that they can tell you every baseball player's batting average, every football player's yards gained, and how many touchdowns he has made.

They cannot quote a verse of Scripture because their life is consumed with that. There is a fourth thorn: our Lord says it is the pleasures of this life. The pleasures of this life attract a lot of people. You remember what the Apostle Paul wrote about Demas? He said, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present evil world." It is the pleasures of this life.

Incidentally, the Greek word for pleasures here is hedone, from which we get our English word hedonist, or hedonistic. A hedonist is

someone who lives for pleasure. It is all he wants: the maximum amount of pleasure with the least amount of pain. If you want to think about a hedonist, think about Hugh Hefner and the Playboy clan. They would be classified as hedonists, as would many other people who simply live for a good time and for pleasure. They are mainly concerned about themselves.

He is talking about the pleasures of this life. Zoe in the Greek speaks of the spiritual life, but the word life here is bios, meaning our life. We use bios in biology, the study of life, and biography, the writing of life. Thus our Lord is talking about the pleasures of this life—anything that pleases us, that can be gotten out of control.

Thorns are distractful, deceitful, disturbing, and deadly. No one would take a handful of good seed, regardless of what kind it was, throw it into a briar patch or a bunch of brambles, and expect to reap a good harvest. It is impossible. Those briars and brambles will choke the seed until it produces nothing. It is there, and it is gone; it is worthless.

The Thorny Ground Hearer is Unsaved

Our Lord is talking about someone who hears the Word of God and has all these thorns in his life: the cares of this age, the deceitfulness of riches, the lust for other things, and the pleasures of this life. When he hears the Word, he half-heartedly receives it. Who wants to go to hell? Who wants to face God in judgment? But he never really deals with his sins. There is no sorrowing, no repentance, and no turning. The thorny-ground hearer hopes to make it into heaven while living a life of sin and rebellion. He prefers his own kingdom to God's kingdom and wants to live life his own way, somehow expecting God to receive him into His kingdom when he dies.

Before we get to the applications, I want you to go back in your Bibles to Jeremiah, chapter 4 and verse 3. Here is some excellent counsel for thorny ground hearers: “For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns.” It does not do you one bit of good to sow among thorns. The thorns have to be dealt with.

It is important to note what our Lord points out concerning the four types of hearers in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Our Lord tells us that the wayside hearer, or the hard-hearted hearer, is lost, because Satan cometh immediately and stealeth the word, lest he believe. When you get to the stony ground hearer, our Lord says, "And these are they likewise." The stony ground hearer is equally lost as the wayside hearer.

When you get to the thorny ground hearer, the Bible says he brings forth no fruit. So the thorny ground hearer is unsaved as well. In fact, the next message you are going to hear is about the good ground hearer, and he is the only one that brought forth fruit. Three out of four are lost.

If you come to the Word of God with a hard heart, you will never be benefited by it. If you come with a shallow heart, you will never be benefited by it. If you come with a half heart, you will never be benefited by it. The only way that you can ever benefit from the Word of God is with a whole heart.

Applications: Dealing with Sin, Neglect, and Repentance

According to the Word of God, sins must be dealt with. Where there is no genuine and honest dealing with sin, there is no salvation. Faith and repentance are the two sides of one coin. He that truly exercises faith at the same time repents, and he that truly repents at the same time exercises faith. You cannot have one without the other. Without true, genuine repentance, without dealing with these thorns, the thorns will overpower the Word to the point that it will not benefit the one who is hurt.

It does not necessarily have to be great sins that destroy the soul. When we think about sins, we think about drunkards, murderers, and whoremongers. But you do not have to be a drunkard, whoremonger, or murderer. Neglect will destroy you just as easily as those atrocious sins. All you have to do is neglect Christ, the Bible, prayer, or the preaching of the word, and you will be destroyed as easily as the drunkard, whoremonger, and murderer. It is the man who neglects his soul who is condemned. It does not matter whether you are moral or immoral; you are still condemned.

You remember that passage in the Song of Solomon where the Bible says, little foxes spoil the vines. It does not have to be a big fox, just a little fox. Little sins will destroy your soul as easily and as quickly as great sins. One little thorn can do a lot of damage; many thorns will do the damage more quickly.

We must actually turn from our sins, not coddle them and pretend that they are not there. I have counseled many people who liked to pretend that they did not have any sins, or at least one real sin controlling them. They pretended it was not there, although it was obvious. The Apostle Paul tells why God sent him in Acts 26:18: "To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me." Why did God send Paul? To turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. In other words, we must be turned. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, Paul tells the Thessalonians how they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

The Apostle Paul also said, in Acts chapter 26 and verse 20, speaking of his message, "But showed first to them at Damascus and at Jerusalem and throughout the coast of Judea and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance." The word meet literally means works evidencing, demonstrating, or manifesting repentance. If a man truly and genuinely repents, there will be evidence of that repentance in his life. There will be fruit. Where there is no repentance, there is no fruit.

We cannot coddle our sins or pretend that they are not there. They are, and they must be honestly and genuinely dealt with. You do not want to be a wayside hearer, a stony ground hearer, or a thorny ground hearer. You should want to be a good ground hearer, because according to the Word of God, that is the only one who is genuinely converted—the only one who produces fruit.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Help us to hear the word scripturally and biblically. Help us to have our hearts prepared, that we may receive the full benefit of thy word and thy truth. May we not be the wayside hearer, the stony ground hearer, or the thorny ground hearer. Make

us wholehearted hearers, Lord, that we may honor and glorify thee and bring forth fruit for thy honor and glory. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 5

The Present Truth

December 11, 2015

Introduction: Peter's Concern for Remembrance

Peter instructs us in a very important principle. Look at verse 12: "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it is meet as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir up you by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. Moreover, I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in your remembrance."

The Necessity of Repeated Truth

Peter states that he does not wish to be negligent by failing to put them in remembrance of the truth, even though he realizes they already know the truth. There are a number of wonderful points here. First of all, based upon verse 12, it should be obvious that truth needs to be heard over and over again. Peter said he was not about to neglect his duty by failing to repeat the truth. It is only as we hear the

truth over and over that we are actually grounded, settled, and established in the truth.

That is one reason why you should read your Bibles over and over. Once you have read through the Bible all the way one time, wonderful—start all over again and do it. It is amazing what you can see, what you can learn, and what you can remember simply by rereading. I have had people tell me many times, "Well, I find it difficult to memorize Scripture." I said, "There is a very easy way."

All you have to do is take a small book of the Bible—say Galatians, Ephesians, or Philippians; it does not matter. Read that one book all the way through every day for thirty days. You will begin to see the purpose of the book, its author, and numerous things about that book. But two things will actually happen. First, after thirty days, your Bible will automatically open to that book. Second, you will have memorized Scripture without really trying to memorize Scripture, because you are going over it and over it. Rehearsing truth forces us to analyze and reinforce that truth in our lives.

Repetition enables us to examine ourselves. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" We are commanded to examine ourselves, and therefore we must hear truth over and over.

Repetition also aids learning. It was not onerous to Peter, nor did he consider it unnecessary, to re-preach and re-teach the same truth. Many times our own people have come to me and said, "Pastor, you remember that message you preached a year or two ago?" When I answered yes, they would say, "We would like you to re-preach that message." After I preached it again, they said, "You know, we got far more out of it the second time than we ever got out of the first time." It is true. When you hear a message over and over, it is amazing how much more you get out of it.

The same thing is true of reading Scripture. Peter is saying, "I know you are settled in this truth. I know you understand it, but you need to hear it again." The principle is simply this: the more you hear truth, the more you understand truth. Do you understand that

one reason we constantly forget Scripture and truth is that we do not hear it repeated enough?

Christ's Example of Repetition

Thirdly, Peter undoubtedly learned this method of instruction from the Master Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Mark 10:1 says, "And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan." Then it says, "And the people resort unto him again. And as he was wont, he taught them again." Jesus came into Judea, and the same people came to Him again. As He was accustomed to do, He taught them again. In all probability, He not only taught the same people; He probably taught the same truths. He simply taught them over and over.

So, we must hear truth repeatedly. Hebrews 2:1 says, "Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." Notice that he said we should give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard. That is past tense. Do you realize there is a tendency to forget those things that you have been taught?

The Danger of Letting Truth Slip

If you do not use them, you lose them, as I said last night. Obviously, there is a tendency, and the older you get, the greater that tendency. I am sure that not every one of you has had the experience of getting up from your desk or going from one room to another, then having to stop and pause and say, "Now, why did I come into this room? What am I looking for?" The older you get, you understand that. It is not that we are going lame. The older you get, the more information you have and the longer it takes to process it, like a computer.

But notice: you have to be careful lest you forget those things which you have heard. In 2 Peter 1:12, Peter says, "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." Peter is saying, "I want to make sure that you are established in the present truth."

The Meaning of 'Established'

The word “established” here is the Greek word “sterizo,” and it literally means to be steadfast, fixed, confirmed, constant, made firm, and established in one’s mind. Peter is saying, “I want the truth to be as firmly established in your mind. I want it to be constant. I want it to be confirmed. I want it to be there.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 112:1-10 (KJV)

The Apostle Paul said in Colossians 2:7, "Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." God, through His Word, tells us that we must be established in the truth. There are certain blessings of being established in truth.

Psalm 112 says:

Blessings of Being Established (Psalm 112)

"Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.

"Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever. His horn shall be exalted with honour.

"The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish."

Here is the man who is established in the truth. He shall not be moved. His heart is established. He is not going to be afraid. Why? He knows what truth is, and he knows who God is.

You must also consider the opposite. James 1:8 says, "A double minded man is unstable in all of his ways." What is a double minded man? Someone who does not really know what he believes anyhow. I was remarking today to Brother James that, since I live out in the country, I see so many little squirrels that have gotten run over by cars. I have probably run over my share of them—not purposefully, and not trying to.

The Danger of Double-Mindedness

Have you ever noticed how a squirrel tries to cross the road? He runs this way, then goes back, and then changes his mind. He does that two or three times until the tires hit him. If he had just kept going, he never would have gotten hit. Or, if once he turned and went back and stayed, he never would have gotten hit. In other words, he is double-minded. He does not know which way to move or which way to go, and he gets run over.

That is the way it is with fallen man. Fallen man is double-minded, and a man who is not established in the truth is double-minded as well. But look back to 2 Peter chapter 1, because Peter says this very clearly in verse 12: “Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”

Defining 'Present Truth'

The present truth. What exactly is the present truth? What is Peter talking about? The word “present” is the Greek word pareimi, and it literally means to be at hand, to be by, or to be present. I can explain it like this: It is that truth which is right in front of you.

Luke 13:1 uses the same Greek word, pareimi, translated in the same way: “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Here is the exact same Greek word, translated exactly the same. Here were people telling our Lord Jesus what Pilate had done to the Galileans, how he had murdered them. But the Bible said they were present there. What does that mean? It means they were right there before Him. In the same way, present truth is truth that is right in front of you.

They were standing right in front of him, talking to him, telling him they were there. They were at hand; they were present. In 2 Corinthians 10:11, the Apostle Paul writes: "Let such an one think this, that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present." You remember what they said of Paul: "Oh, he's mighty vociferous and strong in his letters, but in his speech, he's weak and contemptible." Paul said, "Let me tell you something. Exactly the way I am in letters when I write to you, when I'm standing right in front of you, when I'm present with you, that's exactly the way I'm going to be." So each time you see the word "present," it refers to that which is right in front of you.

What Present Truth Is Not

If you look back to 2 Peter 1:12, here is an amazing truth again. Peter says, "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things," though you know them and be established in the present truth. Peter was absolutely sure that these people were established in the present truth. That is, they understood and applied the truth in their lives. They understood and applied the preaching and the teaching.

Now we're talking about the present truth. Let me tell you to begin with what I do not mean by using that phrase. Negatively, first of all, I do not mean that truth is relative. I do not mean that truth changes with situations, conditions, circumstances, or the progress or the erosion of society.

God's law does not change. God does not change, and His definition of sin has not changed. Man cannot change that which is wicked, perverted, and rebellious into that which is lawful and just. It is impossible. That which was sin in the first century is still sin in the twenty-first century. That which was good, right, and holy in the first century is still good, right, and holy in the twenty-first century.

Many individuals hold to what they call situation ethics, saying that everything is relative and depends upon the situation or circumstance. No. God is absolute. His Word is absolute. It is certain, fixed, and unchanging. Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O Lord,

is thy word settled in the heavens." Our Lord said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

When I speak of the present truth, I am not saying that truth is relative or that it changes. Neither am I saying that there is such a thing as new truth. The phrase the present truth does not imply new truth. If a revelation is new, it is not true, because there is no such thing as new truth. We have the full and final revelation of God in Jesus Christ. John said in John 1:17, "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Was there no grace in the Old Testament? Of course there was. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Anyone who has ever been saved has been saved by grace; no one can be saved any other way. Was there no truth in the Old Testament? Of course. Everything that God reveals is truth.

What, then, does it mean that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ? It means that Jesus Christ is the apex, the epitome, and the fullness of grace and truth. There is nothing above or beyond Him. He is it.

The phrase “the present truth” does not imply new truth. Hebrews 1:1 says, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets.” The word “divers” means various or manifold, of different kinds. The Bible says that our Lord healed divers diseases. I never will forget hearing an old black preacher explain that expression on the radio: “It takes the grace of God to heal them divers diseases. Only Jesus can do that.” When I wondered what he meant, he explained, “You know, them divers diseases, when it comes time to go to church and you just dive back under them covers.” That is a good interpretation, though “divers” simply means various kinds.

Progressive Revelation in Scripture

Hebrews continues: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who, being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His

person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." God, in times past, in the Old Testament and sometimes in the New Testament, spoke to the prophets in different ways—sometimes with a dream, sometimes with a trance, and sometimes with a vision. But He hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things.

For someone to believe in new or additional truth, he has to deny that Jesus Christ is the fullness, the apex, and the epitome of truth. To say that there is a new truth is to say that Jesus Christ is not sufficient. Anyone who thinks he needs visions, dreams, horoscopes, astrology, forecasters, false prophets, spurious religious writings, or anything above and beyond the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God is really committing blasphemy, because he is saying that Jesus Christ is not the fullness of everything.

Therefore, when I speak about "the present truth," I am not saying that there is such a thing as new truth, or that truth is relative and changes. What, then, do I mean by the term "the present truth"?

What did Peter mean when he wrote about the present truth? You have to understand something. God did not simply dump all of His truth upon us at one time. Stop and think about this. The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years by 40 different authors. From Genesis chapter 3 onward, the truth was not revealed all at once. This is what is known as progressive revelation. There was a progressive unfolding of the truth. He gave it little by little.

Isaiah 28:9-10 says: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breast. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

That is exactly the way God revealed truth: here a little, and there a little. Let us take this idea and apply it to the Lord Jesus Christ. Genesis 3:15 is known as the protevangelium. The protevangelium is simply the first promise of the Messiah in the Bible. It is the first promise, but it does not contain everything that would later be revealed about Him.

There are a number of things that could be pointed out in that verse. The only thing that you find about the Messiah in Genesis 3:15 is, number one, that He's going to be born of a woman. Number two, that He's going to defeat His enemy. Number three, that He would be wounded. Or you could say, number four, that it implies a first coming and a second coming. There are a number of things that could be brought out of that verse. But the only thing that you really see in that verse, just reading that verse, is that the Messiah is going to come of a woman.

Do you realize it is only when you get to Genesis chapter 49 and verse 10 that you find that the Messiah is going to be from the tribe of Judah? He's going to be born of a woman, but He's going to come from the tribe of Judah.

It was many years later, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, verses 12 through 13, that you find out the Messiah is going to be from the seed of David. So He is going to be of a woman, of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of David. Finally, when you get to Isaiah 7:14, He is going to be born of a virgin. Then, when you get to Micah 5:2, He is going to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

All I am saying is that here was a progressive unfolding of the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Each stage of revelation would have been, at one time, a present truth concerning Jesus Christ.

There are a number of illustrations of what you and I would call present truth. In Acts chapter 18, verse 24, we read: “And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.” He was an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures. Verse 25 says: “This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”

“And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he

mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos preach, but all he knew was that John said He was to come, and that the One whom he baptized was Him. He knew nothing else. Aquila and Priscilla said, "Listen, there's a lot that has happened since then." They were friends of Paul, and tent makers just like Paul. They took Apollos and expounded unto him the things more perfectly; that is, they filled him in on the present truth at that particular time concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He then convinced everybody scripturally.

Another illustration is found in Acts chapter 19, verses 1 through 5. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus and found certain disciples. He asked them, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" They answered, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." When Paul asked them about their baptism, they said it was John's baptism. Paul explained that John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe on Christ Jesus, who would come after him. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here were people who knew only the preaching of John. They did not know what had happened after Christ came, died, was buried, and resurrected, or after the descent of the Holy Spirit. That was present truth.

We could extend this further. Remember the trance Peter received on the rooftop. God let a sheet down from heaven and told him, "Rise and eat." Peter answered, "Not so, Lord; I've not eaten anything clean or common or unclean." The Lord said, "That which I've cleansed, don't call thou common or unclean." This happened three times. By the time Peter had finished, there was a knock at the door. Men had come from Cornelius, asking him to come and share the Word of God with them. The outcome is recorded in Acts 11:18, when Peter reported to Jerusalem: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." That was present truth. They had not known it before.

Progressive Illumination Today

There was, in the Bible and even as the Bible was being written, a progressive unfolding of truth. Now there is no more progressive unfolding of truth; in fact, there is no more revelation. God is not revealing, and will not reveal, anything above and beyond His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation has ended because revelation is complete.

Someone may ask, “If revelation is ended and there is no more progressive revelation, then there is no more present truth.” No, that is not true. There is still present truth. How can there be present truth without progressive revelation? The answer is that there is progressive illumination. Most people get revelation and illumination mixed up. People call and say, “Brother Weaver, let me share with you what God just revealed to me.” Before they do, some things must be made clear.

"God didn't reveal anything to you. He just opened your eyes to that which was already revealed." Do you understand the difference?

Revelation is the act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before to the human mind. Who wrote the book of Genesis? Moses wrote the first five books. Genesis 1 through 3 contains not only the creation but also the fall of man. How did Moses know what happened in creation? He wasn't there. How did Moses know what happened at the fall of Adam and Eve? He wasn't there. God revealed it to him and inspired him to write it. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. That's revelation.

Illumination is the act of God the Holy Spirit whereby He enlightens us and illuminates our mind to understand that truth that has already been revealed.

So God doesn't reveal things to us. He illuminates us and enlightens us and enables us to understand His revelation of the truth. So there is a progressive illumination because God does not enlighten our minds or illuminate our minds to all of this truth at one time. Do you understand that there is no one who understands all truth? Not one. I don't care if you take twenty Baptist preachers who study the Scriptures for years; you're going to find

disagreements among them, because not all of them understand all truth. God does not show His truth to everyone at the same time.

If you understand this, it's going to help you not only in witnessing; it's going to help you in teaching. Look in your Bibles to the book of Mark, chapter 4, verses 33 and 34. Pay attention to what is being said: “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them. And when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.” Note that He spake unto them as they were able to hear it.

Let me ask you a question. I watched Brother Yancy with his little son tonight, telling him to come to him, and the little boy looked at him and then simply walked over to him. Suppose he got that little one-year-old boy and said, “Now, son, I want to explain to you supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. I want to teach you the difference between dichotomy and trichotomy.” Is that little boy going to understand anything that his daddy says? No, not at all. There are times in your life when you are not able to receive certain truths from God's Word.

God has to prepare you. He gives truth as you are able to receive it. If you really want to receive more truth and really want to understand it, then you have to do like the disciples: get along with Him and let Him explain it to you.

In John 16:12, our Lord tells His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” Isn’t that amazing? He was saying, “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. You cannot handle them now.”

Verse 13 continues: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” The Lord Jesus was saying, “I have many things to tell you. You cannot handle them right now. But the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to illuminate your mind, enlighten you, and teach you things to come.”

If you understand that there is progressive illumination, and that not everybody is able to receive truth—or at least the same truth—it

will make you far more patient and understanding. It will cut down on your frustration and impatience.

Application: Receiving the Present Truth

I had a dear brother in our church who was older than I. I was in that church for fifteen years, and for fifteen years I taught the doctrines of grace there. I invited a preacher, John Reisinger, to come and speak five nights on the doctrine of election. Some of you may have known old John; he was great on that doctrine.

After the fifth night, this dear brother came to me and said, "Pastor, this is just absolutely wonderful. This is wonderful. My question to you is this: Why haven't you been preaching this for all these years?" I replied, "Brother, my question to you is this: Where have you been all these years? I have been preaching it." But he did not see it or hear it until that particular night, or that particular week. The point is that we must understand this when we read First John: How does John divide believers?

He divides them into babes, young men, and fathers. A babe is not going to act like a young man, and a young man is not going to act like a father. The understanding of each one is different. If I am going to teach a babe, I am not going to begin with the doctrine of reprobation. I am going to start with something else, because he is a babe; you have to feed them food that is convenient to them. You do not take a year-old baby or a six-month-old baby and feed him a T-bone steak. You feed them food which is convenient.

You have to understand that not everybody is able to receive truth at one time. I am talking about the present truth, because there is a progressive enlightening and illumination of our minds. One of the problems we experience as Christians is that we are not accustomed to receiving truth as the present truth. We are comfortable with our salvation and with our understanding of certain doctrines, whether creation, salvation, justification, or election. We are comfortable with those things, and we do not put the emphasis upon the preached Word of God the way we should.

In fact, the average individual attaches absolutely no importance to the time, study, effort, and prayer that go into preparing a

message. The average Christian thinks this about the preaching of the preacher: “Easy come, easy go. All I have to do is sit down and listen. That is fine with me. I can get up and walk out. If I do not get it next Sunday, I will get it the next time he preaches it or teaches on the subject.” They have no earthly idea of the prayer and study involved.

I have had people ask me personal, burning questions that they really needed answered. I say, “Let me think about this, and I will try to deal with it.” Then I bring a message answering all their questions, and they are not there. The point I am trying to make is this: If we viewed and understood the phrase “the present truth,” we would look far differently at preaching and accept it far more graciously and far better than we do.

If you were alive in the first century during the cult of emperor worship in the Roman Empire, the present truth would be the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You would either serve and worship Christ or Caesar. If you were alive in Germany in the 1500s, the present truth would be justification by faith alone, and you would either side with Luther and the Reformers or hold to salvation by works as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. If you were alive in France or Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1500s, especially toward the middle of that era, the present truth would be the sovereignty of God. You would either join with Calvin and the Reformers or hold to a humanistic position of the divine right of kings. If you were alive in Scotland during the 1500s, the present truth would be the kingship of Jesus Christ. You would either stand with John Knox and the Reformers or hold a statist position.

If you were alive in England in the 1700s, the present truth would be the purity of the church. You would either hold with the Puritans, who wanted to purify the church, or stand with the status quo in the old church. Later, when the church was not purified and it was not coming to pass, there was a separatist movement, and they left the church. You would either have separated yourself in order to have a pure worship or stayed there, for there was a mixture of paganism with it.

Here we are in 2015. The present truth today still involves the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the superiority of His Word. You will

either worship and obey the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible, or follow the humanist in sodomy, fornication, adultery, aborticide, and social and governmental sins. You will be a politically correct individual if you do not stand with the Lord Jesus Christ. You will either stand for liberty and freedom or be swallowed up by tyrannical, despotic government. There is a present truth.

Martin Luther said, “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ.”

"For the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefields besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." That teaches a present truth. If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except that one little portion being attacked by the world, what I have done is effectively denied Christ and His Word, even though I profess with the loudest voice the rest of it.

There is a present truth: the truth that must be professed is that where the battle is raging. It does no good to profess truth if there is no battle, because no one's going to be listening. The question is this: How do we ascertain the present truth?

It is a truth from God's Word that is under attack by the liberals, the humanists, and the unbelievers. All you have to do is look around and ascertain what truth is being attacked by the left. That is the spot where you need to stand. They're attacking life; I'm going to be pro-life. They're attacking the right of self-defense; I will be pro-self-defense. They're attacking marriage; I'm going to stand for marriage. You have to fight and stand where the enemy is attacking.

Secondly, the present truth is that which is being proclaimed by God's men from God's Word as necessity is laid upon them in the providence of God. When I say God's men, I'm not talking about mama-called and papa-sent, ear-tickling preachers, but real, genuine men of God. Titus chapter 1 gives us an interesting truth: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is

after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." When did God promise it? Before the world began. Were you there? No.

How do you know about this? Look in verse 3: “But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.” How does God manifest His Word? It is through preaching. The Bible says in Amos 3:7, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”

Do you know what the present truth is? The present truth is that which is being laid on the heart of God’s men in the providence of God as necessity is placed upon them.

Let me give you an example. Recently, I was in a chaplain’s conference in Virginia. When I was invited to preach, I instantly knew the message God would have me preach. I was the very first preacher. There were five or six other men, and I brought a message on the judgment of God. Do you know something? The rest of that day and the next day, those other preachers all brought messages on the judgment of God. What?

I said to the people, “You better be paying attention. God is giving you a warning. You better listen.” Here were godly men, all of us preaching the same thing.

What Real Preaching Is

Let me show you what preaching is in Nehemiah chapter 8, beginning in the middle of verse 7, where it is unnecessary to pronounce all the names of the Levites. Here is what real preaching is. There is very little of it in our country today, but here it is: “and the Levites.” The passage says, “And the Levites caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.”

How did they do that? “So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly”—that is exposition—“and gave the sense”—that is explanation—“and caused them to understand the reading”—that is application. What is preaching? It is exposition, explanation, and application.

When I first started preaching over fifty years ago, I quoted an awful lot of Scripture. Sometimes I would quote as many as one hundred to two hundred verses as I preached. I simply quoted them because I wanted to put out all the Scripture I could. People would shake my hand as I left and say, “Wow, you can really quote that Scripture.” But I was not quoting Scripture so they could discover that I could quote Scripture.

It dawned on me one day that God's people do not need Scriptures merely quoted to them. If that is all they need, they can get a record or CD. What they need is the Word of God expounded, explained, and applied. He said that is what real preaching is.

When you have the Word of God expounded, explained, and applied, God will give it to you for your blessing, for your benefit, and for your warning. It is that truth which, in His providence, is laid upon God's preachers as necessity is laid upon them, and they present it to you out of His Word.

When I was seventeen years old, after I got out of high school, I went to boot camp in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. I was raised on a farm, and I went into the mess hall that morning.

I saw something they were trying to feed me that I could not identify. It was creamed beef on toast. There are a lot of different names for that in the service, I can assure you. But being raised on a farm, we had eggs, grits, biscuits, gravy, meat, and potatoes. I looked at that creamed beef on toast and said, "I am not going to eat that slop." And I did not. I just sat there.

We got up and went outside. That was when I found out they had planned a five-mile hike with full field packs for us that day. About nine o'clock that morning, that creamed beef on toast began to look very appetizing. I wish I had eaten it.

Now listen carefully. Neither the cooks nor the sergeants came around at five that morning and said, "Now, Private Weaver, what would you like for breakfast today?" They never asked me. They knew what they had planned. They put all the protein and carbohydrates out for me to eat, and I refused it. I was the one who suffered.

The point is this: You do not necessarily get to tell God's preachers what to preach. You may like it or may not like it. But if it is exposition, explanation, and application, God has put it there for you, and you had better eat it. You had better take it, because it is the present truth for you.

God sets before His people what they need for that week to face their tests, trials, tribulations, and tasks. If you refuse it, you are the loser. You may say, "I get mad. I get upset. I do not like that." He is in charge, not you, and He knows what you need.

Jeremiah 3:14-15 says, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." The knowledge and understanding they feed you is that which He gives them. That is the present truth for you.

Receiving the Present Truth

The first application is this: Are you established in the present truth? Do you have any idea what the present truth is? Tonight, the present truth happens to be the present truth. You should know what Peter is talking about in 2 Peter 1:12. You should know what it means to be established in the present truth. Not just things that you have heard in times past—you ought not to forget them—but you surely should make application of what you have heard tonight and this week, and what you will hear next week and the week after.

Let me show you one last passage. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, and look at verse 13. Let me show you how you should receive the present truth. This will determine whether or not you receive the present truth. What is your attitude toward the preached Word? Do you realize that a lot of people say, when it comes to preaching, “Ho hum,” or, “Hurry up, let’s get this thing over with. I have a roast in the oven; you better let me out by 12”? Most people never come to get in with God; they come to get out. If you ever got in, you would not really care what time you got out.

Here is how you should receive the present truth. The Apostle Paul says: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

You did not say, “That is Brother Ashwood’s opinion. That is what Brother Barber thinks. That is what Brother Weaver thinks.” No. Paul said that when you heard the word preached, you did not receive it as the word from Paul, Silas, or Barnabas. You received it as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually works in you that believe. So here is my question: When you hear the exposition, explanation, and application from the Word of God, do you really and truly receive it as the Word of God?

“This is God’s will for my life. This is how I am to live and direct my life. This is how I am to make application. This is what I am to do in my work and my family.” Do you really receive it as the Word of God? Peter said, “I want you to be established in the present truth.” And the present truth is not court decisions.

It is not the ravings of lawyers or acts of legislative bodies, but that which God's Word declares from God's man in God's providence, as necessity is laid upon him. Hearing it, you must receive it as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh in you who believe. The present truth is that which is right in front of you. Are you established?

CHAPTER 6

The Scope of Christian Obedience

August 16, 2016

Introduction: The Scope of Obedience

Open your Bibles to Ezekiel, chapter 24. Mark this passage. You may think it has absolutely nothing to do with the subject until I come back to it. I was asked to deal tonight with the scope of Christian obedience.

In Ezekiel chapter 24, beginning with verse 15, we read: “Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke. Yet neither shalt thou mourn, nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thy head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died, and I did in the morning as I was commanded.”

When I was asked to preach upon this subject and saw the full slate of subjects to be addressed by the speakers, the first thing that entered into my mind was that there was going to be some serious overlap in these messages. We cannot help but impinge upon each other as we deal with the subject of obedience. The second thought that entered my mind was this: That is good. Repetition aids learning.

Maybe you will hear something over and over again until finally it settles down. When we talk about the scope of Christian obedience, I like to think, when I use the word scope, of hunting, because everybody needs a scope—a good scope. When you look through the scope, you are thinking about the range or extent of your view. Thus, the scope of Christian obedience may concern the view, the outlook, or the range; the application, operation, or effectiveness. It could even include aim or purpose.

In reality, this subject could be exceedingly broad, but I am going to limit it tonight. If scope means the extent or range of obedience, Scripture gives some very succinct answers when one understands what is called arguing from the lesser to the greater.

Argument from the Lesser to the Greater

Our Lord did that in Matthew chapter six. He said, “Consider the birds of the field.” Then He went on to say, “Are you not much more valuable than these birds? Consider the lilies of the field. They do not toil or spin, yet Solomon in all of his glory is not arrayed as one of these.” He then applied it. What He is saying is that here is an argument on something we would call the lesser, but it extends to the greater.

Are we not children of our Heavenly Father? The answer, of course, is yes. Then we have the admonition in Colossians 3:20: “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord.” If God requires children to be in obedience to their earthly parents, how much more does God require us to be in submission and obedience to our Heavenly Father? Does God command servants to be obedient to their masters? The answer is yes. Are we servants or are we slaves? The answer is yes.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 makes that exceedingly clear: “Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God? You are not your own, for you are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit which are his.” If we are servants and slaves, what does our Lord tell us in Colossians 3:22? “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.” If God requires servants or slaves to be in obedience to their earthly masters, how much more are we to be in obedience and submission to our heavenly Master? If that is not clear, look in Acts chapter 3, verse 22, where the Word of God is talking about our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Acts 3:22, the Bible says, “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto your brethren, like unto me, from among your brethren, like unto me.” This is from Deuteronomy 18. Notice: “Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.” It does not matter whether we are talking about children, servants, or Christ. The Bible says that we are to be in obedience to Him in all things.

The scope of our obedience is therefore the totality of our lives. It is to be absolutely complete in all things. We are not to be obedient only in those things that we like, agree with, or choose. We are to be obedient in absolutely everything, in the totality of our lives.

The Necessity of Recognizing God's Sovereignty

First, we must recognize that He is the Father and we are the children; He is the Lord and we are the servants; He is the Creator and we are the creatures; He is the Redeemer and we are the redeemed. He is the One who is in control, and we are to be controlled. He is the potter, and we are the clay.

The Apostle Paul himself said in Acts 17:28, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” Have you ever stopped to think that without God you would have no being? You would have absolutely nothing. Everything that we are, everything that we have, is from Him.

If we do not recognize this simple truth, we will never be obedient in the way that we should be. Obviously, many Christians, or professing Christians, have fallen into the attitude of Pharaoh. You remember, Pharaoh said this in Exodus chapter 5 and verse 2. When Moses came and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go," Pharaoh responded, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." In other words, if you do not recognize God's sovereignty, you are not going to obey Him. If you do not understand that He is the Absolute, the Supreme One, that He is Sovereign, and that beside Him there is none else, you will absolutely never be obedient the way that you should. Our obedience, in one sense of the word, is based upon our view and our understanding of God.

Total obedience requires total submission. Total submission requires the recognition of God—who He is—and also the recognition of ourselves—who we are and what we are. He is the Father; we are the child. He is the Lord; we are the servants. He is the Creator; we are the creature. If we do not recognize God and know who He is, we cannot be obedient in the way that God commands us to be obedient. If we do not recognize our position before Him, we will never be obedient the way we should be obedient.

We must have a right view of God in order to be obedient in the totality of our life. Obedience is a sovereignly dictated order of life.

Obedience as a Sovereignly Dictated Order of Life

I want to prove this to you from Scripture before we come back to our text. In Genesis chapter 2, beginning with verse 15, everyone should be familiar with this passage. God had created Adam and placed him in the garden: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." That is a sermon in itself concerning keeping it.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

The Bible said, “And the Lord God commanded the man.” The word commanded literally means to put under an oath. It means to give him a charge. Adam may have been vicegerent of the earth and governor of the garden, yet he was under obedience to God. His status, his position, and his uniqueness did not exempt him from obedience. Obedience is a sovereignly dictated order of life. God sovereignly placed Adam in the garden, sovereignly reserved one tree for Himself, and sovereignly said to Adam, “Out of all these other trees you may eat except this one. It is mine.”

Matthew Henry said on Genesis chapter 2: “A confirmation of His present happiness to him in that grant of every tree of the garden he may freely eat. This was not only an allowance of liberty to him in taking the delicious fruits of paradise as a recompense for his care and pains in dressing it and keeping it, but it was withal an assurance of life to him, immortal life, upon his obedience. For the tree of life being put in the midst of the garden as the heart and soul of it, doubtless God had an eye to that especially in this grant, and therefore when upon his revolt the grant is recalled, no notice is taken of any tree of the garden that is prohibited to him except the tree of life, of which it is said that he might have eaten and lived forever, that is, never died, never lost happiness.”

God said to Adam, “Continue holy as thou art, in conformity to thy Creator’s will, and thou shalt continue happy as thou art in the enjoyment of thy Creator’s favor, either in this paradise or in a better.” God created Adam, placed him in the garden, and demanded personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. Had Adam given God what He demanded, paradise would have been assured not only to himself, but to his posterity as well.

There are two things to observe. First, Adam was placed under a commandment-oriented life. What did God say? “This do, and thou shalt live.” That is a command. “This do, and thou shalt die.” That is a command. Adam was placed under a commandment-oriented life. Secondly, absolutely nothing was to get in the way of Adam’s obedience to God, because he was obligated to God. He owed God. God was his Creator, his sustainer, his provider, and his protector. Everything that Adam was and everything that he had belonged to God. God gave him everything. He owed God; therefore, his

obedience was to be first and foremost to God, and rightly demanded by God.

The Fall: From Commandment-Oriented to Feeling-Oriented Life

So you have to ask this question: What happened? Why did Adam not give God that which He demanded? Genesis chapter three, beginning with verse one, tells us: "Now, the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, Yea, have God said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden. And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, you shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die, for God doth know in the day that you eat thereof, that your eyes shall be open, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise. She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."

What happened? The answer is not that Adam was tempted. Just because you are tempted does not necessarily mean that you have to yield to sin. Countless individuals have been tempted and have never yielded to sin. Even our Lord was tempted. Temptation in and of itself is not sin. Yielding to temptation is sin, but simply being tempted is not.

What is Matthew chapter 4? Our Lord was driven into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Temptation in and of itself is not necessarily sin. Do not say that the reason he fell was simply because he was tempted. A lot of people have been tempted and have not necessarily sinned.

It is like the little boy whose father told him not to go swimming in a canal. The father came home early and saw his son returning from the canal with wet swimming trunks in his hand. He asked, "Son, I thought I told you not to go swimming in that canal." "Yes,

sir, I know, but I was tempted." "Well, son, why did you carry your swimming trunks?" "Just in case I got tempted." That is the way most of us are. We like our temptation and plan for temptation, but temptation itself is not sin.

The answer is not also that Adam was adding to the Word of God. In verse three, Eve says, "But of the fruit of the tree of the garden, which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." Someone will say, "God did not say not to touch it. God said to eat it." Let me explain something to you.

What Eve is doing here is declaring a biblical principle: when God forbids any act, He also forbids anything that would lead up to that act. You cannot eat the fruit without touching it, and she is saying that it is God's fruit; she is not to touch it because touching might lead to eating.

For instance, has not God said, "Thou shalt not commit murder"? Of course. But when God forbids murder, He also forbids the unrighteous anger, hatred, and strife that would lead to murder. Has God commanded us not to commit adultery? Of course He has. Yet God does not merely forbid the physical act of adultery and fornication; He also forbids covetousness, lustfulness, and evil desires that would lead to that act. Thus, when Eve said, "Neither shall you touch it," she was enunciating a biblical principle. When God forbids an act, He forbids whatever would lead up to it. Touching was a step toward eating, just as lusting is a step toward adultery.

The answer, then, is this: that which caused Adam to sin is exactly that which causes us to sin. The root of his disobedience is the root cause of our disobedience.

Eve was the first person to sin. She took the fruit, did eat, and gave her husband also. We are told expressly in 1 Timothy 2:14, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Yet although the woman was the first to sin, sin did not come into the world through the woman. It came into the world through Adam because God's covenant was with him. Romans 5:12

says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered in the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

The interesting thing is that, in the Greek, “for that all have sinned” is an aorist passive. This means it is something that has happened once and forever; it is over and done with, not being repeated. When did all men sin? All men sinned in Adam. First Corinthians 15:45-48 teaches that Adam was our federal head and federal representative.

What he did, we did. What he sinned, we sinned. What he fell, we fell. It is just that simple. You say, “I do not like that.” Then you do not like salvation either, because our salvation is in Jesus Christ as our Federal Head. What He did, we did, and everything is tied up in Him as well. Without going into detail, let me show you what I am driving at.

Look, if you would please, in Genesis 3, verse 6. When God put Adam in the garden, He placed him under a commandment, or in need of life: “This do, and thou shalt live. Do this and you’ll die.” Now watch verse 6: “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her; and he did eat.”

Where is the word commandment in verse 6? Obviously, it is not there. What you do read in verse 6 is about sight, pleasantness, and desires. What is actually happening with Adam and Eve is that they are forsaking a commandment-oriented life and falling into a feeling- or desire-oriented life. It is true that the woman took and ate, but she also gave to her husband.

Historical Examples of Feeling-Oriented Disobedience

The Bible tells us that Adam was not deceived. He knew exactly what he was doing. If Adam ate because he knew his wife was fallen and wanted to be with her, he still sinned, because God had said that He was to be obeyed. The first commandment is, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Adam would essentially have been placing

Eve before God, which would have been sin anyhow. But he took and ate as well.

Ever since the fall, mankind has been living a feeling- and desire-oriented life. When the fall came, feelings became all-important. When God came walking into the garden in the cool of the day and said, “Adam, where art thou?” where were they? Hiding. You would think that Adam, created in original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, would at least have had enough sense to come running to God, fall before Him, and say, “Oh, Lord God, I have sinned, and my wife has sinned.”

We have done that which has been wicked and wrong and disobedient. We have transgressed Thy law and broken Thy commandment. Lord, please help us. Did Adam and Eve do that? No. What did they do? They ran and hid. Why? Because at this point, feelings are now more important than a commandment. In other words, it might embarrass us, hurt us, or cause us bad feelings if we have to do something like that. No, it is easier to deny it, ignore it, or pretend that it does not exist, because our feelings are now paramount.

No one today likes to be made to feel uncomfortable. Look at political correctness. Look at all the stupidity that is going on because people feel unsafe or uncomfortable. That is simply a demonstration of their fallen nature.

Now consider Joshua chapter 6. We have just seen this in Adam and Eve. Actually, you could classify it as the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. That is basically what happened. But in Joshua chapter 6, the children of Israel are about to conquer Jericho, and God gives a specific commandment concerning the city. God says, “And the city shall be accursed, even it and all that are therein, to the Lord. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And you, in any wise, keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest you make yourselves accursed when you take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it. But all the silver and gold and vessels of brass and iron are consecrated unto the Lord. They shall come into the treasury of the Lord.”

Notice what the Bible says. This city is cursed; everything is cursed. God said, “Don't touch anything in it.” The silver, gold, and all these things were to come into the treasury of the Lord. Do not touch them, because you will make yourself a curse and make the camp of Israel a curse. The command is absolutely plain and simple: do not touch it; do not take anything. If you do, you are going to become accursed. It is a simple, straightforward command.

Achan did not come up and confess. He was singled out by God, and now he was being forced to confess. Joshua said unto Achan, “My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him, and tell me now what thou hast done. Hide it not from me.”

And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done. When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them. And behold, they were hid in the earth, in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.” So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran into the tent, and behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it.

Notice what he said: “I saw it. I coveted it. And I took it.” Do you realize that is exactly what Eve did? Do you realize that is what God says in 1 John 2 and verse 15? “Love not the world, neither the things of the world. For all things of the world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”

So now you are seeing exactly the same thing in Achan that you saw in Adam and Eve. Achan basically gave in to his desires. He gave in to his feelings. He saw that goodly Babylonish garment. He wanted it. He wanted those two hundred shekels of silver. He took it. He coveted. He lusted after it, and he ended up taking it. He was living a desire-oriented life, a feeling-oriented life, and his desire- and feeling-oriented life led to his destruction—and, I might add, the destruction of his family. Had not Adam and Eve already proven this point? You cannot sin against God and escape. Achan proves this

point with his life and the life of his family. No man is going to sin against God and escape. It is just that simple.

Man, down through the ages, ever since the fall, has been living a feeling-oriented life, a desire-oriented life. Judges 14 gives us a very interesting passage.

Notice verse 1: “And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. Now therefore get her for me to wife.” Then his father's mother said of him, “Is there never a woman among the daughter of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?” And Samson said of his father, “Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well.”

Every Israelite knew that God had forbidden intermarriage with pagans and with the heathen. It was plainly commanded. If you do not believe that, you can read it in Exodus 34, verses 12–16, and Deuteronomy 7, verses 1–5. No intermarriages were to take place, especially with the Philistines.

When Samson said, “I found this Philistine woman down in Timnath; I want you to get her for me to wife,” his father objected: “Is there never a woman in your own tribe that you could marry? Cannot you find a sweet, beautiful Hebrew woman to marry? And if you cannot find one in this tribe, there are eleven other tribes. You do not have to take one out of this tribe. Just make sure she is a Hebrew.” What did Samson say? Look in verse 3: “And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well.” Check the Hebrew word when you get home. Here is what he said: “Get her for me.”

“It's agreeable in my eyes. It's pleasing to me. I don't see anything wrong with it.” Really? So not only was he violating plain commandments of God; he was now also violating the fifth commandment, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” What was his attitude? “My feelings have precedence over the commands of God. My desires come first. It doesn't matter what God commands. It doesn't matter what you want, Dad. It doesn't matter that God said,

‘Honor thy father and thy mother.’ No, no, no, no. I don't see a thing wrong with it. Get her for me.”

You know the story, of course. He never married her; she was given to his best friend. If you turn over to chapter 16, he went again to another Philistine woman, Delilah. You know what happened when she cut his hair off. She made him sleep upon her knees, called for a man, caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head, and began to afflict him; his strength went from him. She said, “The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.” He awoke out of his sleep and said, “I will go out as in other times before and shake myself,” but he knew not that the Lord was departed from him. The Philistines took him, put out his eyes, brought him down to Gaza, bound him with fetters of brass, and he did grind in the prison house.

He lived by his feelings. He lived by his desires. It cost him his eyes, his ministry, and his life. He lost everything. Why? Because he lived a feeling-oriented life. Here is the point: we must obey in all things. Literally, our lives are to be brought into totality and in conformity to the Word of God, period. Do you realize what I have been preaching so far is this?

The Two Main Hindrances to Obedience: Feelings and Desires

There are two main hindrances to obedience. If you would examine your life, especially when you have been disobedient to God, probably one of these two hindrances is present: your feelings and your desires. I have heard so many people say, “I don't feel like obeying,” or, “I don't desire this in my life at this point.” One of the major problems we have in modern-day Christendom is that most people live by their feelings. They do not live by the commandments of God; they do not live by biblical principles. Consequently, it is a clever wile of the devil to tempt men to think that they cannot do what God requires them to do simply because they don't feel like doing it.

The Scope of Christian Obedience

Their excuse is, “I can’t help myself. I just don’t feel like it.” Does God command us to pray? “Pray without ceasing.” Yet how many

times have you said, “I just don’t feel like praying”? Does God command us to study? “Study to show yourselves approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly divided.” Yet how many times have you said, “I just don’t feel like studying”? Does God command us to attend the public worship? Yes: “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves.” But you say, “I just don’t feel like going today.”

It is not that you are sick; you simply give in to your feelings. “I don’t feel like going to church. I don’t feel like confessing my sin. I don’t feel like making things right. I don’t feel like confronting this brother.” The problem is that we have allowed our feelings to rule us rather than the Word of God. We have adopted the pagan philosophy, “If it feels good, do it.” On the other hand, we have also adopted the pagan philosophy, “If it doesn’t feel good, I will not do it,” regardless of what God commands. Most of us allow our desires to get ahead of the commandments of God.

I have known professing Christian men whose goal was to be a millionaire, even a multi-millionaire, and then serve God. Really? God gives money to many individuals, and I am thankful that He does. But why do you not serve God now? Your desire to be a millionaire may never come to pass. If God has ordained you to be one, you are going to be one, but you will become one through obedience more than anything else. We put our desires and our feelings ahead of God.

Now go back to our text in Ezekiel, chapter 24. I want to demonstrate something from Scripture as we look at the scope of Christian obedience. The scope is that we should be obedient in all things. Ezekiel is a prime illustration. I have often asked myself, “Would I perform and obey as Ezekiel did, given the same circumstances?” Ezekiel was a priest whom God called to be a prophet.

Ezekiel's Exemplary Obedience in Devastating Circumstances

He was also in captivity in Babylon. Ezekiel was assigned to those Hebrews in Babylon, and he was also assigned to those who were yet to come to Babylon, because he prophesied and preached to those

who had not yet been captured and taken captive. He was also a sign that the temple was going to be destroyed. We need to see his obedience in the most stressful, emotional, and feeling-oriented situation that any man could possibly face: the immediate and instant loss of his wife.

Look at verse 15. The word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." Let me put it bluntly: God told Ezekiel, "I'm going to kill your wife. I'm going to kill her instantly, suddenly."

John Gill said of this passage, "I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke," meaning his wife, who was very probably was of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to; however, of an amiable disposition and, in her conjugal relation, very agreeable to the prophet. No doubt, she was a truly religious woman and, upon all accounts, desirable to him. This lovely object of his affection, the Lord, who is the sovereign disposer of all persons, signified that he would take her away from him by death unto himself—that is, suddenly and at once. The Syriac and Arabic versions render it "with a sudden stroke," as sometimes persons are struck with death at once with a palsy.

What God had just said to Ezekiel was, "Your wife is going to die instantly, suddenly." The unexpected and sudden death of his wife was sufficient in and of itself to cause the most loving and godly man to crumble and become so devastated that he would be unable to think or act. Think about your wives. If the Lord lets us live till January, Alice and I will have been married fifty-four years. I have often said jokingly, "If the Lord took her, I'd have to marry forty to take her place."

That is how dependent I am upon her, and how much she works. I have no idea how long Ezekiel and his wife had been married, but God said, "I'm going to take her away instantly, suddenly. You're going to lose her." God has the sovereign right to do that. He gives life, and He has the absolute right to take life. But that is not all. God only told Ezekiel, "I'm going to take your wife suddenly. Unexpectedly. You're going to lose her."

God commanded Ezekiel to give no indication whatsoever that he was in mourning. He said, “Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke. Yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead. Bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.” He was not to cry, mourn, or shed a tear. He was to bind the tire of his head, put on his turban and shoes, cover not his lips, and eat not the bread sent by others. He was to go on in his business as at other times.

Matthew Henry explains that Ezekiel must not give vent to his passion by weeping or letting his tears run down, though tears are a tribute due to the dead, and when the body is sown it is fit that it should be thus watered. Yet he was not allowed to do this, though he had as much reason to do it as any man and would perhaps be ill thought of by the people if he did it not. Much less might he use the customary formalities of mourners.

He must dress himself in his usual attire, bind his turban upon him, here called the tower of his head, put on his shoes, and not go barefoot, as was usual in such cases. He must not cover his lips nor throw a veil over his face, as mourners were wont to do. He must not be of a sorrowful countenance, appearing unto men to fast. He must not eat the bread of men, nor expect that his neighbors and friends should send him provisions, as they usually did, presuming that mourners had no heart to provide meat for themselves. If it was sent, he must not eat of it. It could not but be greatly against the grain of the flesh and blood not to lament the death of one he loved so dearly, but God commanded it.

Matthew Poole said it is likely Ezekiel had this revelation in the night or evening before, and that God told him what He would do in taking away his wife and what he must not do when she was dead and to be buried. Listen again. “Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke. Yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead. Bind the tire of thine head upon thee, put on thy shoes upon my feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.”

"So I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died, and I did in the morning as I was commanded." Consider whether what Matthew Poole has said is accurate. If I have read the Scripture correctly, when God told Ezekiel, "I'm going to take away the desire of thine eyes," He was saying, "I'm going to take away your wife with a stroke." Within twelve to twenty-four hours, his wife was dead.

He had no time to prepare himself. It was sudden. This humbling, poignant, and condemning truth is given to us clearly in verse 18: "So I spake to the people in the morning, and it even my wife died, and I did in the morning as I was commanded."

Stop and think about this. If God took my wife suddenly, I would probably be stunned, shocked, and dazed, like a deer in the headlights. I would not know which way to turn or go, and I would probably be unable to function for a while. Ezekiel was told, "I'm going to take your wife. You can't cry, you can't mourn, and you can't grieve. What you are going to do is act like it did not even happen and just go on with your life."

"And at even my wife died. And in the morning, I did as I was commanded." You talk about the scope of obedience in all things. His feelings did not interfere with his obedience. His desires did not interfere with his obedience. The situation did not change his obedience. The circumstances did not change his obedience. In the evening his wife died, and in the morning he did as he was commanded.

Application: Our Failures and the Call to Total Obedience

How small and insignificant is our whining and complaining in light of such a devastating loss. If God's grace and mercy could uphold Ezekiel in such a time and cause him to obey, is it not possible that you and I could put our feelings, desires, situations, and circumstances aside and obey God in much lighter and easier times? How have we disobeyed? How have we excused our disobedience when there were no excuses? How often do we consider our feelings, emotions, and desires and completely disregard the plain commands of a holy and righteous God, issued not merely for His glory but for

our good? Have you ever stopped to think that when we place our feelings and desires above God and His Word, we are the grossest idolaters? We profess to love Him, but live for ourselves and our feelings.

When God saves us, He places us back under a commandment-oriented life. He put Adam under that commandment-oriented life. Adam fell and began to live a feeling- and desire-oriented life. But when God saves us, He puts us back under that commandment-oriented life. Our Lord said in John 14:21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." "And he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." What did He say in verse 24? "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." First John 5:3 says, "And this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

What is the love of God? That we keep His commandments. Look in your Bibles at 1 John 2:3-5: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." He that saith, "I know him," and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

God, when He saves us, places us back under a commandment-oriented life. We are to obey. Think about it like this: In the garden, when Adam sinned, what did Adam do? He ran. He did not run to God; he ran away from God. Ever since the fall, man has been running as fast and furiously as he can to get away from God and God's law, because he thinks that is freedom. In reality, it is slavery.

Conclusion: Restoration to a Commandment-Oriented Life in Christ

What does God do? God sends His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes and obeys that law personally, perfectly, and perpetually. He offers Himself as a sacrifice and dies for a foundation and basis for forgiveness. Then He is raised from the

dead, that He might actually give repentance and forgiveness of sins. When He does, He captures the running sinner and brings him back, and that sinner kneels before the Father and says with David, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." We no longer want to run from Him; we want to run to Him. I want you to see one other passage. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 10.

We have to come to this conclusion: if we are talking about the scope of our obedience, the totality of our obedience, absolutely nothing and no one must hinder our obedience to the sovereign God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Our Lord said in Matthew 10:37, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." We could also add, he that loveth husband and wife more than me is not worthy of me.

It is the principle that He is enunciating. He is to be supremely loved and supremely obeyed, because He is God. Circumstances do not change your obedience. Situations do not change your obedience. Feelings, desires, and emotions do not change obedience. You are required to obey regardless. Ezekiel spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening his wife died. He did in the morning as he was commanded. Oh, God, help us to see our miserable failures and excuses in light of the obedience that Ezekiel gave in such a devastating circumstance. God requires obedience.

And He does so in all things. Once more, obedience is a sovereignly dictated order of life. God commands it, and if you love Him, you will keep His Word.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask Your help, grace, and mercy. Help us to obey, Lord, in all things. May the totality of our life be brought into conformity to Your Word. May we love Thee, serve Thee, honor Thee, and bring all our feelings, emotions, and desires into conformity to Thy Word; examine them by Thy Word; and repent of any and everything contrary to Thy Word. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Hanged on Your Own Gallows

August 17, 2018

How to Get Hanged on Your Own Gallows

The book of Esther, chapter three, is where we begin. The title of the message is How to Get Hanged on Your Own Gallows. I will read verse five now, and we will come back and read; in fact, let us begin with verse one. The title of the message, again, is how to get hanged on your own gallows.

After these things did Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hamadathah, the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed in reverence to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.

Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gates, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, he hearkened not

unto them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath, and he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had showed him the people of Mordecai. Wherefore, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

Introduction: The Flesh's Desire to Play God

Fallen man likes to play God. He believes that his will and his way should be supreme and hold supreme sway. It's been that way ever since the fall of Adam. I want you to hold Esther chapter three, but very quickly look back in your Bibles to the book of Genesis chapter three and notice, if you would please, the fall of man. Notice in Genesis chapter three, beginning there with verse one, the Bible says this Genesis three, verse one.

The Serpent's Temptation and Man's Self-Exaltation

The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. He said unto the woman, “Yea, hath God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” The woman answered that they might eat of the fruit of the trees, except the fruit of the tree which was amidst the garden. God had said, “You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.” And the serpent said unto the woman, “You shall not surely die.” For God doth know that in the day they ate thereof, their eyes would be opened, and they would be as gods, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desired to make one wise, she took its fruit, ate, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. Their eyes were opened, they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

Note the subtlety of the serpent. It is clearly seen in that, in verse 1, he begins questioning God. Then he proceeds to deny the authority of God. He not only denies God's authority, but His sovereignty and His word. In verse 5, he proclaims exactly the

opposite of God: “For God doth know that in the day that you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened.” But in verse 4 he had said, “You shall not surely die.” God had already told them that they would die; the serpent denied it. He declared, in essence, that God is a selfish God, holding Adam and Eve back and keeping them from expressing themselves.

The serpent clearly implies to Adam and Eve that it is possible for them to become their own God and that they do not need the one true, the living God. This is the serpent's message: You do not need God. You do not need God to tell you right from wrong. You do not need God to make His law. You do not need Him or His law. So here is what you are to do: make your own law, do your own thing, worship yourself, and get all the honor, praise, and glory for yourself. Magnify yourself. Lift up yourself. Dethrone the one true, the living God and enthrone yourself, and you will be as God.

Genesis chapter three and verse five makes it very plain: “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” The Hebrew word for knowing is yada, which has the force of knowing, knowing by experience, determining for yourself, making oneself known, and revealing oneself. The original temptation is for man to replace God, for man to become his own God.

The Tyranny of Self-Worship

Jean-Paul Sartre, a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, political activist, biographer, and literary critic—and among all those things, not a Christian by any stretch of the imagination—said, “I believe if I am God.” Then my neighbor is the devil. Sartre also said, “Hell is other people.” How could he say that? How could he say, “If I am God, then my neighbor is my devil”? If each man is his own God, anyone who disagrees with him and opposes him is a devil. Anyone who stands in your way, does not agree with you, or refuses to bow to you, your thoughts, whims, and desires is a devil. Hence, in fallen man is born a domineering, tyrannical, despotical, totalitarian spirit that demands everyone worship him, bow to his thoughts, kneel before him, and embrace his ideology.

Unhappily, such perversion and wickedness, and even idolatry, oftentimes rear their heads and reveal themselves in almost every

individual, and sometimes in every Christian. Only the grace and power of God can overcome that. You remember Isaiah 55:8-9, where God said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” Man does not think like God. If man is saved by His grace, then he is to submit his mind and learn to think like God. Until man is converted by the grace of God, however, he prefers his own thoughts, ways, and will. Having his own thoughts, his own way, and his own will is an attempt to play God.

He is, in essence, pleasing himself and exalting his pride. Haman is a clear example of such thinking. The book of Esther describes Haman in such a way that this truth cannot be misunderstood. Esther 3:1 says, “After these things did King Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hamadathah the Agagite and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes that were before him.” The word Haman means magnificent. He was the son of Hamadathah, and Hamadathah literally means double. Evidently, Haman believed that he was doubly magnificent because he demanded honor, homage, and reverence from everyone.

Haman: The Agagite and Amalekite Flesh

The most revealing thing about Haman is that he was an Agagite. The passage identifies him as “Haman, the son of Hamadathah, the Agagite.” An Agagite was an Amalekite. As one commentator said, “Haman the Agagite. The term Agagite is here intended as a most significant ethnic identification. Agag was the king of the Amalekites, defeated by Saul and put to death by Samuel.”

The Old Testament tradition stresses the bitter and unrelenting enmity that existed between the two peoples. Amalek is presented as the preeminent enemy of Israel.

Some have suggested that the term “Haman the Agagite” was intended to show that Haman was of royal lineage, even from Agag. To understand the book of Esther, and especially Haman in the book of Esther, one must understand the origin of the Amalekites. Genesis 36, beginning with verse 10, reveals the origin of Amalek.

The Bible says these are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Ada, the wife of Esau; Reuel, the son of Bashemath, the wife of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. Timna was concubine to Eliphaz, Esau's son, and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek. These were the sons of Ada, Esau's wife. So Amalek is an Edomite, the grandson of Esau.

Esau, in the Bible, represents the flesh because he despised spiritual things. Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 16 identifies Esau as a fornicator and a profane person: “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” The birthright included the headship of the family, to become the patriarch; a double portion of the inheritance, because he was to take care of elderly mother and father; and the lineage of the Messiah. He was willing to trade all of that for a mess of pottage. So Amalek, like his grandfather Esau, despised spiritual things, and he also despised the people of God.

In Exodus chapter 17, Israel has just been delivered out of Egypt. The blood has been applied, and water has been given unto them at Rephidim. Water in the Bible represents, number one, the Word of God, and number two, the Holy Spirit. Notice what happened: “Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” There was deliverance; the blood had been applied. There was water, sovereignly and supernaturally given. When these two things happened, then came Amalek. “And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out and fight with Amalek.”

“Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.” So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek. Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. Moses’ hands were heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him. Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people at the edge of the sword.

The Lord said unto Moses, “Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua. For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” Moses built an altar

and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi. “For he said, Because the Lord has sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

Take note particularly of verse 8: Amalek came to fight. Amalek initiated the attack, did not hesitate, and purposely pressed the issue. Amalek was exceedingly strong—so strong that Moses had to intervene and pray. When Moses was interceding, the Israelites were winning; when his hands grew heavy holding up that rod, Amalek prevailed. Therefore, they put the stone under Moses so he could sit and held up his hands until Amalek was discomfited.

The question you need to ask is found in verse 16: why did the Lord swear that He would have war with Amalek from generation to generation? One would think that if God made war and unfurled His banner, the conflict would soon be over and He would simply annihilate His enemy. But that is not so. He gave that battle to His people, yet declared perpetual war with Amalek. Why? Because Amalek’s hand was raised against God, and it is still raised against God. Therefore, God’s hand is going to be against Amalek.

Amalek in the Bible is a type of the flesh. Amalek reveals the tendency of the flesh to desire its own way, to have its own way, to be pampered, to be satisfied, to be pleased, to be praised, and to live in defiance of God. One commentator made this statement: “The tendency of the flesh day and night is to act in defiance of God's rights.” Amalek's hand is on the throne of Yah, seeking to seize the place which God has gained in the heart of man and the fruit of redemption. It is a war against the flesh which continues until our last breath. God has said that He is in this war. Our flesh lifts up itself against God, and God lifts up Himself against our flesh. That is why this war is going to be from generation to generation.

When you read about Amalek, you have to remember that he was the grandson of Esau. He was an Edomite. He despised spiritual things. He despised the people of God. He despised the law of God. He was always fighting against God. The Apostle Paul said in Galatians chapter 5, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary, the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” So there is a battle.

In Deuteronomy chapter 25, verse 17, God says, “Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt.” We have read how Amalek came out in Rephidim and fought against Israel. Now notice what God says in Deuteronomy 25, verse 17: Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when thou wast come forth out of Egypt.

The Flesh Attacks the Weak and Defies God

Do not forget this: “Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way when you came forth out of Egypt. How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary, and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, and the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven, thou shalt not forget it.”

Look what God says. Remember what Amalek did to you. He said Amalek does not fear God. In Exodus 17, Amalek purposely pressed the attack. He planned it, desired it, and wanted to destroy the people of God. He was the aggressor. He was unprovoked.

He did not need to be teased, tipped, or tested, or enticed. He wanted to destroy. He took advantage of the disadvantaged. He attacked the weak, the feeble, and the helpless. He slipped up from behind to destroy them, against those who had absolutely no protection.

Your flesh will do exactly the same thing. Your flesh will entice you to sin and tempt you to sin. Your flesh will tempt you to play God—to be your own ruler, make your own rules, and lay down your own law. It will attack you when you are weak, faint, disheartened, dispirited, and discouraged.

Your flesh has no regard for God, spiritual things, or truth. It desires one thing, and one thing only: to be satisfied, pleased, and praised. It is willing to do that even at the expense of God.

Again, Matthew Henry said this, I'm just trying to explain to you about Haman so far. Matthew Henry said Haman advanced by the

prince that is by Ahasuerus and adored thereupon by the people. This Haman was an Agagite, an Amalekite says Josephus, probably of the descendants of Agag, a common name of the princes of Amalek, as appears in Numbers 24 and verse 7. Some think that he was by birth a prince, as Jehoiakim was, whose seat was set above the rest of the captive kings in 2 Kings 25 verse 28, as Haman's was here in Esther chapter 3 and verse 1. So Haman was undoubtedly then an Amalekite, and Mordecai was a Judean. What am I saying? Look back in Esther chapter 2 and verse 5. Esther chapter 2 and verse 5. Mordecai was a Judean. Notice Esther 2 and verse 5. Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew or Judahite or Judean whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Now, may I remind you that the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Benjamin and the tribe of Simeon had their inheritance in the southern kingdom, which is known as Judea. So Mordecai then was a Judean in the sense that the Benjamites had their possession in Judea.

Now, interestingly, he was also a relative, a descendant of Saul, the son of Kish. You remember Saul was the first king of Israel. So he was a Benjamite. He was a Judean in the sense that his inheritance was where he lived in Judah. Now, those who lived in Judea were first called Jews by the Syrians in 2 Kings chapter 16 and verse 6. That is the first time the word Jews occurs in your Bibles. The Syrians drove the Jews, that is those who lived in the southern kingdom, from Elath, the Bible says, and they retook that seaport. So, historically now, the Amalekites, who are Edomites, were always the enemies of Israel. And there was a special bond of hatred between the Amalekites and the Benjamites. Now, I want you to hold the book of Esther, but look in your Bibles to Psalm 83. Psalm 83. Just to show you this, special hatred that existed. Notice, if you would, first of all, Psalm 83, then we'll go to Psalm 137. But notice Psalm 83, and let's begin reading there with verse two.

Psalm 83, verse two. The Psalmist writes, For lo, thine enemies make a tumult. And they that hate thee, that is, those that hate God, have lifted up the head, that is, they pride, arrogant, haughty, heady, high-minded. Verse 3, they have taken crafty counsel against thy

people and consulted against thy hidden ones. So they're against God's people. And they have said, come and let us cut them off from being a nation.

"Let's kill every one of them. Let the name of Israel be no more in remembrance." They had consulted together with one consent and were confederate against God. Who was confederated against God in this passage? The tabernacles of Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre, and Asshur, that is, Assyria, which also was joined with them. They had helped the children of Lot. Who were the children of Lot? The Moabites and the Ammonites. All of these people were confederated against the people of God.

If you turn to Psalm 137 and look at verse 7, you will see what the children of Edom said concerning the destruction of Jerusalem: "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said, Rase it, rase it, even at the foundation thereof." In other words, destroy everything. They hated Israel.

Now go back to Esther chapter 3, because Haman is told that Mordecai is a Judean, of the tribe of Benjamin. He was in that southern kingdom. In Esther 3:2, all the king's servants in the king's gate bowed and reverenced Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. Then the king's servants asked Mordecai, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" Why was he not obeying the civil law?

Haman's Pride and Wrath Against Mordecai

When they spoke daily unto him, he hearkened not unto them; he would not listen to them or bow. They told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand, that he was a Jew, or Judean. When Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, Haman was filled with wrath.

The word bow literally means to kneel before, to crouch, or to sink down upon one's knees. Mordecai said, "I'm not getting on my knees before you." The word reverence means to do obeisance—to reverence and to prostrate oneself before another, as an inferior does before a superior, in homage and worship. Obviously, Haman

thought he was superior and desperately wanted everyone to bow before him. Remember something else about Mordecai: Mordecai was a captive.

He was one of those who had been taken captive into Babylon. But Babylon had been conquered by the Medes and the Persians. So Mordecai, basically speaking, was a slave. He was an interloper, a peon; he was nothing. Comparatively speaking, compared to Haman, Mordecai was nothing. I remember years ago an Abbott and Costello skit. Abbott said, "I'm the boss." Costello asked, "What am I?" He answered, "You're nothing." Costello said, "Well, that just makes you the boss over nothing then, doesn't it?" If Mordecai was nothing, why would Haman get so bent out of shape over this?

Pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and wanting the praise and admiration of man lay behind it. Haman viewed himself as superior and Mordecai as inferior. Simply placing his hands upon Mordecai was insufficient. He wanted not only to murder Mordecai, but any and everyone throughout the entire kingdom who was like Mordecai.

I like what John Trapp said about verse 5: "Then was Haman full of wrath. He swelled up like a toad and glowed like a demon," being transformed, as it were, into a breathing devil. He sought the utter extirpation of that people of whom, concerning the flesh, Christ was to come (Romans 9:5). He wished the same to them which Caligula, in a rage, wished to the people of Rome when he said, "I would that you all had but one neck, so that I might cut you all off with one blow." "The Persians, though free men, reverence me," said Haman, "yet this slave thinks himself too good for me."

Matthew Henry goes further: "But it makes Haman's proud spirit rage and fret and boil within him, so that he becomes uneasy to himself and all about him. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. The head must come off that will not bow to Haman. If he cannot have his honors, he will have his blood. It is as penal in this court not to worship Haman as it was in Nebuchadnezzar's not to worship the golden image which he had set up. Mordecai is a person of quality in a post of honor and own cousin of the queen, and yet Haman thinks his life nothing towards a satisfaction for the affront."

Thousands of innocent and valuable lives must be sacrificed to Haman's indignation. Therefore, he vows the destruction of all the people of Mordecai because he was a Jew, which was the reason he gave for not reverencing Haman. Herein appears Haman's intolerable pride, insatiable cruelty, and the ancient antipathy of an Amalekite to the Israel of God.

Saul, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, spared Agag; but Mordecai, the son of Kish, of Benjamin, shall find no mercy with this Agagite, whose design is to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. I suppose that would include those who had returned to their own land, for that was now a province of his kingdom. When you stop and think of the multitudes Haman wanted to murder just because one man would not bow to him, it was to satisfy his flesh, please his honor, and give him praise.

Haman wanted recognition, praise, honor, submission, and worship. He would not let it go that someone would not honor him and recognize him for his position in the kingdom. Unhappily, many preachers and many Christians are just like that. They want the praise, recognition, and honor, and if you do not give it to them, they will seek your destruction.

John 12 and verse 43 speaks of people who would not confess Jesus Christ for fear of being kicked out of the synagogue. The Bible simply says, “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” That is what many people simply desire: the praise of men.

Haman was called in to a little dinner with the queen and wanted to come back for wine with the king and queen on a certain day. He was so happy. Esther 5:9 says, “Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.” The word indignation is very informative.

It is the Hebrew word Chemah, which refers to a burning rage, a venomous wrath, and a furious rage or fever. He was really ticked. Mordecai would not move out of principle or give in to the insolent and arrogant demands of Haman. Haman despised Mordecai because of his character and unwillingness to compromise. Haman

believed he was superior and was pushing the issue to the fullest. His fiery indignation would be satisfied not only with Mordecai's death, but with the death of all his people.

Proverbs 21:24 says, “Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.” Proverbs 11:2 says, “When pride cometh, then cometh shame, but with the lowly is wisdom.” Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 29:23 says, “A man's pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.” Anger, wrath, strife, and all these other things are classified as the works of the flesh in Galatians chapter 5.

Haman was a true Amalekite in fulfilling the desires of his flesh and fighting against God, truth, and righteousness. Haman is called the Agagite. In 1 Samuel 15:1, “The Bible said Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel.” The Lord then commanded Saul: “Now therefore, hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way when he came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” God said, “Kill everything. Don't let anything live.”

Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. He took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. Everything that was vile and refuse, they destroyed utterly. God said, “You destroy everything,” but Saul said, “No, I cannot do that. I am going to spare Agag, and the best of the sheep and oxen.” When Samuel came, Saul tried to blame the people, saying they had spared these things for sacrifice to God. Samuel said that the Lord had rather have obedience than all the sacrifice in the world. Then Samuel took the sword and hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord.

Remember, Agag was the king of the Amalekites. There was a battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. After the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites and had abode two days in Ziklag, it came to pass on the third day that a man came out of Saul's camp with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. When he came to David, he fell to the earth and did obeisance. David said unto him, "From whence comest thou?" He answered, "Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped." David said unto him, "How went the matter, I pray thee, tell me?"

The man answered that the people had fled from the battle, and many of the people also were fallen and dead. Saul and Jonathan his son were dead also. David asked the young man how he knew that Saul and Jonathan his son were dead. The young man said that, as he happened by chance upon Mount Gilboa, Saul leaned upon his spear, and the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. When Saul looked behind him, he saw the young man, called to him, and the young man answered, "Here am I." Saul asked, "Who art thou?" The young man answered him, "I am an Amalekite."

He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me, for anguish has come upon me because my life is yet whole within me. So I stood upon him and slew him because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen. And I took the crown that was upon his head and the bracelet that was on his arm and brought them hither unto my lord.

Now, if you go back and read, Saul had asked his armor bearer to kill him, but the armor bearer refused. So Saul fell on his own sword. Evidently, his life was still whole within him. When he saw this young man coming by, he asked, "Who are you?" "I'm an Amalekite." Saul said, "Come and finish me off, lest these Philistines come and abuse me." And the young man said, "So I killed him."

Saul spared the best, and in the end, the best slew him. Some will dispute this and say, "Well, Saul was already dead. This Amalekite was lying." David evidently believed him because David had this Amalekite executed. But whether he was lying or telling the truth is immaterial right now. He took the crown off Saul's head and the bracelet off Saul's arm. It was an Amalekite who dishonored Saul. Saul spared the best, and the best turned around and dishonored

him. So you could say metaphorically that Saul was slain on the gallows of his own disobedience.

Haman is a true picture of the flesh in its desire for vain honor, glory, recognition, and the praise of men. Your flesh will set you up and destroy you, just as it did Saul and just as Haman was destroyed. Your flesh will give you full confidence against God and against God's law. Read Psalm 10.

What do these wicked people say? "He shall not see." He's not going to judge us. Your flesh will let you believe that you can sin against God and get by with it. It will let you believe that you can do whatever you want to do and that God is not going to punish you. You are the exception. The Scripture tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 12, "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Haman thought he stood because he was the highest in the kingdom next to the king, but he fell. Haman the Agagite was hanged on his own gallows, which he had built to hang Mordecai. As Esther 7:9–10 records, Harbonah said before the king, "Behold also the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standing in the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him thereon." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath was pacified.

The Flesh's Self-Destruction: Hanged on His Own Gallows

If you wish to be hanged on your own gallows, give in to your flesh. Disobey the law of God. Live in misery, strife, envy, wrath, and anger. Refuse to be a servant. Demand that everyone serve you. Demand that everyone bow to your whims, needs, desires, and ideology. But remember this: you reap what you sow.

Take the position of pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and superiority, and see how well that will work out for you in the end. Those like Haman believe that they are to be honored regardless, worshipped regardless, believed regardless, and elevated regardless because of their insatiable pride, arrogance, and haughtiness.

Therefore, they attack those who disagree with them and those who will not bow to them or do them honor, homage, and worship.

Application: Put on Christ and Mortify the Flesh

This truth demonstrates one very clear fact: in Christendom, we have lost a servant's heart, a service disposition, and a service attitude. We would rather dictate and demand than bow and serve. We are fleshly, and we follow the flesh. We are so unlike the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Jesus Christ did not come to be ministered unto; He came to minister. He said in Luke 22:27, "For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth." Jesus said, "I did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister." He came to give Himself a sacrifice for others. He came to serve others.

The Bible says in Romans 14:17–18, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that doeth these things serveth Christ and is acceptable to God, and approved of men." The kingdom of God is not being waited on, but waiting on others. That is why Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." How do you show love to God's name? You minister to the saints. You serve the saints. You serve each other. The only way to serve others is to deny our flesh.

Our flesh wants to be served and ministered to, and it is contrary to the flesh to become a servant and minister to others. The only way we can become servants like our Lord Jesus Christ is to deny our flesh. Romans 8:13 says, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." The word mortify means to make dead; it is where we get the words mortician and mortuary. If you live after the flesh, you will die. But if, through the Holy Spirit of God, you mortify—make dead—the deeds of the flesh, your pride, anger, wrath, and fleshly desires, you shall live.

That is why Colossians 3:5 says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Pride is idolatry as well, because we want to take that which belongs to God. Remember Isaiah 42:8, when God says, “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” God will not share His glory with us. We must recognize that everything we have, everything we are, everything we ever will be, and everything we ever will have is only by the grace and mercy of God.

I want to answer one question before I close: How do I mortify the deeds of the flesh? How do I keep from being hanged on my own gallows? The answer is found in Romans chapter 13 and verse 14: “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. Clothe yourself in His spirit and His attitude, in His words, in His actions, and in His life.

The problem is that our flesh will not lie as quietly and as obediently on the altar as Isaac did. Our flesh will scream for deliverance and satisfaction. We have to learn to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, all those who fight against God and live for their flesh are alike. We may see a drunk lying in the gutter, wallowing in his own vomit and filth, and say, “I do not want anything like that.” It is repulsive to us. But do you realize that the Pharisee in his self-righteousness, and the man in his pride, haughtiness, and arrogance, is just as vile in the sight of God as a little drunk wallowing in his own vomit?

We tend to want to mortify what we call evil, vile things, but still want our pride, the praise, recognition, and honor of man. If we do not get them, we are like Haman: offended because we want people to bow to what we think, and we want to be ministered unto and served.

Rather than to be ministers and servants of others, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the

lust thereof. If you do, you will ultimately be hanged on your own gallows.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for Thy Word, Thy truth, and all Thou hast done for us, giving Thee praise, honor, and glory. We acknowledge and confess that everything we are, everything we have, and everything we ever will be or ever will have is only by Thy grace and mercy. Thou and Thou alone art God, and Thou deservest all honor, praise, and glory. We bow before Thee, rendering worship, homage, and honor. For Thou art Creator, Lord, Sovereign, and Master. We recognize and bow before Thee through Thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and praise Thee in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Biblical Humility

April 21, 2019

Introduction: The Misunderstanding of Humility

Turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 20. Notice, beginning at verse 17:

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

There are not very many messages on the subject of biblical humility. In fact, most Christians really and truly have no idea concerning the source, the essence, or even the value of humility.

We are basically what you and I would call smug, conceited, and proud in our knowledge, in our positions, and in our stances. One of

the clearest evidences that we do not understand or possess biblical humility is that we always endeavor to make and force others to believe as we do. We do not simply teach and pray and wait upon the Lord; consequently, we demand that others see exactly as we see. Biblical humility has been given a bad rap by gross misrepresentations.

Fun has been poked at the subject, as well as at individuals who are truly humble. Each one of us has heard jokingly of a book entitled “Humility and How I Attained It.” Obviously, if there were such a book, the author would no longer have humility, since he titled it “Humility and How I Obtained It.” Years ago, I told you this, but it has always stuck in my mind.

I saw a cartoon that showed two monks walking side by side in their long robes, with their arms up the sleeve. One monk looked at the other and said, "You know, it kind of makes you proud that we're so humble, doesn't it?" Well, that's exactly about the way it goes.

Here in South Georgia, especially July and August, there's usually kind of a joke that goes around. When we're hot and sweaty in those three-shower days, we say, "Well, there's just too much humidity in the air." But many tend to think that just because they have poor posture, they are humble. Humility is not poor posture. I have known people who walked around all the time with their head down, looking at the ground. That's not humility; that's poor posture. It probably indicates an inferiority complex as well, because they're ashamed or afraid to look someone in the eye. It certainly is not biblical humility by any stretch of the imagination.

The World's Pride vs. Biblical Humility

The world does not appreciate humility. In fact, in the world, humility is not a grace, but it is a disgrace. Proud, arrogant, and haughty, the world laughs in the face of true humility. In the world, the proper attitude is: demand your rights, get your way, do whatever it takes, kick the man out from in front of you if he's in your way. Just do what you need to do. Destroy your opponent. You succeed at all costs. That's the attitude of the world.

Look in Psalm 73, as Asaph describes the proud very clearly. He is talking about the wicked: "For I was envious of the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Now look at verse 4:

"For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them."

“How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.” He is describing these wicked people as proud and arrogant, willing to curse God, curse heaven, and curse man; it does not matter to them.

Consider the contrast in Psalm 73:6–12 with the description and statement Jacob gave in Genesis 32:10, where Jacob said to God, “I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant.” I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies. Consider what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:9: “For I am the least of the apostles, and am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” But note what he said: “I am the least of the apostles,” and yet probably he was one of the greatest. He said, “I am the least.” When he came to Ephesians 3:8, he said, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” So Paul said he was the least of the apostles, and he also said he was the least of the saints.

Advantages of True Humility

There is a vast difference between the proud and the truly humble. Do not begin to think that there are no advantages to real, true biblical humility. There are advantages, and the Scriptures show them. In Psalm 51:16–17, David is confessing his sin, but note what he says: “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou

delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." God will not despise a broken and contrite, or humbled, heart.

Proverbs 22:4 tells us, "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life." By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor, and life. We are talking about humility, and the Bible plainly tells us that humility and the fear of the Lord are connected with riches, honor, and life.

Isaiah 57:15 shows some advantages of real biblical humility: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." God said, "I dwell with such."

Our Lord said in Matthew 18:4, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." So God's richest blessings are really and truly upon those who are humble in spirit.

Now, there is a principle enunciated by our Lord in Scripture. Listen to this and think about it. We find it in Matthew 23:12: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." God said, if you exalt yourself, you are going to go down; if you humble yourself, you are going to come up. Our Lord is setting forth the punishment for the proud and the promotion for the humble. If you exalt yourself, you will be brought down. If you humble yourself, you will be taken up.

The Two Greatest Examples of Humility

Augustine, one of the early church fathers, said, "Lo, here is a great miracle. God is on high, and yet the higher thou liftest up thyself, the farther thou art from him. The lower thou humblest thyself, the nearer he draweth near to thee. Low things he looketh close upon, that he may raise them. Proud things, he knows afar off that he may depress them." So although God is high, the more we exalt ourselves, the farther we get from Him.

The Scripture gives us the two greatest examples of humility that could possibly ever exist. The first illustration of humility that I am going to give you is in Psalm 113. Years and years ago, I preached a message from this passage. I have never preached this message here, but it is indeed a very beneficial blessing because of the truth taught here in Psalm 113. Look at Psalm 113, verse 5. Note the question.

"Who is like unto the Lord our God who dwelleth on high?" Verse 6: "Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth!" The very fact that God condescends to behold His creation and His creatures is an act of humility on His part. What right does anyone have to demand that God give them attention, or look upon our needs and desires? The answer is none.

You remember that in Psalm 8, verse 4, David asks God, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" In other words, God, who are we that you should even condescend to look upon us or consider us? It is humility on the part of God the Father, not only to consider His creation, but His creatures as well.

We have nothing and we deserve nothing. David said it like this in Psalm 14, verse 17: "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." It is an act of God's humility just to think upon us. The greatest thing that God could think about would be Himself, for He is the greatest of all. But God condescends to think of us. I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me.

The second illustration is in Philippians, chapter 2, beginning with verse 5. Here is the greatest example of humility outside of the humility of God the Father, and of course it involves the humility of God the Son. The Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Here is the blessed Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who inhabited eternity, who is the majestic, royal God incarnate. He

humbled Himself and became flesh, and He humbled Himself and died in our stead.

Adam Clarke wrote: “The way to arrive at the highest degree of dignity in the sight of God is by being willing to become the servant of all. Nothing is more hateful in his sight than pride; to bring it into everlasting contempt, God was manifest in the flesh. He who was in the likeness of God took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man and humbled himself unto death. After this, can God look upon any proud man without abasing him? Spiritual lordship and dominion, ecclesiastical luxury, pomp and pride must be an abhorrence in the sight of God.”

After the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is impossible for God to look upon pride and arrogance and haughtiness without abasing it. These are the two greatest examples of humility in the Bible. I can confess that there are and were many humble servants of God in history and time past. Many are recorded in the Bible, but none can exceed the humility of God the Father and the humility of God the Son.

Humility Is a State of Mind

Go back to our text, to Acts chapter 20, because there are at least three truths that need to be shown from this passage. The first one may be relatively shocking. Notice in Acts chapter 20, verse 19, what the Apostle Paul was teaching and speaking to these elders, these pastors to whom he was called. In fact, let us read verse 18.

He said, “When they were come to him and he said to them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.” The very first thing to see is this: humility, true humility, biblical humility, is a state of mind. That is what he said: “serving the Lord with all humility of mind.” The Greek word for humility literally means humbleness of mind, lowliness, or lowliness of mind. It means that we are to have a humble opinion of ourselves, a deep sense of our smallness and insignificance, and to comprehend the real truth about ourselves. True humility thinks like this: “I am nothing and I deserve nothing.”

Consequently, the person who is truly and genuinely humble is thankful, grateful, and appreciative for everything. Why is there today no real gratitude, thankfulness, or appreciation shown by men and women, boys and girls? It is because there is no humility. When you think you deserve everything and everything should be given unto you, you are not humble, and you cannot be thankful. You cannot be grateful. You cannot be appreciative.

The Bible teaches us in Proverbs 23 and verse 7, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." When you consider the remarkable life of the Apostle Paul, you would tend to think that this man had to be proud. Here was the Apostle Paul, knocked down by the sovereign God of heaven and earth on the road to Damascus. According to his own testimony, he was spoken to by the Lord personally, and he said he was born as one out of due season. Here was a man to whom our Lord said, "I will show you what great things that you must suffer for my name's sake." He blazed missionary trails. He was an evangelist. He committed and performed miracles and did all kinds of works. He was a man whom God used to write three quarters of the New Testament.

What does he say? "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind." He said, "I'm the least of the apostles. I'm the least of the saints." Albert Barnes says: "Without arrogance, pride or spirit of dictation, without a desire to lord it over God's heritage, without being elated with the authority of the apostolic office, the variety of miracles which he was able to perform or the success which attended his labors, what an admirable model for all who are in the ministry, for all who are endowed with talents and learning, and for all who meet with remarkable success in their work. The proper effect of such success and of such talent will be to produce true humility. Eminent success in the work of the ministry tends to produce lowliness and humbleness of mind, and the greatest endowments are usually connected with the most simple and childlike humility." If we understand what the ministry is all about, which the Apostle Paul is teaching these pastors, it is humbleness of mind.

Hold Acts 20 in your Bibles, but turn to Romans, chapter 12, and look at verse 3. We would not be nearly as proud, arrogant, and

haughty as we are if we truly obeyed Romans 12:3. Look what we have been commanded.

Paul said, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. What the Apostle Paul is saying concerns our thinking, our mind. We are not to think more highly of ourselves.

The Greek word is actually hyperphroneo. It means to think exceedingly high of yourself, thinking superabundant thoughts. Have you ever noticed when you are daydreaming about other people—perhaps saving someone or helping someone—you are always the hero in your own thoughts? That is because we have such thoughts about ourselves. We never consider who we really and truly are and what we are.

The apostle also admonishes us in this same verse to think soberly. Sophroneo means to be in your right mind, to have a sound mind. When we are proud, arrogant, haughty, demanding, and high-minded, we are demented; we are crazy; we are not in our right minds, because we are not thinking soberly.

Would you consider me in my right mind if I invited every one of you to a concert where I was doing all the singing? You would have to think I was out of my mind because I cannot sing, and that would be true. God has never given me the gift of music. I have difficulty playing the radio. That is okay. We have to learn to think soberly about ourselves.

In Acts chapter 20, the Apostle Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders, who were pastors. What amazes me is that he does not communicate how successful he has been in the ministry, how many converts he has won, how many missionary trips he has taken, or how much learning he has acquired. He said, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind."

It is very possible, and very easy, to be puffed up and proud in the ministry, in the service of the Lord, and in the worship of the Lord. Sometimes we give sacrificially, and the next thing we know, we are

thinking, "Well, I did a really good thing then. The Lord must be smiling." How would you define that pride? "I really preached well yesterday." The Lord does bless. The Lord does give liberty and freedom in preaching, but that is His grace and His mercy.

Humility Is a State of Dependence upon God

This is probably one of the reasons why, in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 6, one qualification of a pastor is not being a novice, a neophyte, one newly admitted to the faith, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. It is very easy for Christians to become proud as well. Many dangers surround us, and we easily and quickly fall into the sin of pride.

Lowliness of mind, or humbleness of mind, means that we are willing to share even our trials and tribulations. In Acts chapter 20, verse 19, Paul says, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews." Paul is not ashamed to say, "Look, there were tears." He is not ashamed to say there were temptations. He is not ashamed to say there was trouble.

I used to know a pastor who is now dead. You could ask him, “How are things going?” His standard answer was, “Great and getting better.” That was not true. They had lost their church building and a lot of people. But every time you say that everything is great and getting better, the Apostle Paul did not say that. He said, “Look, I’m in the ministry, and the ministry is tears and trials and tribulations.” If you are truly humble, you are quite willing to share those things, because everything is not great and getting better.

If the apostles had problems with pride, it is very easy for you and me to have problems with pride as well. Look in your Bibles at Luke 22, beginning with verse 24. “And there was also a strife among them,” that is, the twelve, “which of them should be accounted the greatest? And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that

serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth."

There was strife among the apostles over which one should be accounted the greatest. The Lord used them; He used them all.

Jesus Christ had a servant's heart. He served and ministered. He was a lowly-minded servant who wanted to be obedient to His Father and to please Him in all things. In Matthew 20:28 He said, "For even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He said, "I didn't come to be ministered unto. I came to minister."

Unhappily, there are many pastors and many Christians who become upset if you do not give them the attention they need and throw them over your shoulder and burp them like a little baby. Their feelings are hurt: "You don't appreciate me. You don't love me." What? Every Christian ought to emulate our Lord. We come not to be ministered unto, but to minister. That is what the Apostle Paul is saying.

True humility is indeed a state of mind. Matthew Poole said, "He is an infamous doctor in the Church of Christ who thinks himself too high or too great to be a minister in it. For God will abase and men shall abase him who exalteth himself. God resisteth, and men usually condemn and despise the proud, especially ministers who are so. Both God shall exalt and men shall honor those that humble themselves, both to men condescending to those of low degree, and to their work, thinking not the meanest ministry to souls or work beneath them."

John Gill said this concerning the ministration of the gospel: being conscious of his own weakness and insufficiency for such service, a truly humble man is not elated with the excellent and extraordinary gifts bestowed upon him, ascribing all success to the power, grace, and spirit of God. He treats no man with contempt or disdain, does not lord it over God's heritage, claim dominion over the faith of men, or seek honor and riches for himself. He does not even seek what he had a just right unto, a maintenance from the people, but labored with his own hands for his own necessities and the necessities of others.

True humility, first of all, is a state of mind. Look at what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:11: “I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.” Paul said, “It’s true, I’m not behind them. God has used me just like he used them, but I am still nothing.” Nothing.

Secondly, true humility is a state of dependence upon God. If we are nothing, if we have nothing, and if we can do nothing in and of ourselves, we are absolutely, totally, and completely dependent upon God our Savior. Our Lord said in John 15:5, “Without me, you can do nothing.” We may not realize it, but in reality our very life hangs upon God’s grace and mercy. Psalm 66:9 tells us He holds our soul in life, and Psalm 31:15 says our times are in His hands. We are so absolutely, totally dependent upon Him that we cannot even breathe without Him.

Have you really ever wondered about all the tests, trials, tribulations, and afflictions that we face? Have you ever asked, “Why am I going through this trial? Why is this happening to me?” Let me ask another question to answer those: Why did God take the Israelites through the desert on the way to Canaan when there was a quicker, shorter route? Why did He take them the long way around instead of allowing a shortcut? Well, let me answer.

In Exodus 13:17–18, we read: "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt." God led them the long way, not the short way.

Why? One reason was that they were certainly not prepared for war. They had no military might and no military training. But not only that, they still possessed a slave mentality. When they saw the enemy, there would have been a human desire to turn around and go back where, although they were suffering, they were at least comfortable—back to something they knew before. The truth of the

matter is that God was protecting them. He was quite sufficient in and of himself.

But this was not the only reason God led them through the wilderness. It was not just because of their slave mentality, and not just because they had no military training. Deuteronomy 8:2–3 gives another reason: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

God said, "I led you in that wilderness to humble you." He suffered them to hunger. Why did he suffer them to hunger? So that he might feed them.

In other words, once you realize you are nothing in yourself, that you have nothing and can do nothing, you can depend upon Me. I am going to show you that I can take care of you, and you need to learn that you must live by every word that proceeds out of My mouth. So He suffered them to hunger that He might feed them. Many times He suffers us to go through our tests, trials, and tribulations simply to demonstrate to us that He can deliver us and supply our needs.

Look at Deuteronomy 8, beginning with verse 11: “Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might

prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."

"But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day." Notice what He said: "I led you and I humbled you that I might do thee good." He wanted them to understand that they were totally and completely dependent upon Him. Have you ever considered that if we were truly humble, we would be far more dependent upon the Lord? And if we were far more dependent upon Him, we would not necessarily have to face all the tests, trials, and afflictions that we face.

Humility and Blessing

Humility Is a State of Blessing

Biblical humility teaches us to wait upon Him, lean upon Him, trust in Him, submit to Him, and depend upon Him. When we realize, in reality, our helplessness and powerlessness, the more we realize that, the more dependent we become upon Him. True humility is not only a state of mind; it is evidenced by our dependence upon God.

True humility is always a state of blessing. Blessings always follow obedience. Blessings abound when we are humble in and of ourselves and dependent upon God. That is basically obedience.

If you really want to be humbled, learn to pray two petitions regularly. The first is, "Lord, show me thyself." The second is, "Lord, show me myself." You remember, God showed that to Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." When he saw who

God was and who he was, his response was, “Woe is me.” The seraphim took a coal from the altar and purged him and blessed him. Then God sent him, and God used him.

When we are truly humble, we are in a position to receive God’s blessings. One brother said, “I used to think that God’s best gifts were on the highest shelf. And the higher we grew and the higher we reached, the better we could acquire those gifts.” But he said, “I found out differently. God’s best gifts are on the lowest shelf. And the more we humble ourselves and lower ourselves, the easier it is to grasp those gifts.” Certainly, when we are humble, we are in a position to receive God’s blessings.

The Bible says in Psalm 9:12, “When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.” Psalm 10:12 says, “Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble.” Verse 17 adds, “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” God hears the desire of the humble, prepares their heart, and causes His ear to hear.

Remember King Josiah and one of the greatest revivals that ever took place under his reign. When Josiah heard the law of God read, he rent his garments and humbled himself. In 2 Chronicles 34:27, God said to him, “Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord.” God said, in effect, “Because you heard Me and humbled yourself, I have heard you.” Those who are truly humbled are in a position to have God’s blessings; those who are not humbled are in a position to receive God’s judgment.

James 4:6 says, “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” God fights against the proud, but gives grace to the humble. James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” First Peter 5:5-6 says, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth

grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Do you realize that pride is one of the things God hates the most? Proverbs 6 says, "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him," and the first one is pride.

I want to make an application, and I want you to think about this with me. Here is something we already know. Probably everyone in this room could quote 2 Chronicles 7:14 verbatim: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Listen to this: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall"—what is the first thing? "Humble themselves." Do you realize there is not going to be any praying, seeking the Lord, or turning from our sins until and unless we humble ourselves? What is humility?

Application: The Need for a Servant's Heart

It is a state of mind. What did Paul say? "I am nothing. I can do nothing. And the way I serve the Lord is with all humility of mind." It is not what we do. It is not our plans, programs, or meetings. I get tickled in one sense of the word and grieved in another when I pass all these church buildings and see the sign, "Revival this week." Would to God it were a revival. It should say, "Meeting this week." We will pray for revival, but God is not going to send revival until we learn to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Until there is true humility on the part of God's people, we are not going to pray, seek His face, or turn from our wicked ways.

Proverbs 15:33 says, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility." Before honour is humility. If we want God to honor us or use us, we must be humble in His sight. Our Lord said, "I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give my life a ransom for many."

May I tell you where we have erred in Christianity? We have lost the servant's heart. We want to be ministered unto rather than ministering to others. When God enables us to have humility of

mind, He will give us a servant's heart. With that servant's heart, we will learn to pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways.

He will hear and heal our land. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your truth. We ask that you would teach us, build us up with the most holy faith, and give us true biblical humility of mind, that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Help us to have a servant's heart. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen.

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Topical Index

Chapter titles and section headings are listed with the pages on which they begin.

A

Advantages of True Humility p. 135

Analysis of the Hymn's Stanzas p. 16

Application: Our Failures and the Call to Total Obedience p. 112

Application: Put on Christ and Mortify the Flesh p. 129

Application: Receiving the Present Truth p. 89

Application: The Need for a Servant's Heart p. 147

Applications and Conclusion p. 21

Applications: Dealing with Sin, Neglect, and Repentance p. 74

Applications: Designating Praise and Obedience p. 39

Applications: Hearing and Following Christ p. 56

Argument from the Lesser to the Greater p. 98

B

Biblical Humility p. 133

Blessings of Being Established (Psalm 112) p. 80

C

Christ the Door and Good Shepherd p. 46

Christ's Flock Given by the Father p. 48

Christ’s Example of Repetition p. 79

Conclusion: Restoration to a Commandment-Oriented Life in Christ p. 113

Context of the Hymn's Writing p. 13

D

David's Designation of Praise p. 25

Defining 'Present Truth' p. 81

Do Thorns Bother You? p. 59

E

Ezekiel's Exemplary Obedience in Devastating Circumstances p. 109

G

God Has Spoken p. 55
God's Benevolence: Enlarged Steps p. 38
God's Condescension: Gentleness Making Great p. 35
God's Grace: The Shield of Salvation p. 26
God's Preservation: Upheld by His Right Hand p. 30
God's Voice in Written and Living Word p. 44

H

Haman's Pride and Wrath Against Mordecai p. 123
Haman: The Agagite and Amalekite Flesh p. 118
Hanged on Your Own Gallows p. 115
His Sheep Hear and Follow; Others Do Not p. 49
Historical Examples of Feeling-Oriented Disobedience p. 104
How to Get Hanged on Your Own Gallows p. 115
Howe's Abolitionism and Views on Race p. 11
Humility and Blessing p. 145
Humility Is a State of Blessing p. 145
Humility Is a State of Dependence upon God p. 141
Humility Is a State of Mind p. 138

I

Identifying the Thorns from Matthew, Mark, and Luke p. 65
Introduction and Review of Psalm 18 p. 25
Introduction to the Thorny Ground Hearer p. 59
Introduction: God Speaks p. 42
Introduction: Peter’s Concern for Remembrance p. 77
Introduction: The Flesh's Desire to Play God p. 116
Introduction: The Misunderstanding of Humility p. 133
Introduction: The Question and Biblical Foundation p. 7
Introduction: The Scope of Obedience p. 97

O

Obedience as a Sovereignly Dictated Order of Life p. 100

P

Progressive Illumination Today p. 87
Progressive Revelation in Scripture p. 83

R

Receiving the Present Truth p. 94

S

Should a Christian Sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic? p. 7
Should A Christian Sing the Battle Hymn? p. 7

T

The Authoress: Julia Ward Howe's Unbelief p. 9
The Context of the Poem p. 11
The Danger of Double-Mindedness p. 81
The Danger of Letting Truth Slip p. 79
The Fall: From Commandment-Oriented to Feeling-Oriented Life p. 102
The Flesh Attacks the Weak and Defies God p. 121
The Flesh's Self-Destruction: Hanged on His Own Gallows p. 128
The Manner of God's Voice p. 43
The Meaning of 'Established' p. 80
The Nature of Thorns: Distracting, Disturbing, and Deadly p. 60
The Necessity of Recognizing God's Sovereignty p. 99
The Necessity of Repeated Truth p. 77
The Power of Songs to Teach Doctrine and History p. 8
The Present Truth p. 77
The Scope of Christian Obedience p. 97, p. 108
The Seed Fell Among Thorns: Pre-existing Sins p. 64
The Serpent's Temptation and Man's Self-Exaltation p. 116
The Sheep Follow the Shepherd Alone p. 52
The Sheepfold and the Shepherd's Voice p. 47
The Thorn of the Cares of This World p. 66
The Thorn of the Deceitfulness of Riches p. 70
The Thorns of Lust for Other Things and Pleasures of This Life p. 72
The Thorny Ground Hearer is Unsaved p. 73
The Two Greatest Examples of Humility p. 136

The Two Main Hindrances to Obedience: Feelings and Desires p. 108
The Tyranny of Self-Worship p. 117
The Voice of God p. 41
The World's Pride vs. Biblical Humility p. 134
Thorns Are Distracting p. 60

W

What Present Truth Is Not p. 82
What Real Preaching Is p. 92

Scripture Index

Scripture references identified in chapter readings, headings, and manuscript text are listed with their page locations.

Genesis

Genesis 1 p. 87

Genesis 3 p. 42, p. 104

Genesis 3:15 p. 19, p. 84, p. 85

Genesis 3:8 p. 42

Genesis 15 p. 28

Genesis 32:10 p. 135

Genesis 36 p. 118

Exodus

Exodus 13:17-18 p. 143

Exodus 17 p. 121

Exodus 33 p. 49

Exodus 33:17 p. 49

Exodus 34 p. 107

Numbers

Numbers 24 p. 121, p. 122

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 7 p. 107

Deuteronomy 8 p. 144, p. 145

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 p. 144

Deuteronomy 18 p. 99

Deuteronomy 25 p. 121

Deuteronomy 33 p. 28, p. 29

Judges

Judges 14 p. 107

1 Samuel

1 Samuel 15:1 p. 126

1 Kings

1 Kings 19:12 p. 43

2 Kings

2 Kings 25 p. 121, p. 122

2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles 7:14 p. 147

2 Chronicles 34:27 p. 146

Esther

Esther 2 p. 121, p. 122

Esther 3:1 p. 118

Esther 3:2 p. 123

Esther 5:9 p. 125

Esther 7:9-10 p. 128

Job

Job 33:14 p. 43

Psalm

Psalm 3:3 p. 30

Psalm 5:12 p. 31

Psalm 8 p. 137

Psalm 9:12 p. 146

Psalm 10 p. 128

Psalm 10:12 p. 146

Psalm 14 p. 137

Psalm 16 p. 32

Psalm 17 p. 32

Psalm 18 p. 25, p. 26, p. 27, p. 28, p. 30, p. 31, p. 32, p. 35, p. 38

Psalm 18:34 p. 26

Psalm 18:35 p. 30

Psalm 18:36 p. 38, p. 39

Psalm 21 p. 33

Psalm 31:15 p. 143

Psalm 31:8 p. 38

Psalm 33 p. 42
Psalm 48 p. 32
Psalm 50 p. 40
Psalm 51:16-17 p. 135, p. 136
Psalm 60 p. 32
Psalm 63 p. 32
Psalm 66:9 p. 143
Psalm 73 p. 32, p. 135
Psalm 73:6-12 p. 135
Psalm 80 p. 33
Psalm 83 p. 122, p. 123
Psalm 84 p. 28, p. 29
Psalm 103 p. 39
Psalm 110 p. 33, p. 34
Psalm 112 p. 80
Psalm 112:1-10 p. 80
Psalm 113 p. 36, p. 137
Psalm 115 p. 29
Psalm 118 p. 33, p. 34
Psalm 118:5 p. 38
Psalm 119:89 p. 82, p. 83
Psalm 137 p. 122, p. 123

Proverbs

Proverbs 4:12 p. 38, p. 39
Proverbs 6 p. 146, p. 147
Proverbs 11:2 p. 126
Proverbs 15:19 p. 63
Proverbs 15:33 p. 147
Proverbs 16:18 p. 126
Proverbs 21:24 p. 126
Proverbs 22:4 p. 136
Proverbs 22:5 p. 63
Proverbs 23 p. 139
Proverbs 29:23 p. 126

Isaiah

Isaiah 7:14 p. 85
Isaiah 28:9-10 p. 84
Isaiah 32:13 p. 63
Isaiah 34:13 p. 63, p. 64
Isaiah 42:8 p. 130
Isaiah 43:1 p. 49, p. 50
Isaiah 45:3 p. 49, p. 50
Isaiah 55:8-9 p. 117, p. 118
Isaiah 57:15 p. 136
Isaiah 63 p. 17

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 3:14-15 p. 94
Jeremiah 12:13 p. 63

Hosea

Hosea 2:6 p. 63, p. 64
Hosea 9:6 p. 64

Amos

Amos 3:7 p. 92

Micah

Micah 5:2 p. 85

Nahum

Nahum 1:10 p. 64

Matthew

Matthew 1:21 p. 65
Matthew 10:37 p. 114
Matthew 13 p. 65, p. 66
Matthew 16 p. 53
Matthew 18:4 p. 136
Matthew 20:28 p. 142
Matthew 23:12 p. 136

Mark

Mark 4 p. 59, p. 65, p. 66
Mark 4:18-19 p. 66
Mark 4:7 p. 64
Mark 10:1 p. 79

Luke

Luke 6 p. 53
Luke 8 p. 65, p. 66
Luke 8:14 p. 66
Luke 13:1 p. 81
Luke 22 p. 141, p. 142
Luke 22:27 p. 129

John

John 1 p. 44, p. 45
John 1:17 p. 83
John 1:18 p. 45
John 5:24-25 p. 56
John 5:26 p. 46
John 6 p. 52
John 6:37 p. 49
John 6:60 p. 52
John 8:36 p. 21
John 8:47 p. 51
John 10 p. 49, p. 51, p. 52, p. 54, p. 55
John 10:14 p. 50
John 10:24 p. 51
John 10:3 p. 50
John 10:4 p. 56
John 12 p. 53, p. 125
John 14 p. 10, p. 45
John 14:21 p. 113
John 15:5 p. 143
John 16:12 p. 88

John 17 p. 48, p. 49
John 17:17 p. 82, p. 83
John 20:11 p. 50

Acts

Acts 3:22 p. 99
Acts 9 p. 43, p. 44
Acts 11:18 p. 86
Acts 17:28 p. 99
Acts 20 p. 139, p. 140
Acts 26:18 p. 75

Romans

Romans 5:12 p. 103, p. 104
Romans 8:13 p. 129
Romans 9:5 p. 124
Romans 12:3 p. 139, p. 140
Romans 14:17-18 p. 129

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 p. 99
1 Corinthians 10 p. 128
1 Corinthians 15:45-48 p. 104
1 Corinthians 15:9 p. 135

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 10:11 p. 82
2 Corinthians 12:11 p. 143
2 Corinthians 13:5 p. 78

Ephesians

Ephesians 3:8 p. 135
Ephesians 5:19 p. 7, p. 8
Ephesians 6 p. 29

Colossians

Colossians 2:7 p. 80
Colossians 3:16 p. 7, p. 8

Colossians 3:20 p. 98
Colossians 3:22 p. 99
Colossians 3:5 p. 130

1 Timothy

1 Timothy 2:14 p. 103, p. 104
1 Timothy 3:16 p. 45
1 Timothy 6:17-19 p. 71
1 Timothy 6:9 p. 71

2 Timothy

2 Timothy 3 p. 44
2 Timothy 4:18 p. 34, p. 35

Hebrews

Hebrews 1 p. 56
Hebrews 1:1 p. 83
Hebrews 2:1 p. 79
Hebrews 6:10 p. 129
Hebrews 11:3 p. 42
Hebrews 13 p. 53, p. 54
Hebrews 13:5 p. 56

James

James 1:8 p. 81
James 4:10 p. 146, p. 147
James 4:6 p. 146, p. 147

1 Peter

1 Peter 5:5-6 p. 146, p. 147

2 Peter

2 Peter 1:10 p. 51, p. 52
2 Peter 1:12 p. 79, p. 82, p. 94

1 John

1 John 2 p. 106
1 John 2:19 p. 53

1 John 2:3-5 p. 113
1 John 5:3 p. 113

Jude

Jude 24 p. 34

Revelation

Revelation 21:3 p. 42

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