

A photograph of a person's legs and feet walking a tightrope. The person is wearing light-colored trousers with the cuffs rolled up. They are barefoot and walking on a red tightrope. In the background, a city skyline is visible across a body of water under a cloudy sky.

# Balance

**The 15<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Cold Harbor Lectures  
November 3-6, 2011**

**"Only be strong and very courageous,  
that you may observe to do  
according to all the law...  
Do not turn from it  
to the right hand  
or to the left."  
Joshua 1:7**

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## **“NEITHER TO THE RIGHT HAND NOR THE LEFT”**

Nick Genter

The word of God condemns adding to or taking away from its content. While not worded specifically in every book of the Bible, such ideas are found in many through principle and specifically articulated toward the beginning in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32; Joshua 1:7 and 23:6; in the middle in Proverbs 30:6; and at the end in Revelation 22:18-19. The principle is laid out that we must not alter the word of God.

Why do people stray from the word of God, and what harm is there in so doing? While we cannot know a person's thoughts unless he reveals them (1 Corinthians 2:10), there are cases revealed in the Bible that serve as examples of certain mindsets that lead to departures from the word of God.

Abram and Sarai brought about great distress for the world by bringing a child into the world through Hagar. This decision was motivated by a desire to “help God” (Genesis 16:2)<sup>1</sup>. God certainly works providentially through the actions of man (Esther 4:14), but all such actions must be in accordance with God's will, and it was not God's will for Hagar to be mother of the son of promise (Matthew 19:5; Genesis 17:19).

Saul did evil in the sight of God by sparing Agag the king of Amalek and not devoting the spoils to destruction (1 Samuel 15:19). Saul blamed the people for the disobedience, and peer pressure can certainly be behind deviation from sound doctrine.

Jeroboam the First changed the worship of Israel motivated by fear. He feared his own death and the loss of his kingdom to Judah (1 Kings 12:27). Fear can be a powerful force for a departure from the Bible.

Naaman, in 2 Kings 5, questioned God's methods for cleansing his leprosy. As human beings, we seem to need an explanation for everything. A five year old will question the motives of his parents on many things. Sometimes this is out of curiosity, but sometimes this is based purely upon dissatisfaction with his parents' decision. He wants things to be done his way. At times we are simply curious, but we must be satisfied that some things are beyond our knowing, belonging only to God (Deuteronomy 29:29). We may demand an explanation for something God deems to do differently than the ways we might choose. We, like our children, may want things done our way, but God's ways are

always superior. As Moses said, “I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deuteronomy 32:3-4). There is ample reason given for God to have condemned change to His word. He knows what we do not, and He is just and fair.

Among the dangers of changing the Word, two basic concepts rise to the surface: the principles of typology and the judgment of God.

Typology is defined as “the study of types or prefigurative symbols in scriptural literature.”<sup>2</sup> God gives us prefigurative symbols in His word. The damage that could have been done to the symbolism of the tabernacle, the priesthood, and specifically the high priesthood, as they relate to man’s relationship to heaven, is a good example of the need for adherence to God’s word without deviation. The Hebrews writer informs us that the priesthood, and by extension the tabernacle and temple, were all shadows of heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5).

God commanded that all be made according to the pattern that He showed Moses on the mountain (Exodus 25:40). Imagine what would have happened had Moses decided that it would be much more convenient for the high priest if he did not have to go through a curtain to get to the Ark of the Covenant. Suppose, then, he made the tabernacle with no curtain separating the most holy place from the rest of the tabernacle, and when the temple was built it did not have such a curtain either. A person might ask, “So what? What is the big deal with one small change? It is just a curtain after all.” As with everything God included in His word, there is a purpose to this curtain. We may not understand it at the time, but if God wants it done, there is a purpose. Sin separates us from God, who resides in heaven. There is a wall between man and God symbolized by this curtain. Only the high priest was allowed to go beyond that curtain, and then only once a year (Leviticus 16:15; Heb. 9:7). The high priest was allowed to do this for the atonement for the sins of God’s people, as there can be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). Our High Priest, with His superior sacrifice, has entered the true holy place and discharged the duties of a perfect High Priest (Hebrews 9:24). The culmination of His duties resulted in the restoration of man to fellowship with God by sanctification through His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10). Upon the death of Christ,

“The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38). The symbolic end of the separation upon the Savior’s sacrifice is a watershed moment in the history of the world. This moment should be one that provides reassurance of faith and bolsters security in the sufficiency of salvation in Christ.

In our hypothetical situation without a curtain, we have no such symbolism present. One small change could have an effect hundreds, if not thousands, of years later. God knew what He was doing when He established His word. A seemingly small change made by an otherwise well intentioned human being with the limited perspective of finite power and knowledge could greatly alter the significance of the revelation of the omnipotent and omniscient God.

The word of God is the basis for the judgment of man (John 12:48; Revelation 20:12). Imagine a man who has gone through his entire life believing that, with regard to a stoplight, red means go and green means stop. This man has this belief because someone changed the driver’s handbook he was given. What manner of destruction might be caused by this man charging through a red light? What would be his condition in front of the judge when confronted with the page from a proper copy of the driver’s handbook?

Now, Imagine if that same man had gone through his entire life believing that the only thing he needed to do to be saved was believe that Jesus was the Son of God. While belief in the Son of God is surely essential to salvation (John 8:24), true belief entails more than simply mental assent. Saying “I believe” is not the same as confessing the Lord with our lives. This man had never read the words of James 2:26 without the bias given him by a false teacher. How many souls could be led astray by his misguided teaching? What would be his condition in front of The Judge when confronted with the truth from His word?

One concept that must be recognized concerning any change to God’s word is that no matter what is done to paper copies of His revelation, the word itself is enduring (Psalm 119:160). As Jehudi learned in Jeremiah 36:23ff, no matter how much you take knife to paper, the Word is already established by God. Any departure from God’s word is done to the detriment of the deviant and not to the word itself.

Like those men in times past, people today seek to change the word of God for numerous reasons. Some do so from a desire to “help God”; some out of envy. We can depart either to the left or the right based on either of these reasons.

Departures over a desire to “help God” may be well intentioned, but they create stumbling blocks for those seeking to obey God. The idea that it is necessary to change worship to get the modern seeker in the door creates unauthorized, and therefore vain, worship. When we change the way the church is organized, the way it worships, the way members are added, or deviate from the biblical pattern, we create a church other than that which is found in the Bible. A congregation, motivated by fear of decreasing attendance, may institute changes in an effort to bring in new members. This is the same motivation behind the same kinds of changes instituted by Jeroboam.

In an effort to prevent apostasy, some have forbidden things that of themselves are not sinful and made them matters of faith. An eldership may deem that for their particular congregation it is most expedient to meet on Thursday night. This is within the realm of opinion, and another congregation should not feel compelled to disfellowship, mark, or send letters of grievance because they choose to do something different. When we make such decisions, we are no better than the Pharisees with their hedge around the Torah. In this kind of situation, erring on the side of caution is still erring. Paul said, “One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him” (Romans 14:2–3). Clearly, in matters of opinion we are to withhold judgment.

Envy can cause departures from the Word. Envy of the world can lead one to try and emulate the world. The cry of the envious rings out, “Why can’t we have entertainment-focused lives on Sunday too?” We must not think like the prodigal son’s brother, who envied his brother’s life. In the end there was nothing for the brother to truly envy had he cared to study the matter. We must not envy those in the world for their vain attempts at worship, their large gatherings, or any other seeming advantage for the same reason. Dilution of the word of God damages the church and its influence.

Envy of one another can cause great strife. Christianity is the ultimate level playing field, as “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no

male and female,” for all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Since one Christian’s faith cannot make him any more saved than another Christian’s faith, the only score chart would be an artificial chart of human origin. If we desire recognition, or if we simply do not like a particular Christian and wish to feel superior we must create a checklist wherein we can excel and they will pale by comparison. The most effective checklist is often the list unknown to others. This creates division, and division is the bane of the church. The Christians at Corinth, though they were in the right group at the right time with the right elements, were not partaking of the Lord’s Supper due to their division.

We are not to depart from the word of God to the left or the right. We must never bind our preferences as matters of faith, and we must never seek to improve on God’s methods. Those who choose to dilute or divide the church will answer to God for their actions. The god of this world seeks to devour (1 Peter 5:8). The church must be ever on guard against his devices and against the error of those who would seek to throw other Christians to that lion.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> “Typology,” *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*, 1995 ed.



# **DANGERS OF IMBALANCE**

Heath Johnson

## **Introduction**

God is a God of balance (Joshua 1:7; Deut. 17:20). The Bible is a balanced book that demands balanced people (2 Tim. 2:15). Jesus Christ, Paul, and all other faithful proclaimers were balanced preachers (John 7:16; 1 Thess. 2:4, 13). Paul pleaded with congregations to be balanced (1 Corinthians, Galatians 1:6-12).

There is not a more needed study in the church today than that of balance! We are living in an imbalanced world, the church is suffering severe imbalance, and many Christians are exhibiting imbalance their lives. The church is facing deadly dangers because of the imbalance of the world, of its Pastors, its preachers, its people, and its priorities.

## **Dangers of Imbalanced Pastors**

One of the most pressing needs in the church today is that of real balanced leadership. No business, school, nation, or charitable organization can long last without balanced leadership. God, in His infinite wisdom, planned for the body of Christ to be lead by a plurality of good, godly men who meet specific qualifications . Paul plainly lays out the qualifications for Pastors or more commonly called in today's time, elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Peter points out that pastors or elders should take on the office "not by constraint but willingly" (1 Peter 5:2). The book of Acts gives good insight on the role of elders:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20: 28,29).

Peter adds:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:2-4).

From the above passages it can be seen that the duty of elders is threefold. They must lead the flock, feed the flock, and protect the flock. However, many elders and congregations in the twenty-first century view the work much differently. The eldership is largely viewed to today as a corporate board of CEO's whose primary task is to hire and fire preachers and make sure the bills are paid. Herein is the danger of imbalanced leadership, that which God has prescribed to protect, nurture, and feed the church of God is largely non-existent in some areas and congregations are suffering.

What are the dangers of imbalanced pastors? (1) An unprotected flock. Brother B.J. Clarke states:

Consider the problems that are besetting churches of Christ today: Ignorance of the scriptures, worldliness, association and fellowship with the denominations, association and fellowship with change agents among us who are seeking to restructure the church of our Lord, a repudiation of God's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the insistence upon an expanded role for women leading the worship, a failure to practice church discipline, and so on.

Clarke continues:

Please do not misunderstand. There are many high quality men in high quality elderships. Many churches are in very capable hands. Having said that, let's face it-- in many places the church is suffering from anemic leadership. The problem is real, and it will not get better by leaving it alone." (Clarke pp. 38, 39)

Indeed, many churches have fallen into the hands of ravening wolves because their leadership was not in harmony with what God demands.

(2) A starved flock. Many congregations are not receiving a balanced diet of the word of God. Bible classes are not in-depth studies of the word of God, but are rather congregational conversations on current events. Elders must insure that the Bible is being taught faithfully, accurately, and in a balanced manner to all members, from the very young even to the oldest.

(3) A leaderless flock. Many congregations have never reached their real potential because they have not true leaders to direct them. A good, honest, and dream-driven eldership can lead many a congregation on to great things. Of course, elders must follow the ultimate shepherd in all their dealings and decisions.

## **The Dangers of Imbalanced Preachers**

If there ever was a time for balanced preachers now is the time. The Lord has made preaching a priority (1 Corinthians 1:18ff). It is through the preaching of the word that faith is produced (Romans 10:17) and souls are saved (James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:22-25). Preaching is never to be taken lightly (James 3:1). When God sent His Son, He did not send a politician or great philosopher; He sent a preacher. Preachers are to do just that—preach. Paul exhorted Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). We are to preach the whole council of God (Acts 20:27) and should never shirk from preaching the truth.

Preachers must be balanced and stand firmly in the pathway of truth not turning to the left or the right (Joshua 1:7; Deuteronomy 10:20). Preaching is powerful, and it wields a far greater influence than men give it credit. The pulpit can turn a congregation into a staunch island of truth or it can turn a congregation into nothing. Clarence DeLoach states “Preachers, we are involved in serious business. It is a high calling, an awesome responsibility. Yet good men of talent and motivation can be neutralized and made ineffective by imbalance.”

The dangers of an imbalanced pulpit are manifold: (1) False teaching. False teaching has plagued the church since its beginning (Galatians 1:6-10). However, many preachers have not taken a balanced approach to proper study and have allowed themselves to embrace doctrines of men rather than the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 15:9; 2 John 9-11). A balanced view of the Bible is what is necessary to avoid false doctrine (2 Timothy 2:15). Imbalanced preachers will allow their desire for notoriety to supersede the truth (2 Timothy 4:3,4), or will allow their emotions and imbalanced zeal to take over (Romans 10:1).

(2) Extremism. Not only has the church dealt with false teaching since its beginning but it has also had to deal with extremism as a result of preacher’s imbalance. Unfortunately, the church is riddled with extremists.

Often, the tone of intended correction is caustic, presumptuous and self-righteous. The person that has an “anti” mindset and/or a person that feels that all must agree (at least to maintain fellowship) with his personal view(s) on “hobby” issues, or matters of “indifference,” (personal scruples

or “conscience” issues) may also be properly labeled as being pharisaical. Furthermore, it will comprise those who believe that their “love for truth” gives them permission to use un-Christian attitudes and techniques to expose false teachers. Kindness, fairness, Christian liberty, love, courtesy, and such are disregarded so that the supposed, rumored, or imagined error can be crushed. The view of ‘the end justifies the means’ is considered legitimate as long as Truth is being defended.”

Too often a preacher’s “crusade for truth” in fighting “error” does much more harm than it ever will do good. This writer has no problem with opposing true doctrinal error, but extremists preachers who backbite, attack, slander, gossip, and even mock other preachers over trivial matters should repent and balance themselves.

(3) Division. Division is the ultimate result of imbalanced preaching. Both false teaching and extremism will bring about division. Division is sinful (1 Corinthians 1:10ff; cf Proverbs 6:0). The church is a body (Ephesians 1:21,22), and a body is a living thing, one cannot divide a living thing without killing it.

### **The Dangers of Imbalanced Priorities**

Not only must elders and preachers be balanced but the people of any congregation must be balanced as well. There must be a proper balance in the priorities of all Christians. Often a Christian allows his priorities and his perspective to become imbalanced.

Often when a person’s priorities are imbalanced they may allow the temporal to become more important than the eternal. People must realize that the world in which we live is temporal and will pass, but the teachings of Christianity are eternal and will never fade away (1 Peter 1:22-25).

An imbalance of one’s perspective is also a danger. Christians absolutely must keep the right perspective. Christians must be soul conscious (Matthew 16:26), prepared at all times (Matthew 24:36ff). And they must be always ready (1 Peter 3:15). Christians must not allow their service to God to become something routine but must always be mindful of the eternal and not the temporal (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:2).

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## THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

Melvin L. Otey

“Balance” refers to an equipoise, a state of equilibrium that results from the cancellation of one force by an equal, opposing force. Where balance exists, the one force is no more powerful, prominent, or important than the other. Indeed, the two are properly taken together, for they are each part of one whole. Neither is the exception; together, they comprise the rule. In light of this year’s theme of “balance,” there is no more *apropos* subject than the one assigned to me: “The Goodness and Severity of God.”

God is, in fact, a balanced Being, and we see evidence of this throughout His creation. There is an equilibrium between night and day, hot and cold, young and old, male and female, predator and prey, life and death (cf. Genesis 8:22). Not only is God a balanced Being, but He desires that humans, who are created in His image (Genesis 1:27), be balanced beings as well. There is a time, among other things, the Bible says, for us to plant and to pluck up, to kill and to heal, to keep and to cast away, to rend and to sew, to love and to hate, to war and to make peace (Ecclesiastes 3:2-8). The balance in God’s character is all around us and in us.

Sometimes, we lack balance as we think about God. For example, many expect love without hate. Truly, He is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and He loves the entire world (John 3:16), yet He hates false worship (Deuteronomy 16:22), pride (Proverbs 6:16-17, 16:5), dishonesty (Proverbs 11:1, 12:2), and wickedness of every kind (Hebrews 1:8-9). Likewise, many expect mercy without justice, but God is both merciful and just. Indeed, He is merciful (Exodus 34:6-7a; Deuteronomy 4:31; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 136), but He will “by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:7b).<sup>1</sup> When considering one verse, incident, or divine attribute, we must always consider counterbalancing verses, incidents, and attributes, lest our understanding of God’s nature be skewed and our spiritual development be hindered.

God is not a Santa Claus-like figure we can take for granted as we continually solicit more gifts from Him. Nor is He a ruthless dictator looking over the banister of heaven and waiting to terminate us for our every misdeed. Yes, God is approachable, but

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<sup>1</sup> All scriptural quotations taken from the King James Version unless noted otherwise.

He should not be approached lightly. No, we need not be terrified of Him, but we must respect His authority.

God is a balanced Being, and He is balanced in dealing with the human family. The Bible discusses the complexity of His character in various ways, but each discussion fairly fits within the terms Paul employed in the Roman letter, and which we are taking up here: “The Goodness and Severity of God.”

### **The Reality Of God’s Goodness And Severity**

Paul had the opposing forces within God’s nature squarely in view as he penned the allegory of olive trees and branches (Romans 11:15-24). There, he described unbelieving Jews as natural branches “broken off,” or separated from the “root and fatness” of the good olive tree (11:17, 20-21). Believing Gentiles were branches naturally belonging to a wild old tree, but they had been grafted into the good tree to partake of the very blessings from which most Jews had been separated because of their unbelief (11:17, 24). The one party, then, received blessings to which it was not entitled, and the other was stripped of blessings it formerly enjoyed. Regarding this dynamic, the apostle wrote, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (11:22).

As Paul pointed out, on the one hand, God is good. Indeed, He is “abundant in goodness” (Exodus 34:6). It can fairly be said that He is the essence of it, for Jesus declared, “none is good, save one, that is, God” (Luke 18:19). The Lord crowns the year with His goodness (Psalm 65:11), and it endures continually (Psalm 52:1). His goodness was even available to those Jews who had experienced His severity; they could be grafted in again if they did not choose to abide “still in unbelief” (Romans 11:23).

There are more references to God’s “goodness” than one might initially recognize because the KJV sometimes translates the underlying Greek term “kindness,” and several of the more modern translations, including the NASB, ESV, and NIV, do so throughout the New Testament. For example, Paul wrote of the exceeding, or surpassing, riches of God’s “grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7) and affirmed that the “kindness” and love of God toward man has appeared in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Titus 3:4).

Paul's allegory, however, simultaneously draws attention to God's severity, because the Lord is fairly characterized by both attributes. The Greek noun translated "severity" was often used outside the New Testament in reference to "uncompromising hardness" in holding someone to a legal standard (Kittel 107). Similarly, in the Septuagint, the term was employed to describe the "'unrelenting severity' of God's divine judgment of the wicked and the mighty" (Kittel 107). Thus, Paul used a known Greek expression for "the pitiless severity of the Law" to describe the only alternative for those who do not avail themselves of God's overwhelming goodness (Kittel 108). In reality, God is both good and severe.

### **The Recognition Of God's Goodness And Severity**

The word translated "goodness" refers to "goodness in action . . . expressing itself in deeds" (Vine 495), and the Scriptures are replete with displays of God's kind heart in action. In the Old Testament, we read that He gave Adam and Eve a perfect living environment in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8), "blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12), made a great name for Abraham, complete with monetary and familial riches (Genesis 13:1-6, 1 Chronicles 1:32-34), freed the children of Israel when they were enslaved and oppressed by Egypt's rulers (Exodus 18:9), then gave them a land "flowing with milk and honey" that they did not labor to build (Exodus 3:8; Joshua 24:13), and raised a young shepherd to reign as Israel's greatest king (1 Samuel 16:10-13).

In the New Testament, we read that He sent His only begotten Son to die for His enemies (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). When Jesus came, He had compassion on the weak (cf. Matthew 14:14, 20:34), fed the hungry (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 8:1-9), healed the sick, crippled, and blind (Matthew 15:30; Mark 6:56, 10:46-52), brought the dead back to life again (John 11:14-44; Luke 7:11-15, 8:49-56), gave gifts to men as He departed (Ephesians 4:8), and redeemed a chief persecutor of His church to be a vessel to bear His name before Jew and Gentile, commoner and king (Acts 9:13-15; 1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Timothy 1:15). God's goodness is prominently illustrated for us in Scripture.

Without question, "the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (Psalm 33:5b), but the severity of His judgment is just as powerful, prominent, and important. While His kindness is unmistakable in Scripture, so also is His severity. For example, after the Lord



saved the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, He was angered by their murmuring against Him in the wilderness, “and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp” (Numbers 11:1b).

When Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire” before the Lord, they were likewise consumed with fire from the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-2 ESV). When Korah and others rebelled against Moses, God’s chosen leader for Israel, “the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up . . . . They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation” (Numbers 16:32-33). When Uzzah handled the Ark of the Covenant without authorization, the Lord’s anger was kindled, and He struck Uzzah down (1 Chronicles 13:7-10). There are numerous examples of God’s unrelenting severity in meting out punishment, particularly in the Old Testament.

Oftentimes, the balance between His goodness and severity is manifest in a single event or series of events. While Noah, “a righteous man and blameless in his generations,” and his family found favor in the Lord’s eyes (Genesis 6:8-9 ESV), God was uncompromising and exacting with everyone else when He judged the world in the Flood. Man was corrupt and filled the Earth with violence (Genesis 6:5, 11-13), so God punished man and nearly eradicated the human family; “Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark” (Genesis 7:23).

Likewise, when God judged Sodom and Gomorrah and the other wicked cities of the plain because of their sin (Genesis 18:20-21, 19:13; Deuteronomy 29:23; Jude 1:7), He rained upon them with fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed virtually all their inhabitants (Genesis 19:24-25). Yet, in His grace and “kindness,” He spared “righteous Lot” and his two daughters (Genesis 19:19; 2 Peter 2:7 ESV). Later, in saving Israel, God brought a series of debilitating plagues upon Egypt (e.g., Exodus 11:1, 12:13). These and other examples illustrate that God’s goodness and severity are, in fact, counterbalancing forces, properly taken together because they are each part of one whole. We need only recognize the clear illustrations of this truth in Scripture.

### **The Reasons For God’s Goodness And Severity**

It is only natural to wonder why God is, on the one hand, so beneficent and kind, yet exacting and strict on the other. There is good reason, and we should maintain our

balance as we consider the purpose and value of both attributes. They are required by His character and His pursuit of our best interests.

Generally, we value justice. We believe in consequences for wrongful behavior and punishment for those who violate our human laws. We ought not marvel, then, that a just God (Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 45:21; Revelation 15:3) believes in consequences and punishment for those who violate His divine Law. Justice requires that people receive what they earn. “[T]he wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a), so, when God is strict and harsh with sinners, He is merely paying what they are due.

He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:28-29).

Thankfully, He is slow to anger, but He is not arbitrary and capricious as some men are. He is just, and, therefore, cannot clear the guilty or acquit the wicked without the full price being paid (Exodus 34:7; Nahum 1:3).

God’s severity is not only a product of His just nature; it is also a product of His love and concern for us. Human fathers chasten and rebuke their wayward children in order to restrain them from error and danger (Hebrews 12:5-7; Proverbs 22:15, 23:13). Likewise, God punishes us, sometimes quite severely, when we go astray in order to lead us back toward good and right living; if He did not discipline us, it would suggest that we are none of His (Hebrews 12:8). Severe punishment, then, is an appropriate, loving response when we make significant errors in action and attitude.

God expects us to be dissuaded from the mistakes others have made, in part, by the severity of His response. When the earth swallowed Korah and those with him, “they became a sign,” a signal of what others should avoid (Numbers 26:10). Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back at the wicked city of Sodom as she fled (Genesis 19:17, 26); we are told to remember her so that we do not also turn back to what God intends to destroy (Luke 17:32). When God slew Uzzah for touching the Ark of the Covenant, David did not attempt to move again in the same fashion; he learned from his mistake and recognized that he had initially failed to seek God “after the due order” (1 Chronicles 15:13). These displays of justice, and others like them, are for our benefit. The specter of severe punishment restrains evil and encourages good works, both by us and

around us (Romans 13:1-4). We are to be impressed by God's response to transgression and sin so that we avoid doing the kinds of things that would merit similar penalties for us.

Though we have all sinned (Romans 3:23), and, consequently, merited severe punishment, God loves us and this impels His kindness toward us. He actively, unconditionally pursues our best interest, and He prefers to give the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ rather than the eternal punishment we so richly deserve (Romans 6:23). He loves us and would rather save us than punish us eternally. This is evinced by Jesus' death on the cross (John 3:16; Romans 3:16; 1 John 3:16). But the guilty cannot be saved without repentance; God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Repentance is an absolute requirement for avoiding eternal severity, and the riches of God's goodness are intended to turn us back from sin; "God's kindness is meant to lead [us] to repentance" (Romans 2:4b ESV).

Frankly, most of us do not seriously question God's kindness; rather, we take it for granted. He is good because he loves us, but His kindness is purposeful in that it discourages evil, which is pleasing to Him and profitable for us. However, at one time or another, most of us have questioned God's severity. It is also purposeful. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). God is severe because He is just, and His stern punishments restrain evil, which is pleasing to Him and profitable for us.

### **The Recipients Of God's Goodness And Severity**

There is a degree to which all men are recipients of God's goodness in that "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45b). When He allows us to awaken each day with sound bodies and minds and an opportunity to be reconciled to Him and to be numbered among His children, we are beneficiaries of His kindness. However, in an ultimate sense, some will relish God's goodness while others will rue His severity only when Jesus returns to judge the world. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9). We each choose one category or the other based upon the godliness or wickedness of our actions and attitudes.

Many expect redemption without condemnation when the Lord returns, but He will redeem the righteous only while condemning all the wicked at His second coming (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). Jesus said, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). He will “be glorified in His saints” when He returns, but He will take “vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10). In the end, there will be both goodness and severity, redemption for obedient believers and condemnation for unrepentant rebels.

Many expect reward without punishment when the Lord returns, but He will reward only the faithful while He punishes insurgents at the end of time. According to Jesus Himself, when He returns, He will invite some—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34)—and He will banish others—“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). In the end, there will be both goodness and severity, reward for good and faithful and punishment for the slothful and wicked.

The good news is that all we who are now living can choose which of the two categories we will be in when the Lord returns. We can choose to be saved or unsaved, friends of God or enemies, recipients of His goodness or His severity. Noah and Lot chose to live righteously and were saved by God’s grace while all around them were destroyed in His judgment. The question is, “Which do you choose? God’s goodness or His severity?” When we reject God’s goodness, we necessarily inherit His severity (Romans 11:22b). So, if we want to know the ultimate sense of His goodness when the Lord returns, we must embrace His goodness now and abide in the same until He returns (Revelation 2:10). If we do anything else, then we choose severity (cf. Hebrews 10:28-29). “Which do you choose?”

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## **BALANCED PREACHING**

Jimmy Clark

There is no question that the Lord God is interested in preaching. Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21, KJV). There is no question what the saved think of preaching. Paul also wrote in the same context of the previous statement, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Preaching has always had and always will have a dynamic in the work of redeeming men from sin.

However, not all preaching is the preaching ordained of God. Paul wrote to the Galatians,

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, I any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his second letter,

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chieftest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things (2 Corinthians 11:3-6).

There will always be the danger that mankind will view all preaching alike. When this happens, one of two things comes forth. Either men accept messages of conflicting material as acceptable, thus embracing pluralism; or men reject all preaching as being of no value at all since there are conflicting contents between any given sermon in the religious world. True evaluation is to compare what the preacher says to what God actually says in the Bible and accept only what is of God while rejecting anything not of God. This has been and continues to be the plea of the Restoration Movement.

At the heart of divinely approved preaching is the balance needed on all sides in order to proclaim “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Paul had clearly stated to the Ephesian elders, “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” (Acts 20:20). A careful examination of the text of the Bible will show that there is a balance to be maintained in preaching for there to be profitable preaching.

### **Evangelizing And Edifying**

Jesus told the apostles as recorded by Matthew, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20). Mark recorded of this same occasion, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). There is in these two accounts the balance of reaching out to the lost with the gospel through making disciples and reinforcing the new converts to grow into a full knowledge of Christ through further teaching. Paul wrote to the brethren at Rome, “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Romans 1:15). Paul knew the value of preaching the gospel where the message had never gone (cf. Romans 15:19-20) as well as preaching to brethren where the power of the gospel would continue to have its saving effect.

While there is a great deal of joy and excitement that comes in the conversion of new converts through the preaching of the gospel (cf. Acts 11:18), there is also the great satisfaction in doing the long term work of nurturing new babes to become full grown in the kingdom of God. Peter wrote, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22). The seed, the word of God, that made them children of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23) is the same seed that would abide in them and bring them to the fullness of life having been born of God (cf. 1 John 3:9). As a matter of fact, there is a tremendous need for preachers to work diligently in building up the spiritual body that is already established lest there be departures from the faith (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1). Peter wrote in the second letter, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the

world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Peter 2:20-21). There can be a great temptation for preachers to give up on certain brethren because of the hard work of developing the work and go out preaching in places where the gospel has never gone. While evangelism among those who have never heard the gospel is essential, enduring with longsuffering the work among brethren is also as essential. Balanced preaching is to preach to the lost to bring them to Christ and to develop the established congregation once it is in existence. The immediate results are not always present in the long-term work of edifying the brethren like they are when penitent believers are baptized. Both need to be viewed of equal importance by preachers, elders, and brethren everywhere.

### **Exposing Sin And Encouraging Saints**

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). The terms “reprove” and “rebuke” involve the work of correcting what is wrong. The term “exhort” involves the work of encouraging as though one would call someone to his side. Jesus stated of the Holy Spirit’s work through the apostles, “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). Reproving involves convicting the heart of man to see himself as he really is before God. The Bible is the mirror to the soul as James illustrated. “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (James 1:23-24). Man must first see himself as a sinner in the sight of God before the gospel will truly be good news to him. The preaching of the gospel reaches the heart of man by exposing him to the truth and then revealing the answer for his sinful problem.

Rebuking involves making sure that man sees the side of life that man is not to walk. Rebuking involves quite a bit of the word “no” or “not.” Matthew gives an illustration of this in the words of Peter. “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders



and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:21-22). John wrote of Jesus’ words to the church of the Laodecians, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19). There are times when preachers must deal with unpleasant things that expose the sinfulness of man. Paul stated of the kind of warfare that the child of God is against. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Preaching that does not call for men to repent and turn to God is not approved preaching.

Exhorting involves the encouragement to maintain the walk of faith to those who are in the faith. The entire book of Hebrews is one such illustration. It is written, “And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words” (Hebrews 13:22). It also involves the spirit to act upon the encouragement given. Luke recorded in the book of Acts, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). It is also written of the work of Barnabas, “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Paul and Barnabas gave further encouragement among the brethren on the first missionary journey in Galatia, where it is recorded, “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The problems with preaching to any given audience is that when reproofing and rebuking, the faithful take it to heart while those who are hardened refuse to heed. At the same time, when preaching is of an encouraging nature, those who need to repent and come to the Lord take encouragement as a sign that things are fine with them. Balanced preaching involves reproofing and rebuking the erring while exhorting all to have the courage to be faithful to the Lord. Longsuffering and clear teaching are equally needed (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2). Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which

is the head, even Christ:" (Ephesians 4:15). Paul told Timothy in his work with people, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Balanced preaching has the spirit of Christ in love for lost souls and the strength of conviction to oppose that which makes man lost.

### **Exalting God And Educating Unto Godliness**

A third area of balance that is involved in preaching is to exalt God in every way and educate the hearers as to their responsibility before God. The heart of preaching is to declare to man what God has done as the motivation for man to act upon that great work. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). The motivating power of the gospel is the meaning of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Preaching his redemptive work exalts God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One cannot read Ephesians 1:3-14 without seeing this. One cannot read Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem without seeing this (cf. Acts 2:22-40). Preaching is declaring the King's message from heaven as it is clearly recorded in the inspired word of God. The nature of God and the qualities of the Godhead are central to understanding the greatness of the gospel message. Paul magnified the God "whom ye ignorantly worship" (Acts 17:23) to those in Athens in the first century through his preaching. God's redemptive work through the preaching of the gospel manifests that it is God who "worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

The preaching of the work of God is to bring about a work in man. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Balanced preaching will give great attention to this walk. Paul wrote further to the Ephesians, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of

peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). He further wrote, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,” (Ephesians 4:17). One should notice from just the fourth chapter of Ephesians that there is a walk that one is to practice and one that all Christians are to avoid. Balance will show both sides as is revealed through scripture. The Old Testament book of Proverbs is filled with contrasting walks: wise and foolish, righteous and unrighteous, etc. The call of the gospel is one of two directions. Peter wrote, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:” (1 Peter 2:9). The great sermon of Jesus, which is often called “The Sermon on the Mount,” mentions two gates with two corresponding ways (cf. Matthew 7:13-14), two kinds of trees with two types of corresponding fruit (cf. Matthew 7:16-20), and two kinds of hearers illustrated by two types of builders, foundations, and results when tested by the storm (cf. Matthew 7:24-27). The great work of God through Christ should bring out the greatness of the penitent, obedient believer who is steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58).

## BALANCING EMOTION AND LOGIC

Dave Miller

As American civilization continues to manifest all the indicators of social and spiritual decline, one cannot help but observe that one change that has come over society in the last half century has been a significant shift from the rational to the emotional. We have shifted from a print culture to a media culture, from a “read, study, and think” culture to an image-oriented culture. Television and the media overwhelm the viewer with images. This communication medium requires less critical and thoughtful analysis which is supplanted by feeling, impressions, and sensations. Have you noticed that so many movies these days are fast-paced, action packed, and loaded with special effects? Have you come to the end of a movie and felt jarred and over-stimulated? Yet, when the experience is over, you realize that there simply was very little substance—certainly nothing of any real spiritual value. Your spirit was not nurtured with wholesome, uplifting content, but your flesh was excited and stirred.

Religion has not remained unscathed from this culture-wide inclination. Indeed, the extent to which emotion and feeling have affected doctrine and religious practice is monumental. Churches now regularly seek to justify illicit religious practices by confusing spirituality with mere physical or emotional sensation. Change agents manifest an implicit misunderstanding of the nature of spirituality, the role of emotion, and the essentiality of obedience. They equate emotion and feeling with being spiritual. The changes in worship which they advocate are targeted at stimulating emotions and making worshippers *feel* their religion. These emotional sensations are then mistaken for spirituality and religious authenticity.

### Misplaced Homage To Emotion

For example, in his book *Navigating the Winds of Change* (the subsequent page numbers given in parentheses are references to Anderson’s book), Lynn Anderson cites a Sunday morning assembly in which a “communion trio” sang to the congregation and thereby “helped us express emotions for which the congregation knew no song.” “The congregation sat profoundly moved and with uplifted faces as tears flowed” (p. 136). Apparently, shedding tears is conclusive proof that the activity is “authentic,” spiritual,

and scriptural. Similarly, a soloist confessed he used to feel guilty for feeling the way he now felt after singing a solo. His present sentiment is: “I can’t imagine honoring God any other way” (p. 112). Anderson describes the event as one in which “the Spirit of God fell in rich measure on that place” (p. 112).

But the Bible simply does not teach that stimulating the emotions is God-honoring or proof of the Spirit’s presence. God does not call upon us to refurbish worship so that people are not “feeling emotionally left out” (p. 123). If it takes a trio singing to the congregation during the Lord’s Supper for the people to affirm, “Surely the Lord was in this place today!” (p. 127), those people have been conditioned to confuse emotion and novelty with spirituality. I suppose if the trio had not sung, the Lord would not have been in that place that day. I suppose the observance of the Lord’s Supper for centuries without trios has prevented the Lord from being present on these occasions.

For worship to achieve a state of “excellence that honors and glorifies God” (pp. 43, 146), one must pattern worship according to God’s specifications (Leviticus 10:3). Even if cultural paradigms are swiftly shifting (p. 49), the shift is *away from God*. God will hardly accept compromise with those shifting sands. The uninhibited worship style portrayed in the movie *Sister Act* (p. 113) is hardly the spiritual behavior which God expects. Such behavior certainly stimulates emotions and enables worshippers to “get down.” But God is neither impressed nor pleased. God’s criteria for worship is simple and unpretentious: “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24); but the change agent’s criteria is “a warm, friendly, contemporary environment” (p. 90), right-brain styles (pp. 103-115), and the preferences of baby-boomers who look for convenience, not doctrinal correctness, and that which “serves their spiritual purposes” (p. 203).

Notice the concern with fashioning worship to suit humans and what humans think and feel is spiritual and meaningful. The starting point is all wrong. The change agent begins with human preferences and builds his entire case on the need to cater to those human preferences so people can “experience” religion. But then he places a contradictory disclaimer on his case by noting that God is the audience and “worship is not meant to be experienced so much as to be offered, so that God might be glorified” (p. 115).

In other words, let us restructure worship so we can “experience” our worship (p. 42) and feel good—then let us offer that to God and expect Him to accept it since it comes from our desire and our heart. Since baby-boomers resist authority (p. 6; cf. 203), we must forget God’s authority and on our own authority give them what they won’t resist. Since people today want to worship with “freedom” in their “own heart language” (p. 35), we must free them from God’s dictates and let them have what they want. Since God’s will doesn’t “make sense to them” (p. 35), we must offer them whatever does make sense to them.

This emphasis upon the emotional expectations of the worshipper completely misapprehends the emphasis evident in Scripture. Biblically, a warm, friendly church environment is coincidentally achieved when the assembly is carefully conformed to God’s directions—not worshipper desires. This is further proof that the change being promoted is illicit—based upon unscriptural criteria. It never seems to dawn on the change agent that his “left-brain, right-brain tendencies” contention is humanistic hocus-pocus. We are living in a day when the overall direction of society is away from truth and rational assessment of truth and toward “feeling good.” As a result, a significant upsurge in Pentecostalism has resulted and society as a whole is bent toward feeling good and pleasing self. Rather than accommodate this aberration, as the change agent proposes (p. 108), attempting to please people who have cultivated more emotional, “touchy-feely” appetites, we ought to help those people to reorient themselves in order to awaken and cultivate their depressed spiritual appetites.

The shift to emotion is further seen in the emphasis being placed on the “mystery” of faith and the inability of humans to “explain” God. The change agent is attempting to show that churches of Christ have been too heavy on the rational (pp. 110-111, 222). But the priority of the intellectual and rational over the emotional among churches of Christ is simply a reflection of the same priority, the same balance, that Scripture itself portrays. We have simply stressed the necessity of knowing God’s will for our lives—the very thing Jesus stressed (John 6:45; 7:17; 8:32). We have emphasized that the mind, directed by the word of the Spirit, must bring under control the body with its passions, emotions, and appetites (Romans 7:13-8:14). “Rational” refers simply to drawing correct conclusions from the biblical evidence. The change agent acts as if we cannot know right

from wrong, correct doctrine from incorrect doctrine, the rational from the irrational. But the Bible affirms otherwise (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1; Matthew 7:15-20).

### **Emotion In Music**

The shift to emotion especially manifests itself in the area of church music. For example, Lynn Anderson plays up the negative aspects of over-familiarity, asserting that our old songs have lost their meaning (p. 125). Yet, he is quick to say we ought not to “jettison traditional hymns” (p. 135). Why? If his rationale is correct, we ought to jettison all of them! But his rationale is not correct. God expects us to engage in attitude adjustment, i.e., repentance, if worship becomes rote. To be consistent, Anderson ought to be asserting that we need to jettison the Bible since preaching consists of presenting the same old truths over and over, year in and year out. Obviously, worship songs are not the problem. Some people just need to get their attitude straight so that worship remains new, fresh, and genuine. I wonder if the wives of change agents recognize where they will stand if their husbands begin applying the same change rationale to their over-familiarity of them. When feelings become the standard, confusion and chaos are the result—in worship, in marriage, and in all of life.

Anderson insists that a “gifted musician” can make even familiar, traditional music better (p. 136). But that simply proves that change agents are after something other than the spiritual, because the spiritual aspect of songs pertains to their *meaning*. Change agents are not looking to change the words of the song to help convey meaning. They want to accentuate the aesthetic, the emotional, and the skill of the musician—that which makes people *feel* their fleshly sensations stimulated—and then conclude that the music is “better.”

Notice the contrasting viewpoints: (1) The Bible’s view is to address the intellect, the mind, informing the person of the will of God. That word is calculated to then bring the whole person—emotions, body, mind, and all—into obedient harmony with deity; (2) The change agent’s view is to target specifically the emotions, the physical craving for the sensational, the entertaining, the interesting. The individual must, to some extent, disengage the mind in order to allow the pleasurable feelings to prevail and dominate. This momentary condition of euphoria is then equated with authentic spiritual experience.

## **The Holy Spirit**

The emphasis on emotion is also evident in the increased emphasis placed on the role of the Holy Spirit over the last few decades. Churches of Christ have stood apart from most of the denominational world in their view of the Holy Spirit. An incorrect view of the Spirit's role commenced with Calvin. Calvinism has cut a broad swath across Christendom and has even adversely influenced the church (e.g., Max Lucado's books). One manifestation of this influence is the tendency to downplay objective interpretation of the Bible—our ability to arrive at the truth—and in exchange to rely more on the Holy Spirit to “illuminate” Scripture in order for a person to comprehend it.

With the commencement of the modern Pentecostal Movement in 1900, the Holy Spirit was given a new emphasis and role in denominationalism. Suddenly, charismatic tendencies began to spread across denominational lines and infiltrate the religious practices of many different groups. At first, this movement was largely confined to the uneducated, lower classes of rural American society, known for their gullibility and superstitious tendencies. The manifestations of Pentecostalism through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s included frenzied body movements, earning its practitioners the derogatory label—“holy rollers.”

In time, the leading proponents of Pentecostalism (e.g., Oral Roberts) toned down their act and cloaked themselves in an air of respectability and academic authenticity (e.g., Oral Roberts University). Their appeal began to extend to more mainline religious people, spawning a variety of nontraditional charismatic groups (e.g., the “Foursquare” churches, the “Full Gospel” churches, and most recently, the “community” churches that have sprung up all over the country). Now Pentecostal groups (e.g., Assembly of God) have “crossed the tracks” and built fashionable, expensive church buildings, drawing significant numbers of adherents.

Both of these streams of thought—Calvinism and Pentecostalism—are exerting a considerable influence upon churches of Christ today, causing an imbalance between emotion and logic. The heavy emphasis in the past upon knowing the Bible and relying upon the objective nature of Scripture went far to insulate churches of Christ from the subjective, irrational tendencies of Pentecostalism. But as more and more of our younger men have exposed themselves to Calvinistic theology (e.g., Charles Swindoll) and



Pentecostal practice (e.g., Willow Creek in Chicago), churches of Christ have become victimized targets of spiritual contamination. A rash of books, seminars, and sermons have been unleashed upon the brotherhood that promote Pentecostal propaganda—enshrining emotionalism in place of spirituality.

It is not uncommon in liberal churches to hear their members speak of how they think the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding them in everyday behaviors. They speak of how they can “sense the Spirit moving” them, providing “inner promptings” and urging them to do certain things. Liberal preachers admonish the members to “be open to the Spirit’s guidance,” to “fan the flame of the Spirit’s fire,” and to “follow His nudge.” The change that has come over the church respecting the Holy Spirit is simply another manifestation of the liberal tendency to evade personal responsibility for one’s own thoughts and behavior. It is a crutch for the emotionally immature who are desperately grasping for emotional security and spiritual fulfillment. Distorting Bible teaching regarding the role of the Holy Spirit is not the answer. Attributing thoughts that pop into the mind to the Holy Spirit, or feeling that the Holy Spirit is leading one to do something, are convenient ways to do what one chooses to do and still feel justified. Crediting the Holy Spirit with one’s thoughts and acts allows the individual to feel his decisions are out of his control and under the guidance of the Spirit. The resulting euphoria and sense of freedom is a recipe for disaster. One by one, the clear teachings of the Bible will fade into insignificance and irrelevance. Once individuals cut themselves loose from the objective statements of Scripture in order to travel down the pathway of what they think or feel God is leading them to do, other clear-cut doctrines of the Bible will eventually be jettisoned as well (including the sinfulness of denominationalism, instrumental music, and “faith only”)—all in the name of “spirituality.”

### **The True Meaning Of Spirituality**

To balance emotion and logic, one must understand the biblical definition of spirituality. Biblical spirituality is not so much what one *feels* as what one comes *to know and do*. The “spiritual” person in the Bible is the one who earnestly seeks to come to an understanding of God’s will and then diligently obeys that will. “Spirituality” consists of being governed by the biblical substance and content authored by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13-15; 14:37). Since the word of God was authored by the Spirit, to be

“spiritual” is to imbibe His teachings and to engage one’s own spirit in a fruitful encounter with the Holy Spirit’s message (1 Peter 2:2,5). *His* thoughts, opinions, and precepts are permitted to impact the human spirit (Romans 15:27).

“Spiritual worship” entails responding rationally to God’s will with worship that is approved by Him (Romans 12:1-2). “Spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19) are songs whose lyrics convey correct biblical concepts. The “law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14) because its source is the Spirit and it constitutes an accurate expression of the Spirit’s will.

Yet current proponents of change leave the impression that our worship assemblies would be more “spiritual” if we would employ lifting up arms, dramatic presentations, handclapping, female worship leaders, solos, choirs, praise teams, instruments, etc. They simply have not grasped the biblical meaning of “spirituality.” Such innovations cannot be “spiritual” since they are *not authorized by the Spirit* in the New Testament. They may well create more emotional excitement among participants, but such pleasurable sensations are not what the Bible designates “spiritual.”

Our Pentecostal neighbors have long since demonstrated that external artifice and focus on physical display is no indication of true, spiritual worship. In fact, the evidence suggests that such cheap substitutes sidetrack people from true worship. While God intends for our emotions to be engaged as we worship, pure emotional stimulation must not be mistaken for spiritual worship, nor become the essential goal of the worshipper.

Our current culture’s propensity for centering on external appearance and surface image has led some into thinking that external emotional indicators (like uplifted arms, shouts, squeals, handclapping, etc.) are the criteria for measuring spirituality. Nothing could be further from biblical truth. It surely smacks of ego and arrogance for the present generation to be judgmental about the preceding generation by deeming them unspiritual simply because their worship appeared on the outside to be formal and unemotional. Their worship was extremely spiritual, not only because it conformed faithfully to the Spirit’s own instructions, but because it demonstrated compliant spirits, respectful hearts, and a generation of people who were gripped by a calm and reverent awe for the majestic Creator of the Universe. They did not fashion their worship to suit or stimulate themselves. They did not need artificial stimulants to bring meaning to their religion and

their lives. They found true contentment and zestful satisfaction in knowing that they were in tune with their Father and in line with His will.

Their focus was clearly upon God and genuine linkage with Him. The focus being urged upon us today by the “change agents” is on the stimulation of the worshipper. Display and show are the inevitable result as well as never-ending innovation and change as “creative thinkers” (not content to conform to God’s thinking) perpetually formulate “fresh” ideas and new practices. By insisting upon calling attention to self and to “worship leaders,” i.e., professional performers, worshippers become spectators who have been distracted from worship with attention drawn away from God.

Those who wish to revolutionize worship practice in our day owe it to themselves to examine earnestly their motives in hopes of deterring them from their road to ruin. They have aligned themselves with a long line of individuals who have clamored for change—with disastrous consequences (e.g., Genesis 3:6; Exodus 32:1-28; Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 11:1-35; 12:1-16; 14:4; 16:1-50; 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 13:8-14; 14:1-35; 2 Samuel 6:1-11; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21; Isaiah 30:9-13; Jeremiah 6:13-19; et al.).

### **The Proper Interplay Between Emotion, Reason And Behavior**

The conversion of the high-ranking treasurer of Ethiopia provides a fitting example of the proper balance between reason, doctrine and emotion (Acts 8:26-39). On a return trip to Ethiopia from Jerusalem, this government official was reading from Isaiah 53 while sitting in his chariot. When Philip encountered him, he asked if he *understood* what he was reading. When he expressed his desire for assistance, Philip took a seat in the chariot with him and proceeded to explain Bible teaching to him. Notice that Christianity is first and foremost a cognitive experience. Intellectual awareness, mental comprehension, must occur first and must take priority over every other facet of religious experience.

After listening to and thinking about the concepts articulated by Philip, the treasurer “put two and two together” when he happened upon a body of water. Based upon what he had learned from his Bible study with Philip, he concluded that he must be baptized to please God. Notice that the second facet of religious experience is obedient response—compliance with the stipulations of God. Correct reasoning must lead to correct conclusions to which a person’s will and body must submit.

After achieving a rational comprehension of God's will, making a conscious, informed decision to conform to that will, and then enacting obedience, the treasury official "went on his way rejoicing." Here is the proper place of emotion in the Christian religion. Here is the correct balance between human reason, divine doctrine, and human emotion. Human emotion is to be brought under the control of the human mind as that mind is governed by the words of God. Emotion must be rooted in rationality. Rationality must take priority over emotion. The biblical sequence is: facts, faith—and then feeling.

### **Conclusion**

The times in which we live certainly demonstrate a heavy orientation toward emotion at the expense of reason. The tremendous increase in diversity of viewpoint in American society with reference to morality, religion—and virtually everything else—reflects the shift away from rational assessment of truth. The result has been that most people are living life from the subjective perspective of *how they feel* about things. Out of this cultural inclination to resist absolute, objective standards, youthful agents of change in churches of Christ have reacted to what they perceived to be an emotionless approach to religion by past generations in the church.

Apart from whether this perception is fair or accurate, we must reaffirm the fact that emotion is permissible in the practice of New Testament Christianity. Emotions were created by God. The problem facing the church is that those wanting change are assigning an unscriptural function to the emotions. They are employing the emotions in a way and to an extent that God never intended. Liberalism, whether in politics or religion, relies heavily upon emotion rather than intellect, reason, and rational persuasion. The liberal call for change arises out of emotion, is driven by emotion, and depends upon emotion for its continued survival.

Gus Nichols once debated a Pentecostal preacher who would begin to quote a Scripture, pretend to forget it, request help from the Holy Spirit, pause awaiting the Spirit's aid, and then quote it as though the Spirit had supplied it right there on the spot. Nichols saw the audience deeply swayed by this clever strategy. The man tried it once too often and the alert Nichols was ready and waiting. The man misquoted a passage after going through his emotional procedure. Nichols told the audience of the glaring error and quoted the passage correctly. He informed the startled audience that it was not the Holy

Spirit who was aiding the man, but one of the seducing spirits referred to in 1 Timothy 4:1. [Related by Robert Taylor, Jr., in his book *The Church and the Restoration Movement*, p. 95.]

Another insightful example of how faithful Christians of the past have countered the false views regarding the work of the Holy Spirit is that of George DeHoff:

I was preaching in a big tent meeting in Lepanto, Arkansas. . . . One night after the prayer, we were standing up singing and a man came right down the middle aisle, all dressed up with a three piece suit. He shook hands with me, came right on the platform and told me his name, and said, "The Lord spoke to me and told me to come and preach tonight." Well, of course, that upset me. There the brethren got me to hold a meeting and the Lord got somebody else. I said, "What time did the Lord speak to you?" He said, "This afternoon." I said, "What time this afternoon?" He said, "Uh, uh, about three o'clock." Well, I said, "My friend, just be seated and forget about it because He spoke to me at seven o'clock and told me He had changed His mind, for me to go ahead and preach and ignore you. [Related by brother DeHoff at the "Honor To Whom Honor Is Due" Luncheon during the 1988 Fort Worth Lectures at the Brown Trail church of Christ building in Bedford, Texas.]

Those of us living today have been preceded by great, knowledgeable Christian men who have effectively exposed error and accurately presented the truth about the Spirit to so many—and the need to engage in logical analysis of the text. What an eternal tragedy that so many members of churches of Christ are now falling for the same shenanigans and ploys that these men accurately and competently devastated—ploys that have been spawned by the same sellout to emotion.

We human beings are always looking for something new, something exciting and flashy. We reach for the attractive and the appealing. We want the easy way out. We want something that makes us *feel* religious and secure without having to face up to our responsibilities. But genuine Christianity consists of simply taking the written word of God and studying it carefully in order to learn what God expects of us. Spirituality comes from simple meditation and reflection upon the word of God—no brass bands or circus theatrics, no flash of light or dream or vision, no sudden rush attributable to the Holy Spirit. The pathway to heaven consists of honest, intensive investigation of written revelation and a life of diligent, self-discipline and self-denial that strives to incorporate spiritual attributes into our lives—like patience, compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, honesty, integrity, peace of soul, joy, clean moral living.

There is no short cut to spirituality. Resorting to emotion is not the answer. Only words from God will equip us and prepare us for eternity. As Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus said to the father, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). When Satan urged Jesus to perform a miracle, Jesus countered, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). On the occasion of Paul’s defense before Agrippa and Porcius Festus, suddenly Festus cried out: “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” Paul’s cool, calm, intelligent reaction typifies true Christianity: “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak *the words of truth and reason*” (Acts 26:25). Faithful Christians are those who enact in their lives the proper balance between emotion and logic.

## BALANCING ZEAL AND KNOWLEDGE

Emanuel Daugherty

I am thankful for the invitation to appear on the great Cold Harbor Road Lectureship. Since my son and I have been coming for the last five years, it has become one of my favorite programs. The drive down to Mechanicsville gives us a time to be together that I treasure and the beauty of the fall season is a blessing in itself! I am grateful indeed to the lectureship committee for asking me to have a part in this lecture series.

Our topic for discussion is *Balancing Zeal and Knowledge*. When we think of *balance*, we think of a person walking a tightrope, or the weighing of something on a balance scale, or as in our study, balancing zeal and knowledge. *Zeal* may be defined as ardor, eagerness, fervency and passion. *Knowledge* is simply that which we know, having familiarity gained through experience or association, or having been taught; the condition of having apprehended truth or fact. The text for our lesson is found in Romans 10:1-3:

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

Paul begins this chapter with a prayer of salvation for his beloved people, his brothers in the flesh, Israel. The epistle is written to Roman Christians (1:7), thus he addresses them here as "brethren," his brethren in Christ. On other occasions he has identified himself with his Jewish brethren in the flesh, by saying that he, too, is "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. . ." (Philippians 3:5). He states "his heart's desire" for his people, the Jews, that they might be saved. Paul is not just *wishing*; this is a great longing from the depths of his heart. And his desire is backed up by his prayers and his preaching. Paul would gladly "spend and be spent" to win Israel to Christ. He wants them to be saved, and as Tom Wacaster writes, "We do not believe that Paul would desire their salvation beyond the confines of the gospel, so we must understand his desire to be their salvation through submission and obedience to Christ." (442). "There was a lingering hope burning in Paul's heart that they might still

throw off the shackles of unbelief and turn to Christ as Lord and Savior. To that end he offered his fervent prayer” (Winters, 118).

The Apostle goes on to say concerning his brethren the Jews; “For I bear them record. . .” The word here is *marturo*, “I bear witness, which means to testify, to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something” (Weust, 172). “. . . they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” “This gives the reason for St. Paul’s grief. He had been a Jew, and hence he knew only too well the extent both of their zeal and of their ignorance” (Sanday and Headlam, 283). Winters observes, “They had a passion for and a sincere devotion to the will of God as it had been expressed through the Law of Moses (Acts 21:20; 22:3) and interpreted by their own traditions (Matthew 15:1-9)” (118). Roy Deaver describes this as “their particular problem, zeal without knowledge” (101).

The zeal of the Jews in their opposition to Christ and his church was notorious. Jesus said of them, “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”(Matthew 15:7-9); and again, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15). Their zeal was such that they would see Christ nailed to a cross rather than to search the Scriptures and examine the evidence that he was the Son of God (John 5:39-40).

Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles was plagued by Judaizing teachers who followed him wherever he went (2 Corinthians 11:1-4). James, the Lord’s brother, described many who were “zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20). It was these zealous Jews who clamored for the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem that led to his going to Rome after appealing to Caesar. “Of this zeal, Paul was a fitting witness, for before conversion he shared it as a persecutor, and after conversion he endured it as a martyr (Philippians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:24; Acts 21:20-31; 22:4)” (McGarvey, Pendleton, 420).

Their trouble was a lack of balance—zeal without knowledge; thus they found themselves fighting against God. “Zeal is most valuable, but when it is bigoted, blind and ill-founded, it becomes an enemy to change. It is also important to note that zeal is not the sole deciding factor in salvation. There is such a thing as misguided zeal” (Wacaster,



444). “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2). King Saul is an example of one being overly zealous. Notice Samuel’s rebuke: (1) Samuel is aware of the king’s zeal. “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? (2) Knowledge (obedience) is better than zeal. Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. Notice further: (3) Zeal by itself can be sinful. “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” And again: (4) Sin has its consequences. “Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.” (1 Samuel 15:22-23). God’s prophets chastised the Jews saying, they were “destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6; Amos 8:11). This was reflected in their idolatrous worship (Hosea 4:12-13), immoral living, (Amos 2:6-8), and outright rebellion. The Lord challenged the prophet Jeremiah saying,

Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; And from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of my people slightly, Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the LORD. Thus says the LORD: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not listen.’ (6:13-17).

### **Problems Brought On By Failure To Balance Zeal And Knowledge**

One might ask, which is worse, zeal without knowledge or knowledge without zeal? Augustine averred, “For it is better to limp on the road, than to run eagerly outside of it.” Zeal without knowledge has men running outside the way of God seeking and making a righteousness of their own. Herein is the great failure of humanity. Zeal has fanned the flames of millions of souls to their destruction. Religious rabble rousers through the ages have stirred the passions of men to fever pitch to carry the sword in battle against their enemies: The zeal of the Caesars to kill Christians in defense of their gods; the zeal of the Roman papists against heretics, the Inquisitions, the Crusades and wars against Mohammedanism, their religious wars against Protestant Reformers, and

their zealous suppression of the Word of God. There are histories of wars of Protestants against Protestants, Moslems against Jews, Christians, and other Moslem sects. In our own generation we have witnessed the zealous fanaticism of Islam that crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the crash of an airplane near Somerset, PA; all these took a toll of thousands of lives. Even today, Nigerian Christians, and those in other countries of Africa and Asia, fear for their lives from Moslem zealots. Zeal without knowledge in the minds of evil men is a very dangerous thing. Any religion that has to defend its beliefs with a literal sword is not the true religion of the Bible.

Zeal without knowledge has infected the church in our day. In our desire to “liven up the worship,” we have mimicked the denominations by pseudo-enthusiastic programs of drama, contemporary music, instrumental music, hand-clapping, swaying, and dancing in the aisles. These things are but “artificial stimulation” which comes from the emotional “kick” that some want. “In his book *Ashamed of the Gospel*, John MacArthur observes that throughout the evangelical community preaching “is being discarded or downplayed in favor of newer means, such as drama, comedy, variety, side-show histrionics, pop-psychology, and other entertainment forms” (Chambers 93). There is little “thus saith the Lord” to defend their zealous efforts. This will end up producing a church unrecognizable in the New Testament foreign to the God of heaven. “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:4).

An example of zeal without knowledge is the “Crossroads/Boston Movement,” that eventually evolved into the “International Church of Christ,” that brought division to families and churches of Christ throughout the nation and the world. Many young men and women have been put on the wrong road and are practicing at best a peculiar version of Christianity taking them away from Christ instead of drawing them to him (2 John 9).

The modern “Men’s Movement” with “Brother’s Keepers” was a zealous effort that stirred many men to “joining up” with a movement that proved to be faddish and divisive.

But we ask, “What about knowledge without zeal?” Is this any better? Knowledge without zeal produces a dead, lifeless religion. To know and not to do, James says, is sin (James 4:17). It is this “deadness” in the church which has led to the error of those who

are now promoting contemporary worship and Community churches. God designed the worship of the church to be an outlet for reverence, praise and devotion. It is to be engaged with zeal and knowledge, passion, intelligence, and emotion. We must not be afraid of zeal, passion, and emotion in our worship when it is coupled with knowledge, will and determination to obey the righteousness of God as it is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 4:3-4; 1:16-17). We might say that zeal is the life of worship while knowledge is the heart of worship. Life and heart must not be cut out of worship to God for those who worship this way are those God desires to worship him (John 4:23-24). Let us have balance in our worship!

Many denominations shame the Lord's church with their zeal in evangelism and missionary work (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists) while we sit back and pat ourselves on the back while saying, "We have the truth." In some ways our mission work is better and on more solid footing financially than in time past. But we are lagging far behind others in putting men on the foreign field. More men and women need to be trained and encouraged to take the gospel into all the world (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:4). Let's have our zeal match our knowledge in evangelism and mission work!

### **Balancing Zeal and Knowledge**

"Wise as serpents and harmless as doves" ought to be our motto as the Lord's people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let us be balanced in our work and worship, as well as our relationships with God and men. Let us seek the proper balance in all things. Appealing to the Scriptures may be unpopular in our modern culture, but God expects us to be governed by his Word. As we look to the Old and New Testaments for principles, patterns and examples of faithful men and women whose "names are in the book of life," let us strive to please God and his Son, Jesus Christ in all things (Colossians 3:17).

Let us seek *balance in our worship* that it is according to the pattern of the New Testament. In spirit and in truth let us *pray* with faith, energy, and zeal, and follow up our prayers with work, labor and trust in God (Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-6). "In sweet communion" let us *remember the Lord's death, burial and resurrection* in reverential, solemn devotion and love (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). Let us balance our *singing* by praise that worships God with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and that also teach and admonish our brothers in Christ (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

Let us sing with vigor, zeal and enthusiasm but remember to be reverent. May we balance our *giving* by doing so with a heart full of love and zeal for God and his wonderful Son “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15), and with the knowledge that sees the need to give liberally and cheerfully—what it does for us as persons, what it does for the church for its work in the world, what it does for promoting the Cause of Christ, and what it teaches the world about the goodness of God’s people. Zeal and knowledge in giving keeps us from stinginess and hoarding. Let us balance our *preaching and teaching of the Word* by “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), and to remember that we are truly loving others when we “reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Let us have *balance in our evangelism* to be zealous and knowledgeable—seeking and making opportunities to save souls, then teaching them the way that is right and cannot be wrong because it is the way of salvation preached by the apostles and preachers of the New Testament (Acts 2:38, 41-42, 47; Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27).

Let us have *balance in fighting our enemies*. They are men created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), for whom Christ died (Hebrews 2:9); and many times they are our brothers.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strong-holds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Let’s be balanced in dealing with contemporary issues—that we are not “stuck in the past” and trying to maintain methods and customs of a bygone era. The Bible is always relevant and up-to-date. It doesn’t need to be revised or cast aside. Today’s church can be as modern as the times, yet as sound in faith and practice as the first century church by being balanced in zeal and knowledge and liberally applying both.

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# **BALANCING THE TESTAMENTS**

Greg Lewis

## **Introduction**

I would like to thank the Elders at Cold Harbor, and Ryan for giving me the opportunity to speak on the 2011 Cold Harbor Lectureship and especially for the subject of Balancing the Testaments.

As I think about this subject there are two pictures that come to my mind. One is an activity of my childhood and the other is a symbol familiar to all of us. When I was a child, my mother would take my cousin and me to the Shrine Circus every year to celebrate our birthdays. Like most children, I greatly enjoyed this adventure. I liked the lion in the cage, and the clowns, but my favorite thing to watch was the acrobats on the high wire in the “Center Ring.” I was always amazed at the balance that they exhibited. After the circus, when I was at home, I would get on low stone walls and try to keep my balance while walking on them. This usually resulted in failure. I would try to walk fast and would only fall off faster. Then I remembered that the circus acrobats walked very slowly on the high wire, so I tried walking slowly, but I would again fall off.

The next year, at the circus, I watched with determination to see what it was that the acrobats were doing that would help me to have success. I noticed not only that the acrobats walked slowly, but they also had something to provide balance for them. At home, I tried to walk like an acrobat with one of my mother’s broom sticks (not a good idea without asking my mother). I finally found that if I extended my arms out to each side it would allow me to balance myself.

The second picture which comes to mind is that of a balance scale where one side holds all the books of the Old Testament and the other side holds all the books of the New Testament. With all the books of both Testaments on the scale it is perfectly balanced.

Often the charge is laid at the feet of members of the Lord’s church: “You people in the church of Christ don’t believe in the Old Testament.” That charge is made because some in the Lord’s church have stated that we are no longer bound by the Old Testament, meaning the Old Testament Law. This in itself may give people a false impression of

what is believed in the Lord's church about the Old Testament being a part of the Bible.

In explaining why we sometimes do not study the Old Testament, Earle West says, "Old Testament study is often neglected. This may be due to the feeling that since Christians are not under that law, it is therefore unprofitable. Many regard the Old Testament as 'hard.' If studied properly, the Old Testament can be fascinating and profitable." (West, 1959, p. pg 22) This idea may cause some confusion on the part of newer members of the church. In reality, God has always demanded that His people be balanced in their lives and in the use of His Word. God told Joshua, when Joshua was taking over the leadership of Israel, "Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left... (Joshua 1:7). If I were to reword this in the concept of being on a tight rope, God would be telling Joshua not to "fall to the right or to the left." Moses gave the same admonishment to the children of Israel prior to his death, "you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." (Deuteronomy 5:32, 28:14). The wise man Solomon in teaching his son wisdom commands that his son not "turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil." (Proverbs 4:27).

Thus, as we look at Balancing the Testaments may we realize that God truly intends for His Holy Word to be balanced in our lives. This lesson will deal with "Balancing the Testaments" by using both the Old and New Testament in our Study of God's Word, and in our understanding of God's Word.

### **Study Of God's Word**

To properly Balance the Testaments one must start out by having a grasp of the purpose of both the Old and New Testaments. It has been said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and that the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. This writer has also learned that the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. By inspiration, the apostle Paul wrote, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4 NKJV; unless otherwise noted all Bible quotes will come from the New King James version of the Bible). Robertson, in his *New Testament Word Pictures*, says of this verse that "for our learning" means "For the instruction of us" and that "might have hope" equates to "that we might keep on having hope." We could rightly acknowledge that this is, "One of the blessed uses of the Scriptures" (Lindner, 2002, p.

RWP). In 1 Corinthians 10:11 the Holy Spirit says through Paul, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). In these two passages Paul “affirms the value of the Old Covenant... The ‘things that were written aforetime’ would be the things found in the Old Testament, the oracles of God committed unto the Jews... Paul believed that these oracles of scripture still had something to offer to New Testament Christians.” (Clarke, 1996, pp. 38-39). Paul wrote this after the Old Law had been taken away and nailed to the Cross. Paul shows that the Old Testament Scriptures still have some worth to the Christian and still deserve the Christian’s investigation. (Clarke, 1996, p. 39). The Old Testament looks to the coming Savior. (Nix & Geisler, 1968).

Paul, in writing to Timothy, his “son in the faith,” said, “Give diligence [Study—KJV] to present yourself approved” (2 Timothy 2:15). In this we have the concept that one must give diligence to all that the Word of God teaches. We are to endeavor to cultivate and improve our hearts and minds with the Word of God so that we might handle or cut straight God’s Word. (Lindner, 2002, p. ACC). According to John Wesley’s *Notes on the Old and New Testament*, “Rightly dividing the word of truth” carries the meaning of “Duly explaining and applying the whole scripture, so as to give each hearer his due portion.” (Lindner, 2002, p. JWN). As it would apply to Timothy that would have been the Old Testament Scriptures, but for us it is the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Later in the same epistle Paul says, “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15). The Holy Scriptures that Paul referred to are not the New Testament but the Old Testament. When Paul was writing this in about AD 68, the New Testament Scriptures would not have been available when Timothy was a child. Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:16, said “All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God.” Literally, Paul is showing Timothy and those of the first century that the Old Testament is God breathed and thus should be held as important. For those of our day, the Holy Spirit reveals the Old and New Testament are God breathed and thus important for us. Thus, Paul is telling Timothy and us that we need to study both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, because they will make us to be not ashamed before God and the Scriptures



will make us wise. This second admonition is dealing specifically with the Old Testament Scriptures.

We have established that the Old Testament Scriptures' purpose is to bring us to Christ. West says that the Old Testament's purpose is that it "helps to establish and strengthen faith in Jesus as the Son of God.... helps us understand the Christian religion by illustrating some of its basic provisions.... gives us valuable moral lessons" (West, 1959, p. pg 22). If the Old Testament tells us Christ is coming, then we would expect the New Testament to tell us Christ is here, which is what it does. However, it tells us a lot more. The New Testament tells us Christ has come, how to get into Christ, live a life in Christ and that Christ will come again for His chosen. To truly be balanced in our study of the Old and New Testaments we need to study all of the information contained therein. In his book *How To Study The Bible*, Roy Deaver lists a number of reasons for studying the Bible (Old and New Testament). The three reasons that this writer believes are important for this study are, (1) that one should study the Bible with "a respectful and appreciative attitude," (2) one should study the Bible with "proper regard for its purpose" and (3) with "proper regard for seeing the whole" (Deaver, 2002, p. pg vii). In the chapter on respectful attitude he says, "We must respect the Bible as being the inspired word of the Living God." (Deaver, 2002, pp. pg, 1). In dealing with the Bible's purpose, he says,

The Old Testament message points the way to Christ and prepares for Him and for His message... the sacred plan for human redemption brings honor and *glory* to God.... the purpose of the Bible: THE GLORY OF GOD, AND THE SALVATION OF MAN, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. This is the basic point in bible study. This is the divine purpose line which runs from the first verse of Genesis through the last verse of the Revelation. (Deaver, 2002, p. pg 2)

Deaver shows that the purpose of the whole Bible is one, and should be studied as one complete document. In his third chapter on seeing the whole, Deaver says, "We must study the Bible with proper regard for seeing the whole. We cannot understand the part without being able to see how the part fits into the whole." (Deaver, 2002, p. pg 4). He concludes the chapter by saying, "One should study the Bible as he would study a beautiful painting: he should consider the whole, and then consider the parts." (Deaver, 2002, p. pg 5). Thus, to truly have balance one must study the Testaments with the purpose of both the Old Testament and New Testament in mind.

One must also study the Bible not only with its purpose in mind, but also with its promises in mind. God, from the very beginning of creation, had a plan for mankind when man sinned. As one studies the Old Testament he comes across a number of promises that God has made; the promise of the “Seed of Woman” coming into the world to save mankind (Gen. 3:15); and the promise that God gave to Abraham that of his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). God promised that that Seed would come of the loins of King David (2 Samuel 7:12); and all of the promises shown in the Old Testament we find fulfilled in the New Testament in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 1:18-25; Acts 2:22-34). God has not failed to live up to any of His promises.

To be truly balanced one must study the Old and New Testament with the Book’s purpose, with God’s promises given in the Old Testament and Fulfilled in the New Testament, but also the principles of the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament is replete with instances showing the character of God. West says of this,

The Old Testament gives valuable lessons. It does this in part by displaying the character of God and teaching us some of the general principles of his government. It helps us understand our own weaknesses and strength through the stories of various characters who inspire us with their accomplishments and warn us with their mistakes. (West, 1959, p. pg 22)

The New Testament tells us of the creation of the world by God, but the Old Testament shows in depth how God created the world. “Eliminate the Old Testament and you have eliminated the only definitive explanation of the origin of the universe.” (Clarke, 1996, p. pg 42). The New Testament does not show us in great detail how God exercised His magnificent power. Job, chapters 38-40, reveals to us the vastness of God’s power in a way unique to the Old Testament poetic literature (Clarke, 1996, p. pg 42). The Old Testament also shows the faithfulness of God to keep His promises. There is not a promise found within the Old Testament which is not fulfilled in the New Testament. “(T)he Old covenant is valuable in that it affords us the opportunity to see that what God has promised in the Old Testament, He delivers in the New Testament.” (Clarke, 1996, p. pg 45).

In balancing the Testaments one must study the purpose of both the New and Old Testament, the promises shown in the New and Old Testament, and the principles found

in both the Old Testament and New Testament. When one has done these things, one is truly on the way to balancing the Old and New Testaments.

### **Understanding Of God's Word**

In order to Balance the Testaments we must understand that there are things written within the pages of the New Testament that cannot be understood without looking into the pages of the Old Testament. We must also realize that there are things written within the pages of the Old Testament that cannot truly be understood without the New Testament. We have already made reference to the awesome power of God. We can know from the New Testament that God created the world and it was done by the Word of His power (John 1:1-3, Hebrews 11:3. Cf. 2 Peter 3:5) but we cannot know that the world was framed in six literal days and that God rested (ceased His creative powers on the seventh day). In like manner we know that God was involved in creating the worlds in the Old Testament, but cannot not truly grasp the role that the Second Person of the Godhead had in creation of the world without studying the pages of the New Testament (John 1:1-3, cf. Psalm 33:6-7).

An example of the need for supplemental information from the Old Testament is found in the New Testament verse Luke 17:32, where the Scripture simply says, "remember Lot's wife." There is nothing else within the pages of the New Testament that explain who Lot is, what happened to Lot's wife, or the lessons that we are to learn concerning Lot and his wife. One must go back to the pages of the Old Testament to get an understanding that Lot is the nephew of Abraham (Genesis 11:27-31), and that Lot traveled with Abraham from Haran to the promised land of Canaan. Lot and his family moved to the area of Sodom and Gomorrah and the angel of the Lord came to destroy the cities of the plain. Because of Abraham, the Lord spared Lot and his family. As Lot's family was being led away Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:1-38).

The New Testament teaches that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Luke 17:28-30; Jude 1:7). We do not learn from the New Testament the reason for the destruction or the extent of their corruption without returning to the pages of the Old Testament (Genesis 19:1-38).

A final example of how the Old Testament and New Testament are needed to supplement each other so we can garner a better understanding is found in Acts 8:29-40. In this account the Ethiopian Nobleman (Eunuch) is returning from Jerusalem and reading the Old Testament Scriptures. He finds a passage that he does not understand and is asked by Phillip if he understands the passage (Acts 8:30). The Nobleman answers, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:31 NKJV). The Nobleman did not, as we do, have the luxury of having the New Testament Scriptures, thus he was not able to understand of what or whom Isaiah wrote (Acts 8:32-34). McGarvey says of this verse, "He (the Eunuch) could recollect nothing in the history of the prophet himself, or of any other man, to which it would apply he was, therefore unable understand it," (McGarvey, p. pg 98).

To balance the Old Testament with the New Testament we must understand the plan which God has for mankind, but we must also understand the place that the Old and New Testament must hold in our lives. The New Testament teaches that the Old Testament is for our learning (Romans 15:4), for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11), to make one wise (2 Timothy 3:15), thus the Old Testament is very profitable for the Christian (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Hebrews writer focuses on the people of faith of the Old Testament as we have recorded in Hebrews 11. The focus was not to bring the first century Christians back to the Old Testament, but to help "demonstrate the principles and qualities of a faith that endures" (Clarke, 1996, p. pg 45). Old Testament passages can and should be used, not to show we are still under the Law of Moses, but to help New Testament Christians understand how God relates to His people and the obedience He expects from us today. Clarke, in speaking of the value of the Old Covenant, says,

The Old Testament was designed by God to create within man a recognition of the fact that he was lost and needed a Savior... the predominant theme of the Old Testament is 'He is coming.' Though they did not always grasp the full meaning and significance of what they were writing... (1 Peter 1:10-12). The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that connection between these prophecies and Jesus of Nazareth..." (Clarke, 1996, pp. pgs 49-50)

Clarke goes on to say, "The first four chapters of the book of Matthew demonstrate the close relationship of the message of the Old Testament to that of the New Testament. In

fact, the very first verse of Matthew presupposes a knowledge of the Old testament.” (Clarke, 1996, p. pg 50).

The plan and place of the Old Testament is the Christ is coming. What is the place and plan for the New Testament? The New Testament shows people how to get into an eternal relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. From a study of the Old Testament mankind can know that man is separated from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). The New Testament shows how to be reunited with God. Where the Old Testament is for our learning, the New Testament is to show how man is justified. The plan of the New Testament is to show the arrival of the Savior, His redemptive work, His return to be with the Father, and His ultimate return to gather up His own for eternal life.

### Conclusion

Balancing the Testaments allows the Christian to make appropriate application in his life, in home, work, relationships and worship. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is very important for the Christian in understanding the application of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. “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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul is saying that the God Breathed Scriptures, are valuable for teaching (instruction), for reproof (convince men of the truth), for correction (restoring men to proper place), for instruction in righteousness (for communication of all religious knowledge) and this is true of the Jewish Scriptures (Lindner, 2002, p. ACC). Someone has said of this Scripture, “God’s Word is inspired and will **teach us when we are wrong, will teach how to get right, and will teach us how to stay right.**” We need to remember that Paul is writing to Timothy of the Old Testament Scriptures.

For us, the term “All Scripture” refers both to the Old Testament and the New Testament. We must study the principles which are found in the Old Testament showing God’s love and mercy and requirement for obedience in the lives of Old Testament characters while recognizing God’s love and mercy and requirement for obedience in the New Testament.

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## BALANCING GRACE, FAITH AND WORKS

David Sain

### Three Questions

Are we saved by grace? Indeed, we are! One would have to deny plain and emphatic Biblical teaching to say otherwise.

Are we saved by faith? Indeed, we are! One would have to deny plain and emphatic Biblical teaching to say otherwise.

Are we saved by works? Indeed, we are! One would have to deny plain and emphatic Biblical teaching to say otherwise.

### Three More Questions

Are we saved by grace **alone**? No!

One would have to contradict the clear teaching of the New Testament to believe and affirm that we are saved by grace **alone**.

Are we saved by faith **alone**? No! One would have to contradict the clear teaching of the New Testament to believe and affirm that we are saved by faith **alone**.

Are we saved by works **alone**? No! One would have to contradict the clear teaching of the New Testament to believe and affirm that we are saved by works **alone**.

### Unbiblical Extreme And Biblical Balance

To conclude that we are saved by **grace alone** is to draw a conclusion that is extreme and unbiblical. To conclude that we are saved by **faith alone** is to draw a conclusion that is extreme and unbiblical. To conclude that we are saved by **works alone** is to draw a conclusion that is extreme and unbiblical.

However, to conclude that grace, faith and works save us is to draw a conclusion that is Biblically balanced. The Bible teaches unmistakably that all three are involved in God's scheme of redemption.

### The Bible Teaches That We Are Saved by Grace

How marvelous is the grace of our Lord. He has taught us in numerous scriptures that our salvation is made possible by his loving kindness.

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul declared that we are saved by grace:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For **by grace are ye saved** through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.  
(Ephesians 2:4-10, emphasis added)

The apostle Paul also exclaimed the amazing grace of God when he wrote Titus. Speaking about the process by which the Lord has made it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins, he penned these truths:

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, *and* hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but **according to his mercy he saved us**, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being **justified by his grace**, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.  
(Tit. 3:3-7, emphasis added).

The Jews and Gentiles who comprised the Church of Christ in Rome were taught that our justification in Christ Jesus is by grace: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

It is a fact that, except for the grace of God, all of us would be helplessly and hopelessly lost in our sins.

### **The Bible Teaches That We Are Saved by Faith**

Throughout the Biblical record of God’s dealing with man, faith has always been essential to being acceptable unto God. The notable “faith chapter” of the Bible not only illustrates that with the citations of those who demonstrated their faith by their righteous works, it also explicitly declares the essentiality of faith: “But without faith it is



impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

After writing about the faith of Abraham, and how Abraham was justified through his faith, Paul wrote the obvious conclusion: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2, emphasis added.)

A careful study and analysis of this scripture will show the harmonious working of faith and grace in one’s salvation. It teaches that we access the grace of God by our faith in the Lord. Ephesians 2:8, the well known text cited earlier, teaches us that we are saved by grace, but it also explicitly stipulates that we are saved by grace “through faith.”

The fact that we are saved by faith could not be made any clearer than Jesus made it when he gave the great commission, as recorded in the gospel according to Mark. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16, emphasis added). Standing directly between the sinner and salvation is the necessity of believing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **The Bible Teaches That We Are Saved By Works**

There are people who contend that works do not save us—that man cannot contribute one whit to his salvation. Well, there is a sense in which that is true, for no one can do anything that would result in man “earning” his salvation. Every sin that one commits places him under the condemnation of God, and the very best that anyone can live will still leave him “short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and in need of the mercy of God.

However, the Bible teaches that obedience is necessary for salvation, and that we are saved by works: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:24-26, emphasis added).

Regarding the Captain of our salvation, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews taught that obedience is a prerequisite to salvation: “Though he were a Son, yet learned

he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9, emphasis added).

Let it be clearly understood that the works by which one is saved are not works of merit. As stated earlier, one can never earn his salvation. So, the works that are essential to forgiveness are not works of merit, but works of righteousness. Any work that one does in response to a promise or commandment of God is not a work of merit, because the merit belongs to the Lord who gave the command or made the promise. And when one is obedient to the Lord’s commandments, he trusts the Lord to keep his word and provide the promised blessing.

For example, when one repents of his sins and is baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sin, his repentance and his baptism are not works of merit. His actions are the result of his faith in the Lord, trusting the Lord to provide the remission of sin—the promised blessing. Any “merit” in his action belongs to the Lord who made the forgiveness of sins possible by the gift of his grace.

Therefore we conclude that we are saved by grace and faith, but not unconditionally.

### **A Biblical Example**

There is a great example of the role of grace, faith, and works in salvation, in the Old Testament, in the story of the Israelites capturing the city of Jericho contained in Joshua chapter six. Note the following key points in the story.

1. **Israel could not take Jericho by her own strength.** The city of Jericho was five miles west of the Jordan river; seven miles north of the Dead Sea. It was a key point in the conquest of Canaan, but it was shut up tightly. Verse one declares that Israel could not take the city by her own strength.
2. **Jericho was captured by grace.** The Lord “gave” Jericho to Israel (verse 2). That was an act of grace. Israel had done nothing to put God in their debt. God gave them the city, through means that would glorify him.
3. **Jericho was captured by faith.** The city was given to the Israelites, but not by grace alone. They had to believe. They had to trust, but their trust was not in the marching, the

blowing of trumpets, or the shouting. Their trust had to be in the Lord, and in his Word. The writer of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that the city was captured by faith (Hebrews 11:30).

4. **Jericho was captured by works.** The Israelites did not receive that which God would give them the moment they heard his word. They did not receive it the moment they believed his word. The wall fell down and they captured the city **after** their faith prompted them to follow the instructions that God gave to them. Note how the inspired record specifies this fact: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Hebrews 11:30, emphasis added).

### **Six Conclusions**

This story provides an illustration of how grace, faith and works combine to bring us salvation.

1. Just as Israel could not capture Jericho by her own strength, we cannot save ourselves by our own strength. We must have divine providence, which, thanks be to the heavenly Father, is given through his Son (Romans 5:1-2).
2. Just as Jericho was given to Israel by God’s grace, we are given salvation by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:4-5). When they completed their obedience to the commands of the Lord, the Israelites could not, and did not, boast of what they had done. Likewise, when we obey the commands of the Lord and are saved, we cannot, and must not, boast of what we have done.
3. Just as Israel had to trust the Lord in order to capture Jericho, we must believe the Lord in order to be saved (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).
4. Just as Israel had to obey the Lord’s commands in order to overthrow Jericho, we must obey the Lord’s commands to receive the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 5:8-9; Acts 2:38).
5. Every action Israel took in response to the commands of God was an act of faith, relying upon the Lord to give them the city. Likewise, every action we take in response to the commands of God is an act of faith, relying upon the Lord to save us.
6. We do not “earn” or “merit” our salvation any more than the Israelites “earned” Jericho.

## BALANCED RELATIONSHIPS

Dale Jenkins

I would not be surprised if most every writer has not referenced in some manner Ira North's 1983 instant classic, *Balance: A Tried And Tested Formula For Church Growth*. North had both the credibility and the reputation to write the book that is considered nearly two generations later as "the uninspired (but inspiring) text on church growth." The book is so influential that most from my generation of preachers only have to hear the word "balance" in relationship to the church and the red jacketed David-Lettermanish gapped-toothed grin of "Fiery Irey" comes to mind. I've bought, I'm sure, over fifty copies of it to give away through the years.

While I doubt he was the first guy to do it I'd have to call Ira North the modern day father of balance, at least in our brotherhood. It's hard to believe it's been nearly thirty years since he first published his book on balance. Not only do many still consider it the standard on church growth, its message is needed as much today as ever.

Attitudes: Dictionary.com defines them thus: manner, disposition, feeling, position, etc., with regard to a person or thing; tendency or orientation, especially of the mind: *a negative attitude; group attitudes*. Wikipedia adds: "An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for something. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event— this is often referred to as the attitude object...Attitudes are judgments." In a more practical vein we talk about giving an "attitude adjustment" or maybe use the phrase with our children: "don't give me that attitude" or "I don't want any attitude out of you."

While it is not a prominent Bible word (I checked four translations before I found one that used it) it is a common biblical concept. In searching all the translations the following are the verses I found:

- "Pride leads to destruction; a proud **attitude** brings ruin" (Proverbs 16:18 NCV). The old saying, "Our attitude affects our outcome," could very well be from this passage.
- It is also interesting to know that our attitudes can have "personalities." "And Jacob noticed that Laban's **attitude** toward him was not what it had been...He said to them, "I see that your father's **attitude** toward me is not what it was

before, but the God of my father has been with me” (Genesis 31:2,5 NIV). People can observe our attitudes.

- “So the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your **attitude** and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates” (1 Kings 11:11). Our attitudes, which lead to actions, can condemn us.
- “For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the **attitude** of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:22). The Lord can affect our attitudes.
- “Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his **attitude** toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual” (Daniel 3:19). As seen also in the Genesis 31 passage, our attitudes toward others can change.
- “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same **attitude** of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had” (Romans 15:5).
- “...to be made new in the **attitude** of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23).
- “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and **attitudes** of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). God’s Word can reveal our attitudes, even the ones we may think are hidden.
- “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same **attitude**, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin” (1 Peter 4:1). We ultimately have control over our attitudes and they can serve as a protector against sin reigning in our lives.

Just as good doctrine always proceeds good doing, good actions always follow good attitudes. And as we consider the verses above, our attitudes are not accidental. Our attitudes are shaped by certain influences. That influence can be godly as in Romans 15 and Ephesians 5 or they can be ungodly as with Nebuchadnezzar or Solomon. They are conditioned over time by what we listen to and who we listen to. One key to great attitudes is great influencers. If you surround yourself with people whose thinking is always negative or with reading material that is not uplifting then it will not be easy to overcome that influence. On the other hand, if you spend time with God’s Word, drinking deeply from it, and with people who are trying to live for God, it will be challenging for that influence *not* to rub off on your attitudes.

That said, James indicates it is possible to read the Bible and even to know it but not to “do what it says.” Therefore it is possible to be a Christian in name, attend church, read God’s Word but not allow yourself to be changed by it.

Consider carefully James 1:19-25:

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

One can “hear” the Word but not “do” the Word. That is what James is attacking. He’s saying, If you want to be blessed, you’ve got to live the word of God, not just hear it. Not just know it.

I heard about the guy who came to church late. He walked in just as the service was completing. He said to an usher, “Is the sermon done, yet?” The usher was wise and said, “The sermon has been preached, but it is yet to be done.” Be ye doers of the word, don’t merely listen. Put it into practice.

Phillips paraphrases verse 25 “*The man who puts the law into practice wins true happiness.*” Jesus, in Matthew 7, tells the story of the wise and the foolish builder. He says the foolish builder builds on sand. He is like the guy who hears the word of God but doesn’t do what it says. The wise man is the one who hears it and then goes out and makes an honest attempt to put it into his life. Practice it. The simplest definition of maturity is to be a doer of the word. That’s what it means to be mature. You do what the Bible says. We must not only read the word, we must heed the word.

I fear that some satisfy themselves by thinking that just knowing and showing (knowing the Word and showing up for church) will get them by spiritually. But many will be lost because of attitudinal sins. Our attitudes can and will affect our salvation. “For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he...” (Proverbs 23:7). “**Let this mind** be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

With all of this said, you may have noticed that we have not said anything about “balance” in attitudes. There is a reason for that. I am not sure our attitudes need to be balanced. Had you asked before I started this study I would have said “naturally” we do need to be balanced in attitudes. But no longer. Our attitudes need to be right, not balanced. For instance, We are never told to balance “love” with “hate” or “apathy.” We are never told to balance our love 50/50 between love and hate. No, when it comes to attitudes we are to strive to have the correct attitude. Perhaps our culture’s treatment toward love would require such moderation as it may treat love as only acting in a syrupy manner toward those we are trying to love. But a proper understanding of love would require that we in every circumstance treat the person in what would be the most loving way. For instance, with children this might involve a measure of discipline.

The same is true of the attitude of hate. We mess up when we accept the world’s view of hate and start assigning it to people and things not so taught by God’s Word. But God hates. He hates those things that separate people from Him. We need to learn to hate, not in a balanced sense but in a sense that we hate those things which God hates and nothing more.

Therefore...

Do not be balanced in our love. Agape love loves the unloveable, loves when human love gives up, never justifies hating or quitting. It strives to maintain God’s attitude as expressed in Romans 5:8: “God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

Do not be balanced in our service. We must have an attitude of service. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says we are to be “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” In a culture that says, “See how little you can get by with,” that phrase “always abounding” literally means to overdo it. To do more than you believe you should, could or would for anyone else or in any other circumstance than one that involves the work of the Lord.

Do not be balanced in our sacrifice. When it comes to how we share God’s blessings we must not strive for balance but must keep the sacrifices the Lord made for us and the fact that all we have already belongs to God. The marvelous Macedonians gave extravagantly.

We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God (2 Corinthians 8:1-6).

When we have first given ourselves to God other sacrifices follow easily.

Do not be balanced in our confession of Jesus. Our attitude toward the Lord is not only a major step toward our salvation by His grace, it is also that which continually identifies us as both true teachers and genuine disciples.

But how do we know if we are living out the attitudes found in the Word? How do we know if we are more than just hearers of the Word? James 1 concludes with three examples of practicing the word, three examples that prove the attitudes that show that we are doers of the Word.

In verse 26 he says, one of the ways you can know that you are a doer of the word is you have ***a controlled mouth***. *“If any one considers himself religious and bridleth not his tongue deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”* One of the ways you can know if you are a doer of the word is if you have self control over your words.

***A caring heart***. *“Pure religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their distress.”* Some have made this a hot potato verse to argue over, but ultimately what the inspired writer is emphasizing is that as a doer of the Word I help the helpless.

***A clean mind***. *“To keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”* What we put in our mind, spiritual integrity.

What is James saying to us? He’s saying “What are you going to do about what you already know?” What are you going to do about it today? Maybe some of you need to decide to start preparing better for worship. Get up a little earlier so you’re not so rushed, come in late half way through the songs. I sit down for the whole service; I tune in to God and get calm and collected, and I’m quiet and ready. I can say, “Lord, here I am. Teach me, so I can be blessed by your word.” Maybe some of you need to say, “I’m going to read through the Bible this year.” About five chapters a day and you’ll go



through the Bible in a year. “I’m going to start memorizing Scripture. I’ll pick a verse a week and hide God’s word in my heart.” It’s a condition for answered prayer. John 15:7 *“If you abide [continue] in Me and My word abides in you, you can ask whatever you will and it will be done for you.”* The word of God in your heart is a condition for answered prayer. “I need to find a place of ministry where I can get involved.” An article said that all these people believe but less than one-third ever devote any time for ministry. Impression without expression leads to depression. If you’re always taking in, one study after another, and never get out in ministry, it’s going to dry up your spiritual life. James is saying that the blessing of the Bible comes when we start living it.

Let’s strive for the attitudes God teaches us. That is the only proper balance.

## FINANCIAL BALANCE

Wes Hazel

Balance is hard to find in the Christian life. It is especially hard to find when it comes to finances and the Christian life, but that is our task today. One of the reasons we struggle to find balance in regard to our possessions is because the extremes are constantly being promoted by those who claim to be preachers of God's word. These extremes are presented with great emotional appeal to our own desires, limited scriptural basis that neglects the whole of scripture, and a flare that abuses those whose knowledge of God's word is incomplete.

One extreme is what we might call the gospel of health and wealth. It is the idea that if we serve God we not only will have great health but all the wealth and possessions that we could ever desire. Creflo Dollar, who preaches for a large denomination in the Atlanta area, said "I've heard people in church say, 'I may not have this, I may not have that, but praise the Lord when I get to heaven on the other side.' Well, honey, God wants you to get it on this side." Robert Tilton went as far as to say, "Being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity!" (Tilton).

Although this approach to our possessions has a certain temptation to our own vanity, it falls apart quickly when we consider the actual Biblical evidence. The widow who only had two mites was heralded as wonderful example of faithfulness (Mark 12:41-44). The rich young ruler was told to give away all his possessions if he was to have eternal life (Luke 18:18-23). Even Jesus Himself said in Matthew 8:20, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." This extreme of health and wealth pulls one so far away from the reality of poor Christian saints that it causes those who hold to it to fall out of balance.

On the other side is the extreme that if we are going to follow God we can have nothing. Shane Claiborne is a good example of those who would advocate this sort of stripping away of material things. In his book *The Irresistible Revolution* he claims to be "correcting the health-and-wealth gospel by following the Homeless Rabbi" (169). Claiborne says that rather than accumulating stuff for oneself, followers of Jesus abandon everything, trusting in God alone for providence" (104). Of course this flies in the face of

the fact that many of the most righteous people throughout the Bible were extremely rich. Abraham, Job, and David are just a few easy example of this. Even in the New Testament we see Paul writing about being content among an abundance of possessions. Extremes like these cause us to lose our balance and fall off to the left or the right. We are looking for balance.

When trying to find balance we always want to start with a focal point. If you take your eye off the focal point we will lose balance. Our focal point for providing balance is going to come from Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. If we understand what he is saying in this passage we will find balance whatever our financial situation may be.

Paul begins in 1 Timothy 6:17 with these instructions, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world..." Our mission for balance begins by understanding that this is speaking about us. We are the rich! It is easy for us to think this is talking about someone who has more than us. I actually used to preach this verse by referring to a family friend who has as much as anyone I know. I thought that this was his verse. The reality is that this verse is about me. I have just come to understand that in order to find balance and keep away from the extreme of always wanting more. We need to adopt the attitude of David when he said in 1 Chronicles 29:14, "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand we have given Thee."

The reason it is so hard to think about myself as being rich is because I am always comparing myself to people who have more. There will always be people who have more. A better way would be to simply look to how much God has given me. I once heard rich defined by the problems that rich people have but poor people don't. Maybe these will help us see how rich we are compared to the majority of the world. Rich people have so much money....

- They are concerned that their life is going to run out before their money does, so they hire financial planners to help them with this problem.
- They throw out old food to make room for new food in their refrigerator.
- They have to pick which restaurant they will go to and have other people prepare and serve them food.
- They are worried that their kids are getting too much.

- The people they work for will pay them for 2-3 weeks a year to stay home and not come in to work.

The list could go on and on, but we get the point. In our nation we are a very blessed and rich people. This passage is speaking about me and you. We are the rich and until we understand that we are going to struggle with balance.

Paul continues to write to the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17, "...not to be conceited or fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." The easy thing to think when we prosper is that we are the reason for that prosperity. While the Bible does speak of the value of hard work and reaping what one sows, we must never forget that there are many hard working people throughout this world who have nothing. My prosperity has much more to do with God than it does with me. When I fail to understand that I will think too much of myself and I am sure to fall. When I understand He is the source of all my blessings (James 1:17) it will keep me balanced.

Perhaps the best example of this is found in the form of the nation of Israel. Before they entered into the promise land where God was going to bless them as He had blessed no other people in the history of the world, He gave them a warning to not forget Him. Deuteronomy 8:17-18 warns, "Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth." God wanted them to understand that He is the one who gave them even the ability to work with their hands or their minds. All blessings come from Him. This is so important because a failure to understand that our blessings come from God causes us to place too much emphasis in our things and abilities. Proverbs 18:11 reminds us, "A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination." It was a failure to heed this warning that led to the downfall of this great nation of Israel. They thought they could never fall, but when they forgot about God that is exactly what happened.

It might be appropriate to note one of the purposes of those blessings that God has brought into our life is to "enjoy." In speaking about issues of money and possessions, one of the great challenges is to present the material in such a way that gives people more than just an enormous guilt trip. If you have ever spent any time in a third world country,

chances are pretty good that you spent some time dealing with a little guilt that you have been blessed so much and others have been blessed so little. Paul reminds us that there is nothing wrong with enjoying the things God has given to us. Just don't fall for the lie that the rich fool did who thought that he was the only reason he was blessed.

God does not want us to feel guilty about what He has brought into our lives. He does want us to feel responsible. That is what we read in verse 18: "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." Does that sound like you? God has blessed you more than most to enable you to do things that others cannot do. Are we using the resources God has placed into our hands to accomplish His works in this world? This has to start with what we honor God with on the first day of each week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Much debate centers around how much that ought to be, but the least you can find scriptural support for is giving a tenth. Anything below that tenth is launching out in the depths of not needing authority for how we worship God. Of course these words are not limited to that offering before God. When the prophet Malachi rebukes the people in Malachi 3:8 he says the people have robbed God in regard to their "tithes and offerings." Are we ready to share with others?

One of the amazing characteristics that had to have propelled the growth of the first century church is recorded in Acts 4:34-35: "For there was not a needy person among them." That happened because, "...for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need." Do we share our blessings in that way? We should. I know of a family who has a category in their budget of several hundred dollars each month above their regular contribution. The purpose of this category is to share with others who are in need. They never know who they will help, but they are always looking for ways to share what God has blessed them with.

Finally, Paul reminds us that by doing this, the rich are, "storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:19). Of course this refers back to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-20, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break

in and steal.” People debate over how to lay up those treasures in Heaven, but Paul gives at least part of the answer here in 1 Timothy 6:19. Instead of taking all my money and lavishing it upon myself, I must use it for good works, be generous with it, and be ready to share it. It may not be the American way, but it is God’s way. Find a missionary your family can support on a regular basis. Look for those who are struggling to get by from day to day. Take care of the needs of someone you know who is less fortunate. There is no shortage of needs in this world. There is only a shortage of people who are willing to turn loose from the things of this world in order to meet them.

Paul’s words to the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 may be among the most challenging in all the New Testament, but when they are applied to our lives they will lead us along a path filled with peace, contentment, and balance. We must start by acknowledging just how blessed we are by God. We are the rich who have been given more by God than we need. I have no need to feel guilty about that. I must always feel responsible. He has blessed me to carry on His business in this world. To see that the preaching of the gospel is supported, the helpless are taken care of, and His good works are accomplished. As I do this, it is the fulfillment of a higher purpose for my life. I am not only making an impact in this world, but I am affecting my own eternity. Understanding that will give me balance in times of abundance and in times of shortage. Paul said it like this in Philippians 4:12-13, “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” May we all find that same balance.

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## BALANCED PRIORITIES

Lennie Reagan

The lawyer who asked Christ, “Which is the great commandment in the Law”? (Matthew 22:36), was attempting to entrap Christ. The Pharisees, in their tradition, had reduced the Law of Moses to three hundred sixty-five negative commandments and two hundred forty-eight commands. Our Master was asked this question: “There is no way we can keep all these laws, which one commandment do we need to keep?”

“And He said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (NASB, Matthew 22:37-40). The one thing this lawyer was attempting to accomplish exposed the fallacy of our concept of priorities.

I question if I am the one who needs to present a sermon on Balanced Priorities. It appears most American Christians look through the glasses of American Christianity when it comes to priorities. We make the plea, “New Testament Christianity,” which is the proper plea, but it appears what most folks mean is American New Testament Christianity. And American Christianity resembles New Testament Christianity very little. If we are going to be the church we read about in the Bible, let’s be that church. Life is all about priorities and the early church was balanced in their priorities: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

A favorite verse of mine is James 5:17: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.” Elijah was a human being just like us. It was not that he was physically superior to us that made him stand out. And the same thing is true of Noah, Moses, David, Paul or Peter. They were people just like you and me. And when we promote them to a superior status we demote ourselves thinking we can never have the kind of faith they had. And we need to see that it was faith in God that made them stand out. Can we have faith in the same God as did they? The one thing I want us to know is that God loves you and we don’t deserve the things we have right now. And because of God’s love, when we slip into eternity, we will be in Paradise with Him.

Have you ever looked back at church history and thought to yourself, “Why did they do that?” or, “I would never take part in something like that.” Whatever it is it looks so weird to us. Think back to the second and third centuries when among the elderships of local congregations, and the elders would appoint one of the elders as their bishop. Then, all bishops in one city would elect one as the bishop of that city over all the congregations. Now, we think about that and shake our heads and say, “Man, I can’t believe they would do that”—especially after Paul warned them that error would rise up out of elderships.

However, think with me. Every church started doing it. Something that was weird became the norm. At the time it was the thing to do to have a pet rock, right? Go ahead and admit it. You had one, right? Everyone was buying a pet rock. Yet, now, man, that was really weird.

Twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred years from now, what will people think when they look back at the church of this generation? What will be the things we are doing and they will think, why did they do that? What are the normal things, the normal attitudes that are normal to us, but so weird when we look at the Word of God?

Some of you will remember back in the 1950’s and 60’s when the Lord’s church just exploded with growth and I know people have differing opinions about that time. Some think that because there were so many public debates and preachers, back then, started a one to one Bible study with, “You’re going to hell...” However, what I think made the difference was that the Word of God was being taught. It was the power of the



Word that changed the lives of people. The difference was their preparation to love God and love people.

While He was preparing His disciples for the time He would no longer be with them on the earth, Jesus made a very simple statement in response to the inquiry of the lawyer: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

The command of Jesus is very simple isn't it? He is telling us not to allow anything to become more primary than our love for God and for each other. Honestly, sometimes I am challenged to make sure that my relationship with God goes beyond a belief system. Is it more than just my belief in God and is it what Jesus said it must be: a love relationship with Him and with you and our communities, and the people around the world? Sometimes, I think maybe it is a love relationship with God and a “like” relationship to you and the people in the world. But, that isn't what Jesus said is it?

What would happen if everyone in your family today said, “We are not going to go to church anymore? I will never pray again, or read the Bible again, I am through with God.” How would you respond? Would you quietly go with them or you would you say, “Oh, no, not me. I love Jesus so much. I love Him with everything I am, with everything I own, I am going to keep following Him. I hate to see you go, but, I love Him more than I love you.” We have to make absolutely sure that we have our own relationship with God and that we love Him and each other more than we love our families or ourselves. Because there is coming a day we, I, you will stand before God alone and He is going to examine every facet of my life and what He finds is going to determine where I am eternally. At that time we will hear one of two things. “Well done faithful slave” or “Depart from me, I never knew you. I know your wife, she really loves me, I know your children and they love me so much. But, I don't know you....you never loved me.”

There is nothing more important in my life than knowing that I love Jesus and He is the most important thing in my life. Because I love Him with all my heart, I love you

the same way. You know how you are willing to go out of your way to show your love for your husband, wife, kids or a friend? Sometimes, it's the simplest things that mean so much.

Last week, my youngest daughter, Brittany texted me and told me she loved me. But you know the first thing that popped into my mind? What did she do or what does she want? But, that wasn't it. She just wanted to tell me she loved me. We do stuff like that when we love each other. We don't mind making sacrifices and going out of our way to show love. Well, if I love Jesus with all of my being, my life is going to change as I go out of my way to show Him how much I love Him. "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Are we crazy in love with God? Is He the most important Person in our lives?

The second part of what Jesus commanded was that I love my neighbor as I love myself. Who are you thinking about when you walk into a worship service? Are you thinking: I wonder who is leading singing, or how long the sermons are going to be? Or, do you remember that as a family, we are gathering to worship and praise God and to encourage each other to be faithful to God and to serve Him? Did we come in as a lover of people or a lover of self?

There are two things I want us to remember about loving each other the way God said we should (and when I say each other, I mean loving our neighbors as we love ourselves).

1. Understanding. Without doubt, absolutely, imperative, essential to my loving God is to understand why I must love my neighbor as myself. From what Jesus said and the way He said it, it is crystal clear that if I don't love my neighbor in the right way, I can't love God like I should. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). I can tell you I love God, but if I don't love my neighbor as I love myself, I am lying.

2. Practice. Perfect practice makes perfect. I cannot possibly love my neighbor without perfect practice. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is

perfected in us” (1 John 4:11-12). John is not simply making a statement that God loves us. John is giving us the standard by which we gauge our love for each other. Notice he said, “If God *so* loved us.” The word “so” is an adverb of manner and it mandates the love that God has for us is to be the same kind of love we have for each other. The end result of that kind of love is that God will love people through us. If we love God, we love people. The issue of balanced priorities will be settled if we love God the way we Jesus commanded us.

How hard is it for you to say, No? I mean, if someone is asking you to get involved in doing something or another activity comes along, how hard is it for you to say, No? Here’s what happens. We get so busy doing so many other things that the priorities in our life get crowded out and usually the first is God. If God were physically here on Earth and screaming, “Give Me your time, give Me your money, give Me your talents,” it would be different. I know that doesn’t sound real spiritual; but, we need to learn to say no.

It’s kind of like going to Sams, right? We’re going to run in for one or two items and we end with a cart full. When Caryn and I go out to eat at Mayflower we usually will order just one meal. The plate is huge, plus I am cheap. When the plate comes we will divide the food and she has her plate and I have mine. Here’s what I don’t do. When the plate comes I don’t eat from the plate until I have eaten all I want and give her what’s left. She may not have a lot left to eat. She knows and I know that I could eat most, if not all that one plate.

That’s kind of what a lot of folks do with God. We say, “Well, let me do this and this and this and then, if there is any time left, I’ll give that to God. Let me buy this and this, and, oh I really need this and if there is any money left, I’ll give it to God.” We are a consumer oriented people and with that way of thinking there’s nothing to give God. We end up without anything or very little time left to give God.

I am not talking about how we can squeeze God into our lives. What we want to say is that we want God to have priority over me, my life and my stuff, because everyone has time to serve God. Every one of us has enough time to serve God. Every one of us has enough money to give God. Now, do we have enough time and enough money to live

the kind of life we want to live and serve God and give to God the way we should? Probably not. So we have a decision to make and usually—not always, but usually—God ends up sacrificing so we can please ourselves.

I'm talking about the possibility, and I know it's a crazy thought to some of us, about the possibility that we come to a point in our lives that we are more concerned about what God wants than what we want. That is the very core of what it means to be a slave of Christ. That's what Jesus meant when He said we should take up our cross and follow Him, submitting to His will for our lives instead of crowding Him out of our lives and giving Him a token of our lives.

Let's judge ourselves before we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. His priority in that day will be justice. God bless us as we seek to put God first in everything we do.

## **WHAT IS “THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD”?**

Benjamin R. Phillips

It is a great pleasure and honor to once again be invited to be part of the Cold Harbor Road lectures. This congregation for many years has been an encouragement to many brethren, and specifically to me. Your good works have been to the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the edification of the brethren. It is my prayer and desire that the Cold Harbor Road congregation remain a light to the Mechanicsville community for many years to come.

### **Introduction**

How many preachers have you heard proclaim we are living in a society and religious time wherein people generally do not want to hear “the whole counsel of God”? I know I have made many statements similar to this through my preaching. The danger in making such a statement is that we might be tempted to portray our time as more unwilling than any other to hear “the whole counsel of God.” Were there not those in the first century who refused to hear “the whole counsel of God” amongst the Judaizers, Jews, and Gentiles? Were they not present in the fourth and fifth centuries as Catholicism really began to develop into its modern form? Were they not present during the years of the Reformation when Martin Luther rejected the book of James, and Calvin rejected the true Bible doctrine of faith and obedience (Revelation 2:10) for “once saved always saved”? The reality is that there always have been those who proclaim to be God’s people but refuse to accept and teach “the whole counsel of God.”

The other side of the coin is that there have been those through the generations who have been diligent to obey and proclaim “the whole counsel of God.” The Holy Spirit records the apostle Paul saying, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, NKJV. All quotations are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise stated). The other apostles of Christ, followed by multitudes of believers and preachers such as Stephen and Philip followed and taught “the whole counsel of God.” Even in our time there are still those standing for the cause of Christ within the congregations of the Lord’s people the world over.

And, yet, we must ask what we mean when we speak of “the whole counsel of God.” Paul’s statement in Acts 20:27 is such that “the whole counsel of God” stands as the testimony and content of his preaching. Paul’s balance was found in his proclamation of and adherence to it. Thus, if we are to live by and proclaim “the whole counsel of God,” we must understand exactly what that counsel is. Our own balance is dependent on our understanding.

### **The Context Of Acts 20**

As Paul was in route to Jerusalem for Pentecost, concluding his third missionary journey, he stopped at Miletus in order to save time by not traveling through Asia Minor (Acts 20:15-16). Miletus was a seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor that possessed four harbors, making it one of the more important seaports (Myers, 719). It was from Miletus that Paul sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus. The journey from Miletus to Ephesus was about 36 miles by land (Easton, “Miletus”). This was by no means a short journey for the time in which they lived, but the willingness of the elders to make this trip highlights the relationship that Paul enjoyed with the Ephesian church. Their relationship had been fostered during his three years of work with that city and congregation (20:31). There is no doubt that the Ephesian church and its elders held a special place in Paul’s heart.

Overshadowing what should have been a joyous reunion was the impending imprisonment that Paul knew he would face when he reached Jerusalem. Such was a surety, for, as Paul himself said, “the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (20:23). Paul did not know the full outcome of the events, but he seemed sure he would not again see the Ephesian elders: “And indeed, now I know that you all...will see my face no more” (20:25). In fact, it was not long after Paul’s reunion with the Ephesian Elders that Agabus again prophesied concerning Paul: “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles’” (21:11). Paul knew that he was traveling to what might be his death in Jerusalem.

The trip, the content of Paul’s speech, and the tears shed in light of Paul’s coming affliction (20:37) all speak to the care and concern that Paul and the elders shared for one another. But they also set the context for a farewell speech that is reminiscent of

Samuel's defense before Israel (1 Samuel 12:1-4), wherein Paul declares himself "innocent of the blood of all men" (20:26) because he had declared to the Ephesians "the whole counsel of God." Our understanding of "the whole counsel of God" must thus be grasped within this context of care, suffering, and farewell.

### **The Content Of Paul's Speech**

If we are to ascertain what Paul meant when he spoke of "the whole counsel of God," we need to consider the full content of his message to the elders in Acts 20. The United Bible Societies translation handbook aptly divides Paul's speech into four parts:

- (1) verses 18–21 deal with the past, that is with Paul's work in Ephesus;
- (2) verses 22–24 are concerned with Paul's present situation;
- (3) verses 25–31 depict the future (both the future of Paul and of the Ephesian church); and
- (4) verses 32–35 serve as Paul's concluding remarks (Newman & Nida 388).

While there is much to be gained from a detailed, verse by verse study of this passage, it is beyond the scope of our study. Our emphasis is upon "the whole counsel of God." As such we want to focus on two important emphases of Paul's speech that will help us reach our desired end: the proclaimer and the proclamation.

### **The Proclaimer**

While discussing his work as a proclaimer of the Gospel, Paul mentions several aspects relative to his teaching that are pertinent to understanding "the whole counsel of God." First, Paul's preaching was complete in fearlessness. He says, "I kept back nothing" (20:20) and "I have not shunned" (20:27). "Kept back" and "shunned" are both translated from *hupostéllō*, which means "to draw oneself back, out of sight, hence, generally to shrink or draw back, to withdraw oneself, retreat" (Zodhiates, word #5288). One commentator says *hupostéllō* "always shows that fear is the motivating force. It occurs twice in Acts (20:20, 27), once in Galatians (2:12), and once in Hebrews (10:38)" (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 727). This is reminiscent of Paul's statement to Timothy, when he instructed the young preacher to "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). Paul personally faced many pressures while in Ephesus (Acts 19), but he never stopped preaching. Thus we learn that the "whole counsel of God"

requires preaching and living that does not shrink back when under pressure from without or perhaps even within.

Second, Paul's preaching was complete when it came to location. He preached "publicly and from house to house" (20:20). This is part of the same sentence in which Paul confirms that he "kept back nothing that was helpful" (20:20). The location did not matter to Paul. This teaches that "the whole counsel of God" is both a personal and public proclamation.

Third, Paul's preaching was complete in method. In his description of his work, Paul uses several different words with varying shades of meaning to describe the proclaiming that he did.

Interestingly Paul used several words in referring to his role in communicating the gospel: (a) "preach" (Acts 20:20) and proclaim (v. 27), both from *anangellō* ("proclaim, announce"); (b) "taught" (from *didaskō*, "teach," v. 20); (c) "declared" (v. 21) and "testifying" (v. 24), both from *diamartyromai* ("solemnly bear witness to"); (d) "declare" (*martyromai*, "testify," v. 26) (Walvoord, Zuck, & Dallas Theological Seminary v. 2 p. 414 ).

The language Paul uses runs the gamut from the most basic idea of teaching to the loud proclamation of a king's messenger. Thus, "the whole counsel of God" is something that is to be preached, proclaimed, taught, and declared.

We can conclude that Paul, the proclaimer, was complete in method, location, and fearlessness when it came to declaring "the whole counsel of God." But the significance of our above observations is that Paul connects his declaration of "the whole counsel of God" back to what he had been preaching all along. "The whole counsel of God" was Paul's proclamation all along.

### **The Proclamation**

As Paul speaks of his method, location, and fearlessness in preaching he always returns to the proclamation that he was given to make—The Gospel of Christ. Though he speaks of it in a variety of fashions in the text, he connects them together as the fullness of what he taught the brethren in Ephesus. Thus, examining the various ways that Paul describes the proclamation will define for us what "the whole counsel of God" actually is.



First, consider the connection between 20:20 and 20:27. The same Greek word, *hupostéllō*, is used to describe Paul's fearlessness in preaching. He also uses the same Greek word, *anangellō*, to describe his preaching which is translated "proclaimed" in verse 20 and "declare" in v. 27. The two are basically parallel in thought, which means that what "was helpful" and taught "publicly and from house to house" would appear to be parallel to "the whole counsel of God." What was this "helpful" message?

Verse 21 clearly states what this "helpful" proclamation was: "Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." We must be careful not to separate verse 20 from verse 21 because the two verses "are one long sentence in Greek" (Newman & Nida 389-90). The helpful message was the message of salvation that is described here as turning from sin to God and coming to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Much like Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, and other such passages, we have a portion of the plan of salvation presented in the place of the whole. Thus, the first part of the whole counsel of God that is revealed to us in the text is the message of how one comes to salvation.

Second, consider the connection between 20:21 and 20:24. In both places Paul uses the word *diamartúromai*, translated as "testifying" (v. 20) and "testify" (v. 24), to describe the method of his proclamation. That of which he testified in verse 20 is the way of salvation. In verse 24 he is "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God," speaking of what lies before him in Jerusalem. He considers this testimony as finishing "my race with joy" and as "the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus." In other words, he considers "testifying to the gospel" a continuation what he had already been doing.

Paul's work is something that the Ephesian elders were already aware of because it is the race that he been running when he came preaching in Ephesus. The Gospel is the message of salvation (Romans 1:16) and of grace that is in Christ (Gal. 1:6). Thus when Paul came testifying of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" he was testifying "to the gospel of the grace of God" because one cannot proclaim the message of salvation without proclaiming the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel was his race, his ministry which he would one day complete (2 Timothy 4:1-8). The descriptions of verses 21 and 24 go hand in hand, helping us to further understand that "the whole counsel of God" is the "gospel of the grace of God."

Finally, consider verses 25-27, for they are intimately connected to one another and to what has already been said. In fact, these verses serve as Paul's final conclusion of his work amongst the Ephesians. These verses serve as a unit, with Paul framing his completion of work in verse 26 with his reasoning for the work being complete in verses 25 and 27.

Verse 27 is actually the continuation in Greek of the sentence begun in verse 26. In the same way that verse 26 draws a conclusion on the basis of what has been said in verse 25, so verse 27 draws a conclusion on the basis of what has been said in verse 26. In fact, the content of verses 25 and 27 is essentially the same: *the Kingdom of God* of verse 25 is equivalent to *the whole purpose of God* in verse 27 (Newman & Nida 393).

Because Paul has preached to them "the kingdom of God" (v. 25) and held back nothing of "the whole counsel of God," he is "innocent of the blood of all men" (v. 26; cf. Ezekiel 33:1-6 for the source of this image). The two are set as equivalent by Paul because both are placed as the reason for the completion of his work amongst the Ephesians. He had proclaimed "the kingdom of God", thus providing them "the whole counsel of God."

Verse 25 is not only equated with verse 27, but is also a summary of all Paul has already said he preached in verses 18-24. By equating the "preaching of the kingdom of God" with the declaration of "the whole counsel of God," Paul is incorporating all he has already said of his preaching into the idea of "the whole counsel of God." That which was "helpful" (v. 20), the testifying of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 21), the testifying "to the gospel of the grace of God" (v. 24), the "preaching the kingdom of God" (v. 25), and "the whole counsel of God" (v. 27) are all describing the same proclamation. Much like the Gospel accounts each provides a piece of the picture of Christ, so each of Paul's descriptions presents a different aspect of the Gospel, helping to frame a picture of "the whole counsel of God."

The content of Paul's speech in Acts 20 reveals several key points that help us to answer: "What is the Whole Counsel of God?" First, we learn that the whole counsel of God is something that is to be preached fearlessly, in every place, and in every Scriptural way possible. Second, we learn that "the whole counsel of God" is the Gospel of Christ. To preach "the whole" is to preach all of it. We preach what is popular and what isn't. We preach what might be called negative and what is called positive. Simply put, to

preach and live by “the whole counsel of God” is to preach and live by the entirety (“the whole”) of the Gospel of Christ.

### **The Counsel Of God**

Though we have gained a general understanding of “the whole counsel of God” from our study of Acts 20, there is more to be gained by doing a more detailed study of the phrase. “Whole” is simply translated from *pás* and can be translated as “whole” or perhaps even “all” in the given context. The real meat is to be gained by doing further study of the word that is translated “counsel.” Our study will still lead us back to the general understanding we already have of what “the whole counsel of God” is, but with added appreciation for exactly what Paul is saying.

“Counsel” is translated from the Greek *boule* word which generally means “will, purpose, intention as a result of reflection; counsel, decree, aim or estimation as it denotes deliberation and reflection; the assembly of the council. In Modern Greek, parliament is called *boule* (Zodhiates, word #1012). This word is used twelve times in the New Testament, with seven occurrences relating specifically to the divine will of God and five relating to the decisions of men. Acts 20:27 is one of those instances wherein *boule* is used of God.

In reference to God, *boule* is translated (in the NKJV) as “counsel” three times (Acts 20:27; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17); “will” two times (Luke 7:30; Acts 13:36); and “purpose” two times (Acts 2:23; 4:28). Zodhiates sees specific meaning as *boula* relates to the “counsel of God”:

Distinguished from *thélēma* (2307) which stands also for the commanding and executing will of God. The will (*boule*) of God refers only to God’s own purpose. *Thélēma* signifies the will urging on to action, while *boule*, the counsel preceding the resolve, signifies the decision. Therefore, Ephesians 1:11 should be translated “according to the decision [or plan] of His will” (a.t.). The apostle not only gives prominence to the absolute freedom of the decision of the divine will, but calls attention to the saving plan lying at the basis of the saving will as it manifests itself. In some instances *boule* and *thélēma* are perfectly syn [synonymous, BRP]. *Boule* is also used to denote the divine decree concerning redemption (Luke 7:30; Acts 2:23; 4:28, purpose, plan; Acts 5:38; 13:36; 20:27; 27:42; Hebrews 6:17; Sept.: Ezra 4:5; Neh. 4:15) [word #1012].

Thus, we must understand the “counsel” or *boule* of God to be the very decision in the mind of God that results in the action that God has taken.

Paul is telling the Ephesians that he proclaimed to them “all that God has decided to do” as it relates to the salvation of man. As such, the counsel of God is set, and Paul, by revelation, was able to proclaim unto them the very mind of God.

When one considers the message of 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 in light of *boule*, it makes perfect sense. Man is unable to know the mind of God, but the Holy Spirit is able to search the mind of God. The Spirit then inspired men to reveal the will of God unto us so that we might know the counsel of God, which is ultimately recorded as the Gospel of Christ.

To really understand the power of the term *boule*, let us consider Ephesians 1:11: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” “Counsel” is here translated from *boule*. Paul says that all things are worked according to the *boule* of God. In context, Paul is especially concerned with the predestination of Christians, which speaks to how God had determined to save all men in Christ by His own work and not the works of men.

Thus the entire book of Ephesians becomes a commentary on the *boule* of God for the book is concerned with this predestination or means of salvation. The first three chapters of Ephesians discuss the salvation that is in Christ through faith by grace. Paul expounds upon the “mystery” that both Jew and Gentile would be united in one body in Christ. All of this is according to God’s *boule*. The last three chapters of Ephesians discuss how the church is to live in view of the revelation of the mystery, which was according to the *boule*. Thus, Christian living is ultimately a response dependent on the *boule* of God! The plan of God, the person of Christ, and the purpose for Christians are all contained in the *boule* of God that has been revealed in the Gospel of Christ.

When one considers that the Gospel is the revealed will of God, he must also realize that the Old Testament is also God’s message to man from which Christians are told to learn (Romans 15:4). The same Spirit inspired both, revealing even to the writers of old the mind of God for generations that were to come (1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21). In the end, the entire written Word from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 comprises the

revealed *boule* of God. What a privilege it is to be able to view the very purpose, the very will, the very mind of our God. It is the *boule* of God that is contained in the Gospel of Christ. It is that Gospel of redemption in Christ according to the *boule* of God that Paul preached in its entirety to the church at Ephesus. Such is “the whole counsel of God.”

### **Conclusion**

Paul called the elders of the church at Ephesus to him one last time, convinced he would not see them again. He encouraged them in the faith by reminding them of all he had taught concerning the kingdom, repentance, faith, and the “gospel of the grace of God.” He reminded them of his trials, and his fearlessness in preaching. He warned them of apostasy to come from amongst their own ranks. He left them to the “word of His grace” (v. 32) which was the same counsel they had heard from Paul. Paul was confident in his own work, knowing he had done all that he could for the brethren at Ephesus because he had preached “the whole counsel of God.”

What then is “the whole counsel of God”? It is the very message of salvation. It is the telling of the workings of God to bring His Son into this world through the seed of Eve, Abraham, Israel, and David. It is the story of Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection. It is the foundation of the church and the preaching of the cross. It is the proclamation of the will of God for man in coming to Him and remaining true to Him. It is the whole of God’s message to man for his salvation.

Let us, my brethren, ever strive to be like Paul. Let us teach our neighbors, our friends, our family of “the whole counsel of God.” Let us live our lives according to “the whole counsel of God.” Let us never hold back or shy away from “the whole counsel of God.” Let us never forget the privilege we enjoy to possess in written form the revealed mind of God. Thank God for “the whole counsel of God!”

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## **TWO EXTREMES**

Bruce Daugherty

Balance is an important word when considering an individual or a society. To be “unbalanced” is to be mentally unstable or deranged. One reason people lose their balance is that they go to extremes. The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, taught his students in ethics to find the “golden mean;” that is, the balance between the extremes of excess and deficiency (Wedin, 44).

Balance is also important in the life of the servant of God. Long ago, Joshua was told, “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:7, NKJV). Jesus had difficulties with extremists of his day, as the Pharisees and the Sadducees both sought to attack Him (Matthew 22:23-40). The Pharisees represented an extreme that bound the oral tradition to the Torah, while the Sadducees were another extreme that “loosed” the law by only observing the books of Moses. The Apostle Paul spoke of the testimony of his people, that they had a “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” (Romans 10:1-2). Zeal is needed in the life of the Christian, but it must be a zeal tempered and guided by knowledge.

Nowhere is the need for balance more clearly seen than in Church History. Twenty centuries give ample testimony of the difficulty of living in a balanced way for Christ. In fact, one teacher has organized a study of Church History by following what he calls “the pendulum effect” as it goes from extreme intellectualism on one hand to extreme emotionalism on the other (Walton, chart 3). While the chart may be overstated as to some of its details, the general pattern points to the difficulty of keeping a balanced approach to following Christ.

## The Pendulum Effect in Church History

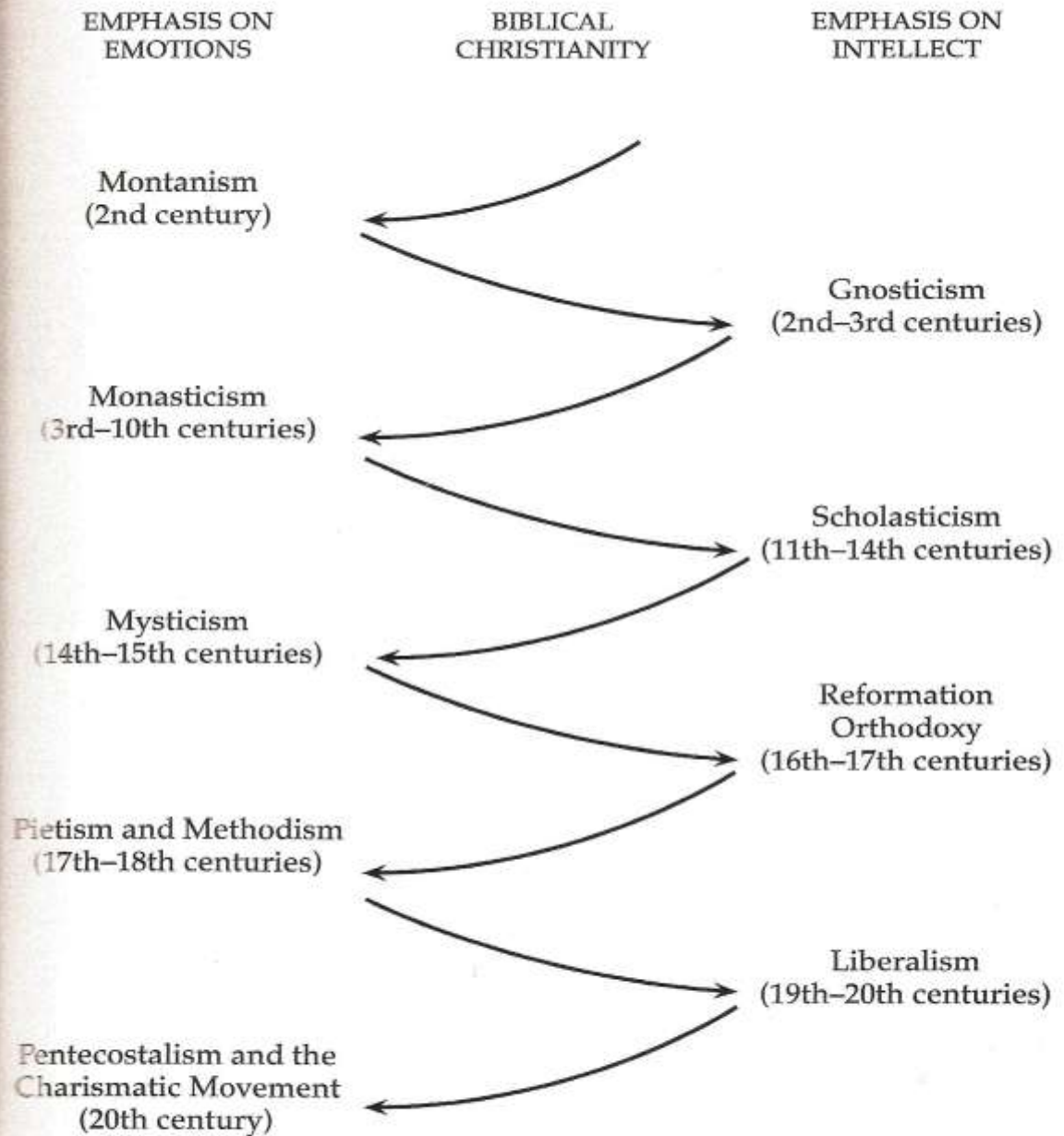


Chart 3



This study will focus on the pendulum effect and how extremes beget extremes. It will do so by examining two examples of extreme reactions found in Church History. The first example will look at the Gnostic heresy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the far reaching reactions it generated. The second will be drawn from the dawn of the Reformation, looking at Martin Luther's reaction to Medieval Catholicism in his doctrine of justification. By making such a study it is hoped that the listener/reader will be able to avoid the pendulum effect in his or her life and offer balanced service to Christ.

### **Second Century Crisis Of Identity**

The end of the first century witnessed many transitions in the church: the Apostles were passing from this life; those on whom the Apostles' had laid their hands were now growing older or passing, and persecution of Christians removed many from leadership in the church. These transitions, coupled with the rise of heretical groups brought a serious identity crisis to the church (Ferguson, *Defining*, 10).

Once thought of as an heretical offshoot of Christianity, some scholars believe that Gnosticism arose prior to and independently of Christianity, but there is no unanimity in the precise origin of the several diverse groups that attached themselves to Christianity in the second-century (Scholer, 13). These groups contained a combination of Jewish, Hellenistic, and Oriental elements in their teaching and practices. Whatever their origins, Gnostics found Christianity attractive and allied with it to produce a number of second century sects. Little of the precise organization of these groups is known today. Until recently, most of what was known about Gnosticism was found in the writings of Church leaders who opposed it. But in 1945 the *Nag Hammadi* materials were discovered in the desert of Egypt. These papyri were written in Coptic Egyptian and furnish an insider's look at one sect of Gnosticism. These materials were translated and published in English in 1977 (Perkins, 466).

Gnosticism receives its name from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*. Gnostics viewed themselves as heirs of a secret revelation or wisdom given by Jesus, the Great Teacher. This knowledge is not learning in the typical sense of understanding truth through reason, but it is a "revealed knowledge" imparted through secret teachings by a heavenly messenger (Perkins, 465). Gnostics believed that man's basic problem was ignorance, not sin. Thus, what one needs is a saving knowledge. Several groups had an

elaborate division of humanity into three orders or classes. At the bottom were pagans, who were viewed as possessing only matter or bodies (Greek *soma*). In the middle were “ordinary” Christians who had come into possession of a soul (Greek *psyche* or *hyle*). At the highest level were the Gnostics who had been enlightened and possessed a spirit (Greek *pneuma*). Gnostics, like Marcion at Rome, borrowed heavily from the writings of Paul, amply supplied with their own interpretations. Most Gnostic groups organized themselves on a school model and were led by a teacher. In addition to Marcion, other important second-century Gnostic leaders were Basilides of Alexandria, Egypt and Valentinus of Rome (Scholer, 13).

Fundamental to nearly all the Gnostic sects was a dualism of nature expressed in contrasts: light-darkness, truth-error, good-evil, spirit-matter. This dualism was expressed in an anthropology where man is viewed as being composed of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. Man is imprisoned in this existence which causes deep dissatisfaction and frustration. Some Gnostic groups developed elaborate myths describing man’s origin, destiny, and salvation. These Gnostics taught that salvation came by way of a heavenly messenger who descends through stellar and planetary spheres, defeating the rulers of these realms (Greek *archons*, see Col. 2:15). This messenger finally comes to earth to bring *gnosis* to man. This revelation awakens the spirit trapped inside the body. At death this spirit is freed from the body and begins to make the long journey through the imprisoning planetary and stellar regions. As the spirit passes through each sphere it is freed from the soul until it is finally absorbed into divinity.

For those who bought into this view of man, it resulted in a different Christ. Gnostics depicted Jesus as the messenger from above who came to reveal saving knowledge to men. He was the “great teacher.” This savior of mankind was a pure spirit according to the Gnostics, for otherwise he would be imprisoned in soul and body and therefore, a fellow prisoner who could not help others to escape. If it *seemed* (Greek, *dokeo*) to the disciples that Jesus was human, this was either an intentional deception or the inability of the disciples to understand a pure spirit being. Gnostics were sure that Jesus was not composed of body and soul; that he was not born of Mary; that he did not die on the cross. This different view of Christ also rejected the Old Testament and

Jehovah as the God of creation. They also rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection and the second coming.

Gnostic teaching also resulted in a different ethical behavior. Because their intense dualism led them to view the material or physical world as evil and the spiritual as good, they either separated themselves from the material world in a rigid, ascetic life or they indulged themselves in physical pleasures, believing the spirit had nothing to do with the body (Gonzalez, 60). Both variations, ascetic or libertine, developed an extreme individualistic version of Christianity which minimized responsibilities to others.

It should not be overlooked that Gnosticism made an appeal to pride, especially intellectual pride. “. . . the Gnostic approach itself created different classes that placed the ones with the ‘true insight’ in a special camp superior to ordinary Christians. Intellectual elitism is a danger always for those ‘in the know’.” (Ferguson, CH, 100).

### **Bishop, Creed, Council: The Response To Gnosticism**

The reaction to Gnosticism by mainstream Christianity or the orthodox Christians was a pendulum swing to an opposite extreme. This reaction accelerated the already developing Monarchial Bishop, the use of creeds, and meetings of church councils (Ferguson, CH, 88). All three would have long term effects on subsequent church history.

Emerging from the plurality of elders (bishops, presbyters, or overseers) in first century Christianity (Acts 14:23; 20:17-28; Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3), came the gradual development of the monoepiscopacy, or one bishop. This bishop presided authoritatively over worship. He led worship and policed those who could take part in the weekly communion services. He was the teacher instructing would-be converts in a lengthy testing period before baptism. He was viewed as holding the truth as a rightful successor to the apostles in contrast to corrupting teachers like the Gnostics. Ignatius is one of the early “Church Fathers” whose writings urge Christians to follow closely to their “bishop” in distinction from the other presbyters.

You must all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and you must follow the board of elders as you would the apostles; and revere the deacons as the command of God. Let no one do any of the things that have to do with the Church without the bishop. . . . Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be.... It is not permissible to baptize or hold a

religious meal without the bishop, but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God (Ignatius, 8).

Due to the doctrinal confusion of the Gnostics, brief doctrinal statements were developed to test the orthodoxy of candidates for baptism or participants in the communion. These brief statements began with the words “I believe” (Greek, *pistueo*; Latin *credo*). These “creeds” were touchstones of faith in a period in which there were no copies of the Bible for individual Christians. These statements contained practical anti-Gnostic statements which separated true believers from the Gnostics. Note the *Old Roman Creed*, now dated about the year 180 AD.

I believe in God the Father Almighty;  
And in Jesus Christ His Holy Son, our Lord;  
Who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary;  
Crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried;  
The third day rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
And sits at the right hand of the Father;  
From there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost;  
I believe in the Holy Church;  
I believe in the forgiveness of sins;  
I believe in the resurrection of the body;  
I believe in the life everlasting (Greek version).

The multiplicity of Gnostic groups troubled Christians throughout the Roman Empire, but nowhere more so than in Asia Minor. In this region, bishops began meeting in councils (synods) to deal with their common crisis. These councils affirmed the authority of the church universal (catholic) as opposed to the individual groups of Gnostics. In addition, these meetings helped establish the understanding that revelation from God was finished and the canon of Scripture was closed (Perkins, 468).

The second century crisis of identity brought about a separation of Gnosticism from mainstream Christianity, even though Gnosticism’s influence would continue to be felt for another three centuries (Perkins, 469). The response of mainstream Christianity however, was a reactionary pendulum swing which sowed seeds of extremist departures from New Testament Christianity. Bishops, creeds, and councils would have long term effect on that which was viewed as authoritative in doctrine and practice among those professing to follow Christ.

## **Martin Luther and Justification from Sin**

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century a young Augustinian monk was troubled about his soul. He found no relief in the sacramental practices of Medieval Catholicism and the confessional booth. No assurances from his abbot relieved him. A trip to Rome only brought further doubts of a system that seemed to revolve around “works” salvation in the form of acts of penitence rather than real repentance and change of life. This young monk confessed:

I was a good monk and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say; that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear this out. If I had kept on any longer I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work. (Bainton, 34).

Thus began Martin Luther’s spiritual journey which culminated in the Protestant Reformation.

Luther’s turmoil about his salvation began with the doctrine of original sin—after all, he was an Augustinian monk, reading his Bible through Augustine’s glasses. It was compounded by a distorted view of God. Looking back on this time in his life he wrote:

I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath! (Luther, 21).

Up to this point in his life, Luther had viewed God’s righteousness as only a judgmental hammer waiting to fall on sinners. But Luther began to change as he studied the Bible, particularly, Psalms and Romans. Two key verses for him were Psalm 71:2: “Deliver me in your righteousness and cause me to escape; incline your ear to me, and save me!” and Romans 1:17: “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith.’” With this discovery of the righteousness of God as deliverance through the gospel rather than judgment, Luther’s hatred toward God was transformed into love. From this point on in his life, Luther viewed salvation as *entirely* in the hands of God. He viewed the function of the law and the Old Testament as driving the sinner to God’s grace in the gospel. This grace was appropriated by faith and not granted by the Catholic Church, sacraments, or surplus

merits of the saints through the sale of indulgences. In reaction to the Catholicism he had experienced, Luther proclaimed justification by faith alone (*sola fidei*). In his translation of the Bible into his native German, Luther changed Romans 3:28 from “justification by faith” to “justification by faith alone” (Bainton, 261). Since the epistle of James states, “You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only” (James 2:24), it is not surprising that Luther condemned the epistle as being “full of straw” (Luther, 19). The pendulum had once again swung past the middle to the opposite extreme.

### **For By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith**

Christians need to know the joy and assurance of salvation without the torment of wondering, “Have I done enough to be saved?” Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches the proper relationship of grace, faith and works without passing to the extremes of faith alone or works salvation:

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

Paul consistently uses the language of grace in this passage. Salvation is God’s gift. It is found in God’s initiative of love (1 John 4:19). There is no one who merits this favor; no one who could work enough to deserve it. There can be no boasting on man’s part. We are His workmanship, first in creation, then in salvation.

God has created humans not machines. As such we have been endowed with the freedom to love, to worship, or to sin. God offers his gracious gift, but it must be received by faith. God’s will does not override the free will of man. For example, a man by his will takes a woman to be his bride, but not without her willingness in the matter! This faith or choice of the will is the response of love to the love of God. It is expressed in obedience to what God has asked men to do in faith (Acts 2:37-38; Acts 9:6; Acts 22:16; Acts 10:6, 33; Acts 11:14; Acts 16:30-34). It is to proceed in full assurance that what God has promised, He will perform (Romans 4:21). To respond in obedience does not nullify grace or faith. It is not legalism to preach that men of faith obey what God asks them to do.

God’s purpose for His new creatures in Christ is that they will practice good works. This is the Christian walk or life conduct. It is to walk in the light with full joy

and assurance, knowing that God's salvation has provisions for children when they fall (1 John 2:1-6). The welcome of heaven is "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

The salvation which is by grace through faith is illustrated in the lives of the heroes of faith as found in Hebrews 11. This chapter commends Abraham, father of the faithful, but also Rahab the harlot. They both trusted in the grace of God, and both expressed that trust in obedience. In particular, note the case of Noah. Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:3). By faith he "prepared an ark for the saving of his household" (Hebrews 11:7). Did Noah say, "I am saving myself by building this boat by my design and knowledge"? Did Noah say, "What a drudgery and burden salvation is as I work building this boat"? Did Noah get on board, doubting if he had done enough to make the boat float? Obviously, the answer is *no* to all of these questions. Because of this, Noah is an example for Christian salvation: "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Salvation is by grace through faith.

### **Applying This Study**

Balance is extremely difficult to achieve in life, and especially in one's life in Christ. Perhaps the meaning of Christian maturity (Ephesians 4:15) is to be able to walk without swinging to extremes.

Gnosticism should warn all Christians of the dangers of pride, especially intellectual pride. But departures from God's design, no matter how well intentioned, only bring more difficulty. One wrong does not justify another.

All individuals should take the matter of salvation as seriously as Luther. Full assurance and joy in salvation is not found in a surplus-and-deficit, check-book view of religion, but in full knowledge of the One who died for us and in our obedience to His commands, as in the example of the Ethiopian nobleman (Acts 8:35-40). But let us avoid the extreme reaction of Luther to a works religion. Obedience to the revealed will of Christ is the balance between the extremes of works and faith only.

. . . the Spirit of Christ is one that excludes all turning from or neglect of the commands of God, or substitution of other service for that ordained by God, and insists on rigid obedience to the divine will as the only fulfilling

of love and the only means of union with God and of cleansing of sin by the blood of Christ. (Lipscomb, 281).

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## UNDERSTANDING FAITH AND OPINION

David Stearsman

The failure to draw a clear cut distinction between matters of faith and matters of opinion leads to taking extreme positions. If one assumes the view that all matters of faith are matters of opinion, the position is liberal—a loose interpretation of what God intended. Liberalism is an extreme position Biblically (Revelation 22:18-19). If one assumes that all matters of opinion are matters of faith, the position is legalistic—far more strict than what God intended. Such is also an extreme position Biblically (Matthew 15:9). We must be willing to seek true Biblical answers in identifying whether a doctrine is a matter of faith or a matter of opinion if we are to please God. Because the Bible is all sufficient in equipping us in all areas of faithful service, we can know that both terms can be defined precisely (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:20-21).

### What Is Faith?

“Faith” (Greek, *pistis πίστις*) is a term that is used in the New Testament both with respect to a person’s measure of belief and as objective truth itself. The usage of this term as a measure relates to a personal “conviction of the truth of anything, [or] belief.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is how much one believes in something. In the Gospels, we see this usage *exclusively*. For instance, in Matthew 6:30, Jesus says, “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”<sup>2</sup> In this instance, Jesus’ rebuke was one criticizing insufficient faith. Regarding the centurion Jesus met in Capernaum found in Matthew 8:5-13, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Matthew 8:10). So by contrast with those in Matthew 6:30, the Centurion was found to have an exceeding measure of faith. Such is the idea behind the term “faithful” (*pistos*) that we read often in the New Testament.

The usage of the term as an objective concept applies when the definite article is used in conjunction with the noun “faith” (i.e. “the faith” (Galatians 1:23; Acts 6:7; Jude

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<sup>1</sup> Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*. New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889.

<sup>2</sup> All Biblical quotes unless otherwise noted are taken from *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Mt 6:30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

3).<sup>3</sup> In this case, “the faith” is the revealed truth we have in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

There are many who verbalize “faith” and claim belief in “spiritual” concepts, yet don’t have Biblical, or true, saving faith. To base a system of belief on “hearsay” is foreign to Bible teaching, as Romans 10:17 says “so then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

True faith is always generated by the acceptance of and adherence to known facts. As the Hebrew writer says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1) The concept of “blind faith” is not Biblical; it is a myth. We do not see Biblical faith defined in terms of probability. Can anyone rightly contend that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and the others mentioned in Hebrews 11 believed in the probability of a God? If “faith” is to be made of a substance no greater than probability, for what can one truly hope? Therefore, we must conclude that faith is absolute certainty in the absolute truths of an absolutely Holy Creator.

By demonstration, let us consider some of the key Biblical passages dealing with faith in the New Testament that are often abused. In 2 Corinthians 5:7, Paul writes, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Some misinterpret this passage by concluding that because we do not walk by sight, we walk with an element of uncertainty. They incorrectly reason that there is much that we do not know, and we can never know, so we must fill in the blanks with “faith.” But to assume this, one must also conclude that sight is the only line of evidence in which we can depend. Observation is but one line of reasoning; it is by no means exhaustive.

Consider again the Hebrew writer: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). John writes, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). Referring to God, Paul contends that “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen” (Romans 1:20). Because we cannot literally see God does not mean we cannot know Him. The Hebrew writer appeals to God’s existence and

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<sup>3</sup> Jackson, Wayne. “Galatians 1:23 - The Faith.” Christian Courier n. pag. Web. 2 Jul 2011. <<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/964-galatians-1-23-the-faith>>.

how He rewards the faithful; John by inspiration shows that we have abounding evidence in the life of Christ; and Paul shows that our witness to what transpired post-Creation, and not the events of the Creation itself, are enough to fully convince us of God entirely; not only convince us of His existence, but motivate us to serve Him.

In this we can see that to have faith is to have certainty. In the context of 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is contrasting faith with doubt. In verse 1 he says, “For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” How do we “know” this, as Paul says? Not because we have received it yet, but because the evidence from Scripture tells us assuredly that it will be so (cf. Hebrews 11:6ff). Some wrongfully conclude that not knowing everything means that we cannot truly know anything. While there are some things God and God only knows (Deuteronomy 29:29; Matthew 24:36), this fact in no way limits the amount of certainty we can have in what He has revealed to us. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” That means that *any* issue that we have in life can be solved Scripturally. So while we do not know what our exact appearance will be manifest in heaven, we do know exactly how to serve God to get to heaven one day. Note that filling in the blank in this area would not constitute faith. It would be merely a guess.

To summarize, simply, “faith” relies on “fact.” Facts are absolutely true, without error, and can be believed with 100% certainty. How one responds to facts about the New Testament shows the measure of faith the person possesses. There are no other facts on which to base our measure of faith than on the objective faith, the Word.

### **What Is Opinion?**

An English definition of the word “opinion” immediately shows us how different the word is from “faith” (or acceptance of fact). Opinion is defined as “a view or judgement not necessarily based on fact or knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> That possibility, that an idea may be untrue, is not found within the realm of faith. For instance, the book of Job

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<sup>4</sup> Soanes, Catherine and Angus Stevenson. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 11th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

presents a situation where a range of opinions were offered. Job's friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar all had opinions, but were far off the truth. On one hand, they were correct in their opinion that God was a God of justice. We can verify this because it is according to Scripture; we can have *faith* in knowing it to be true (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 33:5). On the other hand, the friends' estimation that Job suffered because he did something wrong was in itself wrong. Since this conclusion was not supported by information revealed by God, it was incorrect.

Job also had an opinion. He acknowledged that the righteous suffer and that the wicked seemingly prosper, both truths taught elsewhere in Scripture (Genesis 50:20; Psalm 73; Luke 24:46; 1 Timothy 4:10). Yet when pressed by his friends as to how he arrived at his lowly state, Job makes the mistake of speaking against God to justify himself before them (Job 30:16-23). When Elihu finally speaks, he rebukes Job for elevating his opinion over the true nature of God (33:8-13). In essence, Job had become self-righteous. Elihu then preaches to Job the truth of the matter: God answers people in different ways (33:13-33; cf. Psalm 62:11) and God cannot do that which is unjust (34:1-37; cf. Psalm 92:15; Romans 9:14). We can reason from Elihu's opinion that his was the closest to truth. How? Because his words correspond with what is taught in Scripture.

The New Testament translates the English word "opinion" just twice (Romans 11:25; Romans 12:16). In both occurrences, Paul is showing the dangers of being self-righteous in one's thoughts. In Romans 11:25, the issue is that there were some Gentiles who could have viewed their salvation in a high minded manner in comparison to the Jews, who were still rejecting the Gospel. The English word "opinion" is actually a Greek phrase which, when translated literally, means "wise in yourselves." As Robertson points out, these Gentiles "had no merit in themselves,"<sup>5</sup> the Gospel was God's plan. In Romans 12:16, Paul is warning against elitist thinking, a danger which ultimately can lead to a disassociation from the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13-22).

A sharp New Testament contrast between faith and opinion is found in Matthew 16:13-18:

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they

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<sup>5</sup> Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Ro 11:25). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

There were those that had the opinion that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some prophet. Yet, this opinion was contrary to truth. Note here that the opinion appears to derive from a Biblical place. All names mentioned were true historical people who lived and followed God. Yet “believing” Jesus to be one of these was an exercise void of faith. We know this because Jesus commends Peter for his belief, but not simply because it was his own belief, but rather because it was belief in testimony that came from heaven and not from men.

### **Failures In Distinguishing Between Faith And Opinion**

The area of generic and specific requirements has caused confusion among brethren.<sup>6</sup> One area is the refusal to take matters of faith seriously by placing them in the realm of opinion. They claim that because these have been touchy topics over the years, we would do better to leave them alone and concentrate on the “core Gospel.”

The first problem in this thinking is the assumption that differences over these issues cannot be reconciled Scripturally. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:33, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” Can there be any peace in not knowing the answer to a question? No, and neither can there be any faith. Furthermore, the same apostle said, “Let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4), meaning the entirety of human civilization might be wrong in a line of thinking but that does not change God’s truth. The problem is never with God’s message.

Another problem with this plea is that the “core Gospel” is the *entirety* of the New Testament and nothing less. Jesus’ command to His disciples (and subsequently all who would read) in the Great Commission stressed “teaching them all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20), not bits and pieces that were judged to be inoffensive

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<sup>6</sup> The concepts of generic and specific commands and silence are taken from Beals, George F. *How Implication Binds and Silence Forbids: Studies in Biblical Hermeneutics*. Ann Arbor, MI: PC Publications. 1998. Please see this work for more detailed analysis.

to others. His sending of the Holy Spirit in His name furthered the inspired acts of His disciples, as well as those documents we now have collected in that sacred covenant (John 16:13-15). When Paul tells Timothy that “all Scripture is profitable...” (2 Timothy 3:16) he is stressing that it is useful to solve whatever issue we have in any area, and that most definitely includes the church. That means that there is no issue in “the faith” that can be put in the “I don’t know” category. All actions can be deemed right or wrong by the use of Scripture.

When considering what to deem faith and what to call opinion, the following questions should be asked. (1) Is the issue explicitly or implicitly commanded or forbidden? (2) If it is commanded, are there other specifics given in scripture as to how to carry it out? (3) If it is commanded, and we have considered the other specifics, are there still aspects of how to carry out the command that God leaves to our judgment?

Let’s consider again the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20 says,

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

The explicit commands in this passage are to “go into all the world” and also to “teach the gospel to every creature,” to make disciples by baptizing, and to teach everything that Jesus commanded. All of these are specifics. However, there are implicit actions that *must* be taken for the process to be carried out. “Go” necessarily implies travel of some sort, so a judgment call must be made to travel by car, plane, boat, etc. While the gospel is what is specifically taught, how to teach is not. For instance, one teacher may have a lecture style that suits him, while another may do better asking questions and receiving answers from the class. The method of baptism must be immersion, but the location such as a river, pond, lake, etc. is to be determined by those carrying out the action.

While some call the topic of instrumental worship a divisive issue, this is actually an area which is an excellent study on faith and opinion. We can absolutely, with all clarity and with all belief (faith), come to the conclusion that singing is authorized worship and that to worship with mechanical instruments is sinful. How can this be determined? The New Testament authorizes singing as musical worship (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). It does not, however, authorize nor does it even mention the usage of

instruments as worship in our earthly service to God. As we have demonstrated, the absence of a passage authorizing instrumental worship, Biblical silence, can only persuade us *not* to use an instrument. For one to say “I think it is acceptable” or “I don’t think God cares” only places the topic in the realm of doubt, not certainty. But we can with certainty know that there is no authorization by searching our New Testament for confirmation. If someone “accepts” that instrumental worship is allowed, they do so blindly, and not by faith.

Yet, how do we ascertain what is a specific command and what is not? This is the other problem area—when people confuse expedient actions (matters of opinion) as binding principles (matters of faith). Say for instance that someone wanted to retrace the exact routes of Paul’s missionary journey to go and teach the world. Would such an action be wrong? No, because we do have an example of it being done. Would it be the most effective (expedient) way of carrying out the Great Commission? That would be debatable, considering the modes of transportation available to us now that weren’t around in Paul’s day. Yet we also could by no means say that such an example is binding on us today. Why? Paul’s location was very different than most of ours, for one. We also know that the other apostles went elsewhere out of necessity to fulfill the “all the world” portion of the Great Commission (Acts 1:8; 8:1; 9:31). So we can conclude that Paul’s response in carrying out the Great Commission is what is under observation, and not the method as binding.

There are many matters of opinion which rely on our judgment within the church today that threaten to separate us. If one contended that the travel portion of the Great Commission was the important part of the Scripture, but the “gospel” taught optional, that person would be absolutely wrong. Why? As we have seen, the means of travel was incidental, or optional, while the preaching of the gospel is obligatory. This therefore would be a liberal position toward the word of God. But if another person says that taking the exact routes of Paul in his missionary journeys is necessary because of Biblical example, this person is also absolutely wrong. Why? This is the legalist position. Jesus condemned such an approach in dealing with those who bound a tradition of handwashing (Matthew 15:9). While the practice was acceptable, the demands for it to be practiced were sinful.

Another example of one of these issues is eating in the church building. In 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 Paul told the church at Corinth: “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.” The verses following these are a “refresher course” of corrective teaching in how to properly partake of the Lord’s Supper. The point of emphasis here is treating the Lord’s Supper as a dinner party, not the location where the eating is transpiring. If we were to argue that the location is the emphasis here, the statement in verse 22, “Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” would force us to eat *only* in our own homes. Paul is condemning those in Corinth for not properly observing the Lord’s Supper in keeping with the teaching he had delivered to them, which teaching is still binding on us today.

### **The Plea For Unity**

When considering judgment matters, we must also consider that we do not all think alike. God has created us in His own image (Genesis 1:26) and has in turn left certain decisions in our control for bettering His kingdom. This is an enormous responsibility, but also a great indication of how much God cares for us. But because we are not perfect, not all matters of judgment will be executed perfectly. And because God has allowed freedom in these areas, not all matters of judgment will be executed the same. How do we handle these problems?

One question that may be raised is how can I be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10-13) if I am in disagreement with a brother or brethren over a matter of judgment? Such is a predicament that causes unnecessary harm within the church when not addressed properly. The following questions may be helpful in determining the course of we should take.

### **Have I Considered The Approach?**

As the church, we are to faithfully carry out the literal last will and testament of our Savior Jesus Christ. A good question to ask yourself is “do I handle issues like I am handling the last will of Christ?” Since Christ is the source, all issues will be taken with



the utmost sincerity. It is not “my will be done” but Christ’s will. If one enters matters of judgment with this mindset, it sets a productive tone immediately.

### **Have I Considered My Role?**

We are all to submit to Christ’s authority (Matthew 17:15; 28:18). Any authority that we have comes from His teachings and/or His revealed message. Elders in positions of authority should use their position to glorify the Lord’s kingdom by providing oversight that is the most helpful, not dictating authority for the sake of personal power (1 Peter 5:3). However, they should also realize that there are those in the church who, like Diotrophes, love the preeminence of getting their way. When these individuals are allowed to force their opinions upon a congregation, it does harm to those who are attempting to truly be faithful.

All members of a congregation are to submit to congregational leadership in matters over which God has granted them authority. If I am considerate of my role, I must recognize that I too must submit to congregational leadership in matters of opinion.

### **Am I Being Petty?**

The Bible teaches that all of us are to be submissive to one another with the goal of advancing the Kingdom in mind (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5). If we question the pettiness of our own position, it will shift the emphasis from where we normally place the blame (the other person) to where we don’t like to focus (ourselves). If we remember that God hates those who “sow discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:19), we might rethink our position.

There are times when we hold to a position simply because we came up with it. There are also times when we come up with an idea that isn’t met with the reception we thought our opinion deserved.

An example where this can occur is in a “men’s business meeting.” Because no elders are present and men are required to lead (1 Timothy 2:8-12), scenarios arise where opinions may be in conflict. Someone may have an excellent idea that gets shunned in favor of an idea that doesn’t seem so excellent. Wherever possible, we should be willing to submit. If the consensus in such a meeting does not meet our same judgment and we have taken the situation personally, perhaps we should seek meeting with other faithful brethren elsewhere. Paul and Barnabas remained faithful when they had a “contention”

that was “sharp” (Acts 15:39), but by no means did they seek to tarnish the church by not getting their way. Although they separated on a judgment call, Paul was still harmonious with Barnabas and even defended him against opposition (1 Corinthians 9:6). If a conclusion is drawn that differs from our own and we are hurt by it, it is better to go our separate ways for the time being. We must avoid confrontations over matters of opinion that would limit the church in developing strong members and spreading.

### **Am I “Endeavoring To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit In The Bond Of Peace” (Ephesians 4:3)?**

What is the “unity of the Spirit” in this passage? It is the “inspiration” Paul speaks of in 1 Timothy 3:16 discussed earlier. As he also declares in Second Peter 1:21, this is not something that man has arrived at independently; this is entirely “God breathed” through the Holy Spirit. Our plans, however well intended and heartfelt they may be, are not revelation. Surely we can realize that our thoughts must be kept in humble submission to God’s revealed wisdom. Notice the word “endeavoring” here. This is much easier to write in an article in a lectureship book than to put to practice! However, when we humble ourselves appropriately, it can only guarantee benefits—that is a promise (1 Peter 5:6).

### **Conclusion**

We can see then that it is possible to draw a clear distinction between matters of faith and matters of opinion by using the Scriptures appropriately and submitting to their teaching. Both proper handling of the truth and a proper attitude are required to discern between them.

## **A BALANCED PURPOSE: “IN-REACH” AND “OUT-REACH”**

Edwin Jones

I am convinced the balance between “In- reach” “Out-reach” is found in what I will call “same-reach.” In other words, I believe the Scriptures address the two areas of our subject with the same passage, a passage that provides the complete plan, the desired balance, and the fulfilling results God desires. The passage is Ephesians 4:11-16.

Ephesians 4:11-16 is a section of Scripture we might well call “Church 101.” Here we find the ministry of the Holy Spirit providing the church with a complete set of tools to fully equip it for God’s work of service. This “tool box” is the New Testament.

The New Covenant, by the implication of our passage, is said to represent “the faith” as a complete unit (i.e. “the unity of the faith” or “the faith’s unity,” note the Greek text). Additionally, it provides “the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, the measure and stature belonging to the fullness of Christ.”

“The faith” (Jude 3), represents the full mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16). The attention of the church is to be centered on the Christ (Colossians 3:1-3). The church is to be “conformed to the image of Christ” (Romans 8:29). Therefore, employing “the unity of the faith,” as Ephesians 4:11-16 requires, allows us to grow from the highly vulnerable state of immaturity to the truth-generated maturity of “growing up in all things to Him who is the head—Christ.”

God’s plan of “in-reach” is the very plan that “thoroughly furnishes” all brothers and sisters in His family for “out-reach.” Mature Christians are both equipped (I Peter 3:15) and compelled (II Corinthians 5:14-15) to reach out to the entire world. Who better to serve than those who are Christ-like? Who is better suited to be joined together in a fully-functioning, suitably-sharing family of believers than mature Christians (Ephesians 4:16)? Who would be better prepared or more eager for any aspect of God’s work than a mature, Christ-like Christian?

My point, I believe, has been made clear by our very brief overview of Ephesians 4:11-16. The balance between “in-reach” and “out-reach” is, therefore, simply yet profoundly, Christ-likeness. If we would be internally healthy in our congregations and externally engaged with our world, we must each grow into a mature Christ-likeness. If

the strength of our numbers is ever to be maximized in these two pursuits, our work together must be based on an ever growing Christ-likeness emphasis. The fact the Gospels amount to almost 50% of the content of the New Testament is no accident.

Consequently, we do not need pulpiteers; we need men who will equip Christians to serve (Ephesians 4:12). We do not need a primary focus on the doctrines of Christ; we need a primary focus on the Christ (John 16:12-15). Neither do we need a “Man not the plan” emphasis; we need a commitment to Jesus that will inform and enliven us with respect, that will internalize and follow His will (Galatians 6:14; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20). We do not need either self-vindication or self-congratulation (John 5:43-44), we need to examine ourselves to see if we pass the test of Christ (2 Corinthians 13:5). We need to be a people belonging to Jesus in every New Testament sense His ownership would imply.

Our Bible classes, preaching, planning, earning a living, going to school, visiting with neighbors, and everything honorable in which we engage is to have Jesus as its model. He must be our default system for the entirety of life. The more we are like Him the better we will acquire His balance between the needs of God’s faithful people and the needs of “sinners.”

## HOW “HOBBIES” HARM

Brian Kenyon

A lectureship on the theme of “Balance” is very much needed in our often “imbalanced” brotherhood. From the start, however, the word “balance,” as used by this writer, does not refer to straddling the fence as the image of a tight rope walker might portray to some. Rather, “balance” would better be compared to one’s diet of physical food. Our bodies were created to be maintained, among other things, by proper nutrition (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:13). However, when the physical body does not receive the proper nutrition, physical ailments begin to develop. The major reason for so much physical sickness and disease today can be traced, in large measure, to a lack of nutrition.

So also in the spiritual body, whether individually or congregationally, if we do not receive the proper nutrition, we will suffer spiritual ailments that could very well cost us our souls. As a balanced diet of physical food is to the physical body, so a balanced diet of spiritual food is to the spiritual body. Our spiritual bodies cannot function properly if our spiritual diet is not well balanced. Anything that would promote healthy, spiritual balance must be adhered to, while at the same time, anything that would interfere with healthy, spiritual balance must be avoided—thus, the importance of this lectureship!

The topic of this chapter, “How Hobbies Harm,” falls into the category of things that interfere with healthy, spiritual balance. Hobbies result in spiritual imbalance, plain and simple. The basic definition of a hobby is an occupation, activity, or interest to which people devote themselves. For the purpose of this chapter, we will define a hobby as “any Biblical or perceived Biblical subject with which one becomes obsessed to the point that this particular subject dominates his teaching, and he demands that all others understand the particular subject exactly as he does, with fellowship consequences implied for those who do not.”

This definition would include truly Biblical subjects that do require all to agree upon with fellowship consequences resulting upon those who do not agree (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10), but with which a person can be so obsessed that he loses focus on everything else involved with living a Christian life. Likewise, the definition would also include false doctrine with which we cannot agree and which carries fellowship

implications with those who adhere to it (cf. Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

### **A First Century Example: Judaizers**

The basis of our study to show how hobbies harm will be an examination of the Judaizing teachers and their antagonism toward the apostle Paul. Judaizing teachers, or Judaizers, were Jewish Christians who were trying to bind elements of the Law of Moses on Christians of the first century. Though the terms “Judaizing teacher” and/or “Judaizers” are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible—they are humanly coined terms—an example of their teaching is found in Acts 15, which opens, “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1, NKJ). Later in the chapter Luke recorded, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). Later, before his fellow apostles and elders, Peter asked those gathered in Jerusalem, “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15:10). The Judaizers were definitely the hobbyists of the first century church. Thus, an examination of the harm done by them is profitable to our study. While everything about the Judaizers may not be an exact parallel in every way to hobbyists today, many principles involved are the same and can help us to stay focused on healthy, spiritual balance.

### **Characteristics of the Judaizers**

The apostle Paul dealt with the Judaizing teachers primarily in two of his epistles, 2 Corinthians and Galatians. From Paul’s statements we can get a picture of the Judaizers.

First, the Judaizers were zealous to isolate faithful brethren from other faithful brethren so that the isolated brethren would in turn become zealous toward the Judaizers. After reminding the Galatians how they once received Paul, even “as Christ Jesus” Himself (Galatians 4:12-16), Paul wrote of the Judaizers, “They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you” (Galatians 4:17). The Galatians showed good zeal for Paul when he was there, but by the

time he wrote Galatians something caused their attitude to change. That something was the Judaizers. They were zealous toward the Galatians, but their zeal was not good because their motives were not pure.

“Zealously court” (“eagerly seek,” NAS; “make much of,” ESV) is from a word (*zeloo*, ζηλόω) that basically means to be jealous of; set one’s heart on, be deeply concerned about; show a great interest in (4:18; 1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:4; 14:1, 39). The word can be used in a good or bad sense. This context combines both senses (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2). The Judaizers’ zeal was “not good.” This “zeal” may mean they were envious of the Galatians’ liberty in Christ and/or their relationship with Paul, and thus the Judaizers wanted to destroy that liberty and/or relationship with Paul by bringing the Galatians into bondage. “Zeal” may mean they were pretending to be deeply concerned about the Galatians in order to win them over and bring them into bondage.

The Judaizers’ motives were wrong. The purpose for the Judaizers’ excluding the Galatians was so the Galatians would be “zealous” for the Judaizers. They wanted to create a vacuum and then fill it. Zeal is good when properly motivated, as was the case earlier in Paul’s presence among the Galatians (Galatians 4:18). When Paul was with them, they showed plenty of zeal, but in his absence, they did not (cf. Galatians 4:16).

The second characteristic Paul mentioned about the Judaizers involved their doctrine. When Paul wrote, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7), he was asking a rhetorical question, the answer of which obviously referred to the Judaizers. Then Paul gave specific characteristics about the Judaizers’ doctrine relevant to our study. Initially, the apostle said the Judaizers’ doctrine did not originate with God. Paul said, “This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you” (Galatians 5:8). “Persuasion” is translated from a word (*peismone*, πεισμονή), which only occurs here in the Greek New Testament, that refers to the influential means their doctrine was having. “Him that called you” is a reference to God (cf. Galatians 1:15; 1 Corinthians 1:9), who calls through the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Due to the Judaizers’ doctrine, the Galatians were in the process of not only rejecting Paul, but rejecting God himself (cf. 1 Samuel 8:7-8). To say “No” to God is “a mild way of declaring that they have begun to say ‘Yes’ to Satan, who is using the Judaizers in the distortion of the only true gospel” (cf. Matthew 13:25, 28) (Hendricksen 202).

Next, Paul identified the doctrine of the Judaizers as influential, though it may have seemed insignificant to some. Paul likened the “persuasion” that hindered the Galatians from continuing in the truth to leaven when he wrote, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9). Literally, leaven is a substance such as yeast that is used to make bread rise—it only takes a very small amount to cause a very large amount of dough to rise. Figuratively, “leaven” is used for influence, whether good (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:21), or bad (Matthew 16:6, 11-12; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). In the figurative analogy, the “lump of dough” (NAS) applies to the churches of Galatia, who have allowed the Judaizers to influence them away from the truth. “Unless checked, this Judaizing tendency, though small in itself, will permeate the whole Christian community in Galatia, and make self-offering to God [cf. Romans 12:1] both impossible and unacceptable” (Cole 197).

Paul, however, was optimistic that the Galatians would realize their error and re-grasp the Gospel, when he wrote, “I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind” (Galatians 5:10a). Paul’s confidence is “in the Lord.” That is, it is based on the power of the Gospel and being “in Christ” (Romans 14:14). The meaning of “have no other mind”—which is also translated “adopt no other view” (NAS), and “take no other view but mine” (ESV)—is somewhat difficult but seems to carry the idea that the Galatians will be consistent either with: (1) Paul’s Gospel as a whole; (2) their original attitude toward Paul; (3) what Paul has just written; or (4) a combination of these (Cole 198).

While being optimistic of the Galatians’ future, Paul warned that the Judaizers would have to bear their own judgment, “but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is” (Galatians 5:10b). “Troubles” (“is disturbing,” NAS) means to upset; terrify, or frighten (Galatians 1:7). “Whoever he is” does not necessarily mean that Paul does not know the identity of the troubler, but can refer to “whatever his position is” (cf. Galatians 2:6). The use of the singular may be representative of all of them or just the ringleader.

The third characteristic Paul mentioned about the Judaizers was their complete irrationality. If Paul bound circumcision, he would not be opposed by the Judaizers. He wrote, “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?



Then the offense of the cross has ceased” (Galatians 5:11). The statement, “If I still preach circumcision,” may very well be a reply to accusations that he did preach circumcision when it suited him (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:18) (Boice 490). The Judaizers would not be offended at Paul’s preaching if he included circumcision. “Offense (‘stumbling block,’ NAS, from *skandalon*, σκάνδαλον) refers to that which causes stumbling or trouble, an obstacle (Romans 9:33; 11:19; 14:13; 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:23). Circumcision made a distinction between Jew and Gentile and male and female, which distinction the Judaizers approved, but the Gospel Paul preached removed all such distinctions (cf. Galatians 3:26-29).

The Judaizers are so irrational they might as well castrate themselves as to bind circumcision as a matter of salvation. Paul, perhaps sarcastically, wrote, “I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” (Galatians 5:12). Note the different ways this is translated: “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” (KJV); “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves” (NAS); “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!” (ESV); “I would that they that unsettle you would even go beyond circumcision” (ASV). The Greek term for “cut off” used here is in the middle voice, meaning to mutilate or castrate oneself (Deuteronomy 23:2, LXX). The point Paul makes is that if the Judaizers are so enthusiastic about circumcision, one form of mutilation without God’s authority, why not go all the way and castrate themselves, another form of unauthorized mutilation (cf. pagan practices in Galatia at the time) (Cole 201). If Paul is being sarcastic, he would be saying, “I wish they would go ahead and circumcise themselves from us!”

### **Judaizers Compared To Hobbyists**

As mentioned earlier, while not exactly the same in every respect, the Judaizers of Paul’s day were similar to the hobbyists of our day. There is, however, one major difference: The Judaizers of Paul’s day preached a false Gospel every time, whereas today’s hobbyists do not. Though some hobbyists do preach a false Gospel, even if they all do not, when they ride their hobby to the point that they demand all others understand the particular subject exactly as they do, with fellowship consequences implied for those who do not, they become like the Judaizers of Paul’s day in that they obsessively require

from others what God does not. Keeping that distinction in mind, let us make a comparison between what Paul said about the Judaizers and the hobbyists of today.

First, like the Judaizers of old, today's hobbyists are very zealous in seeking to isolate faithful brethren from other faithful brethren based on the acceptance or rejection of the hobbyists' particular hobby. This zeal is seen in the tremendous efforts that are put forth in such things as vigorously combing over the recorded sermons and writings of individuals whose supposed teachings and/or personalities are the focus of a particular hobby; creating websites dedicated to promoting a particular hobby (and destroying those who do not adhere to the particular hobby); and copying emails to people who have little or nothing to do with the situation that launched the hobbyist's particular hobby. All this is done in an effort to isolate faithful brethren who do not agree with the hobbyists' position. Once faithful brethren are excluded from other faithful brethren, the only fellowship option that seems viable is to have fellowship with the hobbyists. Thus, the hobbyists gain more into their "fellowship." These zealous tactics have commonalities with the scribes and Pharisees upon whom Jesus pronounced a woe, then said, "For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

Second, like the Judaizers of old, today's hobbyists become doctrinally unsound. Again, this is not to say that every doctrine they teach that turns into their hobby is false, but even when a Biblical doctrine is taught to the point that this particular subject dominates a person's teaching and he demands that all others understand the particular subject exactly as he does or else the one differing will be disfellowshipped, then the hobbyist becomes doctrinally unsound.

The influence of the hobby depends on the particular hobby and those involved. Sometimes, as in the case of the churches in Galatia, the influence can be devastating. In other cases, because the hobby and the people involved are so ridiculous that most informed brethren can see right through them, the hobby is not as devastating. However, any amount of harm done to the body of Christ is significant and must be avoided if possible (cf. Matthew 18:8; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13). Thus, the doctrinal influence of all hobbies is damaging, though some more than others.

Third, like the Judaizers of old, today's hobbyists are irrational. Their irrationality is evident in at least two ways. One way is that their fellowship practices are extremely inconsistent. Some hobbyists will have no fellowship with select people who do not agree with their particular hobby, but when it comes to family members or certain friends, they apparently ignore the standards upon which they base fellowship. For example, they will have no fellowship with a congregation because they support a work that the hobbyist does not approve, yet a family member who is active in that congregation will not be publically marked as others are.

Another way today's hobbyists are obviously irrational is the pseudo-logic they sometimes use. This pseudo-logic does not come from uneducated, logician "want-to-bes." Rather, what makes the irrationality so obvious is that some of the hobbyists have well deserved reputations of being very logical in areas outside their particular hobby, but when they seek to justify their hobby and harm the reputation of those who do not agree, they become very illogical. The irrationality of hobbyists sometimes has this writer, like Paul's possibly sarcastic statement in Galatians 5:12, asking himself, "If they are so against faithful brethren who do not agree with their hobby, why don't they just go ahead and circumcise themselves from us!"

### **Particular Harm Done By Hobbyists**

The previous sections about the characteristics of the Judaizing teachers of Paul's day and comparing those characteristics with the hobbyists of today show, in a general way, the harm done to the body of Christ. Now let us consider specific ways of how hobbies harm. Keep in mind as we go through this section that when Paul defends himself against the Judaizers, the truths he often declares about himself are likely in response to accusations the Judaizers made against him to the brethren in Corinth and Galatia. Thus, for the remainder of this study, we will examine the things Paul said in defense of his work against the Judaizers' claims and apply these principles to the harm hobbyists do today to the body of Christ and, by extension, the world in general (cf. John 17:20-26).

### **Hobbies Suppress The Whole Counsel Of God**

One major way hobbies harm is by not allowing the whole counsel of God to be taught (cf. Acts 20:27), which in turn leads to other problems, all of which hinder church

growth, the spread of the Gospel, and the salvation of souls. This harm is illustrated by examining at least two passages where Paul defends his work. First, in defending his work to the Corinthians, Paul wrote,

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15-17)

Far from “stinking up the place,” Paul and his coworkers were “the fragrance of Christ” among the people they influenced. Paul and his coworkers do not change the word of God to make it more attractive like the Judaizers did. “Who is sufficient?” focuses the fact that not just anybody is sufficient to faithfully discharge the Gospel (cf. Paul’s opponents) (2 Corinthians 2:16b). “Sufficient” (“adequate,” NAS) is from a word that means worthy, fit; sufficient, able (2 Corinthians 2:6; 3:5; 1 Corinthians 15:9; 2 Timothy 2:2). Paul was not sufficient within himself (1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 4:1; Galatians 2:7), but his sufficiency was of God (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Paul and his coworkers were different from many teachers who had contact with the Corinthians. They were not like the many who peddled God’s word. “Peddling” means to peddle for profit. This word literally meant “to trade in,” or “peddle,” but because many of the petty merchants would mix water with grape juice and/or use false balances, it came to have a negative connotation (Kruse 87). The word was also used to describe “inauthentic philosophers” who sold their teaching for money (Thompson 40). The fact that Paul later defends himself for not taking monetary support from the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:7-9) seems to indicate that these peddlers were teaching for money, which means they would “corrupt” God’s word to make it more attractive. Paul and his coworkers, however, were sincere with the approval of God (2 Corinthians 2:17b). “Sincerity” is the opposite of the deceit practiced by those who “peddled” God’s word. “In the sight of God” and “speak . . . Christ” further assures Paul’s integrity. Preachers must not dilute or change the message to make it more attractive to potential “customers.”

Second, in defending what he preached, Paul wrote,

For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:5-6)

Paul and his coworkers were servants of Christ. They themselves were not the content of their preaching. As mentioned earlier, Paul's defense that "we do not preach ourselves" likely reflects an accusation by Paul's opponents that he preached himself (which also probably implied that the Judaizers were the ones who actually preached themselves). Whether that is the case, the content of Paul's preaching was clear—he preached "Christ Jesus the Lord" and he and his coworkers as the Corinthians' "bondservants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5a). "Christ Jesus the Lord" was the content of Paul's preaching (1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:5 cf. Acts 2:22-37; 13:26-47).

Rather than promoting themselves, Paul and his coworkers are quite the opposite—they are the Corinthians' servants (2 Corinthians 4:5b). The word translated "bondservants" (from *doulos*, δούλος) refers to a slave (Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:5-6; 2 Timothy 2:24; 1 Peter 2:16). The fact that Paul and his coworkers were the Corinthians' "bondservants" on account of Jesus shows that a right relationship with Christ leads to a right relationship with others. Paul's "service to them is a service to Christ" (Thompson 61).

Contrary to preaching themselves, Paul and his coworkers were simply communicating what God had given them (2 Corinthians 4:6). Paul's use of light shining in darkness here has been taken in different ways, but no matter which of the Scriptural possibilities one takes, it is clear that Paul was showing that his ministry was with Christ's authority, and was, therefore, superior to that of the Judaizers who so actively opposed him. The "knowledge of the glory of God" was the "light" to which Paul referred that dispels darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6b cf. John 1:6-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 2 Peter 3:18). The "face of Jesus Christ," as opposed to the veiled face of Moses mentioned earlier (2 Corinthians 3:7, 13) was where the fulfillment of God's new covenant stood (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18).

Like the Judaizers of old, hobbyists today suppress the whole counsel of God. Even when the subject of their hobby is a legitimate and needed Bible subject, when it

becomes the entire focus of one's prolonged teaching, then it prevents other, needed subjects from being taught. Sometimes the desire of the hobbyist to force his hobby on others results in his distorting God's word to make it appear as if it supports the extreme position taken by the hobbyist (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). Thus, like Paul's opponents, the hobbyist becomes a "peddler" of God's word and promoter of self, wanting to make his hobby as attractive as possible to the "customers" he seeks to enroll in his "fellowship" of hobbyists. Indeed, hobbies harm by suppressing the whole counsel of God.

### **Hobbies Seek To Please Men**

While hobbyists often claim they are legitimately concerned about brethren and the welfare of Christ's church, their actions often betray that claim. While Saul of Tarsus was never among the Judaizers (because he was not a Christian when he persecuted the church), his "hobby" included some of what the Judaizers taught—keeping the Law of Moses. In a verse that served as a transition from Paul's introductory comments in the Book of Galatians to the main body of that epistle, Paul wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). Of particular interest to this study is the clause, "For if I still pleased men." Serving Christ and pleasing people at the Gospel's expense are completely incompatible! Being the slave of Christ means a willingness to give up all for Him, including having the favor of men (cf. John 12:42-43)! The word "still" shows that in the final analysis when Saul of Tarsus served Judaism, he was actually doing it to please men (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1-3), not to please God as he was deceived into thinking (cf. Acts 23:1). This also is true of hobbyists today. They may truly be deceived into thinking they are serving God, but in the final analysis, as their actions reveal, they are serving to please men, especially members and potential members of their "fellowship" of hobbyists.

Furthermore, the point of hobbyists harming through men-pleasing is illustrated by two passages where Paul defends his apostleship against the Judaizers' claims against him. First, Paul revealed the men-pleasing status of the Judaizers when he wrote, "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?" (2 Corinthians 3:1). This verse is found in a section where Paul defended his ministry by showing that it spoke for

itself. Behind each of the rhetorical questions in the verse, which expected a negative answer, stood an actual or expected charge against Paul by the Judaizers (Harris 332).

Behind the question, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves?” was the charge that Paul was recommending himself. The word “commend” means to recommend, or give approval to (2 Corinthians 5:12; 10:12). The issue of commending was crucial in 2 Corinthians (4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18). The fact that Paul was commended by the Lord separated him from the Judaizers. Behind the question, “[D]o we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?” was the charge that since Paul was not sent with letters of recommendation from the Judaizers, he must be suspect. Paul was not here negating the importance of letters of recommendation (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24; Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:3, 10-11), but showing that there is no need for them in his situation—his work among the Corinthians spoke for itself. Just because brethren have letters of recommendation, like the Judaizers possessed, does not mean that they have God’s approval.

Second, in a section where Paul showed his determination to be true to his ministry, he wrote,

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Paul refused to be discouraged, for his ministry was a result of his receiving God’s mercy (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-16). Paul then described the conduct of his ministry both negatively and positively. Again, Paul’s statements here seem to be a defense against the accusations of the Judaizers (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:2; 12:16)—the opposite of these would apply to the Judaizers.

Negatively, Paul renounced hidden things that caused shame, “not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2a). The Greek term for “renounced” is aorist tense, and as used here the action is “timeless and does not mean that he had previously practiced what he says that he has renounced” (Rogers and Rogers 339). Paul did not deceive nor distort the word of God. “Deceitfully” (“adulterating,” NAS; “tamper with,” ESV) means to use deceit, to use bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error, or to falsify (Rogers and Rogers 399). The Greek word is used only

here, but “its use in the papyri in relation to the dilution of wine suggests that Paul had in mind the corruption of the word of God by mingling it with alien ideas” (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:17; Colossians 2:8, 18) (Kruse 102). Judaizers tampered with God’s word by teaching a different Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4) and a different Gospel (Galatians 1:6-7).

Positively, Paul did openly offer himself and his message for the close scrutiny of all—“by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2b). Paul commended himself and his coworkers, but not as his opponents commended themselves (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:22-23). Paul appealed to his hearers’ “conscience” (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:12; 5:11). In other words, Paul had no problem in allowing anyone to unbiasedly evaluate his character and his teachings, which spoke for themselves, without having to isolate or force brethren to accept what he taught. “In the sight of God” is opposite of “hidden” (2 Corinthians 4:2a).

Like the Judaizers of Paul’s time, some hobbyists today ultimately seek to please men. Though they often seemed truly concerned, their actions belied their claims of sincerity. They must constantly do the things that please their “fellowship,” even when they know better. For example, some hobbyists are aware of the inconsistency of their “fellowship’s” practice, yet they go along with it, seemingly for fear of being outcast from those peers. Hobbyists must also “commend themselves” in order to maintain a sense of belonging. Yet Paul warned,

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. . . . For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. (2 Corinthians 10:12-18)

If hobbyists are not careful, they too will end up preaching another Jesus and another Gospel in their efforts to advance their hobby and please men.

### **Hobbies Seek To Harm Faithful Preachers’ Reputations**

In Paul’s defense of his ministry, he makes several statements that indicate the Judaizers were attempting to ruin his reputation among the Corinthians. In addition to the items mentioned above, which carry implications of reputation damaging accusations,



there are at least five other passages that indicate the Judaizers' tactic in trying to destroy the reputation of the apostle.

First, the Judaizers implied that Paul was too much of a cowardly low-life to meet them face to face. The apostle wrote, "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you [the Corinthians] by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you" (2 Corinthians 10:1). In the latter part of this verse (that begins, "who in presence . . ."), Paul adopts the description of himself that the Judaizers used. They taught that Paul was strong and forceful at a distance, but weak when in their presence! The word "lowly" is here used in a "bad sense . . . expressing depression when it is the effect of the want of courage" (Rogers and Rogers 411).

This same character smear is found a few verses later, where Paul, speaking of what the Judaizers claim, wrote, "For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Corinthians 10:9-11). The word "contemptible" ("of no account," ESV, from *exoutheneo*, ἐξουθενέω, to count as nothing; 1 Corinthians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:20). From this verse, some have surmised that Paul was physically weak, but note that this is what "they [the Judaizers] say" about him. According to his opponents, Paul "created a completely different impression through his letters from that which was created through his appearance, causing him to appear 'two faced'" (Thompson 142). "Weighty" letters are the opposite of "weak" physical presence, and "powerful" letters are the opposite of "contemptible" speaking ability (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4). Paul later accepted the charge of "weakness" as a likeness of Christ and thus a sign of an apostle (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:4).

Hobbyists today likewise imply (and sometimes even explicitly state) that those who do not agree with their hobby and/or refuse to engage them concerning it are "cowards." Let us not be discouraged. If Paul, who followed the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:1), suffered this kind of character assault, then we can expect the same (cf. Matthew 10:24-25).

Second, the Judaizers implied that Paul was living for the gratification of the flesh, perhaps even taking advantage of the brethren for his own personal gain. Paul wrote of some, "who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians

10:2). Paul went on to say that though living in the flesh, he was not motivated by the flesh, but was working his ministry according to Divine power (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 cf. Ephesians 6:10-12). There is a difference between living in the flesh and living according to the flesh (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 8:5-8)! Hobbyists today often claim that those who do not agree with nor practice their hobby must be serving only for personal gain, whether it be for money, prestige, or a “cushy” job! Such claims, however, are for the purpose of hurting another’s reputation.

Third, the Judaizers implied that Paul did not really belong to Christ. In the section covering 2 Corinthians 10:7-11, Paul pointed out that not only was he just as authoritative as his opponents, he was actually much more authoritative than them! In 2 Corinthians 10:7-8 he argued from outward appearance—he would later give more objective criteria for testing apostolic authority (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:8; 11:23-28; 12:9-15; 13:5-6). Contrary to his opponents’ accusations, Paul truly belonged to Christ, when in reality they did not. If outward appearance was the criteria for his apostolic authority, then Paul was just as authoritative as the Judaizers. He wrote, “Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ’s, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ’s, even so we are Christ’s” (2 Corinthians 10:7). When Paul’s behavior in the Corinthians’ presence was observed, his boasting would be vindicated rather than his being put to shame. “For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed” (2 Corinthians 10:8). “Boast” (“glory,” ASV) means to take pride in; rejoice, be glad. Paul used this Greek word to refer to his confidence in the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:4, 14; 8:24). Paul’s apostolic authority and his belonging to Christ were ultimately for building up the church, not for destroying it (2 Corinthians 10:8b cf. Jer. 1:10). Hobbyists today often think they are the only ones who actually belong to Christ because, in their minds, they are the only ones who are truly “adhering to the pattern.” However, like Paul said of the Judaizers, some hobbyists today really do not belong to Christ—their hobby riding has taken them away from edifying the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26).

Fourth, the Judaizers implied that Paul sinned against the Corinthians by disregarding their hospitality in his refusal to accept their financial support. Paul wrote,

“Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you” (2 Corinthians 11:7-8). Before looking at this in detail, some preliminary considerations are in order. The Corinthians may have felt offended because Paul would not allow them to support him (cf. rejecting hospitality), especially since this required Paul to resort to manual labor (cf. Acts 18:1-4). Among the Greeks, “it was regarded as degrading for a philosopher or itinerant teacher to engage in manual work to supply his needs” (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10) (Kruse 187). Paul’s opponents twisted his refusal to accept support into “evidence” that Paul did not really love or care for the Corinthians. Second century history shows that abuse by traveling preachers became so prevalent that the *Didache* said, “When an Apostle [one claiming to be sent] goes forth let him accept nothing but bread till he reach his night’s lodging; but if he asks for money, he is a false prophet” (quoted in Thompson 153).

Paul did not sin by refusing to accept support (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:3-14). The question Paul asked expected an obvious answer (2 Corinthians 11:7a). Paul humbled himself by resorting to manual labor to support himself (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:9). Paul’s lowering himself was so that the Corinthians might “be exalted.” By working to support himself, Paul was able to preach the Gospel “free of charge.” Paul’s purpose in not accepting financial support from the Corinthians was to serve them (2 Corinthians 11:8). Paul used other churches’ support for his work among the Corinthians. The Greek word translated “robbed” (from *sulao*, σιλάω) was a word used outside Biblical writings for the robbing of temples and/or the plundering of captured or dead soldiers (Rogers and Rogers 414). Paul likely used such a strong word to show the lengths to which he would go in order to preach free of charge. He “robbed” other congregations in the sense that he accepted money from them, which funds they could have used for other work in the Lord. Hobbyists today are often so focused on their hobby that they wrongly “connect the dots” and have those who do not agree with their hobby guilty of all kinds of sin and ulterior motives.

Fifth, the Judaizers implied that Paul was driven by selfish ambition to deceive the Corinthians. “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (2 Corinthians 12:15). Paul was happy

to make the sacrifices necessary for the Corinthians' spiritual well being. Paul was not only willing to spend his resources in helping them, but he was also willing to sacrifice himself. "Be spent" means to spend in the sense of spending oneself fully, or sacrificing oneself (cf. Romans 9:3; Philippians 2:17). Given the type of sacrifice Paul was willing to make for the Corinthians, they should have loved him even more, but instead they were deceived by the Judaizers to think Paul was driven by selfish ambition.

Paul denied deceitfully taking advantage of the Corinthians when he stated, "But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!" (2 Corinthians 12:16). All would agree that Paul did not financially "burden" them. The clause, "Being crafty, I caught you . . ." has been the subject of differing opinions, but it seems to serve as Paul's (sarcastic?) answer to the Judaizers' charge that he was deceitful (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:11). The exact "cunning" with which Paul "caught" them may refer to his opponents' accusations that he was using the collection for the saints as a way of making financial gain (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:17-18). Hobbyists today often make the claim that other brethren serve from selfish ambition, thus harming their reputation and their valuable contributions to the church's growth.

### **Hobbies Corrupt And Cheat The Local Church**

In a verse where Paul sought to restore the affection from the Corinthians that was lost by their allowing themselves to be deceived by the Judaizers, Paul wrote, "Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one" (2 Corinthians 7:2). The three things he denied doing were likely charges the Judaizers leveled against him. Before considering those charges, consider Paul's touching request for the Corinthians' affection. "Open your hearts" ("make room . . . in your hearts," NAS) is from one Greek word that means make room for, have room for; accept; hold (Matthew 19:11-12; John 8:37; 2 Peter 3:9). The verb form (aorist imperative) used here suggests that Paul was looking for specific action on their part to show their affection toward him (Kruse 141).

As is the case many times, the ones who often accuse others, are in fact guilty of those same sins (cf. Romans 2:21-23). Thus, while the Judaizers accused Paul of harming the church at Corinth, they were the ones who were actually doing the harm. So it is with the hobbyists of our day. They are the ones who wrong, corrupt, and cheat the church by

suppressing the whole counsel of God, by desiring to please men (especially the “fellowship” of their hobby) at the expense of the Gospel, and by seeking to destroy faithful brethren’s reputations.

### **Conclusion**

Most of the time hobbies develop out of legitimate concerns and a desire to truly follow God. However, once the hobby gets rolling, all kinds of harm to individual Christians and the church will result. In the New Testament, the Judaizing teachers of Paul’s day bore a striking resemblance to today’s hobbyists. May the Lord give us the knowledge, wisdom, and courage to never lose focus on the whole counsel of God and to resist the temptation to ride a hobby to the destruction of the church.

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## **PHARISEES, GNATS, AND WEIGHTY MATTERS**

Jimmy Clark

The subject of balance underscores the fact that extremism is a dangerous entity. The Bible is clear as to the nature of what pleases God when it comes to handling His word. The Lord said to Joshua, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:7, KJV). Joshua reminded the nation in his great discourse at the end of the book, “Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left;” (Joshua 23:6). The inspired prophet Moses had made it clear to the nation before his death that God’s word was not to be used haphazardly or as anyone wished according to his own thinking. Moses wrote, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). Notice how the Holy Spirit through Moses stressed that the ability to keep the commandment of God was due to neither adding to nor taking from what God actually said. One is not to read into what God did not say nor is one to explain away what God has said.

By the time one gets to the days of Jesus Christ on the earth, consider what was already present. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:23-24). Luke’s account states similarly of these words, “But woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone” (Luke 11:42). Jesus had already stated previously to a multitude in Galilee, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Jesus also said to his disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). This is

further explained to refer to the doctrine or teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (cf. Matthew 16:11-12). It becomes imperative, therefore, that every Bible student understands what produced the doctrine and righteousness of the Pharisees so that one can avoid all aspects of such thinking.

### **The Pharisaic Mindset Advanced**

The history of the sect of the Pharisees goes back before the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Dietrich Muller wrote concerning the earliest reference,

The designation is only attested in Hellenistic Judaism up till the time of the NT, but not at all in the LXX.... The word was used in the Gk. form by Josephus and in the NT. The date of the appearance of the designation can no longer be precisely fixed. The first occurrences are from the time of Hyrcanus I (c. 135 B.C.). From the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. (under the reign of Alexandra [76-67 B.C.]) onwards, however, the Pharisees were in the public esteem, the most respected and thus the leading group of Judaism (810).

There is no question about the influence of the Pharisees among the Jewish community as Jesus specifically stated, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:2-3). Jesus had previously stated to certain of this mind, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:39-40). Again, Jesus stated to them, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (John 8:45-46). The Pharisees had many years to plant the seeds of their philosophy among the people.

The political circumstances of the day along with the divided state of Judaism led to the strength of the Pharisaic sect. J. S. Howson wrote of the Pharisees and the rise of their power,

They "compassed sea and land to make one proselyte." Their power and influence with the mass of the people was immense. The loss of the national independence of the Jews—the gradual extinction of their political life, directly by the Romans, and indirectly by the family of Herod—caused their feelings to rally around their Law and their Religion, as the only center of unity which now remained to them. Those, therefore, who gave their energies to the interpretation and exposition of the Law not curtailing any of the doctrines which were virtually contained in it, and

which had been revealed with more or less clearness, but rather accumulating articles of faith, and multiplying the requirements of devotion: who themselves practiced a severe and ostentatious religion, being liberal in almsgiving, fasting frequently, making long prayers, and carrying casuistical distinctions into the smallest details of conduct; who consecrated, moreover, their best zeal and exertions to the spread of the fame of Judaism, and to the increase of the nation's power in the only way which now was practicable, -- could not fail to command the reverence of great numbers of the people. It was no longer possible to fortify Jerusalem against the heathen: but the Law could be fortified like an impregnable city. The place of the brave is on the walls and in the front of the battle: and the hopes of the nation rested on those who defended the sacred outworks, and made successful inroads on the territories of the Gentiles (32-33).

They firmly believed they were the heart and soul of the promise made to Abraham—that merely having Abraham's flesh and blood in their family line made them special before God. John the Baptist strictly rebuked this notion when he stated, "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). Jesus illustrated the mindset when he gave the account of the Pharisee and the publican who went to the temple to pray. Jesus stated of the Pharisee, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11). Their righteousness was centered on their keeping the traditions of the elders believing that such was equal to truly keeping the Law as God gave it. It turned out to be zeal without knowledge (cf. Rom. 10:1-3).

### **The Problematic "Minors" Attended**

The Pharisees were noted for their meticulous scrutinizing of the Scriptures. Muller again gives specifics as to their practice. "The legal prescriptions of Scripture were observed with minute attention to detail . . . It is significant that the Halachah, the body of legal decisions which interpreted the law, was reckoned to be equally as binding as the biblical tradition. This is illustrated by Shammai's reply to the question, 'How many Torah do you have?': 'Two; the written Torah and the oral Torah' (Shabbath 31a)" (Dietrich, 811). The attempt to try to make as practical as possible the meaning of how to observe the Law led to the formation of commandments of men that were considered



binding as the word of God itself. Such is a great danger in the use of the Bible in any setting.

Jesus did not, however, condemn their tithing of various herbs as seen from Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42 with the words “these ought ye to have done.” Tithing was very much a legislative requirement by God (cf. Deuteronomy 14:22). The problem with the Pharisees had to do with their misplaced emphasis on outward, ritualistic forms. Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, “For we know that the law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). As a Pharisee, Paul had great confidence in this system of the flesh. He wrote to the Philippians, “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:” (Philippians 3:4). He gives further elaboration on his former confidence by saying, “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:5-6). When Paul became a Christian, his confidence changed from the perverted side of Pharisaic Judaism to the truth. He wrote further, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss of Christ” (Philippians 3:7). Jesus summarized the problem of Phariseeism, when he stated of their traditions, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:7-9). What the law actually said was to be observed by those under the law. What the Pharisees stated by oral tradition that contradicted the written instruction of the law was to be avoided. They lost sight of the spiritual meaning of the law.

Jesus stressed clearly in what is called the sermon of the mount, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time” (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) as a reference to the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matthew 5:20). However, their righteousness was merely an outward show toward men (cf. Matthew 6:1, 5, 16). Jesus later stated plainly, “But all their works they do for to be seen of men:” (Matthew 23:5). While the “gnats” or small matters of the law were stressed, they went too far in their applications by adding to and taking from what the law actually stated by their oral traditions.

### **The Paramount Matters Avoided**

Matthew's account stated the Pharisees "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23). Luke's account states that they "pass over judgment and the love of God" (Luke 11:42). It is important to take a look at what an avoidance of these things brings to one's religious life.

When judgment as defined by God is avoided, the rule of law is substituted for the rule of man. Those in control tend to make decisions for others based upon human will and not according to the divine will of God. The fear of God is lost and the fear of men becomes the focus. The perverted idea that having confidence in the flesh kept them from the judgment of God brought about great abuses. Jesus illustrated this, when he stated, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation" (Matthew 23:14). Paul addressed a similar problem in his nation, where he wrote, "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approves things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law" (Romans 2:17-20). These Jews believed that the real sinners were the Gentile world and not themselves. The first three chapters of the book of Romans reveal that both the Old and New Testaments clearly show both Jew and Gentile are sinners before God apart from the redemption that is in Christ (cf. Romans 3:23-26). Knowing the judgment of God should make man act accordingly, even to his fellow man.

When mercy is avoided, religion takes on an ugly side. God is not just the God of righteous judgment (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5) but also "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). The confused Judaizers tended to show favor to those who were like them. Paul wrote, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). The mercy of God is seen in the giving of His Son for redemption (cf. Ephesians 2:4; Titus 3:5). The mercy of God will be extended to those in the kingdom who "are merciful" (Matthew 5:7). James wrote concerning mercy, "For he shall have

judgment without mercy, that hath shown no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13). While both “the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22) ought to be stressed, it is the goodness of God that “leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4). The Pharisaic spirit that avoided the mercy of God to be extended to others outside their circle of friends caused them to misunderstand the meaning of the command “love thy neighbor as thyself” (cf. Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:29).

By avoiding the love of God, men fail to concentrate on the greatest quality of the Bible. Paul wrote concerning love, “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Colossians 3:14). He wrote earlier to the Corinthians, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Man would never understand agape (love) without seeing the love of God. John wrote, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The Pharisees became unlovable by avoiding the great love of God. Agape became a foreign concept to them.

When the scribes and Pharisees omitted faith as being a weighty matter, they lost sight of the true connection between man and God. Paul clearly revealed what happened to his nation who sought righteousness apart from faith. “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:31-33). Leaving Jesus out of personal redemption leaves man in his sins standing before God in judgment. It is clearly written in the book of Hebrews, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Paul wrote in the Roman letter, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). Seeing that salvation is by

grace and not by meritorious works (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9), faith is a key element to the applying of grace. Paul wrote also in the book of Romans, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16). When works are separated from faith, works become meritorious. When faith is separated from works, faith becomes dead (cf. James 2:17, 26) and of no profit (cf. James 2:14). Obedience to the Lord (cf. Hebrews 5:9) is not actions of meritorious works when faith is tied to the actions. One is not trusting in the action or self when obeying, but in the object of faith; namely, Christ. One shows his faith by his works (cf. James 2:18). Paul made it clear to the Galatians, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6). Jesus clearly revealed what happens to the dispositions and deeds of men when they trust in themselves that they are righteous; namely, they despise others (cf. Luke 18:9).

The study of the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day is a study in zeal that lacked knowledge. The intent to be distinctive was not governed by the clear teaching of the written revelation of God. Man’s wisdom supplanted the wisdom of God in the Scriptures, which led to an off-balance approach to religion. While it is good to be careful to uphold things that are clearly specified in the Bible, one must not leave out the fundamentals of the faith that bring all men to salvation.

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## **“FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH”**

Amanda Genter

It would be difficult for us as humans to find balance in our lives if the reactions to us were as polarizing as those Jesus experienced. Knowledge of His birth prompted some to seek Him out in wonder, as with the shepherds in the region who were eager to “go straight to Bethlehem” as soon as they heard about their Savior’s birth from the angels and then did so “in haste” (Luke 2:8-16)<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, the wise men who traveled from their own country in the East following the star which informed them of Jesus’ birth and led them to their object of worship (Matthew 2:1-12). This same knowledge caused another, Herod, to slay all male children aged two and under who lived in the Bethlehem area, just to protect himself from a rival to the throne (Matthew 2:1-7, 16). The dichotomy persisted throughout Jesus’ ministry. On the one hand were those who flocked to Him to hear His teachings or experience His miracles, and on the other were those who sought after Jesus to gain fuel for their plot to kill Him.

These opposing behaviors bring to mind another unbalancing force. How difficult it must be to go through life without being truly understood by those around us, including our closest friends and family. Herod was not the only one who believed that Jesus would rule an earthly kingdom (Matthew 2:1-6). Time and again we see that Jesus had to refute this concept even among those closest to Him. In their harmony of the gospels, Thomas and Gundry note that “in spite of His reiterated prophecy of suffering and resurrection, the twelve did not comprehend yet (Luke 18:34) because they still anticipated a mighty Messianic conqueror who would establish His Kingdom on earth.”<sup>2</sup> This is why James and John, according to the Mark 10:35-45 account, or their mother, according to the Matthew 20:20-28 account, requested seats to Jesus’ right and left in His kingdom. “This request for places of honor showed a continuing feeling among the disciples that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to restore the glory of the fallen throne and Kingdom of David.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite these potentially unbalancing forces, Jesus lived a balanced life. He had a lot of work to fit into a short period of time, given that His ministry only lasted a few years. But, barring the miracles, did He do something that we cannot adapt to our own lives? John 1:14 records that His followers “beheld His glory, glory as of the only

begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The wording indicates that He is the embodiment of grace and truth. Jesus displayed this grace and truth as He performed His mission here on earth, which in John 4:34 He states as: “...to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” In Acts 1:1, Luke says that he wrote the book bearing his name to record “all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Let us look at the balance Jesus struck between grace and truth as He went about doing and teaching.

Throughout His ministry Jesus met the needs of others, focusing primarily on spiritual needs. He began by setting two very important examples. First, He was baptized. Although He did not have any sins of which to repent, He chose to be fully immersed in water (Matthew 3:13-17) and was thereby recognized by those around as part of the group that was “morally prepared for the Kingdom.”<sup>4</sup> Second, he successfully faced temptation, refuting Satan’s claims with scripture (Matthew 4:1-11). He did not fold to pressure, and He did not allow inappropriately used scripture to sway Him.

Jesus faced His accusers in this same manner. In John 8:3-11 the scribes and Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to Jesus and asked Him what He thought should be done, pointing out that Moses commanded that someone in this situation should be stoned. Knowing that they were testing Him, Jesus simply replied: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” He knew that they knew the teaching of Leviticus 20:10, which states: “The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife...the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.” If, as they claimed, the scribes and Pharisees had caught this woman in the act, in order to follow the law they would have had to bring the man out as well. After pointing out the truth of this matter, Jesus demonstrated grace to the adulterous woman by telling her to “go and sin no more.”

Jesus’ ultimate act in serving the spiritual needs of others was His death on the cross. Although He prayed multiple times in sorrow and deep distress to be spared from it (Matthew 26:37-44), and although He could have requested “more than twelve legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53) to prevent the crowd from seizing Him, Jesus wanted God’s will to be done (Matthew 26:39, 42). This was His purpose on earth, after all.

While addressing the peoples’ spiritual needs, Jesus did not neglect their physical needs. On two separate occasions great multitudes came to Him with “those who were

lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet" (Matthew 15:30). Out of compassion, He not only healed the sick and diseased who were brought to Him, but He also fed the thousands of men, women, and children in the group (Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-38). Jesus understood that it is difficult for us as humans to focus on higher things if all we can think about are our baser needs.

Jesus did not expressly set out to live His life purely for the benefit of those with whom He came in contact, but it was a natural side effect of living His life for God. There is an important distinction here. If we purposely devote our lives to meeting the needs of others, we will be focused primarily on helping those around us in their walk here on earth. We may become so focused on these activities that they draw our attention and energy away from God and worshiping Him. If, however, we focus on following God, we will naturally end up helping those around us in both their walk here on earth and, assuming their hearts possess the right kind of soil, their walk in the afterlife. Serving in soup kitchens, volunteering to teach adults to read, and participating in walks to raise funds for research to fight various diseases are all wonderful activities, but if all we do is perform these activities as planned, what eternally lasting value do they have? If we put serving God first, we will serve not only food for the body, but food for the soul; we will not only provide reading lessons, but access to God's guidebook for our lives; we will not only help in the fight against disease, but give others more time on earth to do God's will.

Jesus did not discriminate in His work. Even though, as He stated, He "was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24), Jesus responded to the faith of those outside of Israel. He healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:22-28), He healed a centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13), and He cured a Samaritan of leprosy (Luke 17:12-19). Although the Jews of His day avoided interactions with Samaritans, Jesus made a point of opening a dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well, which led to an invitation to visit with and teach the Samaritans at Sychar for two days (John 4:7-43). The scribes and Pharisees grumbled about the fact that He received and dined with sinners and tax collectors (Luke 5:30; 15:1-2). Jesus made it clear that He did "not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:32) and that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-

nine just persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Just as the sower in Jesus’ parable did not discriminate between soils, scattering the seed as he went, we should not choose to share the gospel only with those whom we think will respond (Luke 8:5-8, 11-15).

In doing all of these things—meeting the spiritual and physical needs of others regardless of who they were—Jesus led a life that backed up His teaching. He could be uncompromising, and He could not be rightly accused of hypocrisy, because He lived what He taught. Jesus showed balance in His teaching. We see His inclination towards the weightier matters of life early on, when at the age of twelve His parents discovered that He had lingered behind at the temple in Jerusalem after the Feast of the Passover. There they found Him “sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The reaction? All “who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47). Yet although He paid attention to His studies, we know that Jesus did not neglect the physical and social aspects of life. Luke 2:52 records that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Once Jesus began His ministry, He taught in both formal and informal settings. The formal setting shows structure and planning. In Mark 6:1-6 we find that, despite the lack of honor shown Him in His own country of Galilee, Jesus “went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.” After this, “He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). Not only did He follow a chosen route, but He went where He knew He would find an audience for this formal teaching. As Jesus “went about all Galilee,” He taught in the synagogues (Matthew 4:23). Once He reached Jerusalem, we see that “in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him” (Luke 21:37-38). When arrested in Gethsemane, Jesus pointed out the mob’s need to perform the act in secret by stating: “I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me” (Matthew 26:55; Mark 14:49).

In addition to His more formal teaching along a pre-set route in pre-determined places, Jesus taught as He went about His life, taking advantage of teachable moments as



they arose. When He found Himself at the well near Sychar waiting for His disciples to return with food and a Samaritan woman approached to draw water, He took the opportunity to talk to her about living water. The resulting conversation led the woman to tell others that she thought she had met the Christ. Once they had the opportunity to hear Him for themselves, many of the Samaritans believed in Him (John 4:5-30, 39-42). On another occasion, while Jesus was teaching a gathering of people in Judea, they brought young children to Him. The disciples rebuked the adults, but Jesus stopped them, taking the time to explain that we all must “receive the kingdom of God as a little child...[to] enter it” (Mark 10:1, 13-16). These and other examples show us that Jesus made good use of His opportunities wherever they arose, whenever they arose, and with whomever.

When Jesus taught, He tailored His lessons to the audience’s needs. Sometimes the message was harsh. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew’s account, Jesus repeatedly referred to the need to do a better job than the scribes, Pharisees, and “hypocrites in the synagogue” (Matthew 5:20; 6:2, 5, 16). Although the comparisons may have been harsh, we have to understand Jesus was speaking against groups characterized by behaviors that are not pleasing to God, not against every individual within these groups.

The gospels show that Jesus doled out encouragement and correction to Peter, giving him whichever was needed in a given situation. When the disciples saw Jesus walking across the water and Peter desired to come to Him, Jesus supported him by telling him to come and then, when Peter began to sink, reaching out and catching him. Jesus did admonish Peter though, stating: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:25-31). Jesus praised Peter for recognizing that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” stating: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:16-17). However, when Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that He was going to suffer and be killed, Jesus let Peter know in no uncertain terms that he did not understand what he was talking about, saying: “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:21-23).

If we are to be truly effective in teaching God’s word, we must follow Jesus’ example. We must know our Bible and constantly grow in that knowledge (Hebrews

5:12-14). We must take advantage of teachable moments as they arise (2 Timothy 4:2), and we must both encourage and correct in our teaching.

We know definitively that Jesus believed in what He taught. We too should teach with conviction and be able to say, as did Peter and John, “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18-20).

Jesus, the master teacher and ultimate example, struck a perfect balance in His work and His teachings. Everything He did was performed with the goal of furthering the cause of God. He was uncompromising in His zeal for the Father but tender and caring in His dealings with the innocent. Truly He was full of grace and truth.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978) 169.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas 169.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas 36.

## ABUSING GOD'S GRACE

Susan K. Stearsman

### Being Out Of Balance In Our Understanding Of Grace

When something is out of balance, it tends to fall, or move. Think of a washing machine with an uneven load. First it bangs, then it shakes, then it may even migrate across the floor. Eventually, the machine will stop, perhaps with permanent damage.

So it is with doctrine that is extreme in any direction. Being out of balance can cause us to fall or move away from the desired destination. We must use the scriptures to determine the proper doctrinal balance. We can be assured that God has provided all we need to understand the scriptures and thereby remain in balance.

The abuse of grace is either the misapplication of it, or the willful sin in order to receive more of it—using grace as a “get out of jail free” card, or a pass to live a life. The world thinks of grace as the thing that will get them to heaven without ever trying to get there. In the Lord's church, we hear more and more discussion about grace's coverage of willful, unresolved sin. Some members of the church are even teaching that grace obviates salvation.

### What Is Grace?

In simplest terms, grace means unearned, or un-deserved favor. The concept of God's grace is perhaps most tangibly captured in Romans 5:8, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” When we were still sinners, we certainly did not deserve such a gift. But *in spite of that*, God sent his Son to die, thereby offering the world's greatest gift. He bestowed His grace on us because he loved us. The provision of Christ was certainly not God's only act of grace (see Old Testament references), but it is His paramount act of grace that makes possible relief from our burden of sin, and new, eternal, abundant life.

“Grace” appears in English the New King James Version 174 times; 23 in Old Testament, and 151 times in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word most commonly translated as “grace” is *chen*, which is also translated as favor (Genesis 6:8), although other words also express similar ideas, such as *ratson*, meaning acceptance, and *chesed*, meaning kindness.

The Greek word used in the New Testament is *charis*. This term appears 155 times and is also translated as favor (Acts 2:41), credit (Luke 6:32), thanked (Luke 7:19, Romans 6:17) and gift (I Corinthians 6:13). The Septuagint uses *charis* to translate only the Hebrew *chen*.

The word was common in first century usage outside of Scripture with a variety of meanings, such as a pleasant appearance, a gift, a favor, or the thankfulness felt in response to these. (Easton)

Several of the New Testament uses are in greeting format, such as in Romans 1:7, “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is an interesting use of the word, since it indicates that God continually provides grace to us, and that we can pray that it may be given to others. The New Testament writers, in requesting that God’s grace be given to the churches, were asking that God continually provide good to them, in spite of their shortcomings that were about to be addressed in the letters.

The Lord’s provision of a way of salvation for us is in itself bestowing grace. Rather than grace taking the place of salvation, the means of salvation was established prior to our existence, and certainly not in response to any goodness on our part. It was offered, in fact, *because* we were sinners in need of relief. Our acceptance of Christ and putting away of sin is the only rational response to God’s grace.

Grace is not mercy, which is unearned *pardon*. This is a significant difference. Much of the error taught about grace is the result of confusion between the two.

### **Some Common Errors About Grace**

Misunderstanding what grace is and how it works can lead to doctrinal errors that can lead us away from obedience to Christ, even from obedience to His death (which is baptism, according to Romans 6:3). These include:

- I can sin and get more grace.
- I am sinless because of grace.
- Grace makes sin less egregious. It makes God overlook my sin.
- “No condemnation” (Romans 8:1) means I never have to address sin. All people who claim to be “Christian” are covered by grace.
- God offered His grace; there is therefore nothing required of me. It is grace alone that saves.

- The God of the Old Testament did not offer grace; grace is new, and God is different now.
- We have recently discovered a new concept of grace, one that will allow mass entrance into the kingdom, in the absence of knowledge.

All of these errors carry the idea that under Christ, or in the New Testament age, God is more lenient toward sin. He is willing to overlook who you really are or how you really behave. Christ did it all, and therefore there is nothing I need to do or think about to obtain His gift.

Nothing could be further from the truth. God knows every detail about us, His creatures whom He loves (Luke 12:7, 1 Peter 5:6-7), and wants each of us to repent of our sins (Acts 17:30, 1 Peter 3:9). In both the Old and New Testaments, God hates sin (Proverbs 6:16-19, 1 Peter 2:4-9).

As a result of these misunderstandings, grace is sometimes mistakenly portrayed in contrast with obedience. In scripture, however, grace is cited as a *reason* for obeying the Lord, and *motivation* for keeping oneself away from sin. God's grace toward us is a convincing argument that leads us to obey and get rid of sin. Because of God's gift, how can we react other than by keeping away from sin?

### **Grace Versus Law**

While God was as gracious during the period of the Old Law as He is today, the Old Law was not itself a system of grace. The Law did not have power to cleanse the heart because there was as yet no actual atonement. The power of the Law was that it taught us what sin was.

The payment for sin from the beginning has been death. The requirements for sacrifice under the Old law show the horror of sin. The Old Testament descriptions of sacrifices of animals are so graphic that they are sometimes difficult to read. God even required the "living sacrifice" of the tribe of Levi in place of the firstborn of every family, since every family had to pay for sin.

The brutality of Jesus' death demonstrates the same horror. Look back through the gospels at the accounts of the shocking unfairness of Jesus' trial, the cruel beating and mistreatment he endured prior to his death, and the grueling hours he suffered on the cross until he died. This was the sinless Son of God. The Lord exacted a nearly incomprehensible payment for our sin: this brutal death of his Son.

So the Law was effective at teaching us what sin was, and the price of it. However, the Law never offered new life.

It is Christ's resurrection that allows us to be changed—to have *newness* of life. This was not offered to anyone under the Old Law. According to Romans 5:14, death reigned from Adam until Moses (that is, the Law of Moses). New life is a gift that is only available *in Christ*. Christ put to death the law of sin. Our old selves were crucified with Christ so that we would no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:5-7) This does not mean we never sin; but it does mean that sin is no longer our master; it is no longer characteristic of us, because when we are in Christ we must desire to be Christ-like.

In the opening verses of Romans 5, we learn that our introduction into the grace we now have is “through our faith.” In Romans 6:17, Paul mentions obedience “from the heart.” These terms refer to the inner person, and involves the will, the mind, and the desire.

The obedience from the heart requires that the mind, the will, and the affections should all enter into the service. The mind must be enlightened, the will guided, and the affections enlisted before the form of teaching can be obeyed. A peculiarity of the dispensation of Christ is that the service must be from the heart—that is, an outward performance without the desire of the heart to obey God is not acceptable...We wish to enter into Christ that we may obey him. Then the desire to obey God must be present in, and lead to, all service to God...Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance from sin, and burial out of self puts us in Christ, and binds us to a life of service to him, and are the obedience of the gospel.” (Lipscomb, 122-123).

Under the New Testament, we are no longer subject to the Old Law, and in Christ, the law of sin has been put to death. We are, however, still required to obey. Which law is in effect now?

### **The Law Of The Spirit Of Life**

The law of the Spirit of Life is introduced in Romans 8. This is the law that sets us free, in Christ, from sin and death. The Spirit available to us is the very Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Think, then, of the power that that the Spirit offers. It is by this same Spirit we may put to death the deeds of the body (flesh), or sinful deeds.

The law of the spirit is portrayed here in contrast with the law of sin. Christ, through His death, condemned sin itself. He made the law of sin obsolete. A law is a system of rules of conduct that is binding on us. When sin was condemned by Christ, he

made it no longer binding on us. This does not mean that we never sin again (see 1 John 1), but it does mean that we have the opportunity to live a life that is not characterized by sin. We are no longer subject to sin's burden of guilt and shame. We are also free from the punishment that is inevitable under the law of sin: death (Romans 6:23). Now, through the Spirit, we have power to overcome sin.

Notice the emphasis on the mind in Romans 8:5-7. Grace, God's gift of salvation, does not remove our responsibility to control ourselves. We must "set our minds." The Greek word here is *phroneo*, meaning to exercise the mind; to be mentally disposed more or less earnestly in a certain direction; to interest oneself in, or set the affections on.

Exercising the mind is work. It requires constant effort to know God's will, to understand it. It requires desire to enact it in our lives. It is this effort and desire that keeps us occupied with living obediently rather than living in sin.

In Romans 8:16-17, the freedom we have in Christ is described as sonship, whereas the burden we felt under the law of sin is described as slavery. This is a remarkable contrast. Think of being a child in a home versus being a slave in that home. Even a young child feels comfort, familiarity, ownership. It is *his* home. However, even a son has responsibilities toward the father, the owner of the house. In this analogy, we can see clearly that obedience to the father is still a requirement, even though there is profound freedom in sonship when contrasted with servanthood.

### **How To Keep Grace In Balance**

What do you desire? When you were baptized into Christ, and into His death, what died? Does your desire to follow Him supersede all other desires? Does the focus of your mind provide you with tools to overcome the temptations you face?

*Desire to be like Christ.* Keep alive the desire you had when you were first baptized into Christ. This takes the effort of your mind.

*Dedicate your mind to the Spirit.* The mind set on the spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6). Study the word. Spend your time in worship, in prayer. Take encouragement from other Christians.

*Walk by the Spirit.* If your mind is occupied with spiritual matters, you can overcome the desires of the flesh and walk by the spirit. (See Galatians 5)

*Be ruled by Christ.* Submit to Him. Know His teaching. Obey Him.

Let us not sin, then, to obtain grace, or be deceived that grace makes our behavior invisible or unimportant. Sin is still egregious to God. Let us consider God's grace and let it motivate us to live a life free from the burden of sin.

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## PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Jody Apple

Plato the idealist and Aristotle the realist stand side-by-side in Raphael's painting, *The School of Athens*. Plato points to the heavens and Aristotle, with his flattened palm parallel to the ground, seems to motion earthward. If one accepts the popular interpretation of their contrasting gestures, one might conclude that idealism and realism are at odds—or even mutually exclusive. They are not, and most philosophers understand philosophy to incorporate both idealism and realism.

Christianity, like philosophy, often suffers the same supposed dichotomy. For some, Christianity centers on concept. It's the idea, the theory and the pattern of God's revelation that reign supreme. (Unfortunately, restorationism sometimes stalls here.) For others, Christianity focuses on "praxis"—practice. It's what we *do* in life, not what we think, that really matters. Many "emerging church" advocates lean in this direction.

Like the either/or conflict of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian realism, neither alternative can stand alone. These scenarios present us with what logicians call a false dilemma: weighing two possibilities as if they are the only two available—while others actually do exist.

Christianity is neither all theory nor all practice any more than philosophy is all idealism or all realism. We gravely misunderstand biblical Christianity if we do not see that it must integrate both concept *and* practice.

To grasp the significance/importance of putting biblical theory into biblical practice, we will consider:

- God's eternal nature
- How we must imitate God
- The failure of theory alone
- The failure of practice alone
- The nature of New Testament Christianity

### **The Nature of God**

Everything we see within the Bible reveals God's nature. Because the Bible records events that occurred within the parameters of *time*, we might be tempted to think of

God's love as something he began to demonstrate at the moment of creation. We must remember that what God is in Genesis 1:1, he always was and always will be.

We understand that God's love always acts. God so loved that he *gave* Christ as propitiation. He *demonstrated* his love toward us while we were still sinners. God, rich in mercy, always loves us with a great love—and it cannot be anything other than expressed by action (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:10; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4).

But God did not *become* a loving and acting God. He *always has been*, and *will continue to be*, just as he is now.

In Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17, he provided a glimpse of something quite remarkable: his relationship with his Father. (In fact, John began his gospel account by affirming a specific sort of Father/Son relationship, and pointed to it throughout his record of Jesus' life on earth.) We witness this Father/Son relationship as we follow Jesus through his incarnate life, but what we see is simply a *continuation* of the already-existing relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Godhead before the Word became flesh. Their relationship is from eternity, to eternity.

In expressing his desire for the apostles to behold his glory, Jesus states that the Father had given him glory because of the love that God had for him *before the foundation of the world* (Jn. 17:24). What does this mean? At the very least it means that God's characteristic love—which humanity witnesses only within the parameters of space and time—has *always* existed, and has always been expressed, even before time.

This unmistakable display of God's love also anticipates a time beyond this age when it will be just as evident. Every aspect of the heavenly description in Revelation calls attention to God's abiding love for souls washed in the blood of the Lamb. God is eager to fulfill every promise and bestow every blessing, if we simply surrender our will to his and remain faithful to the end.

What God is now, God always has been and always will be. God's love always acts. He demonstrated it to the Son prior to the foundation of the world. He does so in every aspect of his relationship with us today—and he will continue to do so into eternity.

## **We imitate God**

God's thoughts, words and actions are always in sync. What he says is what he thinks, and what he says is what he does. What God has been, is, and will be—serves as our pattern. We must love as consistently and actively as God loves.

To be God-like in all respects we need, first, to know what God thinks. Fortunately, God tells us what he thinks, which is how his thoughts can become our thoughts (Is. 55:1-9). When we read his revelation, we learn quickly that God's thoughts, statements and actions are not only consistent, they also manifest a perfect character worthy of imitation.

But is not enough to know what God thinks: we must also adopt his ways (Is. 55:6-9). We must learn to think, speak and act like God. And, we must practice what we learn. To do less is to be less than what God wants us to be.

If we, as souls created in the image of God, are to become partakers of his divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4), we must think, say and do whatever reflects that divine nature. We must put “theory”—our knowledge of God's character—into practice every day.

## **The Failure of Theory Alone**

Imagine, for a moment, that we need only *understand* the concepts of God and Christianity without putting anything into practice. If theory is all that we need, practice is not essential—which is simply another way to say that obedience is not necessary.

Hebrews 5:8-9 is where we see that this flawed approach clashes with God's thought. Here God identifies those who *obey* Christ as those whom he saves. Practice must be, after all, essential.

If practice is essential, one is simply mistaken to declare that theory is all that we need. First-century gnostic Christians thought that because they grasped the concepts of New Testament Christianity so well, they were exempt from obeying. To their minds, their esoteric, mystical and (allegedly) superior knowledge of Christianity seemed to transcend mere *doing*. John's first epistle exposes the error of their thinking: we cannot consistently claim fellowship with God if we refuse to do what God wants us to do (1 Jn. 1:4ff). Claiming to know Christ without keeping his commandments makes us liars (1 Jn. 2:4). We must keep his word and walk as he walked to remain in his will (1 Jn. 2:5ff).

### **The Failure of Practice Alone**

What about emphasizing practice only, while dismissing the need for understanding and embracing the will of God? If we perform the prescribed actions, surely he will accept them.

If practice alone is sufficient, then having the proper motivation is not essential. If practice alone is sufficient, then blind obedience is good enough.

We run into a roadblock, though, when we consider the many passages that depict repentance as both a *change of mind* and a change of action. How can we imagine we have “repented” if we have reformed only our actions, but not our minds?

We do not even begin to obey the imperative to repent without changing first our minds, then our conduct: theory and practice. And if this is the case, it is utterly wrong to contend that practice alone can be acceptable before God.

For case in point, consider the first chapter of Isaiah. God frequently rebuked Israel for doing what he wanted without engaging their hearts (Is. 29:13; Mt. 15:8). They trampled his courts, brought useless sacrifices and filled his house with abominable incense. They kept feast days, Sabbaths and assemblies; all of these “wearied” God and he despised their hollow obedience (Is 1:12-14). How could they render so much “obedience” to the law, yet remain so far from his will?

They failed to realize that God desired mercy and not sacrifice (Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13; 12:7). This idiomatic expression does not mean that God never commanded sacrifice; he did. It means that outward act of sacrifice was worthless to God without mercy—which would have indicated a godly heart. God wants both.

David’s lament in Psalms 51 emphasizes the need for righteous actions *and* a righteous heart. God does not desire or delight *only* in physical sacrifices or burnt offerings. His true delight takes place when such externals flow from the *spiritual* sacrifices of a broken spirit and a contrite heart. God will never despise these (Ps 51:16-17).

## The Nature of New Testament Christianity

Romans 12 confirms the inherent connectedness of theory and practice. Note the emphasis on the **theoretical**, the conceptual part of our Christian lives:

- Our service to God must be reasonable. (vs. 1)
- The idea of “living sacrifice” entails the idea of selflessness. (vs. 1)
- We are not to be conformed to the world’s patterns; we are to be transformed (metamorphosed). (vs. 2)
- That change of mind comes only through developing a new mind. (vs. 2)
- We must be cautious about how we think of ourselves. (vs. 3)
- We must love without hypocrisy. (vs. 9)
- We must hate evil and love good, which requires that we have God’s sense of moral oughtness. (vs. 9)
- Christians must pray (which requires thought) (vs. 12)
- We must have singularity of mind—a God-like focus—that reflects noble things. (vs. 16)
- We must seek peace (vs. 18) and show greater affinity for good than evil. (vs 21)

All of these attributes of our Christian life involve concept, idea, theory.

Without them we simply cannot be what God wants us to be.

But, as valuable as these biblical concepts are, they cannot stand alone. They must be joined with the concomitant emphasis on praxis, the *doing* part of being a Christian.

Romans 12 addresses this Christian responsibility as well:

- Though our service must be reasonable (involving the mental part of our faith), it is still service—demanding action stemming from selflessness. (vs. 1)
- Though transformed by the renewing of our mind, we must prove what is good. (vs. 2) “Proving” demands we present evidence of a life consistent with what we claim to be. We must, in effect, pass an examination that confirms our faith.
- Though part of a spiritual “body” conceptually, the individual members of that body must actually function. (vs. 4)
- We are to use the spiritual abilities we have received. (vss. 6-8)
- We should actively engage in serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, etc. (vs. 7)
- Love is not enough; it must be sincere (based on the idea of divine love. (vs. 9)

- We are to be diligent in active service. (vs. 11)
- We should continue to pray. (vs. 12)
- We must meet the needs of fellow saints (vs. 13) and treat enemies with kindness. ( vs. 20)

Romans 12 clearly demonstrates that theory and practice go hand in hand—as they do throughout scripture. There has never been a time when God did not both love and act. There could never be a time when God would not expect us to do likewise. To be what God wants us to be, we must think as he thinks and we must do as he does. We must always put theory into practice.

To underscore this conclusion, we look to our perfect paradigm: Jesus.

### **Conclusion: Jesus’s example resolves the issue**

Jesus knew the Father (Mt .11:27), which implies that he fully understood his will. But was he satisfied with “theory” alone? No: “...My food is to **do** the will of Him who sent Me, and to **finish His work**” (Jn 4:34).

He applied the same principles to us:

- We must *know* the will of the Father: “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*” (Jn. 7:17).
- We must *do* the will of the Father: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 Jn. 2:6; cf. Jn. 13:15; Eph. 5:2).

As Christ remained in the love of the Father by keeping the Father’s commandments, so we abide in the Father’s love by obeying him: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (Jn. 15:10). How could we presume to satisfy ourselves with theory alone, when the Son of God had to believe *and* obey?

If we are true disciples of our Lord and Savior, we will do as he did. We will believe and obey; we will put theory into practice.

## CONSERVATIVE, LIBERAL, OR BIBLICAL?

Ralph Gilmore

As I have researched for this lecture, it occurred to me how profoundly thankful I am that someone asked me to deliver this lecture. Even before I became moderator for the Open Forum at the Freed-Hardeman University lectures, I apparently was no more “balanced” as a preacher and teacher than the last person whom you asked said I was. I am grateful to be asked to write on this subject because someone, at least, thinks I am balanced. A funny thing about balance—virtually no one with whom I have spoken through the years admits to being “unbalanced” doctrinally.

From the beginning, I would like to presuppose some limitations for our discussion. First of all, we will not be addressing balance in areas like church growth or benevolence in a direct way. Since I have been assigned the topic focusing on liberal, conservative, or biblical, then the original contexts of these theological descriptions will occupy our attention, i.e. doctrinal or theological. Second, there are some ways in which “liberal” could be used in ways acceptable to most all of us. As some preachers have been famous for saying, “I am liberal—in faith, love, and giving.” Certainly we all should be “liberal” in these ways. Third, there are some ways in which “conservative” could apply that would be acceptable to most all of us in the churches of Christ. Most of us hold the conservative view that the Bible is the Word of God and that Jesus is the Son of God. Most of us would be “conservative” in this context. Therefore, we will be using “liberal,” “conservative,” and “moderate” in their classical senses.

The terms were originally intended to be descriptive, not connotative. I believe the designations of Geisler and Nix<sup>1</sup> are still accurate although there are postmodern dissenters to their definitions. A classical “liberal” is one who dismisses basic Christian doctrines like the Bible is the inspired word of God and Jesus is the Son of God. A “liberal” believes that the Bible is not inerrant and that the Bible “contains” the word of God in some way but is not the word of God. A “neo-orthodox” or “moderate” believes that the Bible is inerrant, but only in matters of faith and conscience. Thus the Bible

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<sup>1</sup> *General Introduction to the Bible, Revised and Expanded*, by Norman Geisler and William Nix, Nashville: Moody Publishers, original edition published 1968, pp. 133-168.

“becomes” the word of God when the Holy Spirit encounters the reader as the reader studies the Bible. A “conservative” believes the Bible “is” the word of God and that the Bible is inerrant, at least in the original autographs.<sup>2</sup> I still believe these descriptions to be completely relevant and not outdated by postmodern concerns.

In this lecture, I want to discuss balance related to theology or doctrine. Dr. Ira North was a professor at David Lipscomb University, preacher for the Madison church of Christ, and editor of *The Gospel Advocate*. Though he was well-known among us for so many worthy reasons, it was in his book *Balance: A Tried and Tested Formula for Church Growth*<sup>3</sup> that North noted ten excellent principles of church growth, only one of which refers to our current discussion—the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph. 4:3). In this lecture, I will briefly observe these four concepts: 1) Should there be moderation in *all* things? 2) In which things should there be moderation? and 3) What is the process I should use to pursue moderation in my own spiritual life?

### **Moderation In All Things?**

Does everything in life require moderation, as you may have heard, or is the principle of no use at all in Christianity, as some claim? There are adherents on both sides of this issue, but, as is often true in cases where moderation is useful, the truth is in the middle. That is, everything in life does *not* require moderation and yet the principle *does* have usefulness in the Christian walk. Let us examine some who have argued throughout history about the significance of balance or moderation.

Where did the expression “moderation in all things” originate? Bartlett attributes the phrase “moderation in all things” to the Roman dramatist Terence (Publius Terentius Afer) c 190-159 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Earlier, Euripides had concluded that “moderation is the noblest gift of heaven<sup>5</sup>, and Hesiod in about the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. said, “Observe moderation. In

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<sup>2</sup> There is a lot of academic “chatter” about these distinctions no longer being valid in this time of postmodernism since we live in a post-denominational, post-Christian culture. However, I believe this discussion to be no more than “chatter” because Bible scholars must of necessity take a position about the inspiration and/or inerrancy of the Bible, regardless of cultural shift.

<sup>3</sup> Nashville: The Gospel Advocate, 1983, pp. 124-26.

<sup>4</sup> *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*; [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com).

<sup>5</sup> 8486. Euripides. 480 or 485-406 B.C.. Bartlett, John, comp. 1919. *Familiar Quotations*, 10th ed.; [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com).



all, the fitting season is best.”<sup>6</sup> Moderation was also an important concept in the Restoration Movement, but the leaders apparently did not claim moderation in all things.

Moderation in all things is an obviously false concept. The principles of intrinsic value and instrumental value are important here. Intrinsic value is in things in-and-of-themselves. This type of value “inheres” in the concept itself. One of the implications of this type of value is that this value never changes, i.e. is absolute. In the Bible, these intrinsic values never change because they are based on the nature of God himself. Examples of intrinsic value in a positive sense are found in Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit. Examples of intrinsic value in a negative way are found in Galatians 5:19-21, the sins of the flesh. These values will not change: the good ones stay good, and the bad ones stay bad. The other type of value is instrumental value. Instrumental value is determined not by the nature of the actions under consideration, but by the negative or positive consequences of the actions or the negative or positive motives of the person(s) doing the actions. Eating meat sacrificed to idols was such a concept in the Bible because the motives or attitudes of the one eating the meat (Romans 14:23) and/or the consequences of eating the meat on others (1 Corinthians 8:13) determined whether the action was acceptable to God.

The understanding of intrinsic and instrumental values is crucial in this segment of the discussion and in the sections to follow. For instance, there can be NO moderation in performing actions that are intrinsically wrong, e.g. there can be no moderation in matters such as murder, rape, incest, etc. In such cases of intrinsic wrong, moderation is a meaningless concept.

Also, moderation is not helpful in deciding any matters where there are only two positions. When Jesus argued in Matthew 6:24 that one cannot serve God and money at the same time, then moderation between these two exclusive positions is impossible. This is also true in deciding whose slaves we shall be. We must serve only God or the devil, and we cannot serve both in moderation (Romans 6:16-17). Thus, our love for God must be without limits (Matthew 22:37), a concept which flows over into our dedication and commitment to Jesus as Christians.

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<sup>6</sup>8446. Hesiod. fl. 8th cent.? B.C. Bartlett, John, comp. 1919. Familiar Quotations, 10th ed.; [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com).

So, “moderation in all things” is a false statement.

### **Moderation In Some Things?**

The principle of moderation or balance is useful in some things, but which ones? To build on our previous discussion, one may conclude that balance is related to those actions or attitudes that are not right or wrong all the time—i.e. instrumental value. Also, it is possible to take an intrinsic value to the extreme when it interferes with the exercise of other things that are right in themselves. For instance, the Bible teaches that it is an intrinsic value to be evangelistic according to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; et al). Yet I have known, and maybe you have as well, preachers who were so evangelistic that they neglected their families in the process and lost their own children. Nurturing our own families is also an intrinsic value (1 Timothy 5:8). So, balance is needed in the exercise of intrinsic and instrumental things as well, but balance is important to instrumental values in a different way. Instrumental values often have their value determined biblically by matters of balance.

Does the Bible teach moderation, or temperance? Indeed it does. One may be tempted to use Philippians 4:5 in the King James Version to prove this point, but may I offer caution at this point? The Greek word rendered “moderation” in Philippians 4:5 in the KJV is *epieikes*. The word appears to come from “*epi*” and “*eiko*.” According to Thayer and Smith, the word should be rendered “equitable, fair, mild, or gentle.”<sup>7</sup> It is used five times in the New American Standard Version: Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; and 1 Peter 2:18. After searching through most of the standard Bible versions, the preferred rendering for the word is “gentleness” or “graciousness.” I am not affirming that the KJV rendering for *epieiko* is incorrect because there is some limited sense in which “moderation” can be implied by the other definitions of the word. I am saying that “gentleness” or “graciousness” is the preferred reading, and I do not want to use Philippians 4:5 as the passage that best teaches balance, temperance, or moderation.

One should also check “temperance” (from the Greek *egkrateia*—i.e. “self-control”). This Christian virtue and fruit of the Spirit describes one who masters his or

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<sup>7</sup> Thayer and Smith@biblestudytools.com.

her desires and passions, especially the sensual appetites.<sup>8</sup> Another section of Scripture often overlooked in this discussion of balance is Romans 14 and 15. Paul lays out principles in this section that deal with finding balance in the church because the church at Rome was so ethnically and culturally diverse. We cannot indulge ourselves with a fuller exegesis of Romans on this occasion, but it is certainly worth our while.

### **Moderation In Process**

There is often a fine line between the motives of one who upsets the local congregation because of his desire to be biblical or his imbalance. I have noticed through the years those who are imbalanced and cause trouble in the church never seem to know that they are imbalanced. If they are having personality conflicts with someone at church and they choose to cause trouble or even to leave the congregation because of it, they almost never recognize the problem as relationship conflict. Instead, the problem has a “doctrinal” cause if you ask them. Rather than face the problem for what it is, having “doctrinal” issues with the other people involved appear to justify their actions. The church gets caught in the onslaught, and it usually takes years for the congregation to recover, if it ever does.

Our concluding section is about how to check for biblical balance in our lives. The list of suggestions is representative and not exhaustive. First of all, we must be biblical. By being biblical, I do not mean simply that someone believes the Bible to be from God or that he or she believes that the bible has been honored in the decision-making process. I mean that one should use virtually every tool at his or her disposal in order to learn biblical truth. We live in an age of superficial Bible study and sometimes superficial Bible preaching. It is sad because, as I tell my students, “I will have little mercy on you when you turn in your term papers if you have spelling and/or grammatical mistakes because you are so blessed to have spelling and grammar checkers built into your word processors.” Why should this be an age of biblical illiteracy? On the Internet, we have access to many Bible versions, free Bible concordances, free Bible lexicons and dictionaries, search engines, etc. If we do not use them, it is generally our fault. Even if one does not read the original languages, books (like *Vine’s Expository Dictionaries of*

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<sup>8</sup> Galatians 5:23; Acts 24:25; 2 Peter 1:6.

*Old Testament and New Testament Words* plus all the free Bible versions that are online) will help any literate person to do reasonably acceptable word studies. I should carefully and regularly monitor my attitude in the search for balance so that I may continue to pursue God's way in meekness and fear (i.e. "phobia"; 1 Peter 3:15). We should use all the relevant Scriptures available on any given topic, and we should use them in context as God intended. Then we should remember who the Lord of the universe is and who we are in relation to him.

Second, we should examine our own lives and pray for God's help in striving for the balance that he wants us to have. God was not kidding when he said that the unity of the Spirit is a state for which we must strive, remembering that there are others whose spiritual walks are connected to ours (Ephesians 4:1-3). According to Galatians 5, we should walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and develop the fruit of the Spirit. There is no way to do this without being spiritually minded. It is impossible to spell "spiritual" without "spirit." We need to take advantage of God's resources that he has given to us, though not of course in a miraculous way.

Third, we should consider our own character attributes that could interfere with our pursuit of the reign of God in our lives. I should ask the questions, "Am I sure that my conclusions have not been tainted by prejudice, disillusionment, bitterness, jealousy, emotional considerations, or some other factor that can adversely affect one's thinking? Even if I am sure of my conclusions, is the point I am stressing vital, of sufficient importance to justify problems? Have I allowed these conclusions to become a personal obsession? Do I find myself talking about them frequently in Bible classes, sermons, and private discussions?"<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, we should not make decisions about the Bible based on "party alignment." By this, I mean that personal relationships never trump biblical truth. When I was younger, I had more tendency to reach some conclusions based on respect for my personal mentors. I could never be thankful enough to Thomas B. Warren, Gus Nichols, Batsell Barrett Baxter, Harvey Floyd, Rodney Cloud, and others, but my allegiance is not to them. My allegiance is to the Bible as God's word. The reason I want to be biblical is

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<sup>9</sup> On this point I owe much credit to Bill Hall, "Moderation in Doctrinal Stability;" [elginhillschurchofchrist.org](http://elginhillschurchofchrist.org).

because I want to be like God. My relationship with God should be more important than all the friendships in the world.

Finally, I should not be tempted to make major changes in my orientation toward God and his word just because I am basking in the sunlight of something new, in the process assuming that all my teachers before me certainly did not enjoy the advantage of what I call “enlightened contemporary gnosticism.” Some of the “enlightened” younger generation appear to believe that they have discovered basic truths that none of the poor “simpletons” before them ever found. Odds are pretty good that all the brothers and sisters who taught me in the past were not fundamentally wrong about everything. As one brother said, “Caution dictates that one go slowly in adopting new concepts and be even more cautious in teaching them.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusion**

I pray, as I tell some of my own students who go on to pursue terminal degrees, that we can maintain balance throughout life. For those of us who have tried to be residents in the two worlds of academia and the church, it is especially crucial that we maintain our balance. When I was considering preaching at a congregation while also beginning my first year teaching at Freed-Hardeman University, I had a wise man, William Woodson, to encourage me to be involved in both pursuits when he said, “You will need to preach and teach to keep your balance. Besides, if you don’t do so, those of us in the academic environment will start to look pretty stale after a while.” I took what he said to heart, and I have never regretted it. I am not claiming that I am as balanced as I should be, but the balance that I do have is partly due to the good advice and the good friends whom God has placed in my life. May God help us in our pursuit to follow the true GPS, i.e. “God’s Positioning System”, so that we will be balanced and not get lost as we are headed in the direction of God.

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Hall, “Moderation in Doctrinal Stability,” [elginhillschurchofchrist.org](http://elginhillschurchofchrist.org)

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**LEGALISM, LAW AND LOVE**  
**The Child of God and the Law of God: Avoiding the Extremes of**  
**Legalism and Antinomianism**

Tyler Young

“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” (Gen. 2:17). So far as an explicit, recorded command, this was God’s first law to man. God created man for relationship with him and that relationship is experienced in the context of his law.

The law becomes the opportunity for man to be tested, to exercise his free will—for man to be man, and so to embrace or reject God. It is the law of God that connects God’s will to man’s; it is the expression of God’s will, the means of man’s probation, the framework of his interaction with God. It is the condition of fellowship with God; its violation, the occasion of God’s grace. The climax of the divine drama of redemption—Christ’s crucifixion at Calvary, along with his resurrection—was God’s gracious response to the transgression of his law.

From the time of Christ and throughout the centuries since, the relationship of man to God’s law has been a subject of concern and controversy. Jesus addressed misunderstandings of the law of God in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mat. 5-7) and on numerous other occasions (Mat. 15:1ff; 23:1ff). The subject of the law, particularly the Christian’s relationship to the law of Moses, was divisive in the early church, at one point requiring urgent attention (Acts 15:1ff) and addressed at length in several of the New Testament epistles, especially Romans and Galatians. What is the relationship between the grace of God and the law of God? What about the law of Moses and the Christian? Is their law under Christ? If so, what is the content and nature of that law? How does it differ from God’s law under previous dispensations? These are not issues on the periphery of the Christian experience, but foundational matters linked in an essential way to our very salvation. Our attitude toward and knowledge of the law of God—especially our understanding of how the law relates to the will of God and our relationship to him—are of crucial concern.

Our focus in this chapter deals with particular perversions of the law of God which constitute, ultimately, a rejection of God's law, and therefore a rejection of God himself. The errors we are addressing here fall under the general heading of legalism. What exactly is legalism? How might we be guilty of it today? How do people use that term incorrectly? Why are those who desire to uphold and keep the law of Christ sometimes mischaracterized as legalists? Does love preclude a careful concern for keeping God's law? Can a blind zeal for keeping God's law ever be unhealthy? If so, in what way? How do the spirit of the law and the letter of the law relate? How do law and love relate? These are questions worth considering if we desire to know God and enjoy the salvation we offers to us by his grace through his Son.

### **THE LAW OF GOD AND THE EXTREME OF ANTINOMIANISM**

Frequently, God admonished his people not to depart from his law "to the right or to the left" (Deut. 5:32; Jos. 1:7, et al). Jesus spoke of the narrow way which leads to life (Mat. 7:13-14). This kind of imagery in scripture suggests that God has set out boundaries for us, and the basic point of it is that we must not deviate from God's will in any way. Though we should use care not to press the language too literally, it is helpful to categorize departures from God's will in terms of different and opposite directions. One way we might think of movement to the left or right of God's truth as (1) becoming too "loose," allowing what God does not (the "left"); or (2) becoming too "strict," forbidding what God allows (the "right"). This can happen when it comes to our attitude toward the law of God. As we navigate the narrow way which leads to eternal life, we must avoid the extremes of antinomianism on the one hand, and legalism on the other. Both are dangerous distortions of God's will.

#### **What is Antinomianism?**

The word antinomianism is a compound term from the Greek word for law (nomos) with the prefix anti, meaning "against;" hence, it's basic meaning is to be against law. In biblical theology it refers to the idea that we, in the Christian age, are not under law in the New Testament in any binding way. It is not our purpose here to deal thoroughly with the historical development and current extent of this error. But we address it briefly in order to understand how it is an opposite extreme to legalism, and to



demonstrate how those who condemn a proper respect for God's law as "legalistic" are operating from an antinomian spirit.

It is a serious error to contend that, because we are saved by grace, we therefore are not under law of any kind or in any way in the New Testament age. If this were the case, we could not even sin, for "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), or living in violation of the law, and "where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15). The gospel of Christ is called the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2), "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (James 1:25). Paul clearly stated that he was "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21).

Yet we find repeated affirmations in the New Testament that we are not "under law" or "under the law." Of the New Testament writers, Paul especially labors to impress this upon his readers. He tells the churches of Galatia "ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18). To the saints in Rome he declares "ye also were made dead to the law," adding that "we have been discharged from the law" (Rom. 7:4,6). Our freedom from law is contrasted with salvation by grace: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Jesus is the focal point of the contrast between grace and law in one of the more notable and dramatic texts on the issue: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

To take any of these statements in the absolute sense—that we are subject to no divine law under Christ—is grossly erroneous, requiring us to ignore or pervert the texts already cited which conclusively indicate that, even under the dispensation of grace in the New Covenant of Christ, we are indeed subject to law in some sense. Even the most cursory examination of the scripture shows this to be the case. For instance, when Paul said to the Galatians, "ye are not under law" (5:18), he went on to list the works of the flesh, warning that "they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Then, after delineating the fruit of the Spirit, he added, "against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:21-23). The implication is clear: while God's law does not prohibit love, joy, peace, etc. (in fact, it enjoins these things), it does prohibit fornication, uncleanness, "and such like" (5:21). This can only mean we are bound by law from God.

### **In what sense are we not under law?**

If there are things which are unlawful for us, we must be under some law, or under law in some sense. What, then, are we to make of the New Testament's declaration that we are not under law? Several points need to be considered in this connection. First, most of the texts informing us we are not under law are referring to, directly or indirectly, the law of Moses. The contexts of the relevant passages bring this out. There has been, according to the book of Hebrews, not an absolute elimination of all law, but "a change also in the law," (Heb. 7:12), meaning an end of the Old Law of the Mosaic era and the beginning of the New Law under Christ. The "law of commandments contained in ordinances" which Jesus "abolished" was "the middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile—the law of Moses (Eph. 2:14-15). In the context in which Paul told the Galatians they were "not under the law," he spoke of circumcision, part of the covenant God made with Abraham which was incorporated into the law of Moses (Gal. 5:2-13,18). That law which "passeth away" and has been "done away" in Christ was the law "written and engraven on stones" delivered through Moses (2 Cor. 3:7-11). When John tells us the law came through Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ, he was not suggesting that there is no law under Christ, anymore than he implied there was no truth under Moses. But notice that "the law" to which he has reference is that which "came through Moses." So it is with other texts which pronounce that we are "dead to the law" or no longer under "the law."

If we are not under the law of Moses, which included the Ten Commandments, does that mean, then, that we are free to worship idols, take God's name in vain, to murder, commit adultery, etc? We realize that matters of this kind—of a moral nature—are still as binding on us today as when they were delivered to Israel by Moses. The moral content of the law, which stems from the unchanging character of our Holy God, was binding before Moses came down with the tablets of stone from Mount Sinai, and is still binding under the law of Christ. When we are told that we are not under the law of Moses, this does not mean there is nothing found in the Old Testament which is binding upon us as part of the New. What it does mean is that we are not under the civil, ceremonial, or dietary aspects and rituals of the law which were unique to it. It means the sacrificial system of the law, including the priesthood and temple worship, was also only temporary

and typical, pointing to and done away by the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ. The book of Hebrews, particularly chapters seven through ten, provides a veritable treatise on this issue.

But there is another and particularly important sense in which we are not under law today. Not only are we not under the civil, ceremonial, and sacrificial aspects of the law of Moses, but we are not under law at all as the basis or grounds of justification. In his letters to the Romans and Galatians Paul places special emphasis on this crucial point, namely, that justification is based on God's grace and received by faith, not on the basis of law-keeping. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight"; therefore, "we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," for "a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:20,24,28). To try to claim a right standing with God solely on the grounds of keeping his law is to deny the need for his grace: "Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4), for, as the apostle previously stated, "a man is not justified by the works of the law" (2:16).

Our preachers and teachers, in the pulpit and in print, typically tell us these passages are referring strictly to the law of Moses. It is certainly true that no man can be justified by keeping the Mosaic law. But there is a broader, more fundamental point being made by the Holy Spirit in these texts. The definite article, though present in English translations, does not appear before the word "law" in the original Greek texts of the passages cited in the previous paragraph. What is the significance of this? The point is not merely that no one is justified by the works of the law of Moses (which might leave open the possibility that we might be justified by keeping the works of some other law), but that no man is justified "by works of law" (not "the law," but simply "law"). This would include the law of Moses in particular, but it encompasses the broader concept of law in general. To say it another way, no man can be justified on the basis of keeping the works of the law of Moses because no man can be justified on the basis of keeping the works of law—period.

Does this mean that there is no sense in which works are an essential part of the process of justification? No. James tells us there is a sense in which we are "justified by works" (James 2:21-24), meaning that obedience to commands of God is a condition to

the reception of salvation, as well as evidence of the possession of genuine faith. Our salvation is based on God's grace, and is received by faith, but not "faith only;" saving faith is always obedient faith. We are, therefore, justified by works in the sense that obedience is required; we are not justified by the works of law, however, in the sense that we cannot stand right with God on the basis of that obedience. For obedience to works of law to be the very ground or basis of our justification would require perfect obedience (James 2:10; Gal. 3:10-11). The law cannot save us, for it condemns us when we break it (Rom. 7:7ff), and our obedience to it cannot make up for or clear us from the curse brought upon us by breaking it. This is why the apostles concluded that binding the law of Moses on the Gentiles, as some Jews were trying to do, was to "put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10).

This is the sense in which, as Paul said, "the letter [the law] kills" (2 Cor. 3:6). This is what Paul is dealing with when he tells us "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" God sent his Son to do (Rom. 8:3, emphasis added). If we could stand right with God on the basis of law-keeping, then righteousness would be earned or merited (Rom. 4:4; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9), making void or unnecessary the grace of God. "I do not make void the grace of God; for if righteousness is through the law" [the Greek text is actually, "through law"], then Christ died for nought" (Gal. 2:21).

The relationship of the Christian to the law of Moses in particular was a critical issue which generated considerable controversy and division in the early church, and gave occasion for addressing the greater point of how grace and law relate to salvation. Certain Jews in the church sought to cling to the old law and bind the whole of it on Gentiles. For this reason, the Holy Spirit through the inspired pen of Paul stressed in no uncertain terms that we are not under law as the grounds for our justification. In Christ, we are not under the curse or condemnation of the law (Gal. 2:13; Rom. 8:1-2). We are not, then, under the law of Moses (in fact, no one but Israel ever was—Deut. 5:3), though the moral law incorporated into it is still binding on us under the law of Christ. The antinomian selectively isolates some of the texts addressing these matters, perverting them to argue we are free from all law in Christ. This is an extreme view which amounts to anarchy. Peter tells us we are "free," but warns us not to use our freedom "for a cloak of wickedness" (1 Pet. 2:16; cf. Gal. 5:13; Rom. 6:1). Those

characterized by an antinomian mentality are essentially guilty of this very thing, appealing to our freedom in Christ to justify a disregard for the law of God.

### **THE LAW OF GOD AND THE EXTREME OF LEGALISM**

The rejection of the law of God is as old as the Garden of Eden. Man still desires to be his own god, to live unfettered by the restrictions of God's law. Though a perennial problem, some scholars suggest that the current state of "Christendom" is perhaps more antinomian in disposition than ever before in its history. The idea that there are no absolute commandments for the Christian or that God does not really require obedience is widely appealing in our postmodern age of moral relativism, with the rising popularity of self-serving, self-constructed religion of convenience. But equally pernicious, if not as prevalent, is the other extreme toward the law of God: legalism.

Legalism is a broad term, often used pejoratively to create prejudice against those seeking to uphold God's law, or to denounce the idea that obedience is essential to salvation. The legalist mentality may be manifested in varying degrees and in different ways which, though distinct, are all related to an underlying attitude that distorts our relationship to God and his law. Some forms of legalism are relatively subtle, but destructive nonetheless. We must use great care to define it properly, to avoid it studiously, and to refute diligently the false accusations of legalism against the faithful. What is legalism? In what ways does it manifest itself? There are several ways in which we can categorize this unhealthy philosophy toward God's law.

#### **Reduction To Rule-Keeping**

In our discussion of this point, let us be clear. Obedience to God is essential to salvation (Mat. 7:21; Rom. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:22). The New Testament is the law of Christ, which contains a "rule" or standard by which we must walk (Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:16). We have exposed above, in no uncertain terms, the popular error that we are not under law to Christ. We affirm again that there are rules or commands for us to obey under the New Testament. There are those who, desiring to worship and serve God on their own terms, contend that "Christianity is not about rules but relationship." They argue that a right relationship with God is a kind of subjective, existential, emotional, esoteric "encounter" and that we need not be concerned with the specifics of his word. They denigrate "commandment-keeping," and disdain any kind of rigidity in doctrine or

proclamation of Christ's demands. But the word of God tells us that keeping his commands is essential to "knowing" him, to experiencing a relationship with him. "And hereby we 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 hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him" (1 John 2:3-5). There is no relationship with God apart from a proper respect for his rules.

That being said, there is a type of legalism which stems from a preoccupation with rule-keeping for the sake of rule-keeping. Its advocates reduce the vibrant, personal nature of the Christian faith to a mere list of rules. Yes, there are rules to keep in following Christ, but faithfulness to God is more than rote, mechanical externalism that isolates or abstracts the law from the God who gave it. This can lead to a sense of self-righteousness, where one prides himself because he does do this, or doesn't do that. He has his list of God's rules and checks them off, confident of his salvation—not because of God's grace, but because of his careful compliance with all the essentials. His assurance is more in himself than in Christ. Perhaps he is like the Pharisee Jesus described, who went to the temple and "stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get." (Luke 18:11-12).

While we should be concerned about keeping God's law, the properly motivated child of God wants to keep the law, not merely for the sake of keeping it, nor for personal pride (though certainly it is right for us to feel good about ourselves—in proper perspective—when we are walking in the light of God's word). He does so, as we will emphasize later, because he loves and wants to please the lawgiver. He understands that all of his rule-keeping does not make him worthy, that he has no grounds for boasting (Eph. 2:8-9). He knows that he is nothing without the grace of God. In this respect he identifies with the great apostle Paul. Despite his abundant labors, and even after all that he suffered for Christ, Paul still humbly acknowledged, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). He dared not glory in himself; his only glory was "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14).

We will comment momentarily and more fully on our attitude toward law-keeping. If we truly understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ, we know that, as essential as it is to respect God's rules, there is much more to the abundant life in Christ than a list of Thou-shalt-nots (John 10:10), and there is a higher purpose in keeping God's rules that is critical for us to understand.

### **Elevating Ritual Over Regard For Fellow Man**

All of God's commands are important; none is optional. Though we err if we undermine or neglect any aspect of the law of God, there are matters which are "weightier." We sometimes encounter a tendency, though, to elevate lesser matters—typically ritual or external items—and emphasize them over other, equally essential issues which may be, in certain senses, of greater import. We might think of this as "majoring in minors." While seemingly "minor" elements of God's law are indeed essential, reducing faithfulness to God to externals or scrupulous concern for only selective features of the law of God is a form of legalism.

The Pharisees of Christ's day epitomized this mentality, and Jesus frequently exposed their skewed perspective of the law of God. In Jesus time, the Pharisees were pridefully preoccupied with strict observance to the ceremonial law, while shamefully ignoring more important obligations under the law. Jesus decried their hypocrisy: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone" (Mat. 23:23). To the Pharisees, punctilious keeping of the command to tithe—right down to the small plants used for their household spices—was proof of their devotion to God, despite their utter indifference toward the welfare of their fellow man. Notice that Jesus was not suggesting as long as we keep the "weightier matters"—as long as we are just, merciful, and have faith in God—the implied lesser matters were unimportant. Of the latter he clearly said "these ye ought to have done." The problem was in thinking that compliance with the minutia of the ritual aspects of the law composed the very essence of what it means to please God, and guaranteed God's approval despite the blatant disregard for other, enormously significant requirements concerning our treatment of others and our trust in God.

We see this attitude frequently in the Gospel accounts. In the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37), as Jesus expounded on what it means to love one's neighbor, he spoke of how a Levite and a priest—supposed paragons of faithfulness to the law of God—passed by a fellow Jew in need. When Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus into his home, he and his other guests were appalled that the Lord allowed a sinful woman to touch him (Luke 7:26-50). They objected at other times to the Lord's interaction with sinners (Mark 2:15-17). When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, rather than rejoicing that God was working signs in their midst and that crippled souls were made whole, they were outraged over what they perceived to be a violation of the Sabbath law (Mat. 12:9-14).

When they delivered Jesus over to Pilate they would not enter the Praetorium “that they might not be defiled, but eat the Passover” (John 18:28). They asked the Roman governor to break the legs of Jesus and those crucified with him to hasten their deaths so their bodies could be taken from the cross before the onset of the high Sabbath of Passover. They were blind to the fact they were murdering an innocent man—the very Son of God!—but maintained conscientious concern for avoiding any ceremonial defilement. Apparently, to them God was more concerned about keeping the Sabbath than he was about justice. (Of course, God was concerned with both.)

Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders' legalism and hypocrisy as well in his citation of the prophet Hosea, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Mat. 9:13; 12:6). God did require sacrifices to be offered under the law of Moses, but often the Jews fell into an empty ritualism in which they felt their observance of ceremonial and sacrificial laws guaranteed God's favor and compensated for their cruel exploitation of the weak and vulnerable. Centuries before Christ, God expressed his disgust for this through the prophet Isaiah:

What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts....Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies... Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary of bearing them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well;



seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isa. 1:10-17).

When our strict observance of ritual is not accompanied by genuine love for God and fellow man, our religion is not only vain (James 1:26-27), it is an abomination which disgusts our Holy God. The Lord's reference to Hosea 6:6—"For I desire goodness, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings"—means that sacrifice and burnt offerings are not sufficient; they cannot substitute for doing good and truly knowing God.

How might this type of legalism be manifested in the church today? We sometimes encounter brethren who seem to believe that as long as they have been biblically baptized, are taking the Lord's supper every Sunday, singing a capella in worship, and attending all scheduled services of the church, that all must be well with their souls. Whether or not they are making any serious effort to serve others, reach the lost with the gospel, pursue holiness, cultivate compassion in their personal relationships, study the scriptures, pray on a daily basis, or love their spouses and lead their families to worship and serve God in the home is of far lesser concern. Perhaps they are not as forgiving, patient and kind as they ought to be, or are not giving of their money and their time to the Lord as they should; but they have the right baptism, right doctrine, right worship—and that's what really matters. They would never compromise the truth on the plan of salvation, fellowship with false religion, or issues like divorce and remarriage. Certainly that is necessary and commendable. But it is shameful to act as though it is the only measure of what constitutes faithfulness to Christ.

Another area where we see something akin to this type of legalism is in the manner some brethren deal with controversial issues in the church. Yes, we must "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3); "mark...and turn away from" those who cause division (Rom. 16:17); identify false teachers (2 Tim. 2:16-18); expose soul-damning error and withhold fellowship from those who persist in it (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11). The Lord boldly and firmly condemned those who perverted the word of God, and brethren who refuse to do so are not pleasing to God. However, some seem to think that militancy against error is the sum and substance of what it means to follow Jesus. While certainly it is necessary to do so, is there not more—much more—to the Christian life? Assessing the preaching and writing of some of our preachers leaves us wondering.

It is a time of widespread apostasy in the brotherhood, and there is no excuse for silence when it comes to standing against the error that is corrupting the bride of Christ. We should emphasize the need to hold fast to the truth in the midst of the escalating departures from it. But brethren are sometimes quick to draw lines of fellowship and then condemn others who hesitate to acknowledge those lines, leaving no room for personal judgment, patient evaluation, or time for growth in those whose discernment may not be as developed as our own. Sometimes situations are complicated, information is unreliable, perceptions are incorrect, the facts unclear or in question. Should we not give the benefit of the doubt in such cases? There is a time for sharp reproof (Mat. 23:1ff; Acts 13:9-10; Titus 1:13; 3 John 9-10). But there is also a place for meekness: “The Lord’s servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Paul was here addressing strife that is gendered over “foolish and ignorant questions” (2:23). Some issues are critical; others are pointless and should be avoided. The challenge, of course, is telling the difference, and even here we need to exercise patience.

Is it not a sign of weakness or indifference when we choose not to inject ourselves into every dispute or decline to line up with certain preachers or congregations every time they wag the finger at someone. A segment of our brotherhood—shrinking, we hope, but still exercising some influence—seems preoccupied with wrangling over every nuance of every disagreement between preachers, and issuing decrees based on their conclusions. A few exhibit a combative, caustic spirit that is contrary to the spirit of Christ. Instead of walking “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3), striving patiently to repair breeches of fellowship, they seem more concerned with scanning the horizon for any deviation from their own orthodoxy that they might strike with venom as soon as the opportunity arises. This they equate with vigilance against error. Those who dare to disagree with them or even question their methods are scorned and roundly disfellowshipped.

Surely we can see the problem with such a disposition. But how is it legalistic? It appears to us to be a tendency toward the kind of legalism we are here discussing in its elevating a particular aspect of the law of Christ—the obligation to oppose error—to the status of greatest importance. Though its advocates might not explicitly affirm it—and perhaps even explicitly deny it—this attitude plaguing the church in some quarters tends to treat militant opposition to false teachers as the quintessence of Christianity, the highest criterion for faithfulness to God. Jesus commended the church in Ephesus for standing against false apostles, but reproved them for leaving their “first love,” and commended them to repent (Rev. 2:2-6). If we act as though marking false teachers is the sum and substance of Christianity or that it compensates for a lack of emphasis on other weighty—perhaps even weightier—matters, we are moving perilously toward an unscripturally legalistic mindset, if we haven’t embraced it already.

### **Missing The Spirit of the Law**

Once more, we do not want to be misunderstood. We are obligated to keep the letter of the law. By that we mean we must respect what God’s law explicitly states or implies, right down to the details or specifics. Properly understood, the law of God is consistent in all respects; there is no tension between the letter—the exact requirements—and spirit—the principle(s) behind—the law. We use care in discussing the distinction between the letter and spirit of the law because of the way in which many appeal to the latter to dismiss the former. That is, they claim we may—or even that we must—disregard some specific law of God to keep the perceived and more important spirit or attitude behind it, which ultimately is “love.” As long as we maintain a spirit of love—which is reduced to mere sentimentality—we need not be concerned about following the law of God exactly. Jesus has set us free, it is alleged, from a slavish and unquestioning conformity to every particular of God’s law, which is now not only unnecessary, but un-Christian.

Take Jesus’ teaching on divorce and adultery, for instance (Mat. 19:1-9). We are told that, according to a strict reading of the Lord’s words, a man who has divorced his wife for some reason other than fornication and has remarried is in adultery. This, it is argued, may be technically correct, but to say that this man must therefore end this “adulterous marriage” would be pressing the letter of the law over the spirit of the law,

which is simply the more general point that God wants us to treat the marriage bond seriously. The spirit of the law is that we should not divorce, but love our spouse's and stay married. To require a man to divorce from someone he loves—even if the letter of the law condemns his “marriage” as adultery—would be cruel and unloving, a violation of the more important spirit of the law. The principle or spirit of love and forgiveness precludes a strict, unyielding enforcement of the letter. As appealing as this thinking may be, it amounts to a rejection of the Lord's teaching.

This is but one example of many similar cases in which people try to justify a rejection of the law of God on the grounds of keeping some higher, nobler spirit behind the law. Consider another, this one in the area of worship. What constitutes acceptable worship has become a leading issue in the church today, as more and more of our brethren are introducing innovations intended to entertain worshippers and attract the world to our assemblies. The use of instrumental music in worship is a part of this trend. Some advocating the “spirit-over-the-letter” mindset may admit that, technically, there is no authority in the New Testament for instrumental music in worship. But not all of us agree on that point. How should we deal with this problem? Unity, they tell us, is more important than disagreements over the specifics of worship, and so as long as we offer our worship in love for God and each other, we should not divide over exactly how we do it. The higher goods of unity and church growth trump any strict reading of the letter of the law.

While we must recognize this kind of thinking for what it is—a perversion of God's will—there is a sense in which a misplaced zeal or distorted emphasis on the letter of the law may lead one to violate both its letter and spirit. Think again of those who are militant, but frequently hostile and obnoxious, in opposing error. At times, they try to justify harsh or rude behavior on the grounds that they are doing exactly what God's law requires—marking false teachers. But what of the spirit of humility and love that should characterize us? One of the reasons we oppose error is because we love souls (1 Cor. 16:14; Rev. 3:19), and does not love compel us to strive to be kind and patient, even when we must be uncompromising in defense of truth (1 Cor. 13:1-13)? We understand and acknowledge again that some situations call for pointed rebuke and strict, direct discipline (1 Cor. 4:21; Gal. 2:11ff). We realize there is considerable room for judgment

in this area, and recognize that confronting the advocates of error is frequently misinterpreted as hateful (Gal. 4:16). Too, we must use care not to judge motives in the absence of sufficient evidence. But we do see those who appear to pride themselves in championing an exaggerated emphasis on the letter of the law, who seem to relish attacking or condemning others in the name of keeping the law of God, all the while neglecting the spirit behind the law. This itself is a rejection of the law.

At other times, we find some violating the spirit of the law because they believe they are keeping the letter of the law, though actually they are keeping neither. The Pharisees condemned the disciples for eating with unwashed hands (Mat. 15:1-20). This was not an actual violation of the law of Moses, but they were more concerned with such externals than they were with the needs of hurting souls around them. This is related to the point we have already made about the elevation of ritual to highest importance, for they cared more about cleansing cups than serving people (Mark 7:3-4; Mat. 12:1-9). Their emphasis was on what they thought to be the letter of the law to the neglect of the spirit or foundational principles of the law regarding love for God and fellow man.

Presbyterian theologian R.C. Sproul offers an interesting illustration of the way the letter of the law may be kept while violating its spirit. Suppose a man likes to drive his car at exactly fifty miles per hour, and does so everywhere he goes. While driving in a zone marked fifty-five miles per hour, he might be commended for conscientious compliance with the law, and his conduct considered exemplary— especially when so many others are speeding by, violating the law without compunction. But when this man enters a school zone marked thirty-five miles per hour, he continues right on through at his usual fifty, insisting on doing so simply because that is what he prefers. Even though he may technically be obeying the law going fifty when the speed limit is fifty-five, he is only doing so because it suits him, and not to keep the spirit behind the law, a concern for the safety of his fellow citizens.

In similar fashion, a zealous insistence on doctrinal or moral purity may belie a high regard for God's law that is betrayed by one's abrasive or callous treatment of others or indifference on other issues. Are we ever really keeping the letter of the law on any particular matter if we are not loving as the Bible defines love (1 Cor. 13:1-13), or if we are not concerned about "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)?

## **Binding Where God Has Not**

We can also be guilty of legalistic distortion of God's law if we require or forbid what God does not, equating our traditions or opinions with God's law, or even elevating them above God's law. The antinomian looses where God has bound; the legalist binds where God has not.

Once more, the Pharisees perfected this perversion, combining their preoccupation with externals with their own traditions. In his account of their confrontation with Jesus over this issue, Mark offers this explanatory note: "(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market-place, except they bathe themselves, they eat not; and many other things there are, which they have received to hold, washings of cups, and pots, and brasen vessels)" (Mark 7:3-4). They confronted Jesus for his disciples' disregard for their ritual hand-washing tradition: "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (Mat. 15:2).

Jesus replied with a rebuke: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" (15:3). He condemned a loophole they had created (another manifestation of legalism that could be treated as a separate point) to free themselves from having to keep the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, adding, "Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; But their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (15:7-9). Here is a virtual summary of legalistic offenses: externalism (concerned only with the outward appearance, rather than genuine devotion to God); hypocrisy; circumvention of God's commands; binding man-made traditions. They were guilty on all accounts. Combining the language from Matthew and Mark's accounts, their legalism was characterized by the Lord as transgressing, leaving, rejecting and making void the word of God (Mark 7:8-9).

There are different ways we can end up doing, in essence, the same thing today. Considerable division and destruction has been caused in the body of Christ over the past

generation or so by those who erred in forbidding what God's word authorizes, binding where God has not bound. We label as "anti" those brethren who condemn the use of multiple communion cups, Bible classes, located preachers, congregational cooperation in evangelism, eating a meal together on church property, having a kitchen in the church building, supporting orphan homes or paying for benevolent aid for any non-saint from the church treasury. Just as the apostles did not tolerate those who sought to bind circumcision and similar aspects of the law of Moses (Acts 15:1ff; Titus 2:3ff), so we cannot countenance modern efforts to forbid what God allows.

We can also become legalists if we bind our judgments or preferences on others, making them "tests of fellowship." Which translations of the Bible are permissible for teaching and preaching? May we sing "youth" or "camp" songs in worship? What about the order of worship? May we have small group meetings on Sunday night instead of a second general assembly? Is it wrong to move or cancel the evening worship on Superbowl Sunday? Is it "liberal" to have a youth minister or a church van to transport youth to church related activities? Or have coffee and doughnuts during Bible class? Or erect a basketball hoop on the church parking lot? Or use images in a PowerPoint presentation during the sermon? What about images (supposedly) of Jesus or other Bible characters or scenes? Is it necessarily a sin to miss a weekday service of the church to compete in a sporting event, or a second Sunday service while traveling? Is it a sin for mothers to work outside the home? **We may have strong convictions about these and other, similar issues (and this writer most definitely has serious concerns with several of these items); but can we demand conformity to our views in areas where there is room for judgment or disagreement within the boundaries of God's law?** To do so moves us beyond the law of God into legalism, legislating for God.

A related problem is the succumbing to the temptation to codify specific applications of the law of God. We should "seek first the kingdom of God" (Mat. 6:33). We must "continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col. 4:2). We are to be generous (Luke 6:38; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). We are to be good stewards of our goods and our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). There are numerous broad principles like these enjoined upon us throughout the scriptures. But what, exactly, do these obligations involve in every situation? Determining that can be a tremendous, lifelong challenge. But there are people who seem

to think they have this figured out and are glad to handle it for us. They are all too happy to inform us exactly when and why we may miss a scheduled service of the church, what we can eat, how much we should give, pray, study, teach, etc. This kind of extremism is cultic and controlling. Thankfully, it is relatively rare (the opposite extreme of antinomian “anything goes” is a far greater problem), but it has caused problems in the church, and we still encounter it in varying degrees from time to time.

The word of God tells us to be separate from the world (1 John 2:15-17; 2 Cor. 6:17-18). What things, then, are “worldly” and therefore to be avoided? Can we publish a list of the multitudinous applications of the principle of purity? There was a time when certain professing Christians practically did that. They were known for what they banned: No card playing. No make-up or pants on the ladies. No coffee. No soda. No movies. No television. No secular music—especially rock music. We still encounter groups who make laws regarding things of this nature. Not only do some presume to legislate on these things, but they act as though observance of these man-made laws constitutes the very essence of discipleship.

True, the Lord’s people should be known for their purity, unashamed to be considered strange for living a radically different lifestyle from the world (1 Pet. 4:3-4). But it is unfortunate if we leave the impression that the defining characteristic of a Christian is not listening to rock music or never wearing shorts (even long shorts that extend to or past the knee). What about being known for “radical” manifestations of mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and selflessness? Isn’t loving each other as Christ loves us an essential identifying mark of God’s people (John 13:34-35)? Of course we must strive to abstain from sin, and worldliness in the church is a grave problem we should not hesitate to denounce in the clearest of terms. But the desire to be moral can descend into mere self-righteous moralism that is unhealthy and legalistic.

In the form of binding where God has not, legalism shackles men, robbing them of true liberty in Christ, chaining men where God has set them free. At best, it is a sincere but misguided misrepresentation of the law; at worse, it is an arrogant alteration of it which presumes to speak for God. That is why we should be as wary of departing from God to the radical right as we are drifting to the liberal left.



## LAW AND LOVE

### **False Charges of Legalism**

One of the most odious accusations hurled about in the church is the charge of being a Pharisee. This sect of Jewish leaders was the object of some of Jesus' sternest criticism. They were enraged by the sting of his frequent rebukes: "Hypocrites! Fools! Serpents! Offspring of vipers!" (Mat. 23:13-33). Though there were exceptions (John 3:1-2; 7:50-51), as a class they were enemies of Christ; they hated him, actively opposed him, and ultimately were instrumental in murdering him. Little wonder, then, the term "Pharisee" is a byword—an insulting epithet reserved for the ungodly. But in the church today, that word is used to label those who take God's word seriously, who actually believe we must do what God says. Unwavering commitment to upholding the law of God is castigated, branded as Pharisaical legalism.

But Jesus never condemned the Pharisees for a scrupulous concern for keeping the law of God. The Lord himself had the highest respect for the law, never undermining it in any way, but always urging others to keep it (Mat. 8:4; 19:17-19; Luke 10:25-28; Mat. 23:23). He did not treat it lightly, but "fulfilled" it, complying with it completely (Mat. 5:17). He "did always the things that are pleasing" to God (John 8:29), which means he kept God's law perfectly. He understood that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good" (Rom. 7:12). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the erroneous, superficial view of the law, emphasizing a profound sense of duty to the whole depth and import of God's commands. We have shown that Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees was not for a desire to keep the law, but for their self-righteous hypocrisy, binding of human tradition, callous unconcern for others, zealously keeping the minute rituals of the law while ignoring the deeper things of the law such as justice, mercy and faith.

Today, though, Pharisaism, or legalism, has been reconstructed as the belief that we are bound by God's law, that there is an absolute standard to which we must adhere, that obedience is essential to salvation, that there are any commandments to keep other than the command to love. Following Christ, we are told, is about relationship, not rules; it's a matter of love, not law. This antithesis between law and love is used to free us from the law of God to do as we please. It amounts to rebellion.

Submission to God is not optional. Our God is The Sovereign Ruler of all things to whom we must render complete and unquestioning obedience. He is not only our Loving Father, but our Law-giving Lord. He is not only a compassionate God, but a commandment-giving God. But God's commandments are not antithetical to his love; they are an expression of it. Through Moses, Jehovah emphasized this point repeatedly when he rehearsed the law to Israel in Deuteronomy. He assured his people of his love for them:

And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out with his presence, with his great power, out of Egypt (4:37).

Jehovah did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples... But because Jehovah loveth you, and because he would keep the oath which he sware unto your fathers, hath Jehovah brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage (7:6-8).

Moses reminded them that "Jehovah commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Jehovah our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day" (Deut. 6:24). It was because he loved them that he delivered them and gave them his law for their benefit. And he called upon them to love him in return, that he might bless them. How would they do that? By keeping his commandments:

Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (6:5).

Know therefore that Jehovah thy God, he is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and lovingkindness with them that love him and keep his commandments (7:9).

Thou shalt therefore keep the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command thee this day, to do them. And it shall come to pass, because ye hearken to these ordinances, and keep and do them, that Jehovah thy God will keep with thee the covenant and the lovingkindness which he sware unto thy fathers: and he will love thee, and bless thee.... Thou shalt be blessed above all peoples (7:11-14).

And now, Israel, what doth Jehovah thy God require of thee, but to fear Jehovah thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve Jehovah thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul (10:12).

Therefore thou shalt love Jehovah thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his ordinances, and his commandments, always (11:1).

Ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love Jehovah your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul... (Deut. 11:13; cf. 11:22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:16,20).

God's love for us is seen in giving his commandments; our love for him, in keeping them. This was true under Moses, and just as true under Christ. Contrast the aversion to commandments on the grounds of "loving" God with the words of Jesus,

If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments (John 14:15).

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him (14:21).

If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my words (14:23-24).

John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved," recorded those words, and in his own epistle, the apostle of love, as he is known, reiterated the teaching of his Savior: "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him... For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 2:5; 5:3). How can we think we can exchange the law for love when John tells us our love for God is manifested,—and his love for us is perfected—in "keeping his word"? Paul tells us as well that love is "the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10), not a substitute for it. In scripture, law and love—love for God and for others—are not contrasted, but inseparably linked.

Notice again John's statement that God's commandments "are not grievous." Those who regard respect for God's law as legalism miss this point. Tragically, they see the commands of God as an undue restriction on our freedom, and for that reason they deny we are under them. How different is the perspective of Moses, Jesus and John, who tell us God's commandments are not a burden, but a blessing. They do not unduly restrict us, but free us from the bondage to our own lusts, and the awful consequences that come from unrestrained indulgence in them. "Whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself; But he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded. The law of the wise

is a fountain of life, That one may depart from the snares of death. Good understanding giveth favor; But the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov. 13:13-15). God’s law is not to make us miserable, but to provide for and protect us. It doesn’t oppress us, but keeps us from oppression.

While we have exposed the legalistic frame of mind that reduces Christianity to mere rule-keeping, the “relationship, not rules” (or “man, not the plan”) thinking is grievous error, for it fails to understand there can be no right relationship with God apart from keeping his word. If we claim Jesus as Savior, we must also acknowledge him as Lord, and that means we are not at liberty to ignore what he commands: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). When he said, in John 12:48, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings,” Christ equated the refusal to receive his word with a rejection of him personally, which in turn is a rejection of the Father who sent him (Luke 10:16). Our relationship to him is tied inextricably to our attitude toward his rules, his commands, his law. Let’s consider further what that attitude should be.

### **OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD’S LAW**

Proponents of the “love, not law” philosophy contend that obedience is an outgrowth of love for God—a result, not a condition, of salvation. If submission to God’s law were in any sense required, they argue, then we would be submitting to God because we have to, not because we want to. This raises an important question. Do we obey God because we *must* do so, or because we *want* to do so?

This question presents us with a false dichotomy. It involves a logical fallacy known as a complex, or loaded, question, meaning it contains an assumption that is not necessarily true. The assumption in this case is that our response to God is out of either duty or desire, not both. But it’s not an either-or situation. The truth is we obey God because we must obey and because we want to obey. Duty and love are not incompatible. Consider a father providing for his children. He does so out of a sense of duty, but the more he loves his children, the more his duty is a delight to him. That is how our relationship with God should be, as it was for the Psalmist, who said, “I delight to do your will, O my God” (Psa. 40:8).

To have the right attitude toward the law of God, we must understand the relationship of God to his law. The law—and here we mean basic morality—does not exist independently or abstractly from God. He does not operate *sub lego*, or under the law, so that it is something higher than God to which he owes obedience. Neither does he exist *ex lex*, “outside” or “apart from law,” so that the law is something he invents, which would reduce morality to God’s whim, and God’s will to mere caprice. God is neither under nor apart from law. The law is not above God or beneath him, but extends from his very character. It is not merely what God commands, but is an expression of who God is.

God’s law, then, is a type of revelation of himself. If we analyze the law of God, we find that it has several functions. First, it restrains. That is, it tends to keep sin in check by spotlighting what is evil, condemning it and commanding us to refrain from it. Second, it reflects. By this we mean that it serves as a mirror of sorts, allowing us to peer into it and see ourselves—not as we might like to think of ourselves or as others might think of us, but as God sees us. It allows us to compare ourselves to God’s perfect standard and evaluate ourselves in light of it. But the law has a third, revelatory function. It reveals to us the moral character of God, providing us with an understanding of his nature, his person.

This is extremely important, because if the law is the expression of God’s person, then my attitude toward the law is my attitude toward God himself. Contempt for the law of God is contempt for God. That is why the word of God says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9). When Paul spoke of the one who epitomizes sin, the personification of evil itself—the mysterious “man of sin” (2 Thes. 2:3)—he identified him as “the lawless one” (2:8). That is how the word of God defines sin: “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). And lawlessness is the most serious of matters because to violate the law of God is to violate God. To act lawlessly is to act in contempt for God.

Conversely, love for God is love for his law. To delight in God is to delight in his law, not merely for the sake of the law, but knowing that the law is the expression of his will. Of the blessed man we are told, “His delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:2; 119:70). In Psalm 119:97 we see this attitude dramatically articulated: “Oh, how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the

day.” The first word of this text is an outburst of emotion. It is not “Oh,” but “Oh!” The Psalmist is enthusiastic and emphatic about his love for God’s law. He rejoices in it (119:14). It is sweeter than honey to him (119:103). If we love God, the law of God is not an intrusion or annoyance, but a source of unparalleled enjoyment. We take pleasure in learning and keeping God’s law—not only out of duty but because, as we have already stated, we want to please the lawgiver.

It is love for God, and not a mere abstract concern for law-keeping, that arouses indignation in the faithful when God’s law is ignored or perverted. “Hot indignation hath taken hold upon me, Because of the wicked that forsake thy law” (119:53). “Streams of water run down mine eyes, Because they observe not thy law” (119:136). “I beheld the treacherous, and was grieved, Because they observe not thy word” (119:158). These sentiments remind us of when Paul was in Athens, and “his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Those who pride themselves in their indifference over the perversion of God’s law by false teachers in and out of the church reveal a shameful lack of conviction for truth. If we love God, we will not be apathetic toward the violation of his law because we understand that such is an affront to God himself. Love for God and for souls will compel us to stand against any defiance of his law (Jude 3).

We often hear people speak of their love for God or their love for Jesus. But seldom do we hear anyone say, “What I truly love about my Christian experience is God’s law. How I love the law of God!” They may say they love the Bible, that they love the word of God. In scripture, though, the word of God is equated with the law of God (Psa. 119:1, 11, 16, 18, et al). God’s law, then, is God speaking to us. To love God’s word is to love his law. And to love his law is to love him.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is no tension between love and law. As we sometimes sing, “Give me the Bible, holy message shining, Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way. Precept and promise, law and love combining, till night shall vanish in eternal day.” That is what have in the Bible, and ultimately what obedience to God is—law and love combining. Obedience to God’s law is the expression of God’s will—of God himself—in our lives. It is wicked, therefore, to condemn all concern for obedience to the law as legalism.

The fundament problem we have in the world and in our own lives is evil. The transgression of God's law is our greatest problem, presenting us with our greatest need, which was met by the greatest expression of love ever known when God gave his Son at Calvary. Therefore when we deal with the matter of the law of God and our relationship to it, we are not distracting ourselves with some tangential question. This is not a mere academic exercise, but a discussion which comes to the very core of who we are, and what God's will is for our lives. Legalism, often misunderstood, is a distortion of God's law, and is ultimately a rejection of God. Even if we do not embrace it outright, for various reasons we may at times unintentionally drift toward it—even with the best of intentions. When we do, we must be honest enough to recognize it and correct our course. That is no small challenge, but if we would walk in God's way, we must be wary of departing to the left or the right.