

Learning from the Mistakes of Jesus

(or Rules for Living and ministry You are
Not Likely to Learn in Sunday school)

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Appendix I

Part I

What?

When you first spied the title to this book, “What?” was probably the first exclamation that came to mind. Since this book is written by a Christian and written *to* Christians, it may have appeared to be rank heresy. I will attempt to answer that question, then to move on to answer the follow-up question: “Why?”

First, the title, once you see the subtitle, becomes an obvious spoof.

You might then ask: “A spoof of *what* then?”

Good question. I think it all starts with our concept (image? idol?) of God. Most of today’s Christians start out with a very “sloppy-*agape*” version of God – what one observer called the “indulgent grandfather” concept of God. We have this image of this very *nice* God based upon highly selective, children’s Bible storybook images of the dealings of God with humankind. That is, all the “*nice* God” stuff, bleached of the holiness, righteousness (there *is* a huge difference), and justice of God.

I have heard it preached that God *never* chastens His children, but rather “gently corrects” them; that He no longer “sends judgments” (like AIDS, and such) on a wicked world; that He “loves everyone unconditionally *just as they are*; that He *never* hates.

I say that many Christians *start* with the “nice God” view, but, I hasten to add, they usually *finish* with that false image as well. I do not mean to diminish the love of God – His grace, mercy and kindness – I only wish to counterbalance what I perceive to be an exclusion of the character of God’s holiness, justice, and wrath against the wicked.

The view of God we hold will certainly affect our presuppositions on doctrine and the way in which we, as believers, relate to God and everyone else – believing and unbelieving. It will guide how we minister in the name of the Lord.

I contend (and I usually do) that much of the Church generally is worshipping a god who is not the God of the Bible. As such, much of what we do in the way of ministry is more derivative of sentimentality and psychology than the Word of God. Comparing many of the things the average church holds as “appropriate” (a currently fashionable word in the true spirit of the post-Christian “church”) would put Jesus Himself on the wrong side of that designation.

Jesus, today, would simply be “inappropriate” in most of what He did. In other words, He made “mistakes.”

Looking at many of the things God – and particularly Jesus – has done would not fit very well with our modern “church growth” or “counseling” teachings. If only God

had had the chance to observe Willow Creek Church or read Dr. James Dobson *before* He had acted and written the Bible! (Tongue planted firmly in cheek!)

The way it works out is that many people, both Christian and non-Christian, believe it is within their purview to *judge God* – especially that mean, Old Testament God.

I am far from being the first observer of this bizarre role reversal. Note what C.S. Lewis said in *God in the Dock*:

“The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should give a reasonable explanation for being a god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God’s acquittal. But the important thing is that Man is in the Bench and God in the Dock.”

We often try to judge God and His actions from our own finite position, then get upset when God disagrees with our assessment. In other words, we want to do things our own way.

Yet, God is *famous* for doing things in strangely. To recast an old saying: “God works in weird ways, His wonders to perform.” When He sent the Messiah, He did not buy advertising time on the Roman Broadcasting Network (RBC) – or even its local affiliate, Jerusalem News Service. He sent angels to tell a bunch of isolated shepherds – the functional equivalent of telling migrant farm workers in central Texas.

To save the world, God *let Satan kill Him and He went into Hell*. What a great way to defeat the Devil, huh?

In the Old Testament, he told Gideon that 32,000 men was just too many to use to save Israel. Then He said the same about 10,000. It was only when there were 300 against hundreds of thousands that God was satisfied to do *His* work.

Why? Certainly no sane Church leader today would use such tactics!

Think about it realistically. Suppose your church, along with others, decided to do a city-wide evangelism push and had set up the orientation session for your troops. Let us say that 5,000 people showed up. The leaders would be thrilled. Then suppose that, as the leaders prayed, God told them that they had too many and they should send home any people who were fearful to witness to strangers.

It would have been hard enough to believe that in the first place. They would probably (if they were Charismatics or Pentecostals) have been rebuking Satan all over the room.

Then let's suppose they settled down and ended up believing it was God talking. When they told the "fearful" to go home, 3,000 leave.

"Well, I guess 2,000 still isn't too bad," they think and go back to praying. Strangely enough, God speaks again saying there are *still* too many. He says they should make an altar call for dedication. He tells them that whoever lies completely prostrate at the altar should be kept, and the rest dismissed.

They obey, but are shocked when only fifty people lie prostrate. Their troops have been, like Gideon's, whittled down 100 to 1.

So why would God make such a "mistake"?

Frankly, God does it to prevent humans from boasting. He wants *all* the credit and glory. Until we get accustomed to this fact, we'll never understand the ways of God in the slightest.

The general idea here is covered in my former best-seller (my tongue "appropriately" planted even more deeply in my cheek), *Jesus Against the Church*, however, this work will attempt to give a little direction and – I hope – guidance from Scripture and experience as to what some of the "rules" of life really are for the believer.

Know this, that most of this has been gleaned from *my own* experience with God combined with the strange acts of God I see in the Scripture. From the human view (and often my own), what I find in Scripture is "mistakes" made by God – mistakes that *work* out to His glory and honor. As a result of the combination of seeing God act mistakenly and what He has showed me to do in life and ministry, I have come to simply submit to and learn from His mistakes.

In our desire for simplicity, we often "simplify" the truth out of Scripture. We bleach out important truths in order to make our message more palatable to the hearers, but we do them no favors in this. We cut ourselves off from hearing what God is telling us to do because our simplistic reduction of biblical truth would exclude these things – even if God wants them. We refuse to do things that God would command because we refuse to believe in the kind of god Who would command them. We create a god in the image of what *we* consider "nice," "fair," and "loving" and ignore what Scripture plainly teaches.

I hope to expose some of these false gods of niceness. This is the "Why?" of this book.

To some, it may seem that there is no connection between most of the "rules" I have written about, but I believe that the central truth here is that we need a truer vision of God and Who He *really* is. The rest of the rules flow from that understanding.

Some of the rules – especially those about our relationship with God – are crucial to understand, others may be more incidental. I can only hope and pray that something here will assist the Church in becoming a better representative of the True God (as opposed to the Dream God) on earth.

Part II

Relationship with God

1. Fear God

The fear of God, like Hell, is one of those topics rarely heard within church walls in America these days.

Almost without exception, when this message is preached, there *is* exception.

I am nearly always confronted by those who tell me that we are to *love* God, not fear Him. Both Christian and pagan are certain of this.

They put forth several arguments, but most often I hear a partial quote from 1 John 4:18, “. . . perfect love casteth out fear.”

My usual retort is to ask the person if they have perfect love.

However, the question must be more fully answered: “Should we (especially in these New Testament times) love God, or fear Him?”

The answer is, “Yes.”

While everyone seems to agree on the “love,” there is much false teaching involved in the “fear.” Some people contend that “fear God” is simply not the Gospel – the “good news.” I propose that you cannot have a true Gospel without it.

So what about the quote from 1 John 4:18, “. . . perfect love casteth out fear”? Doesn't this show us that Christians are to love rather than fear God?

I don't think it does. Quite to the contrary, Jesus Himself commanded His disciples to fear God.

Matthew 10: 28

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (KJV)

I realize that there is a teaching out there that the one “which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” is Satan, but this is patently false.

An illustration will help illumine the point. The situation is much like a trial in an earthly courtroom. Hell is the punishment inflicted by a supreme Judge after a trial. God is the Judge. People either go *pro se* and try to represent themselves before the Court, or they have an Advocate. (1 John 2: 1) Finally, there is the Prosecutor, the Accuser. (Revelation 12: 10)

Only One, the Judge, is permitted to pass and execute a sentence! The Prosecutor does not sentence people to jail (or Hell).

But to further verify the New Testament teaching that we are to fear God, listen to Peter:

1 Peter 2: 17

17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. (KJV) (See also: 2 Corinthians 7: 1 and Ephesians 5: 21)

The New Testament church in Acts models the fear of the Lord:

Acts 9: 31

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. (KJV)

Were these people simply deluded? I think not.

The writer of Hebrews also commends fear of God – with the addendum of a reminder of *why* one should fear God, namely, judgment. This is reminiscent of the “everlasting gospel” in both Ecclesiastes and Revelation.

Hebrews 12: 28-29

28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

29 For our God is a consuming fire. (KJV)

No, I think that the New Testament church (and their leaders) clearly understood the everlasting principle that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Job 28: 28; Psalm 111: 10; Proverbs 9: 10)

The fall-back position of those who want to argue that we are not to fear God is to redefine fear as “reverence.” This is merely a shell game.

Even the Scripture distinguishes the two. For instance, in the verse from Hebrews cited above, we are commended to serve God with *both* “reverence and godly fear.”

Is the writer being redundantly repetitious? Hardly.

Here the writer uses *aidos* for “reverence” which denotes “downcast eyes” and “awe.” However, when the writer says “fear,” he uses *eulabeia*. This word implies “dread,” not mere reverence or respect. The word used in 1 Peter 2: 17 (quoted above) is stronger yet. He uses *phobeo* (from which we derive “phobia”) which was a description of flight occasioned by fear. It meant exceedingly fearful, frightened, and alarmed. The same is true of the Old Testament uses of “fear” in which *yare*’ is used.

When Jesus uses “reverence” in a parable (Matthew 21: 37), He uses *entrepo*, meaning “respect.”

It is not as if there were no alternative terms for reverence. If that was what the writers wanted to say, there were ample words to use for the purpose. (It is unfortunate and confusing that sometimes the KJV translators rendered both *eulabeia* and *yare*’ as “reverence.”)

So, what we are left with is that “fear God” means *fear* God. It is, after all, “a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10: 31)

The conclusion is the same one found in Ecclesiastes – Fear God and keep His commandments because God will judge you. New Testament or Old, it is the final fence on our behavior – if we have it.

James 2: 19 tells us that the demons all believe in God – and tremble. It seems that many people don’t have that much sense.

I suppose if you have “perfect love” for God, you might be an exception. I know that I am not.

2. Love God for who He is and not for what you want Him to be.

2 Corinthians 11: 3-4

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 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. (KJV)

“Another Jesus.” This warning from the apostle slips by a lot of people. There are a lot of “Jesuses” out there: Black Jesus, White Jesus; Laughing Jesus, Crying Jesus; Muscular Jesus, Effeminate Jesus; Straight-Talkin’ Jesus, Psycho-Therapist Jesus;

Republican-Status-Quo Jesus, Democrat Compassionate Revolutionary Jesus; Gandhi Jesus, Onward-Christian-Soldiers Jesus. Then there is the Jesus of Scripture.

The Jesus of Scripture looks – for good reason – just like the God of Scripture. However, to listen to most Christians today you would think there was a kind of trinitarian schizophrenia going on with Wrathful Father-God on one end and Jesus-Meek-And-Mild on the other.

Dispensationalists tend to portray the Old Testament as a time when the former set up impossible demands then randomly threw fits of rage when they weren't met. Think of the deaths of Onan (Genesis 38: 1-10), Uzziah (2 Samuel 6: 1-8), or the 42 children who mocked Elisha (2 Kings 2: 22-25).

Then they portray Jesus as the one who got God to repent of those old ways and acts as a buffer between us (the good people) and any lingering outbursts of God's old ways. Usually they point to the time Jesus prevented the adulterous woman from being stoned. This verse is vastly misused in the first place, but they also neglect to mention that Jesus commanded her to go and sin no more. Also ignored are the deaths of Herod the Great (Acts 12: 18-24), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11) – not to mention the sorcerer struck blind by Paul's word (Acts 13: 7-12).

In Sunday School we are given a distinctly non-offensive God, and that picture is carried through to adulthood. I recall one relatively good Bible story book where the story was told of Israel out in the desert wanting meat and that God sent them quail and they all had a wonderful meal. Unfortunately, the *real* story was that the Israelites were murmuring and complaining about God's provision of manna. God sent them quail alright – until it was coming out their noses while they vomited it up! (Numbers 11: 1-20) The Sunday School God is the one most of us live with in the Church in America.

Scripture, on the other hand, tells us that God is one God and that He “change[s] not.” (Malachi 3: 6) It tells us that Jesus, Who was also God in the Old Testament, “the same, yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13: 8)

While I understand that the *covenants* are different, that doesn't mean that *God* is different. He still has the same opinion of murder, adultery, stealing, coveting, homosexuality, and all the other moral issues that He had when He started. God is not more tolerant of sin than He was in the Old Testament, He has just made access to forgiveness more available – *if* you acknowledge and confess your sin *first*. (1 John 1: 9)

God's love and forgiveness is not “unconditional” (again, in modern parlance) as we are continually being told these days.

Jesus tells us in John 14: 23, “*If* a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” (KJV)

There is a lot of “if” in this statement. The Father does not simply love and make His abode with *anyone* who names the name of Jesus. We first have to love His Son and demonstrate that by keeping Jesus’ words. The same is true of the forgiveness of sin as we saw in 1 John 1: 9.

All the things God says He hates in Proverbs 6: 16-19, he still hates through eternity. (Matthew 5: 18) More on this in Chapter 11, *God hates you and has a wonderful plan for your life.*

A lot of what God says makes us uncomfortable. This is because it is *we*, not He, who lack understanding of the true nature of God. Our perceptions of God – any other god than the one in Scripture – affect everything we do and say about God. To the extent that our *god is different* from the God of Scripture, our *Gospel is different* than the Gospel of Scripture. (See Chapter 7: *The everlasting Gospel*)

The “gospel” I have heard from most Christians today would probably not lead people to any true salvation – only to a “better way of life.” For one thing, any mention of the fear of God (See Chapter 1) is almost entirely absent. The reason for that is that we mostly believe in “another Jesus” or “another God.” We believe in a nice, gooshy, sloppy-agape God Who considers it an *honor* for *any* person – regardless of condition of true repentance – to “accept Jesus.” God is presented as simply *desperate* to have *you* in His kingdom.

The “Unconditional Love” proponents only require that you “accept Jesus,” not that you acknowledge and confess your sin and repent. This is because these proponents want God to “accept them the way they are” but do not want to “accept *God* the way *He* is.

None of this is to say that God is not tender towards His people and forgiving of their sins. (2 Peter 3: 9 and Romans 11: 22) God goes a long way out of His way to be longsuffering of all kinds of evil in the world – and especially among those who are His – lest any perish. This world-wide longsuffering is specifically for the benefit of those who are *already His*. (2 Peter 3: 9) However, it does not last forever. God is not mocked. (Galatians 6: 7)

Even His judgment shows that He is much more than most people feel comfortable with. With one statement, God shows that He does not rejoice when a wicked person dies and expires his last chance to call upon Him and be saved. (Ezekiel 33: 11) Conversely, He tells us that He will *laugh* at the derision and calamity that will befall the wicked. (Proverbs 1: 22-33) We see that He commended His love toward us “while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5: 8), yet He says He hates the wicked and is angry with them every day. (Psalm 5: 5 and 7: 11) Is God schizophrenic? No. He is God – and He is much more than the simplistic God of our imaginings.

Both His judgment and His longsuffering demonstrate His love for His people – based upon His accurate knowledge of us and our strengths and weaknesses. Our love for

God should be based similarly upon accurate knowledge of His holy and righteous nature.

3. Obey God even when you don't agree with Him.

I find that I don't always agree with God.

My response to myself when I feel this way is, "Too bad."

It didn't take me long to figure out that God is *always* right in those circumstances and I am, conversely, always wrong. As the Scripture says, "Let God be true and every man a liar." (Romans 3: 4a)

While "liar" may seem to be somewhat harsh, you must consider the fact that it is *the God of the universe* that we contradict when we "disagree" with Him. He personifies Truth. Any disagreement qualifies as a lie.

Look at the verse cited above. Just before this comment, God is saying that the Jews were called with a holy calling, but some simply did not believe when He sent His Son. The mere fact of not believing was called "a lie." He is God and they "lie" by not believing Him when He sends them Truth. The verse portion after notes that it is this fact that justifies God's judgment against those who will not believe.

But it gets worse. Not only does "disagreeing" with God make you a liar, it means you are calling God a liar. Yikes!

I John 5: 10

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. (KJV)

Not believing God = Calling God a liar. Period.

So what do I do if I read a verse that I "disagree with" now? I call on God to renew my mind so that I will understand His truth. However, I do not wait for Him to actually give me complete understanding before I change what I say and do. I begin immediately to "agree with God" in what I say and how I live. Usually the understanding begins to unfold later – sometimes *much* later. God was and is immeasurably patient with me and my substantially corrupt Adamic nature, so I try to be patient to wait on Him to show me His wisdom.

An example is the issue of adultery. Under the civil laws, as opposed to the ceremonial laws, of Israel, adultery warranted the death penalty. Now as a typical American Christian when I was first saved I tended to see that as "just Old Testament"

stuff. I thought, Like so many others, that God had changed *His* mind and was now less opposed to adultery.

I couldn't have been more wrong! God had good reason for making adultery a capital offense. Not only for the offense it is to Him and His nature, but for the incalculable harm done to the families and the nation where adultery is rampant.

As I came to realize that God did not change His mind about such things, I also came to see that when He designed Israel's civil laws, He gave them the best laws imaginable. As someone once asked, "If not *God's* laws, whose?"

In other words, do we think that our human invention of laws and punishments – based upon the thoughts and intents of our corrupt hearts – will be *better* than God's laws? Are not His thoughts higher than our thoughts, and His ways higher than our ways? (Isaiah 55: 8-9) Are we wiser than He? Even God's "foolishness" is wiser than men! (1 Corinthians 1: 25)

Here I had been ambling along in my Christian walk thinking I was more compassionate than God because I would never have considered executing an adulterer. The root of that belief was that I was not perceiving God for Who He truly is. (See: Chapter 2: *Love God for who He is, not what you want Him to be*) This is why it would never have occurred to me to openly say I was "more compassionate" than He is – I simply didn't know accurately who He really was.

When It began to dawn on me, I had a choice – one I have had to make over and over as a Christian – "Will I speak the truth, or will I, for fear of men (especially the brethren) continue to propagate the same old myths about God?"

It is hard to imagine how alienated one can become when they start saying to other believers that they believe that the civil laws of our country ought to make adultery (as well as homosexuality) crimes of capital weight.

It is hard to make people understand the difference between the adulterer being able to repent of his sin and receive forgiveness from God and his being able to suffer no consequences for his criminal acts. The same people who would have no problem sending a convicted child molester or murderer off to jail – even if they repented and turned to Christ – find it difficult to perceive that an adulterer should be likewise punished. He was *very explicit* about the punishment.

What we have now is the State trying to bring about repentance and conversion through what is called "rehabilitation," and no one is seeking justice for the victims. It is the Church that should be in the business of conversion. The State should be doing what the Bible says it should – punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. (Romans 13: 3-4; 1 Peter 2: 13-14) The whole society – not to mention single mothers and the children of broken homes – are victims of the adulterer, yet the adulterer suffers no retribution at all. In fact, the adulterer is often glorified in the media and popular culture.

So, coming to the conclusion that God was right about the treatment of criminals made it very difficult for me to fellowship in the average Christian church group.

And the process is on-going.

So it should be. It is called “growing in the Lord.”

The rule is easy: “God is *always* right.”

For an example, I turn to the disciples:

John 6: 47-69

- 47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.
- 48 I am that bread of life.
- 49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.
- 50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.
- 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.
- 52 The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?
- 53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.
- 54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
- 55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.
- 56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.
- 57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.
- 58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.
- 59 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.
- 60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?
- 61 When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?
- 62 What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.
64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.
65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.
66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.
67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?
68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.
69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. (KJV)

Here we have Jesus saying something that *nobody* around Him agreed with – or understood. “This is a hard saying,” they said, and they left. There was no attempt to ask for wisdom from Jesus; no attempt to seek the truth. They just left. The remainder (the remnant) were His 12 disciples. They were obviously bewildered. They didn’t know quite what to make of Jesus talking about cannibalism, but they had been following Him around and seemed frozen in place while the others left.

“How about you? Are you leaving too?” Jesus asked them.

With all the confusion; with all the weight of popular opinion, Peter just threw up his hands and said, “We know you are the Messiah of God. We’re confused, but where else would we go to get the words of life?”

That’s the picture! When God says it, believe it and act accordingly. Ask for understanding and wisdom, but, in the meantime, act on His Word.

4. The Ultimate Purpose

Revelation 4: 10-11

10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (KJV)

Would you think that the 24 elders – two dozen chosen out of all of mankind for these positions – might know just a wee bit about God and His purposes? I would think that their words might be important.

Now you have to imagine that these people have been through a lot in order to be given such positions and crowns. After all, Jesus did promise such rewards to those who were faithful in their given tasks.

The first thing we notice is that, no matter how much God has elevated and exalted these folks, the moment *God* comes on the scene they immediately recognize how pale and beggarly their crowns are and how unworthy they are of those blandishments. Their own glory is a mere trinket along side the glory of God – and they *say* so.

Learning some of what God’s ultimate purpose from the words of such men will go a long way toward our proper fear of the Lord.

So, what is God in the whole creation-of-the-world business for anyway? Did He really need a bunch of stupid bipeds to fill up His life? Did His love for humanity so overwhelm Him that He started creation and went through all the muck of having to deal with the rebellion so that He might have a few of these clunky hunks of flesh to hang around with – while many times more were eternal reminders of His failure to be able to attract them and will ultimately roast for eternity in Hell?

To listen to most Christians, this would be the only conclusions one could derive.

Now, don’t misunderstand me, I believe what John 3: 16 says about how God loved the world and sent Jesus to die for us. This is not the problem. The question is: Why did God start the whole thing in the first place?

I don’t claim to understand all of the inscrutable motives of God, but I think the Scripture – and this verse in particular – gives us a clue.

The elders say that “*for His pleasure* they are and were created.”

This is a startling and disturbing concept for us. It makes us – and all of creation – sound like mere *toys* for God. He created the whole world and all that followed it for fun – for kicks – because it felt good to Him! It offends human pride to have ourselves described as though we were mere playthings.

It seems so – well, *insensitive* to our needs! (In modern parlance.)

We much prefer to be the center of creation. A.W. Tozer, one of those pain-in-the-neck Christians everyone hates until he dies and we can praise him without having to actually confront his truth, noted in his book, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God*:

“Christianity today is man-centered, not God-centered. God is made to wait patiently, even respectfully, on the whims of men. The image of God currently popular is that of a distracted Father, struggling in heartbroken desperation to get people to accept a Savior of whom they feel no need and in whom they have very little interest. . . . This view of things

is, of course, a kind of religious romanticism which, while it often uses flattering and sometimes embarrassing terms in praise of God, manages to make man the star of the show.”

However, on reflection, it makes perfect sense that the real goal of the universe is God’s glory. This is the *Eternal Creator of the Universe* we’re talking about, after all. This is no man. (Hosea 11: 9b) It is not as though He *needed* anything – even us! (Acts 17: 25)

So, just how does this Almighty God derive “pleasure”? He enjoys being glorified; He enjoys being honored and worshipped. He created a universe in which, in the end, He is glorified in *all* things and *by* all things.

To our puny and finite (and corrupted) human eyes, this seems to be monumental arrogance, pride, egocentricity, and such. However, the elders answer that charge too: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power.”

Being on-the-spot reporters, as it were, they know something much more truly than we could ever know it this side of the throne room – that it is not “prideful” of God to receive all this glory because it is *true!*

So what exactly is “glory”? One of my pastors did a word study of this and concluded that one of the nearest English equivalents (though none are exact) was the word “significance.” When God is recognized for how significant He was and is to the whole of creation, He is being glorified.

The whole of creation points out the significance of God. Even the most vile, wicked sinner, in the end, bows his knee and confesses that Jesus Christ is truly Lord of all to the glory of God the Father. (Isaiah 45: 23; Romans 14: 11; Philipians 2: 10)

Think about that: The most evil person ever to live will acknowledge God as his righteous judge and Lord *just as he is about to be cast into eternal torment!*

The idea that God will be glorified both by those in Heaven and those in Hell is strange to most American Christians because of our sanctimonious image of God. God, though, is eternally glorified for His overwhelming mercy and grace in and by every person found in the Book of Life. He is *equally glorified* – but this time for His holiness, righteousness, and *justice* – by every person in the Lake of Fire.

It cannot be any other way.

Remember that the Lake of Fire is always going to be around – through all eternity – and we won’t be able to ignore that.

Revelation 14: 9-11

9 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. (KJV)

Now I understood that the *saints* will be in the company of God and His holy angels for eternity, but this verse indicates that the torment of God's enemies will be plainly visible from that locale.

Doesn't that sound terrible? I mean, how could you enjoy the presence of God while the "smoke of their torment" was ascending forever and ever within view? – especially if people we knew and loved ended up in the Lake of Fire?

It seems to be a contradiction – but only if we look from the human rather than the eternal perspective.

My point is that we human beings – corrupted as we are – are unable to appreciate 1) just how *holy* God is, and 2) just how *evil* sin is.

Holiness is God's Number One attribute. Recall all the glimpses of the heavenly courts recounted in Scripture. All of the worshippers are continually saying, "Holy, holy, holy!" We don't see them saying, "Loving, loving, loving" or "Righteous, righteous, righteous."

So then, what is "holiness"?

Most people have the impression that "holiness" is something like righteousness, purity, or sinlessness, but the actual word means "separate," "set apart," "different," or "other." God is "other" than all of creation. He is not "part" of everything, but separate from it. This is why He is incomprehensible – why his judgments are past finding out (Romans 11: 13, and others) and his love passes all knowledge (Ephesians 3: 17-19). He is beyond anything capable of being compared to the natural order of things.

A good example of what "holy" means would be to remember that the vessels used in the Temple in the Old Testament. They were deemed "holy" – "set apart" for use in God's service *only*. Now imagine the horror a true believing Jew of that time might experience if he heard that someone had used one of the gold incense bowls for a bedpan or that a pig was sacrificed upon the altar.

God is not only “other” than the creation, He is specifically separate from sin – and separate from sinners. (Hebrews 7: 26)

We, on the other hand, because we are immersed in a world full of sin, excuse sin, grade sins into big sins and little sins. We may be getting sanctified (being made holy) from day to day with regard to our own sins, but we simply are incapable of seeing how awful sin is *from God's point of view*. We tend to think that if we “don’t smoke, don’t chew, don’t run with boys that do” – if we pray, read, are nice to others, go to church, and tithe, that this constitutes some kind of accomplishment – that we will get some kind of standing before God for reward beyond the gift of salvation. We cannot see that often our best times of obedience to God are tainted with false motives.

This situation will change immediately when we stand before a holy God and see what great grace it is for God to even *consider* allowing beings like us to be included into His kingdom – what great mercy it was for Him to deign to send His Son to die a horrible death for the lowest form of scum in the universe.

We will be grateful for that grace that kept us from Hell.

We will also *instantly* have no problem with the idea of glorifying God *forever* for that unfathomable grace and mercy that allowed us into His holy presence *at all*. We will be horrified that we were so casual about sin in our own lives – and in the lives of others. We will then recognize how utterly deserving of the Lake of Fire we were.

All of our feeble attempts to do right and to serve Him will, as it did with the elders, evaporate into meaninglessness beside the great grace that saved us.

At the same time as we understand fully how evil our sins were and how gracious God’s gift was, we will comprehend just how evil the condemned were (including some that we regarded as “nice folks”), and most of all, how completely wicked it was for people to reject the free gift of God in Christ Jesus and try to make it on their own. We will then be in *full agreement with God* as to why eternity in the Lake of Fire is an eternal declaration of His justice and righteousness. That rejection of God’s Son and His sacrifice will ring eternally in our ears as the worst offense imaginable.

As a result, all the creation – including all the principalities and powers (Ephesians 2: 4-7 and 3: 8-11) – will see the display of God’s wisdom, grace, justice, power, and righteousness and will glorify Him forever because of how deep and marvelous it is.

All other glories – as seen by the response of the elders in the Revelation – will pale in comparison. The ultimate purpose of the universe – to glorify God – will be accomplished.

Our purpose, then, must be to submit ourselves to displaying God’s glory by being conformed to the image of His Son. (Romans 8: 29)

5. Don't focus on the family.

Our mission on Earth is to fear God and keep His commandments. As Christians, it is to “take up our cross” (whatever “cross” that happens to be) and follow Him.

We are promised that all who live godly will suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3: 12) Jesus told us that people who follow Him (prophets) are seldom recognized in their own house. (Matthew 13: 57) More than that, that our *worst* enemies would be from our own families when it came to taking up our crosses. (Matthew 10: 36)

Matthew 10: 34-40

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. (KJV)

There are a lot of ways the Church has tried to dodge the implications of this verse, but it stands regardless. While we are not called to go out of our ways to make our families hate us, we have to be careful that we don't go out of *the Way* to avoid it.

Look at Jesus' word given to one disciple:

Matthew 8: 21-22

21 And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. (KJV)

Most of us would have thought that it was important to go to that funeral. The underlying motivation would be so that we didn't offend our families by stating or implying that we had “more important” things to do – like follow Jesus. However, we would most likely have given our reason for attendance a religious gloss. I mean, think of the opportunities for *witness*!

Am I saying skip all the funerals? Not by any means. I am saying that it is possible that God may have other marching orders for you when such “important” family times come up. We need to take up our crosses – even when it might cause family division.

Most of the teaching in the Church today is overbalanced toward family togetherness and “peace.” I will agree that the balance is sometimes difficult to find, but if you find your motives lean toward just “keeping the peace” it may indicate that you are missing vital opportunities to deliver a life-giving Word to a family member.

Certainly there is the chance they will reject it – and you. They may never recover from it – but then they may recover their souls (even if it is many years later) because of a word faithfully given.

The stark contrast between our love (and fear) of God and our love (and fear) of people in our families should resemble the difference between love and hate. Even our spouses are not immune.

Luke 14: 26-27

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (KJV)

Yes, family members who are confronted by us as God leads will see us as hating them. They will publicly accuse us of being hateful, in spite of the fact that it was our love for them that motivated us to risk their momentary, earthly displeasure in the hopes that we might be together in eternity with Christ. Being falsely accused of hating them is simply part of the cross we may have to bear.

I have been fortunate enough to have a very faithful, believing wife. Most of my children have turned their lives over to Christ and are following Him. However, one of my children (at this time) claims to be an atheist and would not allow us to see two of our grandchildren alone because she could not get us to agree to refrain from talking about God, righteousness, sin, and judgment with them and around them. As painful as it is to be excluded from their lives, it is better than surrendering my voice on the Truth.

The fact is that situations like this – and much worse – are bound to happen in the lives of Christians. This is *why* Jesus told us that we had to take up our crosses and follow Him – even to the point of hating our family. For some, this has meant obeying God and losing their families.

While I grant that it is important, where possible, to live in peace with your family (Romans 12: 18 and Hebrews 12: 14), it is not worth suppressing or surrendering your faith. “Family values” are simply not the ultimate values. Yet, we have spawned huge ministries, sermon series, books, tapes, and teachings that seem to bolster this very idea.

The real question is: What is the most important thing for *eternal* values?

The eternal good for ourselves, the Church, and for others needs to be paramount. God instructed His people in the Old Testament that in application of the Law and its punishments, “Thine eye shall not pity.” (Deuteronomy 13: 6-9; also see, Zechariah 13: 1-3) God wasn’t saying that pity in general was evil, just that trying to mitigate the punishment of God’s holy Law because of pity – even when it was a near relative or friend – did not serve the interests of righteousness.

Israel *could have* pitied Achan after he took spoil at Jericho. (Joshua 7) In all probability Achan was a real nice guy, a good neighbor, a friend to some and a relative of others. There were a *lot of reasons* to go easy on him. However, the “sin in the camp” – the general judgment against *all* the people because of Achan’s sin – was devastating. God’s law does not recognize the kind of “exceptions” we humans like to make based upon our emotional attachments. The safety and purity of the entirety of Israel depended upon executing the proper judgment – death by stoning.

Similarly, the entire tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out by the remainder of the tribes of Israel in order to purify the land of the “tolerance” for sodomites by the Benjamites. (Judges 19 and 20)

It is one thing to “get along” with unsaved relatives, but to acquiesce to them to the degree that you avoid telling them the truth of the Gospel (fear God and keep His commandments) not only endangers the unsaved with Hell, but could very well endanger *you!* (Ezekiel 3: 17-21)

There are eternal consequences to silence – for you and the one to whom you should speak. If you remain silent *solely for the sake of harmony*, you endanger everyone.

I believe enough has been said on the other side of the balance in this matter – in fact, there has been far too much emphasis on the side of harmony – so I won’t repeat that here. I will simply say, follow the Spirit of God, not the spirit of fear of men.

6. No answer is a no answer.

The most profound lesson I have ever learned about guidance is, “No answer is a no answer.”

As a young man, when I would pray about something I wanted guidance on, I would often get impatient waiting for an answer – especially when I thought the matter to be urgent. At some point I would decide to cobble together an answer from available

materials – coincidental circumstances, Bible verses, and such – and move into the jaws of disaster. While God often uses coincidental circumstances, Bible verses, and such as part of how He leads people, there is generally more to it than that. What I was doing was going out searching for things that I could *make* into a leading.

It took a while (hard head that I am), but I finally understood that when God didn't answer "yes," that meant "no."

I have learned to continue in what He has *already told me* rather than changing course – unless I get a *specific* set of orders to change course.

The best biblical example is that of King Saul:

1 Samuel 13: 6-14

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

7 And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

8 And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

9 And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

10 And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

11 And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash;

12 Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. (KJV)

The situation was dire. The massive Philistine army was before them. Israel was losing confidence in the Lord and their leader, Saul. Saul was under orders from Samuel to do nothing until he arrived – but he *wasn't arriving* and the Israelites were abandoning the army. Saul waited and waited and finally decided that he had to *do something* – even if it was wrong. He had to show he was in control so his men wouldn't leave.

So he stepped out of his role as commander-in-chief, and tried – unbidden – to do the work of a priest.

Now the work of a priest is certainly a good and godly work. Sacrifice to God is a wonderful thing. However, *this was not what God told Saul to do!* It was sin because his specific orders were to *wait for Samuel*.

He lost his kingdom because of that rash decision.

Yet, to us, it really seems like one of those “rash” judgments by God.

Look at the circumstances! Saul's military situation *and* his political situation were in jeopardy. Saul had to look pretty unkingly (or today, unpresidential) standing around doing nothing while the enemy gained strength and his soldiers left the field. Didn't God understand the military and political *realities*? Wasn't it unfair of God to force Saul to wait around impotent?

So often we make our decisions based upon the “realities” when, in fact, we have no real idea of what “reality” is. We are limited to temporal, sense-based reality. That excludes *most of real* reality – the spiritual world. For instance, when selecting men for public office, we try for the three-cushion bank shot – we vote for a man who acknowledges that he is evil by his support for abortion or homosexuality *because he is of a political party that might eventually move towards righteousness*. We refuse to vote for a patently righteous man because of the “reality” that he cannot possibly win. We limit ourselves to a vote between Nero and Caligula, between Herod and Pilate.

The political world isn't the only one where we engage in such pragmatism. It is pervasive.

Let's look at a better example:

John 11: 1-7

1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

2 (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.
5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.
6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.
7 Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. (KJV)

Can you image the kind of pressure you or I would be under in this situation? We would feel like such cold-hearted jerks doing something like this. Since Jesus was tempted in all points like we are (Hebrews 4: 15), I am certain that He was tempted to feel that way too.

Yes, Jesus did eventually go raise Lazarus from the dead, but it was not on the human timetable. There was a different set of rules He followed. Jesus had another mode of action:

John 8: 28-29

28 Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.
29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. (KJV)

Jesus did not allow circumstances (our version of reality) to drive His actions, but rather He was driven by God's reality – God's command.

Now, in the incident with Lazarus, it seems apparent that He had actually received instructions from His Father to wait. However, there is an instance where I think the “no answer” principle may be demonstrated.

Scripture tells us that Jesus was fully aware of His mission to go to Jerusalem and be killed. (Matthew 16: 21 and Luke 9: 51) This is what Jesus had in the way of direction from His Father. However, when it came to the Garden at Gethsemene, things were different.

Luke 22: 39-46

39 And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.
40 And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.
41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me:
nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.
43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening
him.
44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat
was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
45 And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples,
he found them sleeping for sorrow,
46 And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into
temptation. (KJV)

Consider that Jesus had, at crucial hours in the past, received word from His Father. (Matthew 3: 17 and 17: 5) He was used to this. Yet here, we see no such manifestation. An angel “strengthened” Him, but no word. Even after the angel’s strengthening, He was still in agony. He *knew* the will of the Father going in. He didn’t need further instruction. Even when He was forsaken by the Father while He was on the cross, He did not follow the path of “reality” and come down off the cross. He *could have done so* had He desired to do it. He had not heard the Father change His orders, so He stuck with the orders He already had.

III

Ministry and Winning Souls

7. The everlasting gospel

What is the Gospel?

The New Testament talks about several “gospels” – the “gospel of the kingdom” (Mark 1: 14 and others) as well as the “gospel of grace” (Acts 20: 24). Many Christians would define the Gospel message as John 3: 16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (KJV)

While this message may be great for “closing the deal,” so to speak, it is hardly the whole Gospel message. Think for a minute: How would this message make sense to or compel action from anyone who did not believe they were a sinner in danger of “perishing”? It wouldn’t, of course!

This message is what may be called the “gospel of grace” – but is useless to someone who does not think they need grace.

However, there is an “everlasting gospel” of which the Scripture speaks.

Revelation 14: 6-7

6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (KJV)

The reason it is called “everlasting” is that it is both complete and applicable to all times and dispensations. In fact, it very clearly mirrors “gospels” in the Old Testament, including:

Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (KJV)

Both of these gospels have three elements in common: 1) Fear God, 2) Worship and obey God, and 3) Judgment is coming.

These elements comprise the entire Gospel – including the gospels of grace and of the kingdom. The fear of God and His judgment are the impetus to bring people to worship and obedience. Worship and obedience bring a person to the cross of Christ and, thus, into the kingdom of God. Both John the baptizer and Jesus preached the “gospel of the kingdom” – “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3: 7 and 4: 17) One can only repent of that which they realize offends God to the point of bringing His wrath and judgment. One can only enter the kingdom of God after repenting. One must fear God first to believe the gospel of the kingdom.

All of this does not come as “good news” to the modern American spreader of the “good news” because it means that he must preach the “bad news” of the Gospel *before* he can preach the “good news” of the Gospel. American Christians prefer a gospel that *feels* good. We have determined – all on our own – what is “good” news and what is “bad” news. The determination was made based upon how things “feel.” Hell doesn’t *feel* good, so it can’t have any place in the “good news” of the Gospel. The same with sin (it is now “destructive behavior” or “mistakes”), judgment, the wrath of God, and so forth. The preaching of God’s wrath because of sin, has been replaced with “God’s Divine Disappointment” for sin. Eternal torment in Hell has been switched to “eternal separation from God.”

However, since we are supposed to be *God’s* servants, it becomes us to adopt *His* definition of the Gospel instead of our own.

The fact is that most American Christians have been so immersed in the false teaching that they need not fear God (see “Fear God” in Part I) – and probably disagree

strongly with God on the need for eternal punishment for the sinner in Hell – that they simply can't bring themselves to include these things. Yet, as seen in the “everlasting Gospel,” these elements of judgment are crucial to the Gospel message. After all, it is *extremely* good news that an all-holy, all-righteous, all-just God-Creator-of-the-Universe would leave us wicked, sinful, corrupt humans *any escape at all*, isn't it?

Consider what Paul the apostle said about his preaching:

2 Corinthians 5: 10-11

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. (KJV)

Here is Paul saying that his motive for preaching is *knowing* the *terror* (*phobia*) of the Lord. He *knows* judgment is coming (v. 10) and he *knows* the terror that accompanies (or at least *should* accompany) that prospect. Knowing these things, he is out there trying to persuade men to flee the wrath to come.

When was the last time you felt that urgency? Is this the reason we are all now content solely with confrontationless, bloodless “lifestyle evangelism”?

Is our lack of fear of God the reason we don't fear *for others' souls*?

Now, lest I be taken to task for slighting “lifestyle evangelism,” allow me to explain something. In essence, Lifestyle Evangelism is a modern, fancy name for living our lives in a Christlike way. Nothing more; Nothing less.

The Scripture tells us that the world will know we are Christians for our love for one another (John 13: 35) and that when they see our good works, they may glorify God (Matthew 5: 16).

However, many view lifestyle evangelism as merely displaying some kind of insipid “niceness” to our neighbors and co-workers. They never imagine having to preach the whole Gospel – both bad news and good news – to these people. Somehow the niceness is supposed to replace the need for these folks to actually face the fact that they are Hell-bound sinners in need of admitting their moral depravity and begging God's merciful salvation.

That comfortable view of lifestyle evangelism has led many American Christians to think that it is the *only* kind of evangelism that they are “called” to. I suspect that one of the reasons for this is the natural (carnal) propensity of human beings toward the fear of man. Real evangelism will, from time to time at least, engender disapproval, anger,

and even persecution. This is something American Christians have, for the most part, been taught are not necessary components to the Christian life. Jesus disagrees. (See below: Chapter 11: *This ain't easy, man.*)

We can fear God or we can fear men. It is that simple. If we fear God, we will likely be placed in a position of “truth-saying” that will bring opposition.

8. Truth-saying.

Just as there are components to the whole Gospel, there are sometimes components of the work of declaring the Gospel. Part of the Gospel is to confront the Church (first) and the world with their sin – to rebuke and reprove the evil deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5: 11). This can come directly as it does with some of my street-preacher friends, or, like me, singling out a sin like abortion or homosexuality as a target. It could be private or public or a mix of the two.

To me it is all what I call “truth-saying” and it all falls under the ambit of ministry. Preaching a salvation message might seem more like what is traditionally called ministry, but I don't think it is really all that different. People are moved toward repentance or resistance by the proclamation of truth – especially the exposure of sin – over a period of time. A salvation preacher may reap the soul of a young woman who has had an abortion quite a long time after someone like me has used a dead baby poster to prick her conscience about what a miserable sinner she is. That conviction may worry on her for a long time and be compounded by many other people innocently or deliberately “heaping coals of fire on her head” with more truth about her lost state.

So, we all work as a body, even when we don't always know about the workings of the other parts and how they affect our work.

Truth-saying is a tough business. Not a lot of people are teachable enough to want to hear the truth.

Proverbs 9: 8

8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. (KJV)

There are not a lot of wise people around. When you consider the dearth of the fear of the Lord – which is the beginning of wisdom – it is a cinch to figure that out.

The truth we are talking about here, for the most part, is the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (Acts 24: 25) – not on the Top Ten list of most people's favorite topics. What I am *not* talking about here is this modern notion of “transparency” or even the kind of stark truth telling that tells a new mother that her baby is homely. For that, see a later chapter, *Honesty is not the best policy.*

However, truth must be said in private settings (Matthew 18: 15) as well as public arenas. But you don't get laurel leaves for doing it most of the time. Jesus said they hated Him because he testified to the world that their works were evil. (John 7: 7) He tells us that the world will hate us as well – if we are His disciples and follow His example. (Matthew 10: 24-25)

Ultimately, when we tell the truth, God's glory will be manifest. Some will receive the truth and be saved to the glory of God's grace and mercy; others will reject the truth and be damned to the glory of God's justice and righteousness. Both outcomes give glory to God.

9. Don't reach for the masses.

A common thread I see in most Gospel outreach is an attempt to reach masses of people. The "church growth" movement was premised upon this. The measure of success is the number of new members (note that I do not say "converts") in their church (not necessarily *the* Church).

While this looks good from a worldly perspective – more people coming to church equals more people in the Kingdom, right? – it is not a biblical reality.

God doesn't want bodies in pews. He wants true seekers and worshipers. (John 4: 23) When it comes right down to it, these are rare. Look at how God's prophets always talk about a "remnant" of Israel being saved. The pattern is there. There are a lot of Israelites, but not many who are "Israel." (Romans 9: 4-9) The pattern of Israel is the pattern for the Church. (1 Corinthians 10: 9-12)

God is not impressed with numbers. While his offer of grace and salvation is made to all men (Romans 5: 5) and should be preached to all men (Matthew 16: 15), He is quite aware that most will not follow Him. (Matthew 7: 13-14)

A.W. Tozer likens the modern approach to the Gospel as being salesmanship of the worst kind. In *That Incredible Christian*, Tozer says:

“In our eagerness to make converts I am afraid we have lately been guilty of using the technique of the modern salesman, which is of course to present only the desirable qualities of a product and ignore the rest. We go to men and offer them a cozy home in the brae. If they will accept Christ He will give them peace of mind, solve their problems, prosper their business, protect their families and keep them happy all the day long.

...

“By offering them a sweetness-and-light gospel and promising every taker a place on the sunny side of the brae, we not only cruelly deceive them, we guarantee also a high casualty rate among the convert won on such terms.”

In our discussion of John 6: 47-69 in Chapter 3: *Obey God even when you don't agree with Him*, we see that Jesus was not afraid to be the only one left following God. When thousands of disciples left, He merely invited the 12 to leave as well. You might say, He was winnowing His harvest looking for the real wheat and shaking out the chaff. In the next chapter, *The Obscurity Principle*, we will see that God often *deliberately* makes His message difficult to understand to clear out the pretenders.

There is a glimpse of this in the New Testament Church as well.

Acts 5: 11-14

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) (KJV)

It is easy to walk right past this. The “great fear” came upon both the Church and those in the world around them as a result of the Church losing two members – Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5: 1-14) God, through the word of Peter, *killed* them for their lie to the Holy Spirit. You don't see Peter trying to beg them to repent just so he won't have fewer members – and considering that they apparently had money, well, you can see how most churches today might handle this.

Don't miss the point here. Carefully note that this event *prevented many* from joining with the Church. How's *that* for a church growth strategy?

Yet verse 14 makes it clear that – despite the fear and the bad publicity this might have represented – the Church *grew*.

I'll borrow from Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California by referring to the *real* formula for church growth.

Acts 2:47b

47 . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (KJV)

It is the Lord, and not all our endeavors to create special programs, be nice, be “relevant,” create an atmosphere, or any other thing that adds to the Church. And He adds *only those He wants, when He wants them*.

He is not interested in notches on His gun belt, just true seekers. (Hebrews 11: 6) *Our* job is to keep His Word and preach the everlasting Gospel whenever God gives us opportunity. While we may do so where masses of people are gathered, we are not there to attract the multitudes. Rather we are there to bring the Word to those to whom God has prepared at that moment.

There is no way to measure success or failure except to know we have done as God has commanded. (See also Appendix I, "Isaiah's Job")

10. The Obscurity Principle

A lot of people are under the impression that Jesus used parables to clarify His message. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus was sent to God's people, so God expected them to have taken advantage of His Word and all that they knew to help them understand what the kingdom of God was all about. However, as always, God's people were dense, ignorant, and willfully disobedient.

The Scripture plainly states that Jesus taught in parables in order to *shut* the ears of the hearers, not open them. (Matthew 13: 12-15)

Consider what John 9: 39 says:

39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and *that they which see might be made blind.* (KJV) (emphasis added)

Historically, this is how God operates. He will speak plainly to someone the first time. If the person resists the truth, He speaks it again, but less plainly. The message gets more obscure as it is repeated to the hardened heart.

For this reason, I think God often exercises me in my ministry of truth-saying in ways that seem to obscure the truth rather than clarify it. In addition, my target audience is not the masses anyway. The Truth is always delivered to masses, but for a hidden remnant. As Jesus would say, "He who has ears to hear . . ." (See also Appendix I, "Isaiah's Job")

This is the reason we see so many oddities in the lives of the prophets. Consider how obscure the message was when Ezekiel dug a hole in the wall or lay on his side cooking over dung. (Ezekiel 3 and 4, also 8: 7-9) Look at Isaiah preaching stark naked for three years. (Isaiah 20: 2-3)

Because of this, we should be careful not to dismiss the leading of the Lord just because it doesn't clearly articulate the message. Sometimes God *wants* to be obscure. Sometimes He is aiming for a *peculiar* people. (Titus 2: 11-14)

A good example from my own life is a calling I received from the Lord to bring the message to local churches about the fact that regular birth control methods – the Pill and the IUD – both cause abortions. It was necessary to let Christians know that they may have blood on their hands that would prevent them from being effective and blessed Christians. I waited on the Lord about how and when I was to do this for two years. He finally had me get a “grim reaper” costume complete with a full-face skull mask. He showed me that I should simply stand outside churches for a half hour or so before services in the costume and hold out the leaflet with the information. I was – for the most part – not to speak or respond to any questions.

I have a lot of speculations about *why* God selected this method, but I’m sure there are other reasons that I don’t see. However, among my speculations and judging by my experiences doing this, I think that most of the people who would be willing to approach such a figure at all are driven by a need to know. They are most likely to read carefully the entire pamphlet – and maybe take it seriously enough to act on it. Simply handing out masses of literature usually results in most of it going unread. There is a kind of curiosity that would propel someone to approach another who is standing silently in the costume. This is the kind of inquisitiveness needed for someone to be willing to accept truth that is difficult.

As I say, God probably has lots of other reasons – probably reasons involving every individual I run across, but I’ll have to wait to hear from Him on those.

The point is: God does things in weird ways. If you are going to serve Him, don’t automatically discount weird leadings.

11. God hates you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

A lot of Christians think that God loves each and every sinner. The shocker is that He does not. God hates sinners.

Psalms 5: 4-5

4 For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.

5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. (KJV)

God is *angry* with them.

Psalms 7: 11

11 God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. (KJV)

Christians should not – as we often have – lightly pass off such pronouncements. Since all are sinners, all fit these verses. There is something very serious about having God angry with you and declare that He hates you.

It is far too easy to parrot the line about God hating the sin and loving the sinner, but in the face of these words – and others – we need to reexamine a very basic, and erroneous, presumption. It may be comforting to *us* to say such things, but it could have eternal consequences for the sinner to whom you are talking.

If, in our desire to do good public relations for God, we do not get across to this person that he should fear God – and that he have *reason to* fear God because of His anger – and that judgment is coming, we are *not* giving him the whole Gospel. His “repentance” will be based mostly on the idea that God is so all-loving and gooshy that not much real repentance is needed. This would be disasterous for his soul – and we could have his blood on our hands to boot. (Ezekiel 3: 17-21)

The next step is even harder. Scripture tells us that people who are unrepentant sinners *hate God* and that we should also *hate them*.

Psalms 139: 21-22

21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?

22 I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. (KJV)

Now, what I am *not saying* is that we should do evil to people that God hates. Nor am I saying that we should hate *our* enemies – there is a distinction. In fact, we are commanded to do good to all men, especially the brethren.

Galatians 6: 10

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (KJV)

We are to abound in love toward the brethren and all men. (1 Thessalonians 3: 12)

So how do we sort this all out? What does a “perfect hatred” of God’s enemies entail. If we have such a “perfect hatred,” how do we then reach out in love to them? More than that, we see verses like John 3: 16 that seem to indicate that *God* loves these folks.

We look at verses like Romans 5: 8 and it seems to fly in the face of the “God hates sinners” statements in Psalms.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (KJV)

John 3: 16 says that God loved *the world*. Doesn't that mean that He loves every person from serial killer, John Wayne Gacy, to your unsaved neighbor, Bob, who is a pretty nice guy and keeps his lawn mowed?

However, the verses above all point primarily to a *general reaching out of God's love*, not a particularized, personal love. John says that God loved the world, or *cosmos* – a broad love toward the general creation. Romans says that He “commended” or introduced His love towards us. He made an offering of His love to the world out of sheer grace. He made that love available to “whosoever will,” but that does not mean that He individually loves the sinner.

God is entirely capable of hating the sinner and his sin, while simultaneously extending an offer of His love. Upon our responding properly to this offer, He then cleanses us and is able to love us as individuals. God only begins to bestow such love after we have truly become His followers. (John 14: 23)

Consider this: When you were God's enemy, while he hated your sin and you were “condemned already” (John 3:18), God did not strike you dead or act upon His righteous wrath against you. Instead, He allowed good things to happen to you on a regular basis. (Matthew 5: 25b) He sent ambassadors to offer terms of surrender to you to save you from the destruction you so richly deserved. Despite having every right to turn you into a cinder on the spot, He allowed you to live long enough to meet the ambassador. Then He graciously opened a window into your utterly darkened soul to allow the Light to penetrate and permitted you to comprehend what you could not otherwise understand – the Gospel. He then allowed you to surrender and throw yourself on the mercy of His court where He granted forgiveness. All of this happened while you were still rightly hated by Him and you were His enemy.

At *this point*, and not before, God loved you as an individual. You had obeyed His command to repent.

John 14: 21 says:

21 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 manifest myself to him. (KJV) (emphasis added)

Again, John 16: 27 says:

27 For the Father himself loveth you, *because ye have loved me*, and have believed that I came out from God.

So, it appears that God's love for *individuals* only comes into play after they become believers and followers. Any other way would leave God throwing people He *agape*-loved as individuals into Hell for eternity.

God is entirely capable of being angry with sinners and hating them without doing evil to them. He is longsuffering. He prefers to allow them to continue in their evil for a season in order that they might repent. He does not *want* them to die unrepentant. (Ezekiel 33: 11)

On the other hand, we are quite incapable of *fully* hating the sinner and the sin without responding to them by doing evil to them. We are sent as ambassadors of the “offer of love.” (2 Corinthians 5: 20) Yet, if we do not bear an appropriate hatred for God’s enemies – if we don’t warn them of His wrath towards them – how can we hope to get any true reconciliation between God and them? *God* is not going to change or apologize – *they* must, like a surrendering soldier, accept all His terms in order to be converted from being an enemy of God to being a child of God. Anything short of that is not sufficient for God. They will remain His enemies – even if you might be foolish enough to believe they are not.

The only way that God’s offer of love can be extended is if we are prepared to show the proper hatred towards God’s enemies.

Think of how an ambassador works. He will sometimes be quite stiff and resistant to the enemies of the nation he represents. He may berate, expose, challenge, or indict the enemy. Other times, he will make overtures of peace – but only while always recognizing the other’s status as an enemy, and only while making the peace offer strictly within the bounds that the ruler of his nation has laid out.

The ambassador does not personally engage the enemy and, in reality, despite the fact that the other is a real enemy, he behaves in a way that always leaves a door open for the enemy who is ready to surrender. There is a certain level of touchableness exuded.

The One whom we represent is longsuffering towards His enemies. (Exodus 34: 6; Romans 9: 22) So ought His ambassadors to be as well.

Many Christians, though, come across as desperate to have these enemies over for the banquet. They are willing to suspend many of their Lord’s requirements for entry. They are prepared to alter the terms of surrender to allow the profane and the unclean to enter in *as they are!* In a word, they forget that these are *enemies*, and, as such, loathed by God. In the process, they become tainted with the same thing that makes these people enemies of God.

Consider the Scripture in Jude 1: 21-23:

- 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
- 22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:
- 23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (KJV)

This indicates a very careful approach to those in sin – careful lest we fall into reproach ourselves.

I recall with sadness the times I saw Christians who were unprepared going to reach out to erring brethren who had fallen into drugs. Often times these Christians really had an insufficient idea of just how evil God counted the sins of the fallen. When they went to try to retrieve the sinning brother, they tried to “love” them by not being frank about the evil and by not calling for repentance. In the end, a lot of the rescuers ended up just sitting around smoking dope with the one they were originally trying to save.

It is a tough balance – to hate evil and evildoers knowing how offensive they are to our God, and to be the instruments of His offer of grace, but we must *never* forget that they – as we once were – are the sworn enemies of God.

12. Be prepared for war.

Scriptural imagery of the work of God comes in two main types. One is farming (or herding), the other is fighting. The pastoral images we get for the former tend towards our preferences for personal peace over conflict. However, the aspect of war is essential to the Gospel.

The result of our preferences has been a rather soft Gospel presentation. Earlier chapters deal with some of the missing harsher realities the modern Church avoids. However, if we are to be His servants, we will plant and plow when we are told, and also slash and clash at His command. The only options are obedience or disobedience.

Some are undoubtedly familiar with military “boot camp.” Those who are know that much of the rigor and stress created by the drill sergeants is designed specifically to break down the individual will and make the recruit learn to *instantly* obey orders – even (and perhaps, especially) the orders that don’t particularly make sense.

The need for such obedience is obvious. On the battlefield, there is not the time or the need for answering a lot of questions about the “how” and “why” of a certain tactic. The objectives of the generals and other leaders may not be known by the “grunts” in the field – but then, neither is the scope of the military situation. A frontal attack on Hill 101 may look like a waste of time – and blood – to the private, but it may be essential territory in the grand scheme of things. Thus we have verses like:

2 Timothy 2: 3-4

3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life;
 that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. (KJV)

Understanding Authority is key to the Gospel. Jesus marveled at the centurion who understood authority and declared it to be a sign of his *faith*. (Matthew 8: 5-10)

War is hell, it is said, but here, war may be Heaven. Or it may mean the difference between Heaven and Hell for someone.

War, though, is not pleasant. It takes an entirely different kind of attitude when you are called upon to war – especially when you are used to such peaceful pursuits as tending sheep or planting seed. However, we cannot shirk the messy, bloody, tumult of war when we are sent to it.

Some years ago, God impressed me with this verse:

Jeremiah 48: 10

10 Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood. (KJV)

Just as there is a time for peace, there is also a time for war. (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8) If you only obey the orders pertaining to peace, you are a draft dodger, you are AWOL. When you use “peace” methods in the Gospel work during a time of war, you are doing the work of the Lord “deceitfully.” Here is the definition for that word in Jeremiah:

Strong’s No. 7423 remiyah (rem-ee-yaw’); from 7411; remissness, treachery:

KJV-- deceit (-ful, -fully), false, guile, idle, slack, slothful.

There is time to “shed blood” in truth-saying. In fact, I am willing to say that a majority of truth-saying – done obediently – would be of this type. No doubt some would quote me the verse that we should “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4: 15), but I cannot think of anything “loving” about trying to plant a seed when swordsmanship against evil is called for.

Certainly our warfare is spiritual and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. (2 Corinthians 10: 3-4) Yet, we do fight in very physical ways. We speak; we proclaim; we expose evil; we denounce evil; we speak up for the oppressed; we disciple individuals and nations; we revenge evil. (Matthew 28: 19; Ephesians 5: 11-13; 2 Timothy 4: 1-5; 2 Corinthians 10: 6; and others)

13. This ain’t easy, man.

I recall looking intently at a large, but intricate pen-and-ink drawing some years ago. The picture was one of fantasy and astonishing detail. While tracing with my eye the delicate lines of one whorl, I spotted, in the most unlikely place, tiny words: “This ain’t easy, man.”

That was a mouthful. Often, when we are walking with God – following intricate paths He lays out day by day – we get the same sense that caused the artist in this picture to heave a sigh and say those words.

A lot of this is due to the fact that following God takes us into paths that are contrary to what men would like to have us do. The world is perfectly happy to see us feed the hungry at the local soup kitchen, but gets upset when we call the diners to repentance. As long as we stay within the confines of our churches with the overt religious stuff and don't make rude noises in public, they are usually content. However, if we start actually proclaiming the claims of Christ on *their* lives, then things heat up. Pagan or Christian, nobody likes to see his own sin exposed. Jesus was explicit about the reaction.

Matthew 10: 22

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. (KJV)

Matthew 24: 9

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. (KJV)

John 15: 18-19

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.
19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (KJV)

John 17: 14

14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (KJV)

2 Timothy 3: 12

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (KJV)

These are not most people's choice for "life verses." They don't appear on any of the little "promise cards" you buy at the local Christian paraphernalia shop. The fact is that following Jesus can be downright unpleasant. In America, where Satan has chosen the pamper-them-to-sleep method of subverting the Church (as opposed to the round'em-up-and-jail'em method), we see little in the way of overt hatred – until we try to openly proclaim truth that runs counter to the worldly

wisdom (even in church circles). Then we are labeled “extremists,” “terrorists,” “homophobes,” “judgmental,” “puritanical,” hate-mongers,” “intolerant,” and a host of other tags that follow the slightest public mention of morality or God’s judgment.

Unfortunately, many Christians take this as a sign from God that we *have been* too judgmental or intolerant, and they retreat behind the walls of their edifices.

More than that, these same Christians who sound “retreat” at the first sign of displeasure from the world will then turn on their fellow believers who hold their ground.

Matthew 10: 36

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. (KJV)

Matthew 10: 21

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. (KJV)

If there is one historical attribute that can be properly laid at the feet of those called “God’s people” at any era in history, it is an obsequious cowardice in the face of opposition. The next most common attribute is to join the chorus calling for the heads of those troublemaking believers who insist on violating all common sense and tact by loudly calling for repentance.

Jesus noted this attribute of the religious:

Luke 11: 47-51

47 Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

48 Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.

49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute:

50 That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation;

51 From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation. (KJV)

Luke 13: 33

33 Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. (KJV)

It is a given that Israel and Jerusalem are biblical types of the Church that we should learn from their mistakes. (1 Corinthians 10: 1-11) However, history has shown that the worst enemies of the work of God have been of the “household of faith.”

This makes doing the work of God doubly difficult. It is one thing to be hated of the pagan world, but when the criticism and opposition comes out of the Church it is a much larger temptation to believe that maybe you *are* wrong – that maybe you shouldn’t be following God in ways that are frowned upon by fellow believers. The Church should have more credibility in your mind, therefore the Church is often the most effective tool of our common Enemy. Some of the fellow believers are opposing you in good conscience – not understanding what God is doing with you – while some of it is pure Phariseeism.

I recall a time when I was pastoring a small church. I was a member for many years and, after the original pastor left, the Lord moved me into that position. The assignment lasted for three and a half years when the Lords suddenly told me to shut down the church permanently. I had quite a few people who could not understand how I could “close down the work of God.” However, the truth of the matter was, if I had kept the church open, it would no longer have been the work of God.

This is a minor example, but others abound. Think about all the really famous missionaries – Taylor, Livingston, Carmichael – who were roundly rejected by major missions groups as unsuitable. Think of the famous preachers and soul winners – Spurgeon, Wesley, Booth, Muller. Their methods were criticized.

If these had listened to the voices of those in the Church around them. They would have been lost in obscurity – and the real work of God and His glory in it would have been greatly diminished.

14. Call a spade a spade.

John 1: 45-47

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! (KJV)

Nathaniel had no tact. His first assessment of the announcement by Philip gets right to the core of the issue to the point of being insulting about Jesus' home town. He didn't play games and Jesus appreciated that. Why? Because that was how Jesus was.

You never find Jesus (or any spokesman from God) calling sin "mistakes," or "problems," or "reactions to childhood traumas."

My former pastor used to say that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin (1 John 1: 7), but that it does not cleanse us from "excuses." He would go on, "As long as we are able to justify ourselves, then God cannot justify us through Jesus Christ."

Today, however, the word sin is hardly named among us. The implications are too severe. It would mean having to take *total responsibility* for our thoughts, actions, and omissions. We rather look for "causes" for our sin. "I was just tired"; "The guy cut me off and almost caused a wreck"; "I was abused as a child"; "I was abused as an adult"; "I didn't have a good role model for a father"; "My mother didn't change my diaper often enough." The list is endless.

The sin is perpetuated when the sinner – excuse me, the person with the problem "habit pattern" – requires years of "Christian" counseling in order to uncover the "source" trauma for the "behavior." Meanwhile, the sin rolls on and everyone just nods their heads understandingly – "Tsk, tsk! Poor dear." No one bothers to *ever* call it sin. No one calls for repentance as the solution.

Human nature is such that we both love and hate confrontation. The problem is that, given the fallen nature, we tend to confront when we shouldn't and fail to confront when we should. By nature and training, we don't like confronting people when it will be embarrassing or may lose us a friend or acquaintance. However, when we understand the fear of the Lord, we understand that eternal fates in Heaven or Hell may hang in the balance.

Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3: 4) – it is a *crime* against God. We are commanded by Scripture to be faithful watchmen on the wall. The blood of those we do not warn will be accounted to us. (Ezekiel 3: 17-21)

Nor must we make an "uncertain sound" when we issue the warning. (1 Corinthians 14: 8) The common practice of minimizing sin produces an uncertain sound for the warning. If someone hears that his sin is just a mistake or unacceptable behavior, he is liable to treat it as something less than sin. He could fail to repent because we have "defined deviancy down" and made criminal acts against the sovereign God into mere "oopsies."

The desire to soften the blow, as it were, when talking to the sinner, may end up making the sinner "feel better about himself." However, this is precisely the opposite of what needs to happen! The sinner *needs* to feel low self-esteem (to use the modern

vernacular) because he is a *rebel and a criminal*. There is nothing to have esteem *about!* (Romans 7: 18)

Let me take an example of some of my anti-abortion work: I address abortion to both Christian and pagan audiences, and in all cases I refer to it as murder – a violation of the Sixth Commandment worthy of the death penalty. A lot of people – out of both groups – chide me that I am engaging in harsh “rhetoric” and that I am unlikely to make any “converts” by these means. They recommend that I “tone down my language.” In their minds, my sign should read something like, “It is a mistake to terminate your product of conception.”

Now, supposing that I was able to convince someone to change their mind on abortion through that sign. First of all, I would rejoice that a child survived, but I would have failed my duty as an ambassador of Christ as a truth-sayer. I would have not told the woman that it was sin, that it was murder in God’s eyes. The word “mistake” could have easily been understood as “a mistake *for* you” instead of being a categorical evil. I would have also denied the humanity and the *imago Dei* of the Unborn child. In fact, everything on that sign promotes the lies of the devil concerning abortion in particular and sin and righteousness in general. It would be easy to imagine that this same woman could have an abortion the next time she got pregnant while still believing what I had on the sign.

I believe the root of our unwillingness to address sin head-on is founded in our lack of the fear of the Lord and our subsequent lack of understanding about the *hatred of God*. (See: Chapters 1 and 11) Because we do not have any personal fear of God or understanding of how God hates sin, it is hard for us to represent that to others.

What this means is that we need to pray for the fear of the Lord to inhabit our own lives, lest we pass on a false gospel – and a false hope – to others. In addition to that, any lack of understanding of the seriousness of sin may lead down the same path as my old friends who went to “rescue” their fallen brothers. (See, Chapter 11) It could result in a fall for you.

It is of ultimate importance that we seriously consider this. We need to specifically pray that God infuse us with the fear of the Lord. It is a dangerous prayer, but one I regularly pray. If you are serious, be ready for an answer.

15. Righteous rudeness.

Jesus was once invited to speak at the pastor’s prayer breakfast (so to speak), but He did not respond the way most of us would. He was rude.

Luke 11: 37-52

37 And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.

38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.

40 Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?

41 But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.

42 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 to leave the other undone.

43 Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.

44 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.

45 Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.

46 And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

47 Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

48 Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.

49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute:

50 That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation;

51 From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.

52 Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. (KJV)

Think about this scene for a moment. Here a Pharisee invites Jesus to his house for a meal with his fellow religious people.

What an opportunity! If only Jesus could just influence these men, then He would have a much better chance of spreading His message. With the support of Pharisees and lawyers, He would have much more credibility. He could do so much *good* – if He would just be a bit less direct.

The mistake was to take the opportunity to simply expose these men for what they were. However, it is never a mistake to confront evil directly when that is what is called for.

Our modern sensibilities would have been seriously ruffled. It doesn't say what the reaction of the disciples was – or even whether or not they had been invited – but I suspect most of us would have blushed 25 shades of red and would have made faces and “ahem”ed the whole time hoping to get the Lord to lighten up.

As I have noted before, truth-saying is not easy. Often it calls for a large measure of what we call “rudeness” because the Bible is simply not Emily Post. Souls, not feelings, are at stake. I have no doubt that Jesus' exposition of the sins of these men contained a motive that they would repent, but the truth needed saying in either case – for salvation or condemnation's sake.

Now when I talk about this directness of Jesus, the reply I often get is, “Well, Jesus only said those things to the Pharisees and religious leaders. With the common people, he was more gentle.”

There is some truth to this – but not in the way a lot of people think.

It is important to notice the real difference between the people who got the rough treatment from Jesus and those who did not. The major difference had little to do with being religious officials or being rich (though those things could add to it), the main difference was that these were people who already thought they had what God (and subsequently, Jesus) had to offer. They thought they were already spiritual and had spiritual vision.

John 9: 39-41

39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.
40 And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?
41 Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth. (KJV)

While the people who Jesus confronted believed they already had it all together tended to be rich, powerful leaders, this is not a prerequisite. I have observed that many of the down-and-out people of today – even completely pagan ones – have the same attitude. They chafe at the idea that anyone would say or imply that there might be some serious problem (sin) with them such as would separate them from God. In fact, they often positively state that they are just fine with God, thank you very much!

Are these not Pharisees? Do they not need similar words?

16. If you have the burden, you are the committee.

Jonah was a man undone. He really didn't want to go to Nineveh. However, he had been appointed to do so. There was no way for him to shirk the call; he couldn't send someone else in his place. That's the way it is with calls from God.

One of the premiere characteristics of humanity is the pass-the-buck syndrome. The manifestation most recognizable and odious is the "blame game." Starting with Adam and Eve it was "The woman You gave me did it," "The snake did it," and so forth. While this is problematic enough, a more insidious appearance of the syndrome is less noticed.

Over my years in ministry, perhaps the most common reaction to whatever I happen to be doing is, "Why aren't you [insert *any other* kind of activity]?"

This most often comes from people who claim that they "agree with me on the issue but." My response to them is, "If God has placed [insert other kind of activity suggested] on your heart, then *do it*, and leave me to do what God has called me to do."

A slightly different approach would occur when someone would call my office at Advocates for Life Ministries with a great, new idea about how to stop abortion. When the suggestion was not something we were already doing, it was usually something that we either did not have the resources to do or something that we did not believe God had called us to do. However, when I would ask the person with the idea if they were planning to do what they were suggesting, the line usually went silent. "Well, I was kind of hoping that *you* would do it," they would finally say.

I would point out to them that they had just finished telling me what a great idea that *God* had given *them* for stopping abortion. Then I would ask them why they supposed that God would give *them* the idea if He wanted someone else to organize it. Unless it was something completely outside the scope of what God had given us to do, I would often say, "Hey, if you get the thing going, we'll be glad to help in any way we can. We'll join your effort, but God called *you* to do it so we believe you should follow through.

This is the principle at work: If God gives you the burden to do some righteous work, then He has just elected you to be the committee to accomplish the work. You won't necessarily be left to do it alone, but you will be the chairman.

Any attempt to pass the buck to someone else in hopes that you won't have to "take responsibility" will fail. You may be able to fool others into thinking you were fulfilling your assignment by just taking the idea to others, but that won't wash at judgment.

Besides the obvious motive of evading the work and responsibility, this kind of dodging often finds its roots in our propensity to spend our time looking at what *others*

should be doing instead of what *we* should be doing. We want to remove splinters from our neighbor's eye while keeping planks in our own. (Matthew 7: 3-4)

The classic example of minding thy neighbor's business was in John 21.

John 21: 19-22

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. (KJV)

Peter's worry was what John would do; Peter's *job* was to follow Jesus himself.

A lot of this plays itself out where there are differences in ministry *style* – as opposed to calling. There is a huge spectrum of ministry that could be called “street ministry.” Some is simple, one-on-one; others distribute literature; still others engage in public proclamation – some gently and others confrontationally.

You don't like the guy out there preaching “turn or burn”?

“What is that to thee?” as Jesus would say, “Follow thou Me!” This is not the time to try to convince this preacher to adopt some other mode of ministry. If you believe that there needs to be a non-confrontational outreach to this crowd, that is probably God's call *to you* to provide it – in conjunction with or in spite of the “turn or burn” preacher.

Adopt the attitude of Paul.

Philippians 1: 14-18

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. (KJV)

This guy understood a central truth – that even those who spoke truth for the wrong motives would be used of God to spread the truth (even if they later were individually held guilty for their motives).

Another truth that is important here is that people who are ministering in ways that bother us may simply be obeying what God has told *them* to do. They are “another man’s servant” and we don’t – barring their works being directly sinful or an instruction to us from God – have the right to simply confront them based upon our preferences for style.

Think for a minute of all the things God’s men have done: Isaiah preached for three years stark naked; Ezekiel lay on his side cooking food over dung; One prophet was told to marry a whore; Jesus called a woman a dog.

Are you really in a position to tell these servants of God what their Boss wants them doing?

In reality, if you see a need for a particular ministry – especially when others are ministering in different ways – it is probably God giving you a job, not telling you to give your job to the other guy.

“What is it to thee? Follow thou Me!”

17. Godly diversity

God is not politically correct. He is simply correct.

While the world forces call for “diversity,” so does God. The conflict comes over the meaning of “diversity.”

As human beings, we aren’t really much for God’s kind of diversity. We tend to be clannish, cliquish, exclusive, and judgmental over the smallest things – like the Lilliputians’ and their war over whether to open the large or small end of the egg. We like the predictable, the safe, the familiar. This is why we have so many different forms of worship services.

In places in Africa, the emphatic speaking of the preacher is punctuated by drums; old-style Quakers in silence wait until the Spirit moves someone to speak; barber shop quartets harmoniously (one hopes) croon songs of God’s love – while next door alternative rockers crank up the guitars; stately processions of ministers and attendants enter the rear (or side) of churches while the organ peals out the Doxology; t-shirted street ministers admonish crowds in public squares; blow-dried hair and a polyester suit decks the pastor of the independent church where he exhorts a blue-collar congregation to holy living; robed clergy sonorously edify their congregations.

The question here is not whether one of these forms is the biblical form – God has not laid out one of those. The question is whether these people are, in their forms, lifting up Christ and promoting the truth of God as they have been given orders to do.

As I tried to establish in the last chapter, it is usually not “our place” to be judging other men’s servants – particularly if the “other man” is the Lord of Heaven. If there is an issue of overt sin, that is another matter – See, Chapter 28: *Open rebuke is better than secret love*. If, perchance, you have received a word from the Lord to correct something, that also is another matter – but one must be careful here not to mistake our personal tastes for a word of the Lord.

God’s word is full of diversity. So is God’s kingdom.

Revelation 5: 9-10

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (KJV)

Look at who gets to be kings and priests! People of *every* kindred, tongue, and people. I have imagined us all singing unto God’s glory each in our own languages, yet all able to understand each other and all singing the same song. What a glorious event!

You say, “Yeah, that’s in Heaven, though.”

True enough, but listen to this:

Romans 12: 5-8

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. (KJV)

Even more to the point:

1 Corinthians 12: 4-25

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. (KJV)

In the previous chapter, I showed Paul's attitude toward a lot of this – even about those who were out of line in their “ministry.” In this verse, he betrays a fundamental trust in the operation of the Spirit and in the ability of the Spirit to “work all in all.” He warns against schisms in the body over who is doing what kind of work and how.

This is a Spirit-borne attitude not natural to human beings. I cannot tell you how often I cringe at seeing some people’s ministry, yet I am restrained from offering my “wisdom” by Wisdom.

I have to admit that a lot of this diversity just looks plain messy to me. Here again, the Scripture is helpful:

Proverbs 14: 4

4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox. (KJV)

In other words, oxen are messy creatures. You are continually “cleaning up” after them, if you get my meaning. You can, however, avoid the mess – just don’t have oxen. If you choose this option, though, don’t expect to get any *work* done.

I have to admit that when I see some works of ministry, it is hard to hold back on expressing my own preferences – my own style. The funny thing is that *my* style is one of the ones that people seem to find objectionable – often other believers.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, I get unsolicited “help” from people all the time telling me how to do my job. Almost always it comes from people who are doing nothing at all. A typical encounter when I am doing anti-abortion work:

Helper: Shouldn’t we be just getting out the Gospel. If people were saved, they wouldn’t be getting abortions.

Me: Maybe. When was the last time you went out witnessing?

Helper: That’s not the point.

Another scenario:

Helper: That [dead baby poster] is gross. I agree with you on the issue, but that’s not the way to go about it.

Me: I’ll tell you what – you make up the kinds of signs you think are appropriate and bring them here, and I’ll put mine away and we can hold signs together.

Helper: I don’t have the time.

Me: Then why do you have time to criticize what I’m doing?

I try to remember the multitude of such instances when I have that urge to offer unsolicited advice about someone else's style.

We can make all the arguments we want that some methods "turn people off," but I have seen people (and babies) saved through confrontational means as well as through gentle approaches. What am I to make of that? Should I tell the people who were saved through a means that makes me queasy that they should become unsaved and return to the Lord through a "proper" means?

If we are all parts of one body working together "all in all," it is obvious that there will be inexplicable differences of operation. After all, taken separately, what do the functions of the eye and the spleen have in common – unless, of course, you look at the whole body operating *together*. This is what Scripture tells us to do.

I think I have to just put up with the dung in the bottom of the stall and trust that God works all these weird and diverse body parts together for His glory.

18. Followers don't make a leader.

I once heard a Bible teacher assert that you cannot be a Christian leader until you have followers. I saw what he was trying to get at, but he was sincerely wrong.

David was king of Israel when he was anointed by Samuel. (1 Samuel 16: 1-13) It was only a matter of God's timing before that became apparent. However, the appearance of followers did not confer leadership. Jesus was a leader long before anyone responded to "Come, follow Me!" On several occasions, he actually invited His followers to leave – as we discuss in other chapters. In fact, the next two chapters are integral to the proposition of this chapter.

Beyond that, Jesus, in many ways, avoided having followers. He repeatedly told people not to reveal what He did by way of miracles (Matthew 8: 4) and not to tell people He was the Messiah (Matthew 16: 20). He even ran away when people wanted to make Him a king. (John 6: 15)

A very telling event took place between Jesus and his brothers.

John 7: 2-10

- 2 Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand.
- 3 His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.
- 4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.
- 5 For neither did his brethren believe in him.

6 Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready.

7 The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

8 Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.

9 When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee.

10 But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

Here Jesus' brothers point out what seemed to be the obvious: "If you want to have people follow you, you have to publicize your ministry. You need followers to be a leader. It is a mistake for you to hide out here."

Jesus didn't agree. In the worldly mind – the mind of his brothers – they were right, and it is *always* the right time to implement the world's plan. However, that was not what was needed in God's eyes. The brothers went ahead, but Jesus stayed behind – for a while. When Jesus finally went, He again violated the first rule of publicity and only went secretly.

What could He have been thinking?

Jesus knew He was the Ultimate Leader, yet His leadership was not dependent upon followers being apparent. In fact, most of Jesus' followers would, like us, appear only *after* He left this world.

So, I contend that some people's leadership will not appear until after they stand before the Throne. To judge leadership based upon seeing followers is to fall into the trap of judging by outward appearances. (John 7: 24)

19. Don't fear loss of influence.

A truth-sayer should not allow the mere appearance of things to change his mission. As noted above, you may not know how many people you are leading – you may never see them – but, if your call and work is from God, don't allow this to stop you.

We have also discussed the issue of not being afraid of "turning people off" by the truth. The prime example was when Jesus told His followers that they must eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. The resultant defection did not deter Him from His work. He was not afraid that He would lose influence over them. In fact, He was fully aware that any attempt to soften the truth or try to explain it would be lost on these people – at least for the moment. They *may* have later come to understand and accept what He said, but He left that in the hands of His Father.

More subtle is the temptation to curb your tongue over the fear that you might lose a *position of influence*.

20. Don't chase the unbeliever.

Matthew 19: 16-22

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (KJV)

I suspect that most of us, if we had been in Jesus' place, would probably have called out and "explained" to the young man that he only had to give up everything "in his heart."

This is yet another illustration of how Jesus did not try to chase down those who did not respond to His words. Earlier we discussed the incident where Jesus told 5,000 people that they needed to eat His flesh and drink His blood. He assumed that those whom God had prepared for His message would "get it" the first time. Perhaps He understood that some of those who left would later respond, but He was content with those whom the Father had enlightened at that point. He was not after numbers.

This principle is very explicit in the Word. On several occasions, after teaching the crowds, Jesus makes the curious refrain:

Matthew 11: 15

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (KJV)

and

Matthew 13: 9

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (KJV)

Jesus was after people who were truly ready to be His followers. He sorted through those who followed Him around for those who would follow Him everywhere. This is what happened with the 5,000. This was the process at work when Jesus spoke in parables – those who either understood the hidden message or were willing to ask Him for the understanding, continued. Those who did not, left. Jesus took not time to coddle or “bring them along.” They were not “ripe” fruit – and perhaps were not fruit at all, but tares.

Remember when Jesus asked the disciple who *they* believed Him to be and Peter piped up, “You are the Christ! The Son of the Living God”?

Notice that Jesus immediately exclaims, “You’ve *got* it! This is the kind of faith and revelation that I will build My kingdom upon!” (Matthew 16: 17-18 EDV – Extemporaneous deParrie Version)

Only people to whom God had been revealed – and who responded in faith to the revelation were qualified to be with Him. Some of the others may come along later – just as we see people finally saved years after the initial hearing of the Gospel – but they would simply be dead weight until that time.

Likewise, we should not be concerned with chasing down people just because they seem to be so close, or so promising. We should be aware that until the fruit is “ripe” it does no good to pick it.

21. Don't say (or do) more (or less) than God says.

Proverbs 30: 5-6

5 Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (KJV)

I remember once when I was witnessing to a young lady. I had explained the basic gospel to her and I had literally opened my mouth to begin to elaborate when I heard an almost-audible voices say, “Shut up!” I stopped with my mouth wide open for a couple of seconds after that debating what had just happened, then I snapped my mouth shut. I looked at the young lady and after a couple of moments I simply asked, “Do you want to get to know Jesus?” She replied, “Yes” and we just started praying. She called upon the Name of the Lord and was shortly afterwards baptized.

This incident impressed me to think about how and when I witness. Often times – more often than *I* would like – the Lord wants me to simply shut up and do nothing while *He* works. I believe we can simply get in the way of what God is doing by injecting ourselves into His work when we should sit back and watch the Lord fight the battle.

This, I believe, is due to our inherent pride. We believe that we can do it ourselves, or that God couldn't do the work by Himself.

In the Old Testament, God shows a marked preference for “whole stones” for the altar of the Temple. Whole stones are what they are – as God has used the elements to form them. No iron instrument – and therefore, no hand of man – has formed them. (Joshua 8: 31; Deuteronomy 27: 6)

Beyond this kind of thing, we must remember just Whose Word we are delivering. It is not our own. It is the Word of God in a prophetic way. Just as the Scripture tells us not to add to the words on those pages. (Deuteronomy 4: 2; Deuteronomy 12: 32; Revelation 22: 18) Just so it is not good to add to the words He gives you for any particular occasion.

For this reason, I try to be very careful in how I engage in the work of God. Whether it is in public or private truth-saying, witnessing, discipling, or any other work that affects others. I don't want to “help” the Lord where He wants no help.

I have seen this principle at work when it came to my children once they became adults. At varying levels, they all chose as adults to rebel against God. While none of them were ever in any doubt about my position on the moral issues that they were violating, most often God limited my desire to see them saved and serving Him to prayer and example. It was maddening. It was *not at all* the way I would have had things go. You cannot imagine the bizarre routes that they went through before returning to God.

As a parent, I was in agony watching them ram their heads against the wall – repeatedly. However, when it came to giving them unsolicited advice, God simply wouldn't allow it. With rare exceptions, He gave us words for them but we were always cautioned to give those words *and nothing more*.

You know what? God still did the work – and continues the work with them and my grandchildren, as well.

Does this mean that this is always the way to handle it? Not at all. Not only should you say no more than God gives you, you should say no less than He commands, too.

I am reminded of Jeremiah 48: 10, “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.” (KJV)

Often, as we have said before, the work of the Lord means truth-saying in a way that is difficult, painful, and seemingly heartless. However, we are dealing with a deadly enemy – sin – that leaves people forever in Hell. Like war, telling the truth – wielding the sword – is often bloody. If we neglect to do so according to the command of the

Sovereign, we are condemned in much the same way as the watchman on the wall in Ezekiel. (Ezekiel 33)

Paul once told his fellow believers:

Acts 20: 26-31

26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

28 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.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (KJV)

Notice the words “all the counsel of God” in verse 27. Paul claims that he was free from their blood should they fall from the faith because he had been faithful to “warn” them and had not neglected to give them *all* the counsel of God.

All the counsel of God includes calling people to fear God, telling them how much God hates sin and sinners – in the midst of making the ambassadorial offer to God’s enemies of forgiveness and sonship for those who surrender to Him as King. (See Chapters 1, 7, and 11)

A friend once told me that he had attended a church for a while where the practice was to read passages of Scripture containing promises, “If you will do thus, I will bless you this way” but always omit the following passages where God would promise, “If you do not do thus, I will curse you this way.” They told my friend that it was an attempt to keep things “positive.”

However, “being positive” is not the whole counsel of God. Those who follow such policies may find their judgment very severe.

22. Cyrus's money, pride, and the offer you shouldn't refuse.

Cyrus, while quite impressed with certain Israelites and their God, was a thoroughgoing pagan. As leader of the Persian empire, known for its cruelty, he probably was the fountainhead of many evils. Yet, the prophet, 400 years before the Israelite captivity, names him as God’s servant. (Isaiah 44: 28 thru 45: 6) Why?

God used an enemy to literally pay the bills to rebuild His Temple upon the return of the Israelites from captivity.

Often times, we are more squeamish than God. I believe most Christians today would be greatly conflicted about using the funds of such an evil despot to do the work of the Lord. However, Ezra and Nehemiah had no such problem.

I believe it had to do with the fact that God had granted these men favor in the sight of the wicked ruler. He had placed no “strings” on his gift.

This is not to say that we should simply accept all offers of help. Even in the rebuilding of the Temple, some who offered help were refused. (Ezra 4: 1-3) Therefore, we must be discerning. God often uses the least likely people – even those outside the faith – to further His work.

I often think of David’s chief thirty captains. (2 Samuel 23) Most of these men were not Israelites, yet they were a faithful band of men given to David by God to protect him until he should assume the kingdom. The whole “army” of David was somewhat questionable. After he was fully dispossessed by Saul’s demon-driven ambition and blood-lust, David began his private army for the defense of the borders of Israel.

1 Samuel 22: 1-2

1 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him.

2 And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men. (KJV)

This sounds like the equivalent of a bunch of outlaw bikers. Yet this was who God used.

I look back on a time when I filed a civil rights lawsuit against half a dozen homosexual organizations and their leaders. I did this completely on my own. I had no attorney, no funding, no organization. It was just me against them – and their nine attorneys.

Now Portland’s homosexual population is – per capita – only exceeded by San Francisco. They are fully ensconced in local government, the police department, and the court system. Their demonstrations are lively to say the least. I was suing specifically against the violent tendencies of their activism.

As the time approached for a major court hearing on a motion to dismiss by the sodomites, God placed in my path a young man from New York City – a tough, wily

character who was used to handling troublemakers in bars in the Irish district. He knew how to be effective without endangering himself any more than necessary. He was not a wimp. Nor was he foolhardy.

Upon finding out about my hearing, he started by asking what kind of security arrangements I had made. I had made none. He offered to take that role. This was a man who, at that time, was a complete non-believer. No believer had made such an offer. Immediately, God reminded me of the thirty captains, and I agreed.

This man not only made special arrangements with the U.S. Marshal Service, who guard the federal courthouses, but also rounded up two, large, black get-away cars and half a dozen (legally) armed men to act as drivers and a security force.

When the day came, there were scores of homosexuals ready to “greet” me. Many were in the courtroom and even more were outside to meet me as I left. This man and his team were ready. After the hearing ended, no one was allowed to approach me. Even an acquaintance who was unfamiliar to the team got pinned to the wall when he tried to come up to me.

The man had arranged to have me hustled out a special side door into the waiting chase cars full of armed men. This completely bypassed the angry mob that awaited me at the general entrance.

In another instance, I was helping four local street preachers who were being harassed by the City of Portland and a local business. To stop the harassment, they decided to file a federal lawsuit. One of my jobs was to try to locate an attorney who would take the case without charge – or on contingency.

My experience has been very bad in finding attorneys who are on “our side” for such cases, but I tried anyway. The only response came from a well-known local civil rights attorney who is an atheist. He took the case.

All this is to say that God had made provision in these cases. I did not wait for “Christians” to step up to the plate as that was not what God provided.

The lesson here is that the help God sends – like the messengers He sends (See Chapter 36: *Never refuse a man who offers you a breath mint*) – will not always be of the appearance that we would imagine. Be ready. Don't reject Cyrus's money just because he is a bad boy.

I often see that refusal of God's provision because it is Cyrus's money is not based as much on principle as on spiritual pride. There is a self-sufficiency hiding behind that “The Lord will provide” pronouncement. It often goes well beyond the overt Cyrus's money circumstances, too.

Undoubtedly you have probably heard the old joke about the preacher stuck on his housetop during a flood. While praying for God to help him, a rowboat, then a coast guard cutter, and finally a helicopter all offer to take him off the roof. Each one is told, No, thanks. The Lord will provide.” Eventually the preacher drowns and, when he comes before God, he asks why God did not help him. The Lord answers that He sent a rowboat, a coast guard cutter, and a helicopter – “What other kind of help were you waiting for?”

Many years ago, the Lord broke me of the pseudo-spiritual attitude that had me rejecting money or other help when others asked. Barring specific instructions to the contrary (and there *have been* some), I assume that the offer of help is a valid provision from God.

After all, if you were having to move a heavy piano down a couple of flights of steps, would you check the spiritual credentials of those offering to help? Probably not. Why, then, would you balk at receiving cash money for help?

It is more than the issue of spiritual credentials. I know I used to try to appear spiritual and humble (like the preacher on the roof) by refusing a cash donation from people I thought more needy than myself. Eventually, God embarrassed me about the false pride. Who was I to decide who God would use to give me provision?

On some occasions I have seen people get themselves into quite a financial bind over such displays of false pride. (At least they didn’t drown.)

Not only is the provision itself from God, so is the manner in which He chooses to deliver it. I have learned to humbly and gratefully accept God’s provision – even when delivered by means that make me uncomfortable or embarrassed.

Learn to accept grace at God’s hand. It’s an offer you shouldn’t refuse.

IV

Fighting Enemies

23. Expose evil.

Ephesians 5: 11-12

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. (KJV)

This is a complex verse. Often I hear people quote verse 12 as a justification for not talking about, or even knowing about, the evil going on around them. I know Christians who elect not to even read the news for fear of becoming aware of evil and, not wanting “even to speak of those things” keep themselves in ignorance.

Is this really what this verse suggests? Philippians 4: 8 tells us that we should think on the things that are pure, lovely, and of good report. Does this mean we should seek to block out knowledge of all that is evil?

I don't think that such a thing could be fairly drawn from the Word. It almost seems contradictory, but verse 11 tells us not to have "fellowship" with the deeds of darkness, but to "reprove" them. How can you reprove something if you have no knowledge of it? What does reprove mean?

Strong's No. 1651 *elegcho* (el-eng'-kho);

of uncertain affinity; to confute, admonish:

KJV-- convict, convince, tell a fault, rebuke, reprove.

How is it a "shame even to speak of those things" if we are to reprove them? I suggest that in verse 12, the "in secret" is not talking about where the dark deeds are done, but where the *speaking of them* is done. The whole verse is about openly rebuking and bringing to light evil (see subsequent verses), therefore it would be a shame if we only spoke of the evil deeds secretly.

Look at it this way: If we only sit around in our little Christian enclaves talking about the evil of others, we are liable to a justifiable charge of gossip – or perhaps we get some guilty pleasure by our vicarious participation in the evil by secretly discussing it. The shame is that we are not exposing evil to the light – which we are commanded to do – *and* that we are participating in this little self-congratulatory discussion of how much we "thank God that we are not like these others." (Luke 18: 11)

There are many levels where God has people expose evil. John the baptizer is one who publicly exposed the sins of the Jewish leader for his incest. At the other end of the scale is the man, in obedience to Matthew 18: 15 who goes one-on-one with an offending brother. Both are commanded forms of exposing evil. Either may be required of any Christian at any time.

So why do we need to do this exposing of evil?

The first reason is God's glory. On judgment day, God's glory will be manifest by His great grace and mercy upon those who responded to the truth when their own evil was exposed by believers. God's glory will also be manifest in His justice of condemning to Hell those who rejected the truth. The exposing of evil is necessary to God's judgment.

The second reason involves God's current judgment. The exposing of evil in a nation sets up the vindication for God to bring either revival or judgment there. Even more, this is true within the Church. Judgment comes first to the household of God. (1 Peter 4: 17) Sin in the camp must be purged or the whole suffers. (Joshua 7) This is one

of the reasons for the process of disfellowshipping – the first reason being the hope that the erring brother will repent and be restored.

This is why all believers are called to be truth-sayers. Sometimes it is public, other times private, but *always* necessary.

24. Porcupines discourage handling.

I have a newspaper clipping taped to my computer about porcupines. At the bottom is the following advice: “Don’t put your lips on it!”

This is good advice. You shouldn’t mess with porcupines. God designed them so that they are not aggressive creatures that go around attacking others, but that they also have a way to protect their own interests from attack.

In connection with dealing with enemies, Jesus told us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. (Matthew 10: 16) While we are told to be harmless – like the non-aggressive porcupine – we are also commended to some level of craftiness.

How does this work out?

Aren’t we supposed to “turn the other cheek” and “love our enemies”? Yes.

A lot of the work God has given me lately involves using the legal system to “slap back” at God’s enemies. Some people find this troubling in light of those instructions on turning the other cheek and loving your enemies, but there is an important distinction here. There is a huge difference between *our* enemies and *God’s* enemies. There is a vast gulf between turning *our* cheek and turning *everyone else’s* cheeks.

The Scripture prohibits us from taking personal vengeance – from personally retaliating for wrongs done against us.

Romans 12: 19

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
(KJV)

It is important to not allow the current usage of the word “vengeance” to color your view of this verse. If vengeance were always evil, God would not say it was His. Vengeance and vindictiveness are not the same.

For instance, when someone becomes angry with you because you are serving God and pushes or punches you, you simply keep on going. It is, however, quite another matter when someone is using such tactics as a means of stopping God’s work in a broader context. In the first instance, the man is *your* enemy. He is opposing you because

he is angry about what you are doing. In the second instance, we see someone trying to stop God's work as a whole. He is *God's* enemy. If you simply turn your cheek, you will just make him more bold to do that to the next man doing God's work. You will be, in essence, turning the next man's cheek.

Think of it this way: If someone were to shoot you purely as a means to get past you in order to shoot those in the room behind you, are you still doing right to "turn the other cheek"?

Now, this does not mean you necessarily push or punch back a guy who hit you. Go back and read the passage. We are to *give place unto wrath*, we are told. Then we are reminded that it is God's place to "repay."

This is where the next chapter of Romans comes in – remembering that there were no "chapters" in the original letter to the Romans.

Romans 13: 1-5

- 1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.
- 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
- 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:
- 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.
- 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. (KJV)

Most of the time this passage is given in reference to Christians obeying the laws of the land. However, the passage is not so limited. Look at the language and compare it to the verse we looked at in Romans 12.

Vengeance is God's; God gives governments authority; government authority is supposed to be used to "revenge" and "execute wrath" upon evildoers; so, we should be subject for "wrath" sake, as well as conscience.

In other words, in a limited sense, governments are legitimate tools of God for avenging wrongs against Christians. Think of it this way: If someone breaks into your house and steals all that your family has, it is not wrong to get "revenge" by having the police and courts deal with the thief. Even if you choose to forgive his trespass *against you*, it would be unwise (and possibly evil) to simply let an unrepentant thief go free since he will undoubtedly victimize your neighbors (whom you are also to love). You have some biblical obligation to protect your neighbors from evil as well.

Now the same is true of civil courts. There are times when individuals or groups, intent upon stopping the work of God, will – counting on the general “turn the other cheek” mentality – do great evil against God’s servants. They will lie, slander, assault, and cause the false arrest of God’s servants as a tool to stop the work. Sometimes we can get police to arrest them, but often the police will side with these forces, so there is no way to get *the enemies of God* arrested.

However, God still has us living in a nation that has a partly working court system. Sometimes the best way to stop concerted efforts against truth-saying is to simply sue them.

The issue isn’t getting money, it is bringing the legitimate government function of “revenging evil” to bear on the miscreants. Sometimes – especially with wealthy individuals or groups – the large amount of the lawsuit will have its effect. In other cases, just the mere turmoil a lawsuit can bring will eventually result in their changing their behavior. In either case, you get these enemies of God off your backs – and off the backs of your brethren who will follow in your place doing the work of God.

This is called the Porcupine Theory of Law. If you become prickly enough, committed enemies of God – government officials, corporations, or individuals – will learn to leave you alone lest they get a snoutful of quills.

Now I know by now many of you are ready to quote to me about how Jesus took it all without uttering a word. This is true, but a lot of what we as Christians do is not really a WWJD moment (What Would Jesus Do?), rather a WWPDP (What Would Paul Do?).

This is not the deification of Paul, but you must remember that our *mission on earth* is more like that of Paul than that of Jesus. That is why the different responses.

Jesus came specifically to suffer and die. He did not open His mouth because everything was going according to the Plan. However, Paul, when before the courts, did *nothing but* open his mouth! (Acts 22: 1-22 and 24-29; 24: 10-25) He defended himself with vigor – all the while using it as a platform to preach to the judges and officials.

With Paul, the question was not a simplistic WWJD, but a realization that there was more work for him to do, so he “used the system” to do it. Look at Acts 22: 24-29 where Paul claims his rights of Roman citizenship. He didn’t just lie down and die, or become a martyr. Paul literally had that Roman Centurion in fear for his life over what he had done – as it is a capital offense to bind an uncondemned Roman citizen.

This was used earlier to Paul’s advantage in Phillipi in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas, both Roman citizens, preached and then cast out a demon from a slave girl with a spirit of divination. The owners of the slave and the local officials had them arrested,

beaten, and jailed in stocks. Eventually, after God got glory from saving the jailer and his household, this is what happened:

Acts 16: 35-39

35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.

36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. (KJV)

These officials were scared to death. Paul and Silas let them off the hook, but do you think for a moment that these officials were going to go around easily arresting Christians after this? Not likely. Paul asserting his legal rights kicked open the door for the brethren to keep ministering in Philippi.

Paul was not avenging himself here, he was avenging God's people through legitimate channels of God's vengeance – the legal system. By doing this aggressively, he kept the mission of truth-saying alive for both himself and others.

Occasionally, God will personally intervene with vengeance. The case of Ananias and Sapphira comes to mind. (Acts 5) Also consider the blindness of Elymas. (Acts 13: 6-12) However, this is not the norm.

The criteria with legitimate “vengeance” seems to be whether we are just trying to satisfy our own personal anger, or whether our motives are beyond ourselves. However, as part of being “wise as serpents,” it might be well to become as prickly as porcupines in those areas that will allow truth saying to continue as freely as possible.

25. Never give a sucker an even break.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

- 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (KJV)

While we are in the world of men (enemies of God), we are enjoined from taking personal vengeance for wrongs done. We are commanded to do good to those who are our enemies. (Romans 12: 19-21)

At the same time, there is a time to act in a way that would *appear* different – to finish off the enemy. It is very similar to the distinction between the times when we turn the other cheek and the times when we must take a legitimate route of defense. A lot of it hinges on the word “personal.”

What I mean by this is that there is a huge difference between turning your *own* cheek and turning the cheeks of others.

The Scripture tells us of the time when Saul was commanded to utterly destroy an Amalekite city and its people (1 Samuel 15) for their ill treatment of God’s people. The newly-anointed king led his armies in – but then withheld himself from killing Agag the king of the Amelakites. It took no time at all for God to send the prophet to confront Saul for this.

Now, Old Testament Israel is given to the Church as an example to warn us away from making the errors they made. (1 Corinthians 10: 11) Often times Christians will confuse the mercy required to deal with personal affronts with letting evildoers off the hook who are bent on further destruction against the Church or other people.

Again from my own arena, if I have the opportunity to close down an abortion clinic by exposing some hidden evil of the owner of the building, I don’t think that is the place for showing mercy upon the owner. Even if he has personally hurt me, he is not so much *my* enemy, but the enemy of God, the Church, and the innocents who are taken to die there. If I extend mercy there, I am acting beyond my jurisdiction. Only the children killed there or God Himself have the authority to forgive the crimes the man has committed against them. I may forgive the slights against *me*, but I still have a duty to protect others that supersedes my forgiveness.

I often hear people tell me that we should forgive the abortionists, but that decision is not in my hands. If I can find a way to ruin his “medical” practice or “coerce”

him to stop, I owe it to the justice of God to do so. To do otherwise is to fall into the sin of Saul.

Such things may take a number of forms – including the earlier mentioned legal actions. It often requires a keen eye for the underlying situation. I am reminded of a situation in which Paul the apostle found himself. He was in Roman custody after being arrested in the Temple. The following morning, the centurion brought Paul before the Sanhedrin to find out what the Jews had against him. This was a very dangerous time as the Jews were seeking to kill him and the Romans would have probably liked to see the troublemaker out of the picture as well, so here is what Paul did:

Acts 23: 6-10

6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. (KJV)

Notice what Paul did here. He observed the factions in the room and took advantage of a single doctrine he shared (somewhat) with one of them and soon had them at each other's throats. Not only did one of the factions – one that wanted him dead – end up defending him, but the Romans also ended up defending him against both of the Jewish factions. He used their own petty jealousies to remove him from danger.

This is a perfect example of what Jesus meant when He told us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. (Matthew 10: 16)

A modern example of a similar situation arose when Planned Parenthood sued a bunch of anti-abortion people for millions because they had put out fliers identifying abortionists by name and calling for pickets.

We cried, "We are Americans, and it is for the promise of free speech we are on trial!" We received the support of rabid pro-abort groups who were also very invested in free speech.

When *Life Advocate* magazine published the exposé on the D&X (partial birth) abortion procedure, the doctrinaire pro-aborts were forced to publicly defend the gruesome procedure to maintain their ideology, but it split them off from many mainstream pro-aborts. The rift created dissension in the ranks and even converted a number of pro-aborts who had not realized the all-or-nothing nature of the pro-abort leadership.

V

Relationship with Your Spouse

26. Love your wife.

Ephesians 5: 33

33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (KJV)

Men and women are different. They are animated by different forces. This is succinctly pointed out here in Ephesians.

While a lot of what is written below regarding relationships with other Christians may apply to husbands and wives, there are many things that either don't apply or apply differently due to the intimacy of married life.

Women are generally motivated by their emotions – we'll get to the men in the next chapter – and God wisely instructs men to love their wives. One reason for this instruction is it is *not natural* for men to love their wives. If it were, there would have been no reason for the command.

Men, as noted above, tend to want “reverence” or “respect” from their wives. Wives want their husband's love. The problem is that most men don't have a clue as to how to fulfill that need.

Deuteronomy 24: 5

5 When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken. (KJV)

In the Old Testament, a man was given a year off any compulsory obligations like Temple service or military duty to learn how to “cheer up” his wife. This indicates that there are things to be learned by husbands – difficult things.

As a man, I can testify that it took me quite a while to understand how my wife's emotions were wrapped up in her every day life. I learned to be aware of how what I was going to say would “sound” to her emotionally. I learned, against all my normal

impulses, to remember to pick a flower for her for no particular reason. I learned to value the insight that this emotional nature can provide in making good decisions for the family. I learned – and am still learning – how to give that unique female nature deference.

I'm sure some people would say that I am just “going soft” and allowing my wife to have too much sway, however that is not what the Scripture says.

1 Peter 3: 7

7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (KJV)

It appears that the Scripture *commands* that I acquire knowledge of my wife's female nature and operate accordingly. The reason is two-fold. First, she is a weaker vessel. Most of us guys stop there. We recognize a physical way of being a weaker vessel. We even see a spiritual weakness that makes women more likely to be indecisive or soft where firm decisions need to be made.

What we forget is that the second reason is because we are “heirs *together* of the grace of life.”

When we see in the Scripture that the husband is to be the head of the household, we forget that this is something we do *together*. Yes, the husband has the final say on household decisions, but a man who neglects the insights of his wife out of hand is operating on half power. Indeed, such disregard of the wife will result in repercussions from God. The verse here says, “. . . lest your prayers be hindered.”

This word “hindered” is a strong word.

Strong's 1581 ekkopto (ek-kop'-to);

from 1537 and 2875; to excise; figuratively, to frustrate:

KJV-- cut down (off, out), hew down, hinder.

This word might be accurately rendered “jammed back down your throat” in today's language.

Husbands, you don't want this in your life. Look at the famous Proverbs 31 woman. How is it that her husband's heart “safely trust[s] in her” (verse 11) while she is going about all of the business of buying, selling, making profits, reinvesting, and caring for her house (as well as for the poor)? Are women incapable of good judgment (as some men think)? Evidently not.

The scripture commends the wisdom of such women saying, “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” (verse 26, KJV)

Isn't this the kind of woman you want working through life “together” with you, advising you, assisting you? Not only is she dispensing wisdom, the “law of kindness” is in her tongue. Kindness is often the very thing that is needed in a situation, but men often will not come up with that on their own. They need someone to counsel them to the wisdom of kindness.

Those who refuse this blessing not only have their prayers hindered, they probably make a lot of bad decisions because they don't get the kind of input they need from that very different perspective. (If want additional reading on the idea of women having wisdom in matters serious, try reading 2 Samuel 20 where a woman from a town known throughout Israel for its wisdom sends out a woman as the town representative.)

The way to nurture a wife's ability to assist you in this “grace of life” is to cultivate your own ability to live with her according to knowledge – to learn to cheer up your wife. You have to learn to *love* your wife. This means *work* for most guys.

27. Respect your husband.

Part B of the above verse from 1 Peter says that wives should “reverence” or “respect” their husbands. This indicates a very different need than the wives' need for love. In fact, this need is as incomprehensible and difficult to women as love is to men.

Do you remember how the boys used to show off around the girls back when they first began to notice girls? They continued to show off because they wanted to impress people. They wanted *respect*. It was (and is) a driving force in their relationships with other people. It got perverted by the carnal nature in many ways: men brag about their “successes” with women, cars, combat, and many other things in order to get the respect they want. However, that respect can also be sought in righteous ways. He can be respected by others for his godliness. He can be respected by his wife for those things he does to provide for his family, for his good decisions, for his care for his children.

Going back to the Proverbs 31 woman, look at what this woman is doing. She is engaged in a lot of commerce. In those days that meant going to the gates of the city where the elders (officials) recorded business contracts. Verse 23 says, “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.” (KJV)

How do you suppose he is “known”? Could it be because of the way she speaks of him while she is there purchasing a piece of property? (verse 16)

In understanding how your husband is wired, you will see that, as much as possible, he needs to know whether or not you respect him. He needs to hear from you when he has made a wise decision. If you disagree with a decision, barring any gross sin, you should keep the discussion between the two of you. Even the children should be

shielded from these times wherever possible. Since the children are to honor their father and mother, neither should undermine that by their actions or words towards the other.

This is a tall order for both husband and wife. In living day-to-day, we very often let our love and respect slip away. We begin to make unkind comments or roll our eyes with others – especially our children – around. Both the husband loving the wife and the wife respecting her husband is a difficult order to fill. However, we are commanded to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5: 48) It is a lot of work, but we must continue to work.

VI Relationships with Believers and Others

28. Open rebuke is better than secret love.

One of the worst cancers in the Body of Christ is gossip. The tongue of the talebearer sows untold havoc. A place is made for this evil when brethren do not follow simple protocols when there are disputes among them.

Matthew 18: 15-17

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (KJV)

Here is the essence of church health. When there are problems, the specific party who is offended is *obligated* to go *first* to the offending party. When?

Matthew 5: 23-24

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (KJV)

God here is requiring us to even suspend our prayer and praise to Him in order to make the attempt to clear up such disputes. It almost seems to place our relationship with our brother ahead of God – but I think that is just the surface appearance. When it gets right down to it, God, who sees the hearts, is fully aware of your roiling spirit over your dispute and, frankly, it stinks up the sacrifice.

The process in Matthew 18 indicates that the believer first handle it personally. There is no running off to the pastor or elder to complain about the offending brother. This is a job for each believer, not for Church leaders.

I recall when I first received a position as pastor in a small group. Almost from the outset, I got calls from the gossips who wanted to tell me that so-and-so said this-or-that about them (or even me). I made it a practice right away to interrupt them and ask if they had personally spoken to the one who was alleged to have uttered the offending remark. “Well, uh . . .” was the most common answer. Then I would order them to shut up and call the other person before saying another word to me or anyone else. This put a large crimp on the rumor mill in the church.

The second step in Matthew 18, I believe, is a measured one. The offended person needs to prayerfully determine if the issue at hand is serious enough to warrant further action. If it is, then one or two witnesses must be chosen. These should never be close friends or people who are liable to side with you as this part is more of an opportunity to determine *who* is the one that needs to repent. This is not a time for a bunch of like-minded people to ambush someone else. The witnesses are “witnesses,” not prosecutors. They must be chosen from people for whom both parties have respect and who are respected in the Church. (1 Corinthians 6: 1-8) Done properly, it might even result in a judgment that the offended party was really at fault.

In the case where the one who is determined to be at fault refuses to relent, then the matter is placed before the Church. If he again refuses, then excommunication takes place.

Since this last step is so extreme in consequence, we must reserve it for those sins that are worthy of banishment. Two Scripture portions are helpful here. Immediately following the rebuke to the Corinthians about them taking their brother “to law” rather than being judged by fellow believers who are solid, we find this list of offenses:

1 Corinthians 6: 9-10

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (KJV)

I believe that this indicates the seriousness of offenses that are taken before the Church. The passage in 1 Corinthians 5 concerning excommunicating has a similar list of offenses for which believers are to refuse company with the offending person.

1 Corinthians 5: 11-13

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (KJV)

The continuation of the scenario in Matthew 18 provides the biblical authority for excommunication.

Matthew 18: 17-20

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (KJV)

The purpose of excommunication is two-fold: 1) There is the hope that the isolation from the brethren will induce repentance and return (2 Thessalonians 3: 14) , and 2) To keep sin out of the camp. (1 Corinthians 5: 1-8) We see penitent response to Paul's 1 Corinthians admonition to excommunicate the fornicator in 2 Corinthians 2: 1-11 and 7: 8-12)

However, one must bear in mind that Matthew 18 continues with Peter asking Jesus how many times he should forgive an offending brother if he asks forgiveness. Seven times seventy. The parable of the unforgiving servant follows. This is a severe warning against becoming overzealous in our rebukes and excommunications.

Remember, even a heretic gets two admonitions before he is rejected. (Titus 3: 10-11)

So then, gossip is cut short by application of God's instructions – and so is creeping resentment. The Church is also kept more pure. However, there is another matter yet to be seen. While it is good to cut gossip in the Church and resentment by those who are wronged, there is also the soul of the offender to consider.

This is a brother – the one who is fallen. We should be careful that whatever wrong he is involved in does not escalate – and care about him enough to say something

right away. This is the reason for the chapter name – “Open rebuke is better than secret love.” (Proverbs 27: 5)

Is it not better to treat a wound right away rather than let it fester and become infected and possibly lead to gangrene?

In this, it is much that same problem we have with truth-saying in general. We must fear God – for ourselves and others – and we must acknowledge the true evilness of sin.

Galatians 6: 1-2

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.
(KJV)

This is real love. Secret love is nothing. It is a sounding gong or tinkling cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13: 1)

I John 3: 18

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. (KJV)

29. Neither borrower nor lender be.

Contentment is an important characteristic to cultivate.

1 Timothy 6: 6-8

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. (KJV)

One does not become “content” by accident or nature. Like all good characteristics, it requires choices of discipline. When it is a contentment combined with godliness, its source is the knowledge of and trust in our Father in heaven, and our knowledge of “how things are” – that “naked came I from my Mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.” (Job 1: 21) It is a choice of the will to see the facts of life and trust the wisdom of the Father. It is that simple; and that difficult.

So, now you are asking: What in the world does this have to do with borrowing and lending?

That is a good question, and I shall try to answer it. Both borrowing and lending involve something very close to the heart of man – money. As one of my pastor’s once put it, “Money is substitute God.” It provides the *appearance* of all that God promises to give in reality – power, security, home, health, and love. Since we are “in the world but not of it, it is still necessary for us to use money, but we are sternly warned about its effects on our relationship with both God and man – especially the brethren. As such, all of our relationships can either be poisoned or enhanced based upon how we view and use money.

Luke 6: 35

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. (KJV)

Based upon this verse, I have always held that lending is a bad way of doing business with others. I never lend money.

We are instructed here to “lend” hoping for nothing again. So, to me, this really says “give.” Notice also that this teaching occurs as part of how our enemies should be treated. We are also taught that we should give to the poor – which is lending to the Lord. (Proverbs 19: 17)

Proverbs 3: 27-28

27 Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

28 Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. (KJV)

The “to whom it is due” is those who need it – enemies and friends alike – but the phrase here that sticks out to me is “when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.”

I mentioned before that I don’t lend money. I give 1) to those who ask and have need (true need), and 2) if I have the money to do so. Unless specially prompted by the Holy Spirit, I do not give from the money needed by my family for necessities, but if I have more, I will give that.

Here is contentment: I trust that God has provided for my family’s needs – and is now using me to provide for the needs of another. God often provides for things well beyond my actual needs and I praise God for those, but I try to keep in mind that those are extras provided by God’s grace, not a new level of expectations. Paul said (just a few verses after the word on contentment that started this chapter, I might add), “Having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” (1 Timothy 6: 8)

Here is the benefit: If you always give as opposed to lending, you never “count on” having that money for other things; you never have a sour attitude toward your brother (or anyone else) when you see them recalling that they owe you; they never have to feel ashamed or deliberately avoid you because they are in your debt. It does wonders for continuing fellowship if no man owes you.

Conversely, it does similar wonders if you owe no man.

Romans 13: 8

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. (KJV)

This brings us to borrowing. We aren't talking about borrowing a cup of sugar from the neighbor here. And while this verse continues to remind us to give “what is due” to kings (respect), the government, (taxes) and such, in this chapter we're talking about borrowing money. Besides the obvious benefits of not having someone in the position of becoming embittered if you are slow about repaying or the awkwardness of being around a friend to whom you owe money, there is a much more powerful reason not to borrow.

Proverbs 22: 7

7 The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. (KJV)

When you owe money to others, you become their servant. You may be required to do all sorts of things for the lender before you are done – some of it may lead you to do something even sinful. There is no sense putting yourself in that position. Consider what the proverbs say:

Proverbs 6: 1-5

1 My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger,
2 Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.
3 Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.
4 Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.
5 Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler. (KJV)

In short: Get out of debt!

There is a contentedness that comes with being satisfied with what you have, and believing that when God wants you to have something more, He will give you the cash money to get it. I have come to believe that, if I don't have the cash for it, it can wait.

Also, it is important to realize that we don't know the future – and certainly cannot control it. To extend yourself on credit or other forms of loans amounts to a promise that you will be earning what you expect and that you will pay out of what you claim to know you will have. Such boasting is evil and the Scripture warns against it.

James 4: 13-15

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. (KJV)

For this reason, up until I was 50, there was never a credit card in my home. We now have one for the purpose of getting certain things we need off the Internet – but the moment the order is typed online, the cash goes with the card into an envelope awaiting the day when the bill arrives.

It is this contentedness that allows me to give when I have it in my power, and to wait on God to give to me when I have need.

Certainly borrowing and lending puts a wedge between brethren and friends – something to be avoided. However, even borrowing from institutions has serious drawbacks. It often denotes an impatience with God's provision and a restlessness in our souls.

30. Put it in writing.

Since this section is about relationships within the Body of Christ, it might seem rather crass to suggest that we put in writing any of those things in which we interact. It is like suggesting (in modern times) that we draw up a marriage contract – like the “pre-nuptial agreements” we read about. It all seems the perfect way to bleach every bit of love and spontaneity out of the relationship.

This is not true. In fact, putting things in writing is often the very thing that prevents the destruction of fellowship.

Think about this: In ancient Israel marriage was conducted by contract – sometimes without the parties ever having met prior to the wedding. Without getting into

a discourse on the cultural upbringing that allowed these newlyweds to view their marriage not as an act of love but the beginning of *learning to love*, ask your self whose marriages lasted longer, theirs or our modern ones?

I have been unfortunate enough to be involved in any number of situations where a contract would have been a good idea. My wife and I rented a house for many years from a woman who was a godly woman and great saint. However, the house we rented had been lived in by her parents and was somewhat of a shrine to them in her mind. Both of us went into the situation with completely different expectations. She expected us to be keepers of the museum and we expected her to understand that she was renting to a family of (at that time) six – two adults and four small, active children. She expected me to care for several old and virtually fruitless fruit trees and fuss over them so they would produce some meager fruit – which she also expected my harried wife to can. We expected to cut the lawn, rake the leaves, keep the blackberry thorn bushes from swallowing up the yard, and let the kids play outside.

Needless to say, there was trouble between this flinty, tough old lady and this stubborn man. A contract would have clarified those expectations and saved us the several years of grief it took until we came to our separate peace about our roles in the deal.

I have seen long friendships broken up over business dealings done on handshakes between brethren; marriages undone by unreasonable expectations; churches and ministries split over undiscussed differences in vision.

From the times of ancient Israel to the present, every contract from marriage contracts to international agreements has contained very specific information. It must answer the following questions:

1. Who is in charge?
2. What are my responsibilities?
3. What are the rewards if I fulfill the contract?
4. What are the penalties if I don't?
5. How long does the contract bind me?
6. How is the contract enforced?

Lacking any of these answers, a contract is pretty useless. Look at the “answers” to these in today’s marriage license – which pretends to be a contract of sorts:

1. The state.
2. None.
3. Maybe sex; maybe companionship; maybe financial and emotional support; no guarentees.
4. None.
5. Until whim do we part.
6. By state court decision.

Now, look at the answers in the type of contract that might have been drafted in ancient Israel:

1. God.
2. To reserve ourselves sexually and emotionally only for our spouse; to provide financial and emotional support; to care for the home and proper rearing of children; security; etc.
3. Pleasing God; a heritage for the family; a stable home; children raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; children who are known to be of a specific parentage; financial and emotional support; sex; the opportunity to “be as one”; etc.
4. Death; divorce, separation from the spouse, and ostracism from the community.
5. Until death; until unrepentant adultery or abandonment by one spouse.
6. The godly elders of the city conduct a trial if violation of the contract is alleged.

Now, which would you rather have?

Some may argue that the second contract lacks romance, but how romantic is it when the person promises that they feel good about you at the moment; that they think they would like to spend their life with you (barring unforeseen circumstances like “falling in love” with someone else); that they want to prove their love by making empty promises to you in front of a minister or a judge; that they are content to let the state dissolve this union the moment they (or you) decide that you want out for whatever reason (or no reason at all).

This sounds romantic? That’s all you get with a state license, though.

Now let’s transfer this to a situation where two Christian men, one a framer, the other a sheetrock man, decide to work jobs together. They figure that they will just split the money down the middle on any job they do. So, what happens when one ends up putting in more hours than the other on a job – and this seems to happen job after job? Can you see the resentment building? Is it worth it?

The fact is that human nature is such that we all have expectations of every agreement we make. I think that my job is this; the other person thinks I will do more. When it doesn’t happen, unpleasant things happen.

Romans 12: 10-11

- 10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;
- 11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; (KJV)

I see a connection between not being slothful in business and being (and remaining) “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” Such affection must be carefully cultivated. It does not grow or remain healthy of itself and we must insure that no weeds infect the ground of common fellowship.

Hebrews 12: 14-15

14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; (KJV)

Not only do we need to be diligent in rooting out such things, we should proactively seek to prevent them and encourage them in others.

Hebrews 10: 24

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: (KJV)

In the end, it does much more to preserve brotherly affection to “put it in writing” than to leave it to the vagaries of human nature. Human nature is such that misunderstanding – and sometimes outright deception – are worthy of consideration. If we are to be “diligent in business” (Proverbs 22: 29), how much more should we be diligent in preserving brotherly love?

31. Keep records.

When you enter any kind of truth-saying, you can expect opposition from within and without the Church. Often the opposition will attempt to smear you or misrepresent you to others in order to “take you off the field.” Other times misunderstandings between brethren will arise out of simple human nature – much like those mentioned in the previous chapter.

Here, I am suggesting a little preventative medicine.

I keep copies of most of my correspondence – especially concerning subjects that are controversial or touchy. I have had more than one occasion to regret not having done that. “DeParrie said such and such to me!” they would say. I had no proof that this was not so – until I started keeping records.

Does this seem a little cynical to you? Maybe you are thinking that I should simply allow people to slander me and my work without reply? I don’t think that is biblical. Paul the apostle defended his preaching and teaching on several occasions and

pointed out the errors in the reports of what he was alleged to have said. He called upon witnesses to prove his ministry and integrity. (1 Thessalonians 2: 10)

Witnesses are very important in truth-saying. God relies upon witnesses – both eyewitnesses and written witnesses. In fact, your entire faith rests on a written record that God created for you. Why would you suppose that such things are unimportant for your own ministry?

The fact is, that recording things in writing is a valid way to memorialize what God has accomplished as well as to protect the work of God in your ministry. You would not think ill for a minute of a ministry that signed a lease agreement on a building they were using. It wouldn't bother you if, in the course of a dispute over the conditions of the lease, the ministry kept a file of the correspondence on that dispute. Why would you think it unseemly for someone to keep correspondence to protect against possible future conflicts?

Some day there may be a need, as was true with Paul and others, to defend the work you have been doing and to put destructive rumors or lies to rest. Being diligent in “business” is a good thing. Being wise – first about what we say and write, then about keeping written records – may be the best way to respond. While we are urged to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5: 39), that does not mean we should be unwise in our dealings with the world, the flesh, and the devil. (Matthew 10: 16; Luke 16: 8)

32. The worst thing they can do is say no.

Luke 18: 1-6

- 1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;
- 2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:
- 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.
- 4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;
- 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.
- 6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. (KJV)

It would have been easy – not to mention natural – for this poor widow to think, “I’ll never get justice, so why ask?” That is what most people do when confronted with a situation that looks difficult where faceless bureaucracies are in control.

That is also true of most people with God or any man. We presume that we know the outcome, so we simply don't face the disappointment of a "no" answer. We simply give up before we even start the fight.

First, the parable teaches that we should seek from God – and that God sometimes appears to not respond to the sufferings of His people. However, in keeping with the teachings of Romans 12 and 13 about the lawful government being the instrument of God's vengeance, I believe some of our asking can be in the form of seeking redress through the courts. (See Chapter 24: *Porcupines discourage handling*) Often they say "no," but that is no reason to quit asking – at least according to this parable.

Of course, because I have had an active "court life," it is natural for me to relate this principle to that arena, but it also applies elsewhere.

It is astonishing in ministry how often God will place provision before us and we don't get it because we simply do not ask – both Him and the people He sends to provide for us. We would rather scabble and scrape, twist and manipulate, bite and scratch to get what we need.

James 4: 1-2

- 1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?
- 2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. (KJV)

It is as if we are convinced that God does not *want* to give us what we need. Or other times, we want what belongs to others or what we should never have at all. However, envy and greed are separate issues. The problem of our unwillingness to ask is either pride or fear. We don't want to look foolish if we are told "no" or we fear that we will be refused our request.

My question is: "*So what?*"

The widow knew she would never get justice by not seeking it. She also knew that they couldn't toss her in jail just for asking. She was willing to brave the rejection – repeatedly – on the hope that she might actually get the justice she craved. She didn't let pride or fear stop her.

An extension of this principle is: It is easier to say "sorry" than to ask permission. This kind of thing often comes into play when one is involved in public ministry.

Suppose you want to hand out literature near an event and find a perfect point for doing so. Are you unsure if the place you are going to hold your sign or pass out fliers is public or private? Just step in and start. If you are on private property, someone will soon

tell you and you simply move. Nothing lost, and you also had at least a limited time to use that most effective spot for a while. (Those who told you it is a private spot may be lying to you, so, later, you could go look up the area on the public records and find out.) Other times, you will find that even the people who think the property is their own are unsure and will leave you alone.

Does God's work seem to need a rather big ticket item like a van or trailer? What would be the harm in asking that guy who runs the recreational vehicle lot if he has one to donate? What about the neighbor whose RV has been sitting unused in his driveway for the last five years? It isn't as if they can have you arrested for asking. You won't walk off the lot after a "no" answer with anything less than you had when you walked on. Does God lead people to do such things? Absolutely! Often it is the very boldness of your request that impresses the giver to agree.

In an earlier chapter we looked at using Cyrus' money. The same applies here.

Perhaps you recall my story in Chapter 22 where I told of asking a person, who was a non-believer at the time, to help me as a bodyguard during one of my more raucous court appearances.

If I hadn't asked, I wouldn't have had that somewhat-less-than-angelic protection – but it was *God's* provision and protection.

33. Sometimes its best to apologize even when you are right.

When it comes to personal relationships, squabbles almost always are a result of both people doing something wrong. The first may offend the second, but the second's initial response is usually wrong and simply escalates the situation.

In serious offenses, there are remedies in Matthew 18: 15-18 and 1 Corinthians 6: 1-5 that have been discussed above. More often than not, though, the actual controversy starts out as something relatively minor.

If you follow up on the citation in 1 Corinthians, you find this advice:

1 Corinthians 6: 7

7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? (KJV)

Here, Paul is addressing those who "go to law" against a brother and asks why not just suffer the wrong for the sake of the Body. I am suggesting we extend the principle and be longsuffering toward one another. (Colossians 3: 12-13) In fact, I am suggesting that we, for the sake of peace with one another, actively take the burden of fault for a controversy – even where the other person was also at fault.

After a first rocky year of marriage to my wife, we separated. I was a lazy bum (and a few other unpleasant things), but she had no biblical warrant to leave me and file for divorce. It was a nasty situation all around.

Over a very short period of time, God took me to the woodshed to chasten me over my laziness and other wrongs. I saw what I had done wrong and took direct action to resolve that by diligent application of the Word of God.

However, my wife was (understandably) not easily convinced and continued to proceed with the divorce and to rationalize why it was biblical. She was being very rebellious – something which the Lord would deal with without my help, thank you very much!

I, on the other hand, wanted very much to reconcile and prove myself to her. While the Lord had dealt with my laziness, He still needed to deal with my pride. He had to show me that my relationship with my wife was worth dying to self for. So, while I was praying about what to do, He showed me that I should admit I was wrong – that 100% of the blame for the situation was mine. I didn't understand it right away, but I obeyed anyway.

Later I could see that there is no real way to split fault 60/40 or 70/30 or any other way. With a wife or a brother in the Lord, the principle applied. Whether or not I was the one who initiated the sequence of events, I was 100% to blame for the wrongs that *I* had done. So taking the whole fault was true – I was 100% at fault for the things *I* had done. I was choosing to overlook the fault of the other person.

1 Peter 4: 8

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. (KJV)

Proverbs 17: 9

9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. (KJV)

In other words, it is worth the effort to even allow yourself to be “defrauded” and overlook the transgression in order to maintain the unity of the Spirit. When our own reactions have been unrighteous, taking the path of humility and simply owning responsibility for the conflict will often restore that unity. If the other person needs straightening out, we can put that in God's hands and go on with life.

34. Honesty is not the best policy.

One wag has it that once honesty has been reduced to the level of mere “policy” that it is no longer of any value. There is a lot of truth (or honesty) in this observation. I find it singularly significant that “honesty” is not listed in the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians. If honesty is such a great policy, why then is it missing from this illustrious list?

Perhaps because honesty is not an absolute good. In fact, there are quite a few characteristics we regard as good that do not make the cut either – optimism, humor, among them

Now, I have major objections to the current mania for “honesty” or “transparency” in our relationships, but I will address that later. I first want to demonstrate why honesty is not an absolute good.

First let us look at the commandment that you are probably thinking of right now:

Exodus 20: 16

16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. (KJV)

I am not trying to be slippery when I say that this is a very specific command. The commandment prohibits bearing false witness *against* your neighbor. For instance, you are not to lie in a trial about your neighbor’s guilt when you knew him to be innocent. Such testimony was *seriously* punished. (Deuteronomy 19: 16-21)

In other words, you are not to tell a lie to the detriment of your neighbor. The distinction is in the phrase “against your neighbor.” This was not in the commandment by accident or as an editorial flourish.

Let’s look at another situation: Suppose the forces of the Evil Empire are looking for your neighbor in order to kill or imprison him. Suppose further that your neighbor has done nothing wrong. Do you lie about him biding in your attic?

The question here is, Which of these things violates or conforms to the Great Commandments. Since these commandments comprise all the Law and the prophets (Matthew 22: 36-40), which of these would be “love” – an attribute that actually appears in the fruits of the Spirit?

It certainly would not be love to turn an innocent neighbor over to the Evil Empire for punishment, nor would it be love to lie about an innocent man so as to make him appear guilty.

Scripture gives us notable occasions where a lie was told, and God commended a liar. The most prominent, perhaps, is the lies of Rahab the harlot in Jericho to protect the soldiers (spies) of Israel. (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11: 31; James 2: 25)

This is why honesty is not an absolute good. It is possible to tell the truth “against thy neighbor” in a way that will bring about an unjust and evil result.

A good example is gossip. Scripture forbids us to gossip, even when what we say is the truth. We can reveal things about people that, while strictly true, are intended to create an evil result.

I know a young man who spent several years in the penitentiary for involvement on a homicide. While in prison, he not only became a Christian, but became a very solid individual. After his release and probation were finished, he went on to marry, father children, and become an example of a hard-working, honest man. Shortly after marrying, he and his family moved to a small town in the Midwest. He developed a generally good reputation for an “outsider” in short order, but all that was ruined when a local bully of a sheriff decided to “run” his name. The sheriff had an axe to grind and soon made it known that the young man was an ex-convict. As one might expect in a small town, the people – who already were suspicious of new people – took the news and changed their attitude about him. (It might be noted here as well that many of those who turned on him were “Christians” and people who had personally experienced the young man’s honesty and generosity.)

The sheriff had borne *true* witness against his neighbor, but it was evil.

However, there is the fad of “transparency” to deal with. The theory here is that relationships flourish when those involved are committed to a level of intimacy where all our inner thoughts and feelings (especially *them*) are brought out into the open.

I cannot express what unmitigated bushwah this is. First of all, there is plenty of Scripture that commends keeping our thoughts to ourselves.

Proverbs 11:12

12 He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. (KJV)

Proverbs 17: 28

28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding. (KJV)

Both of these tend to show that there is great value in simply shutting up. That will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter, so I’ll move on to another issue – the harmless lie.

Under the transparency theory, honesty is essential, even when it is brutal. While I commend such honesty when bringing correction of sin to a brother, I have serious reservations about doing so when my mother asks my opinion of her new hat – especially when she appears to be enthralled by it. Saying, “That looks fine” does not constitute bearing false witness *against* her – and probably saying, “Boy, that looks terrible” would fall under the heading of telling the *truth* against my neighbor. It certainly would not be much of a fruit of the Spirit.

35. It is better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool, than to open it and remove all doubt.

My father used to quote this from Mark Twain. You probably noticed the similarity between this Twainism and one of the verses quoted in the last chapter.

Proverbs 17: 28

28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding. (KJV)

Add to that:

Proverbs 10: 19

19 In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. (KJV)

There is a lot to be said for keeping your mouth shut. God Himself uses words as the instruments of His power and does not waste them. Neither should we.

On the practical end, consider a scenario like this: Imagine that you have misread someone in your Bible study group and thought evil of them. You thought you had good reason to think some awful thing of them, but later found you were wrong. You had, by reason of some prejudice, believed an evil report. Yet, you had not done anything like gossiped about the other person that would constitute a personal attack on them. Do you confess this to them?

I would argue that it would not be wise in most circumstances. I believe your repentance and confession should definitely be made to God, but not the person themselves.

Why? It would cause unnecessary pain to them and might damage any future friendship you might have. The other might be less enthusiastic about being more of a co-laborer with you if the first thing you tell him is that you originally thought he was a [fill in the blank]. Your sin was primarily against God Who commands that you love the brethren, not against the other person.

The kind of “transparency” consistent with the modern mantra would do more harm than good. The brotherly love we are commended to would suffer unnecessarily for it.

It is rather like the “honesty” of telling your mother that the hat looks awful – except here, instead of saying anything, you are simply *refraining* from saying anything.

In addition to causing damage to your relationship with your brother, there is also another matter. Not everything deserves sharing. Jesus warned not to cast our pearls before swine. (Matthew 7: 6)

So what are the “pearls” of which he speaks? In other contexts, the pearl is compared to the kingdom of heaven which, when a man finds, he sells all he has to get it. (Matthew 13: 45-46)

Now, I believe, this “kingdom of heaven” spoken of is much more than simple salvation. It encompasses the entirety of someone’s relationship with God from salvation to glory forever. The man sells “all that he hath” – all of his relationship with the kingdom of this world, family, friends, and such to obtain it.

A man’s relationship with God is a deeply personal affair. Much of what goes into a Christian life is developed below the surface in a man’s communication with the Father. Other people see the “blade, the ear, and then the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4: 28) that develops *as a result* of the personal communication that lies at the root. Galatians 5: 22-23 tells us of the “fruit” of the Spirit, but where is the root? It is in the prayer closet; the private study and meditation; in the night seasons. (Psalms 16: 7)

As one brother used to say, it is not wise to go around digging up your roots just so you can display them to others. In other words, many of the things that constitute your relationship with God are private and should remain so.

The swine, in the case of Jesus words, would probably be best understood as unbelievers as they would be least likely to have even a rudimentary understanding of that private life. They would probably just use it against you – as evidence that you are dotty.

However, there are also things you shouldn’t even share with those closest to you. Just as you do not share with others many of the intimate moments of your relationship with your spouse, you should not do so with that sweet fellowship that you share with God.

If, for instance, you do not share with others about the details of your’s and your spouses’ sex life or private talks, why would you share the details of your fellowship with the Father?

We are even told not to let others know we *are* praying or fasting (Matthew 6: 6) much less sharing openly about some of those private, Father-to-son connections. When your Father “rewards you openly” for your “closet” relationship, it will be manifest as the fruit of the Spirit to the glory of God the Father. The power of God in your life will become obvious to all (Isaiah 58) and, in the end, He will say *before all*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25: 21)

36. Never refuse a man who offers you a breath mint.

2 Samuel 16: 5-6 and 9-10

5 And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came.

6 And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

* * *

9 Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.

10 And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? (KJV)

The most difficult times of my walk are when I face criticism. Because my work is often controversial, I have developed a relatively tough hide as a result. However, I have to be very careful that this does not prevent me from receiving *legitimate* criticism. It is a difficult task.

On one level, nearly *anything* a Christian does while following the Lord will bring criticism. People who think you should do it some other way, or some other time, or some other place, are as common as dirt. The most consistent comments to my work are: “This isn’t the time or place for that.” If I listened to every time that was said, there would *never* be a “right time or place” for my ministry. Sorry.

On the other hand, I have, on a number of occasions, been brought up short by the Lord for sins of omission or commission. The thing that is surprising to me is how often the criticism of the Lord has come from the mouth of pagans – or even enemies. I’ve even seen the time when a drunk walked up to me with the Word of the Lord!

I always tell people that if God can use a burning bush (Exodus 3: 2-4) or a jackass (Numbers 22: 21-32) to speak through, he can use me, too. If I accept that

premise, I have to be prepared to accept the Word of the Lord from whatever vessel God chooses to use as well.

The first time I became aware of the verses above was when my former pastor was teaching on being teachable. One of the things that I believe made David “a man after God’s own heart” was his ability to listen for the voice of God” correction whether it came from Nathan the prophet, or an enemy like Shimei. He was *willing* to hear God’s correction. This made him a wise man. (Proverbs 9: 8)

My hope is to emulate that wisdom. The only way I can do this is to be *open* to criticism – sometimes even subtle criticism – being sent to me by God.

Some of this will involve major issues of sin or error in my life, other things will be simple, ground-level, day-to-day stuff for getting along with my brethren and neighbors.

I mean, sometimes when someone offers you a breath mint, it is *more* than just a polite gesture because they were having one themselves. Face it, you may have bad breath!

Epilogue

No “Balance”

One of the problems with writing about doing God’s work in “not the usual way” is that most of us don’t have much in the way of “balance.” We tend toward extremes.

The intent of this book is not to move people toward extremes, but to pull them way from the currently-fashionable extremes. However, I am not really appealing to “balance” in the way that term is often used.

By way of example, let us take the matter of imprecatory prayer – that is, prayer in which we ask for the destruction of our enemies and God’s enemies. The Psalms are about 1/3 such prayers. Now, God didn’t suddenly throw those out of the Bible after Jesus came on the scene. Nor did they suddenly become spritualized to include only Satan and his demons. So we must deal with them.

In today's culture in the Church, it is an uphill battle to convince believers that there is *any place at all* for imprecatory prayer. Once that is done, though, it is hard to convince them not to try to "balance" their prayer lives between imprecatory prayer and supplicatory prayer. ("Let's see now, my last two prayers were asking for blessings upon people, I need to throw in an imprecatory prayer for balance.")

The seeming opposites in what Scripture shows in how we walk with God have nothing to do with balancing them. It has to do with personal relationship with God.

I often say that it is our responsibility to get to know how God thinks – that is, to come to know Him in His Word and in prayer to the point where we gain an innate sense of how God would feel about things we encounter. In this life, we are often confronted with issues and questions that do not lend themselves to some ready Bible verse. In recent years things like cloning, genetic engineering, and other scientific marvels have come to the fore. Those who know God intimately respond to such things out of the wells of that intimacy – only later finding Scripture confirming their initial reactions.

The HIS (God's) story of the world is filled with places where God attempted to have one-on-one relationships with people. The predictable response was that people would rather have a bunch of rules rather than a relationship with God. They clamor for the formula rather than the Face of God.

The people at Mt. Sinai wanted Moses to go back up the hill and get a rule book rather than having to hear His voice again. (Exodus 20) Later, they wanted a regular king to rule over them rather than God's personal rulership. One can hear the palpable pain of rejection in God's words to Samuel when He said, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." (1 Samuel 8: 7 KJV)

In the Church today, we search the Scriptures to find a formula for every question, a rule for every activity, but we do not want to know God personally. That is far too dangerous. I know this is true. I feel that instinct of the carnal nature to run away and hide from His Presence every time He tries to move me closer.

There is nothing in such a personal relationship, however, that will contradict the Word – especially once we see the *whole* Word as opposed to those that are on the Christian political correctness list.

The reason we don't need "balance" in these things is because we really need such a personal walk, that our words and actions mirror what God wants now, not what we attempt to define by sterile search of Scripture.

APPENDIX I

Isaiah's Job

by Albert J. Nock

One evening last autumn, I sat long hours with a European acquaintance while he expounded a politico-economic doctrine which seemed sound as a nut and in which I could find no defect. At the end, he said with great earnestness: "I have a mission to the masses. I feel that I am called to get the ear of the people. I shall devote the rest of my life to spreading my doctrine far and wide among the populace. What do you think?"

An embarrassing question in any case, and doubly so under the circumstances, because my acquaintance is a very learned man, one of the three or four really first-class minds that Europe produced in his generation; and naturally I, as one of the unlearned, was inclined to regard his lightest word with reverence amounting to awe. . . .

I referred him to the story of the prophet Isaiah. . . . I shall paraphrase the story in our common speech since it has to be pieced out of various sources. . . .

The prophet's career began at the end of King Uzziah's reign, say about 740 B.C. This reign was uncommonly long, almost half a century, and apparently prosperous. It was one of those prosperous reigns, however – like the reign of Marcus Aurelius at Rome, or the administration of Eubulus at Athens, or of Mr. Coolidge at Washington – where at the end the prosperity suddenly peters out and things go by the board with a resounding crash.

In the year of Uzziah's death, the Lord commissioned a prophet to go out and warn the people of the wrath to come. "Tell them what a worthless lot they are," He said. "Tell them what is wrong, and why, and what's going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don't mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you," He added, "that it won't do any good. The official class and their intelligentsia will turn up their noses at you, and the masses will not even listen. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life."

Isaiah had been very willing to take on the job – in fact, he had asked for it – but the prospect put a new face on the situation. It raised the obvious question: Why, if all that were so – if the enterprise were to be a failure from the start – was there any sense in starting it?

"Ah," the Lord said, "you do not get the point. There is a Remnant that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new

society; and, meanwhile, your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it.” . . .

What do we mean by the masses, and what by the Remnant?

As the word *masses* is commonly used, it suggests agglomerations of poor and underprivileged people, laboring people, proletarians. But it means nothing like that; it means simply the majority. The mass-man is one who has neither the force of intellect to apprehend the principles issuing in what we know as the humane life, nor the force of character to adhere to those principles steadily and strictly as laws of conduct; and because such people make up the great, the overwhelming majority of mankind, they are called collectively *the masses*. The line of differentiation between the masses and the Remnant is set invariably by quality, not circumstance. The Remnant are those who by force of intellect are able to apprehend these principles, and by force of character are able, at least measurably, to cleave to them. The masses are those who are unable to do either.

The picture which Isaiah presents of the Judean masses is most unfavorable. In his view, the mass-man – be he high or be he lowly, rich or poor, prince or pauper – gets off very badly. He appears as not only weak-minded and weak-willed, but by consequence knavish, arrogant, grasping, dissipated, unprincipled, unscrupulous. . . .

As things now stand, Isaiah’s job seems rather to go begging. Everyone with a message nowadays is, like my venerable European friend, eager to take it to the masses. His first, and only thought is of mass-acceptance and mass-approval. His great care is to put his doctrine in such shape as will capture the masses’ attention and interest. . . .

The main trouble with this [mass-man approach] is its reaction on the mission itself. It necessitates an opportunist sophistication of one’s doctrine, which profoundly alters its character and reduces it to a mere placebo. If, say, you are a preacher, you wish to attract as large a congregation as you can, which means an appeal to the masses, and this, in turn, means adapting the terms of your message to the order of intellect and character that the masses exhibit. If you are an educator, say with a college on your hands, you wish to get as many students as possible, and you whittle down your requirements accordingly. If a writer, you aim at getting many readers; if a publisher, many purchasers; if a philosopher, many disciples; if a reformer, many converts; if a musician, many auditors; and so on. But as we see on all sides, in the realization of these several desires the prophetic message is so heavily adulterated with trivialities, in every instance, that its effect on the masses is merely to harden them in their sins. Meanwhile, the Remnant, aware of this adulteration and of the desires that prompt it, turn their backs on the prophet and will have nothing to do with him or his message.

Isaiah, on the other hand, worked under no such disabilities. He preached to the masses only in the sense that he preached publicly. Anyone who liked might listen; anyone who liked might pass by. He knew the Remnant would listen. . . .

The Remnant only want the best you have, whatever that may be. Give them that, and they are satisfied; you have nothing more to worry about. . . .

In a sense, nevertheless, as I have said, it is not a rewarding job. . . . A prophet of the Remnant will not grow purse-proud on the financial returns from his work, nor is it likely he will get any great renown out of it. Isaiah's case was exceptional to the second rule, and there are others – but not many.

It may be thought, then, that while taking care of the Remnant is no doubt a good job, it is not an especially interesting job because it is as a rule so poorly paid. I have my doubts about this. There are other compensations to be got out of a job besides money and notoriety, and some of them seem substantial enough to be attractive. Many jobs which do not pay well are yet profoundly interesting, as, for instance, the job of research student in the sciences is said to be; and the job of looking after the Remnant seems to me, as I have surveyed it for many years from my seat in the grandstand, to be as interesting as any that can be found in the world.

What chiefly makes it so, I think, is that in any given society the Remnant are always so largely an unknown quantity. You do not know, and will never know, more than two things about them. You can be sure of those – dead sure, as our phrase is – but you will never be able to make even a respectable guess at anything else. You do not know, and will never know, who the Remnant are, nor where they are, nor how many of them there are, nor what they are doing or will do. Two things you know, and no more: first, that they exist; second, that they will find you. Except for these two certainties, working for the Remnant means working in impenetrable darkness; and this, I should say, is just the condition calculated most effectively to pique the interest of any prophet who is properly gifted with the imagination, insight, and intellectual curiosity necessary to a successful pursuit of his trade.

The fascination – as well as the despair – of the historian, as he looks upon Isaiah's Jewry, upon Plato's Athens, or upon Rome of the Antonines, is the hope of discovering and laying bare the "substratum of right-thinking and well-doing" which he knows must have existed somewhere in those societies because no kind of collective life can possibly go on without it. . . .

Concerning all this, too, the prophet of the present knows precisely as much and as little as the historian of the future; and that, I repeat, is what makes his job seem to me so profoundly interesting. One of the most suggestive episodes recounted in the Bible is that of a prophet's attempt – the only attempt of the kind on record, I believe – to count up the Remnant. Elijah had fled from persecution into the desert, where the Lord presently overhauled him and asked what he was doing so far away from his job. He said that he was running away, not because he was a coward, but because all the Remnant had been killed off except himself. He had got away only by the skin of his teeth, and, he being now all the Remnant there was, if he were killed the True Faith would go flat. The Lord replied that he need not worry about that, for even without him the True Faith could

probably manage to squeeze along somehow if it had to; “and for your figures on the Remnant,” He said, “O don’t mind telling you that there are seven thousand of them back there in Israel whom it seems you have not heard of, but you may take My word for it that there they are.”

At the time, probably the population of Israel could not have run much more than a million or so; and a Remnant of seven thousand out of a million is a highly encouraging percentage for any prophet. With seven thousand of the boys on his side, there was no great reason for Elijah to feel lonesome; and incidentally, that would be something for the modern prophet of the Remnant to think about when he has a touch of the blues. But the main point is that if Elijah the Prophet could not make a closer guess on the number of the Remnant than he made when he missed it by seven thousand, anyone else who has tackled the problem would only waste his time.

The other certainty which the prophet of the Remnant may always have is that the Remnant will find him. He may rely on that with absolute assurance. They will find him without his doing anything about it; in fact, if he tries to do anything about it, he is pretty sure to put them off. He does not need to advertise for them nor resort to any schemes of publicity to get their attention. If he is a preacher or a public speaker, for example, he may be quite indifferent to going on show at receptions, getting his picture printed in newspapers, or furnishing autobiographical material for publication on the side of “human interest.” If a writer, he need not make a point of attending any pink teas, autographing books oat wholesale, nor entering into any specious freemasonry with reviewers.

All of this and more of the same order lies in the regular and necessary routine laid down for the prophet of the masses. It is, and must be, part of the great general technique of getting the mass-man’s ear – or as our vigorous and excellent publicist, Mr. H.L. Mencken, put sit, the technique of boob-bumping. The prophet of the Remnant is not bound to this technique. He may be quite sure that the Remnant will make their own way to him without any adventitious aids; and not only so, but if they find him employing such aids, as I said, it is ten to one that they will smell a rat in them and will sheer off.

The certainty that the Remnant will find him, however, leaves the prophet as much in the dark as ever, as helpless as ever in the matter of putting any estimate of any kind upon the Remnant; for, as appears on the case of Elijah, he remains ignorant of who they are that have found him or where they are or how many. They do not write in and tell him about it, after the manner of those who admire the vedettes of Hollywood, nor yet do they seek him out and attach themselves to his person. They are not that kind. They take the message much as drivers take the directions on a roadside signboard – that is, with very little thought about the signboard, beyond being gratefully glad that it happened to be there, but with very serious though about the directions.

The impersonal attitude of the Remnant wonderfully enhances the interest of the imaginative prophet’s job. Once in a while, just about often enough to keep his intellectual curiosity in good working order, he will quite accidentally come upon some

distinct reflection of his own message in an unsuspected quarter. This enables him to entertain himself in his leisure moments with agreeable speculations about the course his message may have taken in reaching that particular quarter, and about what came of it after it got there. Most interesting of all those instances, if only one could run them down (but one may always speculate about them), where the recipient himself no longer knows where nor when nor from whom he got the message – or even where, as sometimes happens, he has forgotten that he got it anywhere and imagines that it is all a self-sprung idea of his own.

Such instances as these are probably not infrequent, for, without presuming to enroll ourselves among the Remnant, we can all no doubt remember having found ourselves suddenly under the influence of an idea, the source of which we cannot identify. “It came to us afterward,” as we say; that is, we are aware of it only after it has shot up full-grown in our minds, leaving us quite ignorant of how and when and by what agency it was planted there and left to germinate. It seems highly probable that the prophet’s message often takes some such course with the Remnant.

If, for example, you are a writer or speaker or a preacher, you put forth the idea which lodges in the *Unbewusstsein* of a casual member of the Remnant and sticks fast there. For some time it is inert; then it begins to fret and fester until presently it invades the man’s conscious mind and, as one might say, corrupts it. Meanwhile he has quite forgotten how he came by the idea in the first instance, and even perhaps thinks he has invented it; and in those circumstances, the most interesting thing of all is that you never know what the pressure of that idea will make him do.

Albert Jay Nock (1870-1945) was editor of the Freeman (1920-1924) and author of Jefferson: Our Enemy the State, and many other books on the philosophy of government and human freedom. Isaiah’s Job is extracted from Chapter 13 of his book, Free Speech and Plain Language (William Morrow & Co., NY).