

Truth On Fire

The Pastor's Pen Archives—2001 January - June

Don Roberts, B.A., M.Div.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Remember Lot's Wife | 3 |
| Spiritual Offense and Defense | 4 |
| No Place for Double-Mindedness | 6 |
| Prepare to Meet Thy God | 8 |
| The Remedy for Heart Failure..... | 10 |
| Jesus Is Jehovah | 12 |
| Proof-Text Religion | 14 |
| The Case Against Our Sin | 16 |
| Petitions and Possessions | 17 |
| The Value of an Hour with God | 19 |
| A Tale of Two Men | 20 |
| Providence and Our Bag of Bricks | 22 |
| Absolute Truth | 24 |
| A Psalm for Senior Citizens | 26 |
| Believing or Fainting? | 28 |
| The Path of Obedience | 30 |
| The Sufficiency of Christ..... | 32 |
| Divine Direction..... | 34 |
| It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over | 36 |
| An Analysis of Temptation..... | 38 |
| The Mysteries of Godliness and Iniquity..... | 40 |
| The Proliferation of Witchcraft | 42 |
| The Remedy for Our Sin | 44 |
| The Critical Nature of Fatherhood | 46 |
| The Persistent Sodomites..... | 48 |

Remember Lot's Wife

One of the truly profound aspects of our Lord's teaching ministry was His ability to package enormity of significance within brevity of statement. A case in point is the admonition given in Luke 17:32—“*Remember Lot's wife.*” In that context, Jesus was responding to Pharisaical demands for an explanation of the coming kingdom of God (17:20). He spoke subsequently of the need to be prepared for the revelation of the Son of man in its suddenness and power (17:30). We know that Lot's wife “*became a pillar of salt*” when she “*looked back*” upon Sodom's destruction in violation of God's command (Genesis 19:26). The solemn warning issued by this reminder is the danger of one setting his or her affections upon the things of this world!

In his book *Holiness*, author J. C. Ryle devotes an entire chapter to Lot's wife. It is entitled “*A Woman to be Remembered*” and deals with the dangers inherent in looking back. The following excerpts are offered for your edification.

“It is sad to see how many a gallant ship launches forth on the voyage of life with every prospect of success and, springing this leak of worldliness, goes down with all her freight in full view of the harbor of safety. It is saddest of all to observe how many flatter themselves it is all right with their souls when it is all wrong by reason of this love of the world...They began with Jacob and David and Peter, and they are likely to end with Esau and Saul and Judas Iscariot. They began with Ruth and Hannah and Mary, and are likely to end with Lot's wife.

“Beware of a half-hearted religion. Beware of following Christ from any secondary motive, to please relations and friends, to keep in with the custom of the place or family in which you reside, to appear respectable and have the reputation of being religious. Follow Christ for His own sake, if you follow Him at all. Be thorough, be real, be honest, be sound, and be whole-hearted. If you have any religion at all, let your religion be real. See that you do not sin the sin of Lot's wife.

“Beware of ever supposing that you may go too far in religion, and of secretly trying to keep in with the world...I urge upon every professing Christian who wishes to be happy the immense importance of making no compromise between God and the world. Do not try to drive a hard bargain, as if you wanted to give Christ as little of your heart as possible, and to keep as much as possible of the things of this life. Beware lest you overreach yourself, and end by losing all...For your happiness' sake, for your usefulness' sake, and for your soul's sake, beware of the sin of Lot's wife” (pp. 167-8).

Brethren, in another place Jesus declared this kingdom truth—“*No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62). It is my prayer for all of us that the year 2001 will be a year marked by a certain looking forward to the glories that await us in Christ. May none of us be found looking back when our Lord appears from heaven!

Spiritual Offense and Defense

There were four well-compensated, professional men who spent this last week preparing to play the adversarial role of their lives. These are the Defensive Coordinators for the remaining NFL playoff teams. On chalkboards littered with “X’s” and “O’s” they have plotted strategies designed to disable key offensive ball handlers. They are hungry to ply their tactics to the opposition, and cannot wait to take the field! They desire to keep the opponent scoreless through four quarters, and produce a shutout! This is what every defense worth its salt seeks to do! Every offensive coach and player knows this to be the case!

Should the child of God think less of his or her spiritual foe? We face an adversary with a similar mindset on a daily basis. His name is Satan, whose very name means adversary. He is the *accuser of the brethren* and ceaseless in his slander (Revelation 12:10). He roams about *as a roaring lion* hungry for a spiritual kill (1 Peter 5:8). In his quiver are *fiery darts* of lethal cunning (Ephesians 6:11, 16)! His resources surpass those of *flesh and blood* (Ephesians 6:12). The fruits of righteousness are repugnant to him. The spiritual shutout is his goal! The silver lining for the saints, however, is that we already have a copy of his game plan!

In the shadow of the crucifixion, Satan had another key ball handler in his cross hairs. These revealing words were spoken to Peter — “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*” (Luke 22:31-32). Is your mind prompted to think of Job and déjà vu? Satan clearly had his sights set on Simon Peter, and requested permission from our Lord to apply the destructive power of darkness to this man. The embarrassing and heart-breaking denials of Peter are well documented for the record. His bitter weeping over personal sin, and subsequent usefulness as a key kingdom ball handler, are also part of that instructive record. In the two thousand years that have transpired since the resurrection, Satan has no doubt made his desires known regarding other key gospel handlers. Would one of those be you, or me?

There is much encouragement to be derived from this passage. First, the sifting of true wheat does not ultimately damage the wheat. It can only dislodge from the wheat that chaff that is still attached, and therefore detrimental to the wheat’s purpose. Second, the intercessions of Christ for His elect are always answered in the affirmative! Peter’s spiritual blunder did not constitute a failure of his faith. It is the advocacy of Jesus Christ that guarantees the eternal salvation of His own. Third, spiritual conversion, as a matter of progress in sanctification, is always held out as a remedy for personal corruption and failure. Jesus will never leave nor forsake us! Fourth, the God of mercy and grace can transform renegades into resources. Peter had become a bad influence and source of discouragement. The power of Pentecost made him a reservoir of strength for others!

Brethren, one of the great challenges facing God’s people in this hour is the need to equip (and, in many cases, re-equip) for spiritual warfare. We have grown accustomed to mediocrity in spiritual performance. In gridiron terms, the red zone is a field position

rarely attained. Many who manage by the grace of God to encroach upon the enemy's red zone end up settling for field goals instead of touchdowns! The church needs a fresh dose of godly sorrow for sin, repentance, cleansing, and Holy Ghost power! It is my conviction that our Offensive Coordinator wants to go beyond surviving the spiritual opposition. He desires to run up the score!

No Place for Double-Mindedness

One of the most powerful forces affecting the human frame is fear. In dictionary terms, fear is defined as an emotion of alarm and agitation caused by the expectation or realization of danger. Adam and Eve discovered that fear was the traveling companion of disobedience, which led them to distance themselves from God's presence (Genesis 3:10). It is to be observed that fear and deception are nearest of kin. The felt presence of God, as a sacred privilege, was now perceived to be a danger rather than a delight! Satan has continued to foist this falsehood upon the world at large by convincing sinful men that a form of godliness as expressed by religion is the remedy for any and all conflict with the Almighty. Religion may serve to mollify the conscience, but lacks the wherewithal to regenerate the soul, remedy the fears and deceptions inherent in spiritual death, or restore the enjoyment of God's presence.

Fear is also defined as an extreme reverence or awe, as unto a supreme power. The Scriptures are replete with references to fear that is God-ward. It is a healthy reverence that inspires rightful worship. It is an attitude that fully acknowledges His grandeur and His grace, His mercy as well as His majesty, His sympathy as entwined with His sovereignty, His preeminence as the platform from which He exercises pity upon the fallen sons of Adam. In contrast to the first, this second form of fear draws us to God's presence as opposed to driving us from it.

Paul expressed to the Corinthian church what might be considered a third kind of fear — the fear of mental corruption. He said, *"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"* (II Corinthians 11:3). Paul was addressing the issue of false teachers pretending to be apostles (11:13), who had transformed themselves into ministers of righteousness (11:15). Paul identified them as the ministers of Satan, who himself is transformed into an angel of light (11:14). They were attempting to introduce corruptive religious philosophy into church doctrine that would impede single-mindedness toward Christ. The fact is the believer's sufficiency is in Christ *alone!* Jesus *is* salvation! Jesus, plus this or that religious exercise, is a recipe for spiritual disaster!

The opposite of simplicity (single-mindedness) is not complexity, but rather duplicity, or double-mindedness. Lenski comments, "The picture is that of a cloth that is smoothly laid out so that no fold hides anything under it...the mind and all its thoughts are set solely and singly upon him in love, loyalty, devotion, and there is no duplicity which secretly turns to another." Tasker adds, "Single-hearted devotion to Christ is easily destroyed...When men, beguiled by false philosophies of human origin, look anywhere else except to the cross of Calvary for salvation, or when they are misled into thinking that the rites and ceremonies of the Church are in themselves the means of salvation, then the simplicity that is in Christ is lost." This is why James told us that the *"double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"* (James 1:8).

Brethren, duplicity of mind, or double-mindedness, among God's people is perhaps the greatest obstacle to revival and spiritual awakening in the America! I remember on one occasion hearing Bob Jones III say: "Our problem is not that we do not love God. It is

that we do not love Him only!" May God grant us the grace of simplicity toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and a fresh experience of His presence! There is simply no place for the double-mindedness in the work of Christ!

Prepare to Meet Thy God

It is an accepted fact that a sovereign God has chosen average men to perform supernatural tasks. The OT prophet Amos is a case in point. His name means *burden* or *weight bearer*. He was contemporary with the prophets Isaiah and Hosea during the reigns of Uzziah (Judah) and Jeroboam (Israel). To his fellow Israelites, he was a simple country boy whose rural roots had made him a herder of sheep and a gatherer of sycamore fruit (7:14). He possessed no prophetic heritage, nor formal schooling in the prophetic disciplines. Yet God called him to preach the Word one day while he was following his flock. Amos summed up his calling in these words — “*The Lord took me*” (7:15). He became a visionary with the ability to see the words that others could only hear (1:1). As a minor prophet, he was instrumental in delivering several major prophetic messages to his sin-laden and idolatrous nation. Biblical historians surmise that his entire preaching ministry was performed in the one year of 808 B.C. The impact of his preaching brought this assessment from the corrupt priest Amaziah — “*the land is not able to bear all his words*” (7:10). One of the telling judgments upon America in this hour is the absence of an Amos to sound a national alarm!

Among the portentous messages delivered by this man of God was the following ultimatum — “*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!*” (4:12). In the preceding verses, Amos chronicled in detail how the Lord had sought to get their attention with a view to repentance and restoration. He sent cleanness of teeth, and want of bread (4:6). He withheld critical rainfall that diminished their harvests (4:7). Mildew and the palmerworm destroyed their gardens, vineyards, and fruit trees (4:9). They were plagued with Egypt-like pestilences to which their horses succumbed, filling the land with the stench of death. The young men of the nation met untimely and premature deaths by the sword (4:10). Some of their cities experienced catastrophic overthrow, and the rest were spared *as a firebrand plucked from the burning* (4:11). After each of these five historical references to the work of His chastening hand, the Lord said, “*Yet have ye not returned unto me.*” The unresponsive and insensitive behavior of the nation had set the stage for a more profound meeting with their God in judgment! The prophet’s message was, “Get ready!”

The certainty of judgment to come was tempered with a merciful appeal. The Lord followed up His ultimatum with the following conditional promise — “*Seek ye me, and ye shall live*” (5:4), and “*Seek the Lord, and ye shall live*” (5:6). Is this not the way of a sovereign yet compassionate God? Does not the Almighty hold out hope for the hopeless? The Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He delights in mercy. I wonder how many in the audience of Amos sought the Lord for mercy and life in response to his message of preparation? How many of us have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, confessing that He is Lord, and finding eternal and abundant life in Him? Is there someone reading these words with whom the Lord has been dealing in grace with a view to repentance and restoration? This much is certain. The words *prepare to meet thy God* constitute what ought to be a worthy life ambition for every man!

Brethren, one of the great inevitable truths of our existence is a future appointment with God Almighty. At the risk of redundancy, I repeat that this meeting with a sovereign and holy God is unavoidable and inescapable! Amos prophesied about a meeting in judgment within the context of history. This principle may rightly be applied in the context of eternity! Are you preparing to meet the Lord? Wise men and women will embrace this certainty, and sanctify themselves in preparation for this most solemn meeting. No quest in this life is more vital!

The Remedy for Heart Failure

The number one cause of physical death in America is cardiac disease and subsequent heart failure. Numerous public service messages on health are reminding us to eat right, exercise, and take care of our hearts. The food industry in many sectors has placed a “heart-friendly” rating on certain foods by affixing a red heart seal to the product. In matters spiritual, God has established His church to address the issues surrounding spiritual death and the way to life abundant! I wonder how much attention is being given to spiritual heart failure among the people of God?

David the Psalmist wrote these inspired words: “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me” (Psalm 40:11-13). Revelations of this nature are to be treasured! The man who wrote these words was the recognized spiritual leader of Israel. Yet this godly man agonized over the same frailties common to all men. David acknowledged a case of spiritual heart failure. It is cause for glory that he also experienced the remedy—an effectual deliverance made possible by God’s tender mercies as expressed in His lovingkindness and truth!

The word *faileth* is from the Hebrew root **azab**, meaning *to loose or relinquish*. The idea is that of the heart loosening or relinquishing its grip upon the Lord. In contrast stands Jacob, who refused to relinquish his grip upon the pre-incarnate Christ, saying, “*I will not let thee go, until thou bless me*” (Genesis 32:26). In a word, the Psalmist is discouraged, and overcome by a sense of hopelessness exacerbated by personal sin. An acute consciousness of the innumerable evils that surrounded him, as well as the iniquities that seized him, rendered him incapable of looking up into the face of his God. These are the reflections of a man after God’s own heart, a man longing for purity in the Divine presence. It was no doubt the penetrating light of that presence that exposed the darkness latent within his soul. The ungodly, my friend, have no such capacity!

In his commentary on *Psalms*, Charles Spurgeon cited the following poignant words of David Clarkson regarding personal sins that are more than the hairs of our head. He said, “It may astonish any considering man to take notice of how many sins he is guilty of any one day; how many sins accompany any one single act; how many disclose themselves in any one religious duty...Pick out the best religious duty that you have ever performed, and even in that performance you may find such a swarm of sins as cannot be numbered. The best prayer that you ever put up to God is stained with irreverence, lukewarmness, unbelief, spiritual pride, self-seeking, hypocrisy and distractions, which an enlightened soul grieves and bewails. And yet there are many more that the pure eye of God discerns, which no man can take notice of” (*The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1b, p. 250).

Brethren, the powerlessness exhibited by most churches today is proof positive that an epidemic of spiritual heart failure is running rampant among the people of God. A church

surrounded by evil on every side, and seized upon by her own sins, is the problem! The remedy (as it has been through the ages) is a persistent Jacob-like appeal to the tender mercies of God, and deliverance effected by the precious blood of Jesus – the Lamb without blemish or spot – Who loved us, and gave Himself for us. Make haste, O Lord, to help us!

Jesus Is Jehovah

It was wise King Solomon who told us “*there is no new thing under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Two thousand years of Church history have confirmed both its validity and immutability, especially with regard to doctrinal errors of the damnable sort that continue to resurface through the centuries. The most pernicious of these is the denial of the Deity of Christ (i.e., that Jesus is God). Jesus is Jehovah Incarnate! He shares an eternal and co-equal relationship with both the Father and the Spirit. The denial of these Biblical truths concerning Christ leads logically to a denial of the Triune nature of the Godhead (i.e., that God exists eternally in Three Persons). Contrariwise, the rightful embrace of Christ's Deity leads the believer to adopt Trinitarianism as well. The Deity of Christ and the Triune nature of God are both Christian doctrines, and stand together. No man is, nor has any right to refer to himself as, a Christian who rejects these two tenets of the faith.

The heretic Arius (250 – 336 A.D.) appears to have been the first voice to articulate and legitimize this heresy. Church historians have called Arius a heresiarch (the founder or chief proponent of a heresy). In other words, Arius was a heretic of the first order! In a nutshell, Arius “denied the Divine nature of Christ. He maintained that the Son of God was not eternal, but created by the Father from nothing as an instrument for his creation of the world; and that therefore he was not God by nature, but a changeable creature, His dignity as Son of God having been bestowed on Him by the Father on account of His foreseen abiding righteousness” (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 83). This core set of beliefs came to be called Arianism after its founder. In Biblical terms, it is a doctrine of devils.

Solomon was right! There is nothing new under the sun. The two most aggressive door-to-door cults in this nation are nothing more than modern day versions of the old Arianism. The devil has modified the packaging, but still delivers the same lethal toxin in the form of half-truths. The Latter Day Saints may be living in the latter days, but saints they cannot be. Jehovah's Witnesses may be witnesses indeed, but Jehovah they cannot represent. Why? First, they misrepresent the Christ of Scripture, Who has existed eternally as God and the Word in face-to-face fellowship with the Father (John 1:1-2). Secondly, a righteous man who is not the God-Man is simply *another Jesus* (II Corinthians 11:4), who is powerless to provide propitiation for sinners, or to mediate in their behalf at the Father's right hand. Anyone who meditates upon the text of Galatians 3:19-20 without preconceived bias will come to this inescapable conclusion — one of the key designs of the incarnation was to bring the role of Mediator into the Godhead! The phrase *God is one* (v. 20) simply means that the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5), is both God and Man! Third, they both teach (in subtle and varying degrees) that a meritorious bestowal of the same Divine dignity is possible for sinful men if they can attain to the same abiding righteousness. Each time they leave my doorstep, my soul is stirred and troubled, knowing that, apart from God's enlightening grace, they will continue to stumble in spiritual darkness. It is a fact, my friend, that no man is capable of performing a good work while he is misrepresenting the God of truth!

Brethren, we have cited and analyzed just two examples from the many groups that propagate this ancient heresy, which has always been rejected by the true Church. Are we troubled by the fact that thousands of nominal Christians are swept into these antichristian cults each year? Are we burdened over a “doctrine-lite” church that has, by default, allowed this world to classify Arianistic religions as branches of Christianity? Isn't it fair to say that, for the most part, true believers have been out-hustled by the heretics? The pulpits and pews of this nation must erupt once again with a flaming passion to extol the Biblical virtues of the eternal, virgin-born, sinless, crucified, risen, ascended, sovereign, and soon-coming Son of God! It is preaching of this caliber that elicits faith from hearers, leads them to bow their knee to Jesus, and say with Thomas, “*My Lord and my God!*”

Proof-Text Religion

Seminary students learn the value of the proof text early on in their scholastic careers. The mastery of chapter-and-verse references is often the difference between passing and or failing a systematic theology exam. It is also common for both preachers and parishioners to cite key verses in the midst of discourse in order to infuse a well-made point with the quality of indisputability. A judge preparing a trial verdict will scour case law in search of proof texts that will validate the judgment he or she is about to render. Have you ever been denied compensation for an insurance claim due to an exclusionary proof text embedded in the policy's fine print? The point is that proof texts can be formidable as both friend and foe. They can set you free, or nail you to the wall!

The wielding of proof texts in the arena of religious debate should therefore be carried out with a degree of discriminating wisdom. True Christianity is not primarily a proof text religion. It is Christ living in His people through the indwelling Spirit. It is a subjective and dynamic experience built upon the objective reality of truth.

I have no doubt that Saul of Tarsus was driven by numerous Old Testament proof texts each time a disciple was murdered or imprisoned by his hand. He believed he was doing God a service with his zealous persecution of the church. The one needful and critical item missing from his religious resume was a personal knowledge of the living God! In Philippians 3:4-14, the apostle made it known that he counted all his religious attainments as *dung* (v. 8), that he might “*know him [Christ], and the power of his resurrection*” (v. 10). Paul's conversion teaches us that there is a vast difference between quoting the Scripture and experiencing the God of Scripture!

One of the most stirring New Testament accounts of resurrection power took place in Philippi as recorded by Luke in Acts 16:25-34. This passage contains one of the most powerful and oft-quoted proof texts in Scripture. In response to the Philippian jailor's question, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*”, Paul and Silas replied, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (v. 30-31). Is it possible to be any clearer than this regarding the basis upon which God justifies sinners? Do you believe that Luke wrote this inspired account for the sole purpose of establishing proof texts? The answer to both questions is a resounding “No”!

What Luke sets before us is a beaten and imprisoned evangelistic team, praying and *singing praises to God at midnight* (v. 25). A *great earthquake opened all the doors, and loosed the chains* from every prisoner (v. 26). At the point of suicidal desperation, the jailor heard these most welcome words, “*Do thyself no harm*” (v. 27-28). The jailor, now smitten with conviction, and desirous to know the God of these inmates, cried out, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* (v. 30). For the first time in his life, his standing with God was more vital than his standing with Rome. That same night, he and his entire household heard *the word of the Lord* (v. 32), believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and were saved by the grace of God. He forthwith fed and washed the men of God, and was baptized with his family before sunrise (v. 33). What Luke has painted for us is a portrait of God's supernatural power at work in the trenches of spiritual warfare! The fact that proof texts were produced is purely incidental.

Brethren, there is another proof text here of a more subtle nature that demonstrates the Deity of Christ. Note that Paul and Silas are *singing praises to God* (v. 25), and that the converted jailor is *believing in God* (v. 34). In the midst is the admonition to *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 31). The enlightened mind may reasonably conclude from this event that 1) praising God includes the Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is the equivalent of believing in God! That noise you just heard was the door slamming on the heretics who gainsay the Deity of our Lord. Yet wisdom reminds us that our proof texts are of limited value unless we are experiencing the same kind of supernatural power that created them!

The Case Against Our Sin

The New Testament epistle of First John is composed of what might be called evidentiary content. That is, there are certain evidences or fruits that manifest themselves in the lives of born again believers—God's elect. One of these evidences is the conspicuous demise and cessation of habitual sin. John wrote, "*And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin*" (I John 3:5).

The apostle makes two unmistakable assertions. First, the Lord Jesus is absolutely and infinitely holy! Secondly, the purpose of His earthly manifestation and ministry was to eradicate sin in the lives of His subjects through the sinless and substitutionary sacrifice of Himself. In other words, His entire existence as the God-Man was and is a campaign against sin in all of its forms and degrees. Therefore sin constitutes a contradiction of what we know to be true about Christ!

In the aftermath of the Great Plague of London, the great Puritan preacher Ralph Venning (1621-1674) published a book entitled Sin, The Plague of Plagues. This work is still in print today as The Sinfulness of Sin. No one with a desire for holiness should be without this volume! No book outside of Scripture does more to magnify the true nature of sin against God. Here are a few excerpts as food for thought:

"Sin is not to be committed for any reason because it is contrary to God, against his will and glory. This reason overbalances and outweighs any reason that can be given for sinning. No matter how plausibly sin and sinners plead, no matter how gainful or pleasurable sin is, yet still it is a sin, that is, it is against God, which is a greater reason why it should not be committed than any that can be adduced why it should...There are many aggravations of sinning against God. It is against God who made us; indeed, fighting against God who made us...It is a calamitous thing to sin against God as a Maker...How unnatural it is to sin against our parents! What is it then to smite the Father of our spirits, the Father of our father and mother!

'Sin is against God in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. He has our being and well being at his disposal; he can crush us as the moth and turn us not only to the dust but to the Hell of death. What he does for us and what he can do against us put us under an immense and powerful obligation not to sin against him. We are beholden to him for all the good we have...There are two great wonders: the one, that God should be so good to man, who is and does evil against him; the other, that man should do evil against so good a God. O foolish people and unwise, thus to requite the Lord!" (*The Sinfulness of Sin*, pp. 197-9).

Brethren, the case against our sin is overwhelming! It is fundamentally against God, and injurious to Him! In the aftermath of his adultery and murder, David acknowledged, "*Against Thee, and Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight*" (Psalm 51:4). May the Lord Jesus awaken within each of us the same acute awareness! We know that this is in keeping with His purpose to take away our sins, and that genuine revival is impossible without it!

Petitions and Possessions

The unlimited possibilities of effectual prayer are mind-boggling! Have you ever sought God for a three and one-half year rain stoppage, as Elijah did? Have you ever felt “out of your depth” when submitting a petition to the Almighty? What man or woman of like passions among us has not struggled at times with the enormity of a particular request? Yet the Scriptures encourage us to petition God at all seasons for that which men consider impossible, that His will might be facilitated on earth as it is in heaven!

One such passage is I John 5:14-15—“*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*” We are taught here that petitions premised upon the will of God are always heard. This assurance thus inspires confidence in the petitioner, who knows that God is able to transform such petitions into possessions! The following two examples are instructive.

As the Babylonian captivity was drawing to a close, Daniel learned by Jeremiah's prophecy that *seventy years of desolations* and captivity were to be accomplished against Jerusalem (Daniel 9:2). The end of that prophetic time frame was approaching. Therefore Daniel, *by prayer and supplications with fasting, set his face unto the Lord God* for wisdom concerning God's fulfillment of His covenant (9:3-4). He *mourned for three full weeks* awaiting a definitive answer from the Lord (10:2). On the twenty-first day, *the man Gabriel* (9:21) arrived with a vision of things to come, and an explanation for the delay. He said, “*Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days*” (10:12-13).

Daniel was assured that *his words were heard* on the first day, that his petition had become a possession, and was dispatched immediately. It arrived on the twenty-first day due to wicked opposition in the spirit realm. Daniel learned that the apparent delay was no reflection upon God's lack of ability or desire to deliver! Daniel understood that kingdom life is combat in the most serious sense of the word. Those in search of drive-thru fast food religion need not apply!

The book of Hebrews provides for us another remarkable example of prayer that was heard. Concerning the Lord Jesus, it is said: “*Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared*” (Hebrews 5:7). The writer is no doubt elucidating the Gethsemane experience of our Lord. He was heard!

We know from the Gospel accounts that his perspiration flowed as drops of blood during the pre-Cross agonies he endured. Yet every longing of His soul as the God-man was premised upon doing the Father's will. Well, since the One that was able to save Him from death chose not to do so, what exactly was the possession secured by His petition? Grace! Grace sufficient to sustain Him in His agony! Grace ministered by the eternal Spirit to accomplish eternal redemption in behalf of those who would come unto the

Father by Him! Grace to endure death without defeat! Amazing grace! Divine grace! Infinite grace! Resurrecting grace!

Brethren, at the core of our praying should be a fervent desire to understand and experience the will of God! We must understand that being heard of God does not always imply an immediate response or immunity from tribulation. The path of obedience is often strewn with obstacles and suffering, but always evokes the pleasure of God!

Prayer that is heard is always answered, and turns petitions into possessions! God's answer may come as enabling grace that nurtures a spirit of patience and perseverance. In every instance, however, it accomplishes God's will in the lives of His elect, who hunger and thirst after righteousness!

The Value of an Hour with God

Have you ever considered the value of an hour, or the impact that just one hour might have upon your life? Our day consists of 24 of these units. Our week contains 168. We sometimes complain that they pass too slowly, or fly by too fast! The truth is that all of us have the same precious allotment of hours, and they are all valuable. We may choose to expend them wastefully, or to invest them wisely.

On the eve of His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus and His disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, as was their custom. It was here that Jesus had invested many valuable and influential hours with His disciples. On this particular night, however, the soul of Jesus was "*exceeding sorrowful unto death*" (Mark 14:34). He took Peter, James and John with Him to another part of the Garden, and bid them "*pray that ye enter not into temptation*" (Luke 22:40). He walked a little farther to pray privately.

Upon His return, He found the disciples sleeping. He said to Peter, "*Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch with me one hour?*" (Mark 14:37). One hour! Just one! Yes, they were tired, and their eyes were heavy. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak! Jesus finally said, "*Sleep on now, and take your rest*" (MK 14:41). A strategic window of opportunity had slammed shut! An hour that could have been invested in praying was wasted in sleeping. As a consequence, these prayerless men were ill prepared for the arena of spiritual conflict that was fast approaching.

After His arrest, they took Jesus to the high priest's house. A fire was kindled in the midst of the hall, and Peter sat down with the crowd. It wasn't long before a certain maid identified him as a disciple, but he disavowed any knowledge of Christ. A little while later a man also recognized and confronted him as being a follower of Christ, but he denied. Then a third confidently affirmed his identity. For the third time he vehemently denied any affiliation with Christ, and the cock crew.

This man who had pledged his allegiance unto death now found himself drowning in a tempestuous sea of denial. The Scripture says that between the second and third denials was "*about the space of one hour*" (Luke 22:59). One hour to think! One hour to regret! One hour until total spiritual collapse and meltdown! One hour, perhaps, to wish he had that hour in the Garden back! That opportunity was now lost! An hour spent sleeping, and now an hour spent sinking!

Brethren, there are many lessons to be learned from Peter's failure. Critical among them is the value of an hour, and the spiritual vulnerability that is created by lost opportunity! It is clear that the misuse of one hour in Peter's life made a devastating difference! One hour can prove to be a valuable commodity, or a lost opportunity! How will we utilize the precious hours that are allotted to us this week?

A Tale of Two Men

Abraham and Lot were two individuals who shared a common heritage, both physically and spiritually. We know from Scripture that both were men of faith, and possessed a righteous standing before God (Romans 4:3; II Peter 2:7-8). In other words, both were saved men! Old Testament narratives, however, paint a rather vivid contrast between these two spiritual sojourners. Their lives took noticeably different paths.

What do you suppose were the contributing factors behind such dissimilarity of life? A multitude of expositors attribute Lot's spiritual demise (and rightly so) to his bad decision-making, especially when he *pitched his tent toward Sodom* (Genesis 13:11-13). I would argue that his inability to make good choices had its own set of distinctive roots.

First, Abraham was an altar builder! The initial occurrence of altar building was in response to a promise given by revelation (Genesis 12:7). The fact that God had appeared to him, and made Himself known, was all the motivation this man needed to establish a place of worship. As a nomadic cattleman, he built altars on a regular basis as a priority of life, and called upon the name of the Lord (12:8). Upon his return from Egypt, we find him revisiting Bethel, the place of the first altar, where he called upon the name of the Lord (13:4). After he and Lot separated one from another, he removed his tent, relocated to Hebron, and built there an altar to the Lord (13:18).

Abraham's life was anchored in worship of the God Who had revealed Himself to him, had promised to make of him a great nation (12:2), and gave him a land (12:7). There is no evidence that Lot, who was likewise rich in cattle and possessions, ever built an altar to worship God for his goodness and benefits.

Secondly, Abraham was a man willing to be governed by the word of promise. In time, the burgeoning flocks, herds, and substance of both men had become so great that the land could not handle the traffic (13:6). An inevitable strife ensued between the herdsmen, which led Abraham to offer a practical remedy. His proffer to Lot was not what you would have expected! After all, Abraham held all the trump cards, so to speak. It was Lot who had ridden Abraham's coattails to prosperity. It was Lot the nephew who was subordinate to uncle Abraham. Abraham could have rightfully and unilaterally dictated the terms of land allotment. He chose rather to defer the first choice of land to Lot without any apparent regard for his own personal interests in the matter.

How was Abraham able to conduct himself in such a self-effacing manner? The answer is that Abraham entered the negotiations with rock solid assurance in the promise of God! He reckoned there was no way that Lot's choice could offset or nullify God's promise regarding "this land" (12:7). Thus there was no need to manipulate the situation to his advantage. God would be God, and bring His promise to pass, without regard for Lot's choice.

Men, women, and youth alike who learn to negotiate the conflicts of life based on the promises of God are blessed indeed, and truly honor Him! They have come to understand, like Abraham, that security is never sacrificed or compromised by selfless

reliance upon God's sure promises! This is a lesson that seems to have eluded Lot to his own spiritual detriment!

Brethren, Lot was a man governed by sight, and motivated by self-interest. Abraham, on the other hand, was a man in whose life worship was central, and whose decisions were governed by the word of promise! Those in search of spiritual keys to power and prosperity would be wise to embrace this dynamic duo as a pattern of life! I am convinced that these two personal attributes are the pivotal difference between a fruitful life and one marked by futility. So, using Lot and Abraham as measuring sticks, how would you characterize your walk these days?

Providence and Our Bag of Bricks

All of us know that the misfortunes of life can sometimes hit us like the proverbial bag of bricks. Within a brief span of time, the autobahn of life can be transformed into forty miles of bad road—an experience common to believers and unbelievers alike. Some individuals, however, enter this world with that bag of bricks already strapped to their backs.

A classic example is the blind man of John 9:1-41. He must have pondered his physical infirmity on many occasions, questioning the purpose of his existence as a man born blind. On a particular Sabbath day, he finally got his answer! Jesus revealed to this man and His disciples that divine providence, interwoven within the fabric of his life, was the cause behind the effect!

The providence of God is a lofty and multifaceted concept. Providence signifies that God sets the course of human affairs and events, including any and all intervention that He deems appropriate. It speaks of His wise and benevolent management, careful foresight, and advance preparation for His acts. It portrays Him as the divine guardian of history.

What Jesus taught his disciples was that a providential God had orchestrated the entire course of human history so that this man would cross paths with Jesus in the right place at the proper time, so that “*the works of God*” could be “*manifest in him*” (9:3). His miraculous healing was the first of its kind (9:32). Would any of us be willing to deny God His sovereign prerogative to fashion a blind vessel in order to manifest His glory through demonstrations of power and mercy?

There are two ancillary aspects to this miracle. First is the knee jerk reaction of the disciples after Jesus saw the blind man (9:1). They inquired, “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:2). Jesus quickly refuted the false notion that infirmity is always a punishment brought about by sin (9:3). In so doing, He disallowed the imposition of false guilt upon this blind man. In no way was he or anyone else directly responsible for his bag of bricks.

Second is the backdrop against which it was performed—powerless religion. The Jewish authorities were masters of instigation, interrogation, and intimidation, threatening expulsion from the synagogue for any man who confessed *that Jesus was the Christ* (9:22). In spiritual terms, they themselves were blind (9:40-41), and remain so until this day (Romans 11:25).

The man healed from his blindness was therefore the lone confessor! His rejoinder to their repeated questioning was, “*Wherefore would ye hear it [my testimony] again? Will ye also be his disciples?*” (9:27). The word *also* is key, for it indicates his personal desire for allegiance to His Deliverer!

After all was said and done “*they cast him out*” of the synagogue (9:34). Jesus heard of his expulsion, sought him out, and brought him to saving faith (9:35-38). The great truth here is that the Lord Jesus is able to do for us what religion has no ability to do—deal effectively with our bag of bricks!

Brethren, the providence of God is both mysterious and marvelous! We can actually be made a part of it as well as be affected by it. Providence is always at work because God is always at work! Providence that gets us kicked out of religious darkness, so that we might experience the light of Christ, is at the pinnacle of His tender mercies! Let us learn to render thanks to the Lord for His gracious providence, even though our bag of bricks sometimes makes it difficult to understand. Amen!

Absolute Truth

The United States of America has managed to embroil itself in a life and death struggle with God. At the core of the controversy is the abdication of absolute truth. Dr. James Kennedy, Pastor of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, succinctly summarized this issue in a recent address to a Christian conference, saying: “The denial of the existence of absolute truth is nothing more than a form of practical atheism, which indirectly denies the very existence of God.” He was and is correct! The roots of relativism (i.e., what is truth for you may not be truth for me, and vice versa) have extended themselves so deep into the national conscience that only a miraculous and merciful intervention of God will be able to put this malignancy into remission, and restore the spiritual and moral health of the nation!

The first question to be asked and answered is: “If absolute truth does exist, where can it be found?” There is a two-fold answer. First, it resides in Jesus of Nazareth—God Incarnate—Whom the Father has made *both Lord and Christ* by virtue of His resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:36). Jesus declared that *He was the embodiment of truth* (John 14:6). His followers likewise affirmed that, in contradistinction to Moses and the law, *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*, and that the *fulness* of these attributes resided in Him (John 1:14-17). We are also told that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8), demonstrating that the absolute truth as revealed in Him will not diminish one iota throughout the endless ages to come. How is that for absolute?

Secondly, it finds its full expression in the written Word of God! The words of Scripture were given to us *by inspiration* (II Timothy 3:16) as *the Spirit of God moved upon holy men* (II Peter 1:21), who were set apart for this purpose. This supernatural phenomenon refutes the modern-day claim that divine truth could not have been delivered through a human conduit without compromising its purity and integrity. This same godless Gnosticism also rejected the Deity of Christ, denying that God could robe Himself in humanity and remain absolutely holy as the God-Man.

In the great intercessory prayer of our Lord, as recorded in John 17, Jesus said to the Father, “*I have given them thy word*” (v. 14), and further requested, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth*” (v. 17). This petition on behalf of the disciples for progress in personal holiness was premised upon their possession of absolute and immutable truth!

Therefore the doctrine of relativism, in its denial of absolutes, makes personal purity an impossibility! The fact that violence and immorality are running rampant across America is solely attributable to the abandonment of absolute truth. This is the legacy of the relativism—a concept readily embraced by the world at large due to its seductive lie that there is no direct accountability to a Sovereign God!

Brethren, it is incumbent upon us, as the people of God, that we pursue a sanctified life through the eternal truth revealed in Jesus Christ and the inspired Scriptures! If the Church, as the pillar and ground of the truth, finds itself neglecting the pursuit of

holiness, then it has adopted a practical atheism of its own! It thus becomes a spiritual Titanic, whose life preservers hold little comfort for those adrift in the debilitating waters of sin. The apostle Peter admonished us, saying, “*And if the righteous scarcely [with difficulty] be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*” (1 Peter 4:18). America, my friend, is in a code red condition! The Church of Jesus Christ alone has the remedy for its spiritual and moral decline—absolute truth that is both believed and practiced!

A Psalm for Senior Citizens

Christians who regularly attend a Bible study group frequently find themselves discussing the life of David, his exploits as a young shepherd boy and king of Israel, and the spiritual lessons to be drawn from his experiences. If each of us was asked to give the first word that comes to mind when hearing the name David, I suspect the two most common answers would be Goliath and Bathsheba. But how many of those group discussions do you suppose have focused upon David's mindset as a senior citizen?

Fodder for such a discussion may be found in the seventy-first Psalm, where David wrote: "*O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come*" (Psalm 71:17-18). The phrase "old and grayheaded" indicates that Psalm 71 was written in the latter years of his life—a psalm from a senior citizen!

Psalm 71 is essentially a personal tribute to God's manifested righteousness from the womb to the tomb. David affirms that the Lord has been his *strong habitation* through the years, and that he will *continually resort* unto Him (71:2). The fruits of *continual resort* are *continual praise* (71:6) and *continual hope* (71:14). Therefore any abatement of hope, or feelings of hopelessness, can be traced directly to the neglect of prayer and praise!

He rejoices in the *quickenings* power of God, which causes him to rebound from the *great and sore troubles* of this life, and will one day resurrect him from the dead after these troubles take him to the grave (71:20-21). His reflection upon the *great things God has done* in his behalf leads him to conclude that God's righteousness is *very high*, and to ask the rhetorical question, "*O God, who is like unto thee?*" (71:19). The answer is built into the question—no one! Would to God that every old and grayheaded saint could approach the winter of life with such a dynamic testimony, and such lofty conceptions of God! What pastor would complain if he had a church filled with these kinds of folks?

In the text cited, David provides a unique perspective on life from his vantage point as a senior citizen. First, we see that *youth* is the optimum time to submit oneself to the authority and instruction of God! The process of aging without yielding diminishes the pliability of the will, and makes spiritual enlightenment the more difficult.

Secondly, we understand that truth *imparted* is meant to become truth *declared*! Failure to express with the mouth what God has enjoined to the heart results in spiritual stagnancy! Thirdly, we see that there is a deep-seated desire within this man to be used of God to such an extent that demonstrations of His *strength and power* would produce a permanent impact upon *his generation*, and *every one that was to come*! God honored that desire (at least in part) through the ministry of his son, Solomon, who experienced first hand the manifested glory of God! I can identify with David at this point, having the same desire for my children!

Brethren, it is entirely legitimate for every man and or woman to long for such a spiritual legacy! Can you envision David living in modern-day America, beholding the shortfall of

Acts-like power in God's churches? I can see him falling on his face, and crying out, "O God, send a revival, and let it begin in me!" The fact is there are many old and grayheaded saints in our nation, and around the world, who have already taken this position, and long for genuine spiritual awakening in this generation! May the Lord increase their tribe, and honor their desire!

Believing or Fainting?

One of the most effective teaching methods is the use of contrast. Teachers are able to attach value and or weightiness to an object or action simply by setting it over against an extreme alternative. It is therefore no surprise that the Holy Spirit would employ this device regularly as He moved through the writers of Scripture.

The Proverbs that reflect the Wisdom of Solomon are a prime example. The Psalms of David are replete with contrasts as well. The first Psalm begins with "*Blessed is the man that...*" and proceeds to inform us that "*The ungodly are not so, but are like...*" The masterful use of contrast is also seen in the words of Jesus to Nicodemus as He stated, "*Whosoever believeth in him [the Son of man] should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16).

In Psalm 27:13, David offers this word of personal testimony by means of contrast, saying, "*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.*" He stresses the critical role of *believing* by setting it in contrast to the unsavory alternative of *fainting*, and thus employs his personal experience to both admonish and encourage his readers. David believed *to see* the Lord's goodness. The phrase *in the land of the living* indicates an historical manifestation that was observable. I believe he saw the goodness of the Lord in two ways.

First, he saw it personally. Our text indicates that those who *believe* in Him are those who are predisposed to *wait* on Him. It also suggests that the primary benefit was a strengthening of heart. *Wait* is from a Hebrew root meaning *to bind together by twisting*. David emphatically exhorts his readers to bind and entwine their future expectations with what they know to be true about the Lord and His goodness! Abraham did so, and Isaac was born. Moses did so, and the Red Sea parted. Joshua did so, and the walls of Jericho fell. Joseph did so, and was exalted to Pharaoh's right hand. An hundred and twenty disciples did so in an upper room, and on the day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost fell upon them like a mighty rushing wind!

Secondly, he saw it prophetically. In one of His many confrontations with the Jewish leadership, Jesus was asked whether He was greater than their father Abraham. In his response, Jesus said, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad*" (John 8:56). In other words, Abraham was able to look down through the corridors of time and envision the Messianic seed prefigured in his son Isaac. David, as did Abraham, saw Messiah as the ultimate manifestation of the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. This Messianic hope, entwined within the fabric of his soul, kept him from fainting. This expectation was fulfilled in the Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Father made both Lord and Christ by His resurrection from the dead.

Brethren, the Easter season is a celebration of the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead made the restoration of spiritual life a certainty for every believer! The precious blood that He shed for our sins was both sinless and divine. The resurrection is a validation of this truth!

More blessed still is the fact that, unlike Abraham and David who saw this goodness by prophetic foresight, you and I have the privilege of beholding it in retrospect. The bottom line, however, is the same. We are either believing or fainting! I pray that this Easter celebration will serve to revitalize our faith, instill good courage within us, and strengthen our hearts. Amen!

The Path of Obedience

Most of us would buy into the idea that every life has its pivotal points of decision that ultimately affect its direction and outcome. A television advertisement that ran several years ago was based upon a poem in which a traveler came upon a fork in the road that diverged into two paths. His inability to travel both paths and remain one traveler led him to take *the path less traveled*. That, as the poem concludes, made all the difference—a good difference! A country music hit of the late 1980's capitalized upon the idea of *the road not taken*, in which a man reflects upon what might have been if he had married the girl back home. The gist was that his choice of a wife had made a real difference in his life—a bad difference!

A unique confrontation is recorded in II Samuel 12:7-14, in which the Lord revealed to David, through Nathan the prophet, the difference that obedience could have made in his life if he had obeyed God's commandment, and avoided the sins of adultery and murder. Nathan said, "*Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have moreover given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?*" (7b-9a).

David is reminded that he has blatantly sinned against the manifold goodness of God! Are we mindful that our sins are transacted against the glories of Christ and His precious blood? In the hypothetical phrase *if that were too little*, the Lord lays bare his heart to this man, and to all who would walk with Him in humility. There are no limits to His willingness and ability to embellish the lives of His elect with gracious and tangible gifts!

The point is not that David should have asked for anything more, but that he should have been content with the God Who had elevated him to the throne, and had not bankrupted Himself in the process! Beware, dear friend, when the Lord Jesus Christ ceases to be enough for you! This lapse of loyalty was a life-changing blunder for David. Although he would receive forgiveness for his sin, God imposed a set of long-term consequences that were both troublesome and debilitating throughout the remainder of his reign.

The word *despised* refers to the *disesteem* of another, or to one party falling *out of favor* with another due to *contempt*. In David's case, the one thing that stood between him and his desire to be sexually satiated with another man's wife was the commandment of God. In his mental processes, the commandment became an impediment to personal and sensual pleasure. He thus set aside the commandment, and indulged himself. In so doing, he despised both the commandment and the God Who gave it.

In his three-fold denial of Christ, Peter suffered the same kind of internal breakdown. The desire for self-preservation overrode his loyalty to Jesus. Peter's love of self did not *replace* his love of Christ, but rather *displaced* it. The firm yet tender manner in which Jesus afterwards dealt with the fisherman should not allow for any minimization of his sin.

Ananias and Sapphira, members of the church at Jerusalem, ran up against the same obstacle—*thou shalt not bear false witness!* The desire for peer recognition coupled with monetary greed led them to trample the commandment of God. The whole church learned soon afterwards that the Holy Ghost was offended by their unholy offence, and served up the most severe discipline possible—physical death!

Brethren, the fact that David despised the commandment of the Lord should put us all on notice that the same evil potential resides within us. When the Lord ceases to be the preeminent driving force behind our affections and conduct, we are on the cusp of spiritual peril. We may never desire a *replacement for Christ*, but may entertain a *displacement of Christ*. As marvelous as the grace of forgiveness is, there are no guarantees regarding the long-term consequences of our sin. The bottom line is this: the path of obedience always makes a good difference...and disobedience a bad one!

The Sufficiency of Christ

Has your spiritual IQ ever been tested? Has the Lord ever immersed you into a special set of circumstances in order to discover the degree to which faith would govern your thoughts and actions? In the Old Testament, Abraham is a classic example, being instructed by God to offer up his only son Isaac. In the New Testament, the disciple Philip experienced a similar test administered by the Lord Jesus. The circumstances were somewhat different, but the essence of the test was the same.

The Bible describes those test conditions, saying, "*When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do*" (John 6:5-6). The context is the feeding of the five thousand. I am convinced that Jesus continues to prove His disciples in similar critical situations.

The wording of the question posed to Philip, coupled with the explanatory remark of 6:6, enables us to assume certain conditions to be true. First, Jesus in reality was not requesting a solution from Philip. This was not a test of his ingenuity or administrative ability. It was rather an examination designed to evaluate Philip's estimation of Christ and His ability in an apparently impossible situation. Jesus Himself was the solution, and knew exactly what He would do to provide bread for the multitude.

Secondly, Jesus clearly implied that the disciples' moneybag contained the funds required to purchase food sufficient to get the job done. Jesus assumed the sufficiency of funds, and made the critical issue a matter of *where* it would be purchased. Thirdly, Jesus had every intention of feeding this multitude. Failure to satisfy this hungry crowd was not an option.

So how did Philip respond? His immediate assessment was strictly rational! Two hundred pennyworth (a year's wages for the typical worker in those days) would not be sufficient. It is doubtful whether the moneybag held two hundred pennyworth of hard cash. The point is Philip failed to extract the true assumption from the question. The issue was never a matter of sufficient financial resources.

Andrew, on the other hand, did make the proper assumption, and began to look through the crowd for those who might be packing vittles. My sense is that the five loaves and two fishes found in the lad's possession more closely represented what the resources in the moneybag could buy. However, Andrew failed to factor in the potential for the miraculous, saying "*but what are they among so many?*" (6:9).

If he and or Philip had perceived all the truth articulated by Christ, perhaps they would have brought the five loaves and two fishes to Jesus, saying, "These, Lord, are just about what the moneybag will buy! We have no doubt about your intent at this point, and can hardly contain our excitement in anticipation of what these five loaves and two fishes will become in your hands! Let the feeding begin!"

Brethren, the five loaves and two fishes are no doubt representative of a number of spiritual realities, one of which is Gospel. The Lord's broken body, His infinite suffering

on behalf of sinners, the precious redeeming blood that flowed from His wounds, and His triumphant resurrection from the dead are together sufficient to cleanse a repentant soul from sin, and secure eternal salvation for the believer. They are also representative of your life and mine when surrendered to, and broken by, the sovereign and supernatural hands of Jesus Christ!

In God's redemptive plan, the Gospel requires human instrumentality for its distribution, enabling God's elect to obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory! (II Timothy 2:10). That even one of His sheep should fail to enter the fold is not an option! Let us never doubt the sufficiency of our Lord and His Gospel, or His ability to use a yielded vessel to accomplish what men may consider impossible!

Divine Direction

Once each year the Hollywood establishment honors itself with Oscars. There are a multitude of categories in which actors and film industry workers can earn an academy award for a superlative effort in their particular discipline. One of these awards is for best director. He is the one that brings all the elements of a film together. He storyboards the entire film before shooting ever begins. It is his daily responsibility to manage the cast and schedule, and deal with both cooperative and difficult personalities. The skills of the director are absolutely critical to the success or failure of any story depicted on film.

If the significance of a director is so easily discerned in the area of godless film making, how much more is the critical nature of divine direction in matters pertaining to life and godliness? Make no mistake! God is a director! He is the best director. The Scripture admonishes us saying, "*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*" (Proverbs 3:6).

The Hebrew word translated *direct* is **yashar**, which in its causative usage (as here) means *to make straight, even, right, pleasant, and or prosperous*. The object of the verb is *paths*, which refers metaphorically to each and every avenue and corridor of travel through life. In order to receive this level of direction, we are exhorted to *acknowledge* Him in all our ways. *Acknowledge* is the Hebrew **yada**, meaning *to know or ascertain something by seeing* it. The *acknowledging* of the Lord in all our ways means operating with the certainty that He is present at every turn in the road, and deferring to His wisdom and guidance as a practical exercise of faith. What a comfort for the faithful to know that their Divine Director has promised to endow their paths with that which is right, straight, and even; and further enhance those paths with pleasantness and prosperity! One day lived under this kind of sovereign direction from the Lord is worth infinitely more than a thousand empty accolades from men!

The paths in which we are directed of the Lord have at least two unique attributes. First, they are paths of righteousness. David said, "*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*" (Psalm 23:3b). If God is in the activity, it will be marked by spiritual and moral rightness! He does this for the sake of His own reputation as a God of holiness and moral rectitude.

Secondly, they are paths of mercy and truth. Again, David writes, "*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies*" (Psalm 25:10). Truth is the objective and absolute standard of righteousness as revealed in His Word. Mercy is the heavenly balm of pity and compassion bestowed upon those who love the truth, yet require the grace of forgiveness in their lack of performing it. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is the key to the paths of life, for He is "*full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14-17).

The prophet Jeremiah issued this word from the Lord to a backslidden Israel, saying: "*Thus saith the Lord, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'* But they said, '*We will not walk therein*'" (Jeremiah 6:16). The *old paths* are the paths characterized by

the truthful and merciful direction of God. The nation was encouraged to submit itself once again to the Lord's direction, and *ask for* a restoration of those *paths* in the land. The call to obedience included a promise of rest for the soul. While a remnant within the nation may have taken heed to the message, and found a place of repentance and rest, the vast majority refused to be directed by God. I believe the same to be true of America in this hour!

Brethren, it would be a healthy exercise for each of us to consider our relationship to these paths, and the degree to which we are willing to be directed by the Lord. Are we adhering to the paths, asking for a restoration of the paths, or abandoning the paths altogether? One thing is certain! The man, woman, or young person who opts to operate under the direction of the Lord, and in His paths, will experience God's best, and take a back seat to no one in this life!

It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over

Yankee great Yogi Berra is often credited with the saying, "It ain't over 'til it's over!" How many times have we heard that phrase used to describe a hard fought athletic contest where a victorious individual or team managed a last-minute comeback against great odds? How many premature predictions have been revised due to last-hour turnarounds? Examples abound!

There are, however, numerous Biblical illustrations of this truth that were lived out thousands of years before Yogi caught his first major league fast ball. I would like to call upon two witnesses, who will gladly testify to the ability of God to provide a last-hour intervention of grace.

Our first witness is a convicted felon whose crime was theft. He was scheduled for a pre-Passover execution with Barabbas and another unnamed malefactor. Because he was tried and convicted under Jerusalem jurisdiction, I am inclined to believe that, within the last three years of his criminal career, he had been exposed occasionally to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. At the very least, he was aware that a miracle worker was in the area, Who claimed to be the Son of God. Perhaps the memory of former contacts provided the basis for his assessment of Christ in admonishing the other thief who blasphemed, saying "*This man hath done nothing amiss*" (Luke 23:41).

The nature of crucifixion, with its excruciating torments that made breathing so laborious, must have made the uttering of these words most difficult. He was not finished! The grace of conviction had obviously gripped his soul! With what appeared to be his next breath, he delivered this petition to Jesus: "*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom*" (23:42). Jesus responded with a guarantee of paradise before sundown! Only an hour or so remained until his damnation would have been sealed. O, the power of his petition! Remember me! Whatever you do, Lord, don't forget me! Include me in your kingdom! Never have brevity and urgency found so powerful a union! This compelling witness affirms to us the truth that it ain't over 'til it's over!

Our second witness lived in the realm of royalty. His name means the *strength of God*. He became the twelfth king of Judah at age 25, and died at age 54 after serving his nation faithfully for 29 years. He is best known for his opposition to idolatry. His intercessory prayer offered on behalf of Judah, and against the king of Assyria, turned back the most powerful army of its time, and delivered a nation from captivity. He is also credited with a major infrastructure project that brought precious drinking water inside the walls of Jerusalem. The success of his reign can be explained in five words: "*he clave to the Lord*" (II Kings 18:6). We are, of course, speaking of king Hezekiah.

At age 39, this godly man with an exemplary track record became sick with a boil (20:7). Apparently the infection spread throughout his body, so that he was "*sick unto death*" (20:1). The prophet Isaiah delivered the word of the Lord, saying, "*Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live*" (20:1). Now, if a doctor pronounces you terminal, a second opinion is immediately sought. If the man of God says it's over, no other opinion matters!

Hezekiah *turned his face to the wall*, and *wept sore* as he made his case before the Lord in prayer (20:3). Before Isaiah could get out of the building, the Lord responded, instructing the prophet to deliver (among other things) the promise of an additional *fifteen years* of life (20:5-6). That, my friend, is prayer power! The experience of Hezekiah teaches us that effectual fervent prayer can still tap the omnipotence of God where no other options exist, and that our last recourse is often our best resource!

Brethren, the truth is that as long as prayer and supplication stand between an individual and death's door, it ain't over! This truth should not be offered as an argument for sinners to wait until their dying breath to embrace the Lord Jesus. Nor does it prove that God will cure every terminal disease if the right prayer is offered. What it does argue for, however, is the infinite love and compassion of God toward sinners, which can deliver the petitioner from the impending jaws of both death and hell!

Pilgrim, are you mired in the slough of despond? Take the word of a dying thief and a delivered king—it ain't over 'til it's over!

An Analysis of Temptation

During the 1960's and 1970's, comedian Flip Wilson made the retort "The devil made me do it!" one of the trademarks of his standup performances. He carved out a niche for himself that transformed laughter into loot. Many in his audiences, however, found license in the laughter, extracting from his comedy routine an excuse for their sin.

Inherent within the fallen nature of man is an instinctive reflex to blame others for spiritual and moral failure after caving in to temptation. God's post-transgression encounter with Adam and Eve provides undeniable evidence of this truth. Adam is confronted, and he blames the wife. The wife is confronted, and she blames the serpent. The attempts to transfer blame were futile. God held each party personally accountable for their actions, and levied the consequences against them according to their sin.

In the first chapter of his epistle, James admonished the brethren, saying: "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed*" (James 1:13-14). James affirms in absolute terms that God is never (1) a target of temptation, or (2) the author of circumstances designed to entrap an individual. The true source of temptation is identified as personal lust.

The word *enticed* is from the Greek **deleazo**, which means *to lure or entice by bait*. The words *drawn away* are the translation of **exelko**, a combination of **helko** (*to draw or drag*) and the prefix **ex** (*out of*), which is added for intensity. Both verbs are present passive participles, which depict temptation as a durative process, and the brethren as objects or recipients of the drawing and enticing activity. Thus a direct correlation between internal lust and the external lure is established. Lust literally gives birth to sin at the point where contemplation of the lure becomes an act of the will in embracing it (1:15).

Make no mistake! Satan is a bait provider! He is like the expert angler who designs his own lures, and frequents his favorite bass hole to discover what will draw a trophy largemouth out from the safe cover of a rock formation, a tree stump, or other protective structure. His choice of bait is determined by (1) what he hears us say, and (2) what he sees us do. These points of observation enable him to discern our thought processes, and serve up the appropriate lure.

Many interpret Satan's "*Yea, hath God said...?*" approach to Eve as an attempt to introduce doubt regarding God's instructions (Genesis 3:1). I believe there was a second and more practical objective—to investigate her thinking! On the initial query, he hit pay dirt! In her response, Eve had omitted two cutting-edge adverbs—*freely* and *surely* (3:2-3). Upon detecting this slight yet unmistakable drift in her mindset, Satan proceeded to push the envelope, and explore the degree to which he could misrepresent God.

Eve was so thoroughly deceived that the forbidden fruit became a tool for personal development rather than the instrument of spiritual death. Mark this down! If any of us ever get to the place of contemplating an upside to disobedience, we are being deceived.

Our safe cover is the Lord Jesus Christ! The best defense in the hour of temptation is a resolve to be governed by the truth; in thought, in word, and in deed. I sense that Satan approached Jesus initially for the same reason he approached Eve—to investigate his thinking. He wanted to discover if forty brutal days in the wilderness had done anything to alter His thinking regarding the business of His Father. What he found in the God-Man was an unflinching desire to be governed by the truth! Herein And therein lies the difference between the first Adam who transgressed and the Last Adam who triumphed!

Brethren, we also must continually fortify our minds by meditating in the Word of truth! The enticing lures of this life tend to loose their luster when the snag hooks of spiritual death are exposed and glistening in Divine sunlight.

The Mysteries of Godliness and Iniquity

A Biblical mystery may be defined as a spiritual truth made known to man by Divine disclosure that otherwise could not have been known. It is God removing the veil from that which was previously hidden, so that man may comprehend the significance thereof. In his New Testament epistles written to local churches, the apostle Paul made it abundantly clear that God had chosen him to be both the recipient and the disseminator of revelation regarding these mysteries. I would like to call your attention to two prominent mysteries identified by the apostle.

The first is *the mystery of godliness* (I Timothy 3:16). Paul stated that there was *no controversy* regarding its greatness! In other words, anyone who paused to reflect upon God condescending to the confines of history, and being *manifested in the flesh*, would readily confess to the immeasurable magnitude of such an act.

In short, the mystery of godliness deals with the incarnation of God as Jesus of Nazareth, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of a virgin! He was *justified in the Spirit*, meaning that the Spirit of God validated and vindicated the truthfulness of His every word and deed by resurrecting Him from the dead. He was *seen of angels*, suggesting that the heavenly host observed with care the humble ministry of their Heavenly Master, who for a season was made a little lower for the suffering of death. He was *preached unto the Gentiles*, demonstrating that His precious blood had been shed for all men, and thus the wall of partition between races had been broken down. He was *believed on in the world*, proving that He was the one and only legitimate object of worship and saving faith. He was *received up into glory*, indicating that the restoration to His former glory was a fitting conclusion to His triumphant Messianic mission. Glory!

The second is *the mystery of iniquity* (II Thessalonians 2:7). *Iniquity* means *lawlessness*. The apostle said that this mystery was already a work in progress at the time of writing. How much more in our day! The mystery of iniquity is an attitude of lawlessness that prevails in religion. God is professed, but His law is abandoned!

This is especially true in the realm of the Gospel! In the context, the apostle spoke of *the day of Christ*, and taught that it would not come without the revelation of the *man of sin*, the *son of perdition* (2:3). This is the antichrist, who "*opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*" (2:4). His coming will be "*after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders*" (2:9). In other words, he will brandish his miracle-working credentials as evidence that the power of God is behind his ministry!

The work of antichrist as described by Paul bears an eerie resemblance to the modern day tongues speaking, healing, and health-and-wealth ministries being foisted upon the religious multitudes by those who feign themselves to be apostles. By the way, did you notice that the antichrist makes his boast in the temple of God? This uniquely Jewish reference indicates that latter-day Israel will actually embrace the antichrist as their Messiah. This is sad indeed, because there is much heated speculation these days

among the religious leaders in Israel that Messiah is soon to appear. Unfortunately, Israel will believe the lie!

Brethren, a few conclusions should be drawn from the comparison of these two mysteries. First, the mystery of godliness is about God becoming a man. The mystery of iniquity, on the other hand, is about man becoming a god. This lie is a prominent teaching within several charismatic and cult groups. Secondly, it must be noted that Satan possesses tremendous deceptive power! His greatest works are those that are mistaken for the work of God. They will culminate in the antichrist, but are already observable in the present hour! Thirdly, we must understand that events that appear to fall within the category of the miraculous are not necessarily divine in origin! Yes, the mystery of iniquity doth already work!

The Proliferation of Witchcraft

Our nation is experiencing the proliferation of witchcraft on an unprecedented scale by means of television. The onset of this phenomenon seems to have started with singer Dionne Warwick's endorsement of the Psychic Hotline. The Sci-Fi channel now features the program "Crossing Over" in which the host interacts with audience guests to establish contact with deceased loved ones, and acts as a medium for message exchanges. Another Sci-Fi offering is the Tarot Card hotline, where viewers are promised the truth about themselves and their future through a consultation with the cards. The list is lengthy! All such enterprise is witchcraft. It is the domain of demons, and condemned by the Scriptures.

In Deuteronomy 18:9-15, the people of God were warned against the abominations of the surrounding nations—the users of divinations, the observers of times [astrologers], enchanters, witches, charmers, consultants with familiar spirits, wizards, and necromancers [contactors of the dead]. They were instructed to *be perfect with the Lord thy God* (v. 13), and to avoid such activities (v. 14).

Moses further declared that a Prophet like unto himself would be raised up from among them, who would serve as the ultimate source for the words and wisdom of God. There would be no need to seek out other sources. The Prophet to whom Moses referred is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 7:37-38). Thus every child of God should see Jesus (including the revealed truth of the Scriptures) as the single and sufficient resource for truth and wisdom. Such unadulterated focus is what it means to be *perfect with the Lord thy God*. It is witchcraft to seek or receive that which is purported to be divine knowledge from another source.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul instructed the churches of Galatia that *witchcraft* was one of *the works of the flesh* (Galatians 5:20). The Greek word is **pharmakeia** (English "pharmacy"), which is the equivalent of sorcery, and includes every kind of mystical enchantment designed to procure divine knowledge, power, and or protection. The sorcerer often employed physical objects (charms, amulets, etc.) to which he or she would assign the power of protection or blessing. The greater goal, however, was to impress the applicant with the mysterious resources and powers of the practitioner, and thus create a sense of awe and dependency. The word implies the use of drugs (whether physical or hypnotic) to obtain the desired ends by reducing psychological resistance.

The work of witchcraft is not confined to the occult. The Trinity Broadcasting Network, for example, serves up witchcraft on a daily basis. How so? The claim that a prayer cloth can become a point of contact with the anointing of God is witchcraft! The practice of someone standing before a "prophet" who lays hands on the body, and utters a "prophetic word from God" regarding that individual's future, is witchcraft. The attempt to induce a tongues-speaking experience as a vehicle for receiving a so-called prayer language and a "deeper experience with God" is witchcraft.

I have observed on several occasions a prominent television preacher holding his arm back as if to throw a baseball, asking the audience if they were ready to receive the Holy Spirit, and then delivering the anointing to the congregation by completing the throwing motion. This man is a practitioner of witchcraft. In all of these instances, men, objects and or experiences have become the conduits for alleged truth, power and blessing, and render both the practitioners and the recipients *imperfect* before the Lord. There is nothing holy about the spirit in which they operate!

Brethren, the practitioners of witchcraft are proliferating among us in growing numbers. In spite of all the claims that these experiences are REAL, the only issue that should concern the child of God is whether they are RIGHT according to Biblical standards! Any attempt (religious or otherwise) to establish a point of contact outside of Jesus Himself (whether by prophet, object, or experience) as a vehicle for God's power and blessing is witchcraft, pure and simple.

The Remedy for Our Sin

The national spotlight is currently focused upon Terre Haute, Indiana, and the impending execution of Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber. The blast that demolished the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, is the most heinous act of terrorism ever perpetrated on American soil. For six years the wheels of justice have turned against this man, and tomorrow morning the ultimate measure of justice will be extracted from him by lethal injection.

Abolitionists are calling for a moratorium upon federal executions, which they consider to be cruel and unusual in nature. Personally, I believe that capital punishment is a God-ordained work of righteousness to be carried out by human government, but readily confess that it lacks a remedial aspect. That is, no remedy exists for the one hundred sixty-eight souls (including nineteen children) who died at his hand. While McVeigh refers to them as *collateral* damage, the fact remains that they are *permanent* damage!

The crime committed by McVeigh against his government pales in comparison to the spiritual crimes we have committed against a holy God. Our violations of His expressed will constitute spiritual high treason worthy of eternal death and damnation. The Scripture says, "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*" (Romans 5:12). One man (Adam) was responsible for the entrance of sin into this world. It was fatal for all mankind, and left both spiritual and physical death in its wake.

The words *passed upon* depict the permeation of the sin's effects throughout the entire human race, much like a drop of cyanide poison placed in five gallons of pure water contaminates all five gallons of that water. Talk about your collateral damage! It gets worse! The phrase *for that all have sinned* means that God reckoned all men to have sinned with Adam. This means that we all participated with Adam in his transgression, making us a cabal of conspirators as well as victims. God is absolutely righteous in His indictment of sinners, and for imposing wrath and eternal suffering in the Lake of Fire as an expression of His justice. There is, however, a remedy for the universal damage caused by sin.

It is time to segue to a second execution—one by crucifixion. Outside the gates of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago, and on a cross erected upon a hill called Calvary, the Just One suffered and died for the unjust (II Peter 3:18). The Lord Jesus bore our sins in his own body on the tree (II Peter 2:24). He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5:21). The execution of Jesus as a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners (in concert with His resurrection from the dead) placed God in the unique position of being both just (in extracting the full penalty for sin) and the justifier of those that believe in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

I will never cease to marvel at the great depths to which God condescended in order to provide a full satisfaction (propitiation) for *the sin* (one huge block) and *the sins* (every detail) of *the whole world* (John 1:29; I John 2:2). Jesus is the single and sufficient

remedy for sin. He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; but he who remains in unbelief will continue to abide under the wrath of God without it (John 3:36). It is the grace of God that enables the sinner to believe this message of good news, and appropriate by faith the remedies of divine forgiveness and eternal life (Acts 18:27). As a believer, Jesus is *wisdom* for my ignorance, *righteousness* for my spiritual and moral blunders, *sanctification* for my native unholiness, and *redemption* for my self-imposed captivity (I Corinthians 1:30). Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift of grace!

Brethren, it is no wonder that the apostle Paul refused to glory (boast) except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It transformed his relationship to the world as well as the world's relationship to him (Galatians 6:14)! May we embark upon the new week with these two executions before us! I would encourage you to join Isaac Watts in surveying the wondrous cross upon which the Prince of glory died, and conclude with him that love so amazing, so divine, is demanding of my life, my soul, and my all!

The Critical Nature of Fatherhood

Have you ever been drawn into a debate about which parent is the most important, the mother or the father? The question is sometimes asked, "If you had to grow up with just one parent, which one would it be?" In reality, this debate cannot be won. Each parent brings something to the table by God's design that the other cannot provide.

Parenthood is a team effort! The spiritual, psychological, and emotional nurture of children is dependent on both father and mother in order to achieve the desired results! It should therefore surprise no one that the major contributor to the turmoil in our nation is the steady disintegration of the God-ordained family.

The role of the father in America has taken some devastating blows in the last half century. As we celebrate another Fathers Day, we are made aware once more that millions of our children have no idea who their father is. Millions more are estranged from them by divorce and or abandonment. One of the difficulties incurred in evangelism is the inability of many to comprehend the concept of the Fatherhood of God inasmuch as they have no earthly counterpart with which to relate it.

Revival in America is a virtual impossibility apart from repentance in the hearts of derelict fathers. I can only imagine how a particular female college student must have felt upon hearing in the media that her father, the President of the United States, had committed adulterous acts with a whore in the Oval Office. The current White House occupant was recently embarrassed by revelations of public revelry and law breaking on the part of his daughters. Barbara Bush remarked that he was "getting back a little of his own." Abortion, the legalized murder of the unborn, has also contributed to the hostile national climate. So, you want to be a father, and raise your children in America? Be prepared for mortal combat at the gates of Hell!

The challenge of achieving spiritual success in fatherhood is gargantuan, and mistakes along the way are common! It would seem that an acute sense of failure must have accompanied a number of Biblical fathers to their graves. What kind of emotional baggage do you suppose Adam carried after Cain, his firstborn son, had murdered his brother Abel? No doubt Adam had instructed his sons concerning the effects of sin, and the way of approach to God by offering a substitutionary blood sacrifice. Abel received and obeyed the truth, but Cain rejected it! Do you suppose Adam second-guessed his methods in the face of such disappointment, and wondered what he could have done differently to alter the outcome?

The prophet Samuel grew up under the tutelage of Eli the priest, whose own sons polluted the priesthood with public licentiousness. Samuel developed into a spiritual stalwart, serving his God and nation faithfully, but saw his own sons end up as money-hungry judges who perverted judgment in the land by taking bribes (I Samuel 8:3). In a way of speaking, they were corrupt politicians! Do you think Samuel's conscience might have condemned him in the end? If I had been Samuel, at some point I would have said to myself, "By the grace of God, my sons will never be the public disgrace to me that Hophni and Phinehas have been to Eli!" It appears, however, that he overextended

himself in caring for his nation to the neglect of his own family, turning his worst fears into reality!

What about king David, a man after God's own heart? His son Amnon committed rape and incest against his own half-sister Tamar. Absalom spearheaded an internal political revolt against him, and died at the hands of Joab. There is no sadder Biblical portrait of a broken-hearted father than that recorded in II Samuel 18:33: "*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*"

Brethren, it is a perilous world in which we seek to be fathers to our children. The Scripture says, "*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). Our best shot at successful fatherhood is a life of obedience to this command, coupled with a conviction that the Lord will ultimately honor our faithfulness with the fruits of righteousness in our children! O God, make it so!

The Persistent Sodomites

The minions of militant homosexuality have delivered to America another dose of harsh reality. That is, our forced march toward Sodom continues! The ranks of the righteous breathed a collective sigh of relief a while back after the Supreme Court, in a five to four decision, upheld the dismissal of a homosexual Boy Scout leader. It was a victory for freedom, and the right of association!

But the war continues! As the perverts in Lot's day sought to break through the door of his house to satiate their lust, so gay rights activists seek to impose their agenda upon us, and gain legal legitimacy through our court system. They are hoping that their latest lawsuit, which involves the exclusion of two alleged homosexual boys from the Scouts, will pack enough gravamen to swing one of those five Justices in their favor, and force the reinstatement of those boys.

Why is this so crucial for the righteous in our nation? The right of association affirms that special interest groups have the right to define who they are—and who they are not—and regulate membership in accordance with those definitions! If the Sodomites succeed, and the Boy Scouts lose the right of association, there will be no safe haven left, including the church! It will place in jeopardy every New Testament assembly that obeys the Biblical injunction, "*Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person*" (I Corinthians 5:13).

The growing legions of "gay Christians" are further evidence that many in the land are willing to exchange the truth for a lie—that godly men can also be homosexual men. I Samuel 20:41-42 is one passage cited as proof. The men in question are David and Jonathan, who experienced a manly love of the purest kind. Jonathan had envisioned David as king of Israel, and himself by David's side. He was emotionally distraught by his father Saul's determination to kill David. In this field, after the lad who had been fetching arrows was sent away, David and Jonathan grieved together over the disappointment instigated by Saul. The Bible says they "*kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.*" A strained interpretation of the word *exceeded* is used to argue for a sexual release on David's part. A careful examination of the text destroys this wicked notion.

First, the kisses exchanged were likely placed on the cheeks according to Eastern custom. There was nothing untoward or unusual here. Secondly, the Hebrew word for *exceeded* is from a root that means *to twist*, and in some passages *to exceed* or *surpass* (i.e., I Kings 10:23). The meaning is clear! David had exceeded his emotional and physical capacity to weep any longer. The root meaning *twist* presents to us a picture of David having been wrung out, all of his emotions having been squeezed out of him. David was spent, emotionally and physically. This is not an uncommon experience for the pure of heart. They often weep over personal and spiritual disappointments until they can weep no longer. Only a dishonest mind of the darkest sort could interpret *exceeded* as representing a sexual experience.

Thirdly, as Jonathan was departing for the city, he said to David, "*Go in peace.*" Common expressions among homosexuals include "Peace in the way" and "Walk in peace". It appears that members of the homosexual community, in an effort to use this text as justification for their sin, have adopted this salutation as reflective of what they consider to be God-ordained love among homosexual men.

There is no contextual basis for this. Jonathan continued his salutation, saying, "*The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed [children] and thy seed [children] for ever.*" In other words, "May the LORD, Who is central to the spiritual and manly love we have experienced, continue to keep the bond strong among our children and their children in generations to come." Jonathan's words are the expression of one heterosexual man toward another, both anticipating future procreative activity with their wives according to God's design.

Brethren, we are beyond crunch time in America. The Sodomites are persistent, and will no doubt continue to bombard the realm of sanctity until they succeed! What about the elect of God? Will we exhibit the same degree of persistence at the throne of grace?