

Truth On Fire

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The Anonymous Man

How would you answer the following true or false question? Jesus and his apostles were the only ones who preformed miracles while he was on this earth. If we were to insert that question on a standard Bible quiz, I dare say that a high percentage of participants would give “True” as their answer. But they would be wrong! In the Gospel that bears his name, Mark records an incident involving an anonymous man who was casting out devils in Jesus’ name. Its significance is both instructive and encouraging.

The apostle John brought up the incident during a private house meeting, saying: “Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followed not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us” (Mark 9:38). The verb tenses paint a colorful picture of the encounter. The verb “casting out” is a present participle, signifying that John and his cohorts likely witnessed not one but several exorcisms. The verb “forbad” means “to hinder or restrain” with a view to curtailing or stopping the activity. The tense is imperfect—continuous action in past time. So, the anonymous man continued to cast out demons from his beleaguered countrymen while the apostles kept on insisting that he curtail his ministry and join their ranks. The anonymous man apparently considered the emancipation of sinners of greater import than a token association with John and the boys, and therefore went about his business...to their chagrin.

Now we know two things to be true of any man or woman who is casting out devils in Jesus’ name. First, that individual is operating in faith. Secondly, he or she is operating in the power of the Spirit! Or to say it another way, they live as did Stephen, a man “full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost” who “did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:5, 8). Or as Barnabas, who was a “good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (11:23-24). Barnabas was a preacher par excellence. He “exhorted” the disciples at Antioch to “cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart” with the result that “much people was added unto the Lord” (11:23). That, my friend, is effective ministry—an effectiveness that is absent from the great majority of churches across America!

Could it be that the faith and Holy Ghost power that accentuated the ministries of Stephen, Barnabas, and the anonymous man are absent from ours? The reason sinners are not being added to the Lord is probably because saints are not cleaving to the Lord! The point is this unnamed man, while an annoyance to the apostles and anonymous to us, shared a kindred spirit with Stephen and Barnabas!

Two questions come to mind. First, what made the apostles think that this man would be better off in their company? This is the same crowd that Jesus had referred to as “faithless” and admonished for their lack of spiritual discipline in the areas of “prayer and fasting” (9:19, 29). Moreover, they had been engaged in a petty, self-serving squabble about “who should be the greatest” (9:34). Our anonymous man was operating on a higher spiritual plane than the apostles, and did well to reject their offer. He had already learned what the apostles had yet to learn at Pentecost—that experiencing and enjoying God’s presence and power was not restricted to the physical presence of Christ!

Secondly, when did the anonymous man establish his faith connection with the Lord Jesus? While there is no definitive answer, Mark appears to have provided a hint in the same chapter. Remember the earlier dialogue Jesus had with the father of the demon-possessed son from whom the disciples were unable to cast out the dumb spirit? The father asked: "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (9:22). Jesus rejoined: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (9:23). Jesus was telling the father in no uncertain terms that faith in him and the power of his name was the trump card for apostolic impotence! In other words, your faith could have gotten the job done without my personal presence or any help from my personal assistants. I believe our man was in the crowd that day, heard our Lord's words about the primacy of faith, and ventured out with an unfettered vision founded upon the word of Christ!

Do you and I have a problem being anonymous? Are we willing to be anonymous with men while being approved of God? Living by faith and being filled with Holy Ghost power is not an apostolic privilege. It is as readily available to those of us who labor in obscurity as it is to those who appear to be pillars in the church. That unnamed man was an outsider from an apostolic perspective, but an insider from the only perspective that really counts—God's!

It is said that prayer is the key to heaven, and faith unlocks the door. May the Lord Jesus grant us grace to embrace faith afresh, and to open as many kingdom doors for God's glory as did Stephen, Barnabas, and the anonymous man!

'Hatred' from a Biblical Perspective

In our politically-correct and progressively-corrupt culture, Liberal forces are redefining practices once thought of as abnormal as the new normal. Sodomites and lesbians now have a civil right to marry and practice their perversion, as do all members of the LBGT community. Our culture has, in essence and on purpose, exchanged the God of scripture for one of their own making. Even some Baptist groups with a fundamentalist track record on same-sex sin have announced they are going to revisit their heretofore strict biblical views on homosexuality, lesbianism, etc.

We who embrace the scriptures as the final authority in all matters of faith and practice are bound by faith to adopt the mind of God as expressed in his Word. That means identifying all sexual sin, whether fornication, adultery, homosexuality, transsexualism or transgenderism, as deviancy, morally corrupt and abominable behavior.

Proponents of sexual deviancy argue that it should be allowed since it harms no one but the parties involved. Such logic presupposes an absentee God. Yet the scriptures, which chronicle God's role as Creator, who made mankind as male and female, as well as his Omnipresence and Omniscience say he hates this stuff. It's offensive to him as a flagrant violation of divine design. If God hates sexual sin, why would anyone want to like it? The answer to that question can be found in John 3:19.

If God and a believer have the same mind about sexual deviancy, the PC world will wrongfully brand that individual as a hater. The scriptures portray hatred in three basic ways. First, there is 'hatred' which is a "work of the flesh" (Galatians 5:20). It's visceral ill-will towards someone that wishes them harm and thus rejoices in their misfortune. Such visceral, fleshly hatred is strictly subjective in nature.

Secondly, there is "hatred" in the sense of rejection, which is objective in nature. Jesus taught followers to "hate" their fathers and mothers as a prerequisite for discipleship (Luke 14:26). That is, Jesus is the ultimate authority for the believer, not his parents. Believers are to honor father-mother and honor Jesus at the same time. It's an authority thing. Jesus illustrated this truth at Cana of Galilee when he changed water into wine. He said to his mother Mary: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:4). There was no disrespect in our Lord's words, but a loving assertion he was operating under an authority higher than hers. To hate one's father and mother is to reject their ultimate authority to call the shots in life. For the true disciple, Jesus is the ultimate and final authority.

We see this second usage in Romans 9:13: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." In the context, the Lord's hatred of Esau was the rejection of firstborn Esau in the Messianic line. He elected Jacob for that purpose. God's hatred (rejection) of Esau had NOTHING to do with his personal salvation. This interpretation is bouyed by the prophecy given to Rebecca: "The elder shall serve the younger" (Romans 9:12). The fact that elder Esau NEVER served the younger Jacob means that the descendents of each man were in view. The purpose of God according to election was fulfilled in the Messianic seed of promise, the Lord Jesus Christ, coming through the line of second-born Isaac and second-born Jacob. It was God's sovereign prerogative to

reject Ishmael and Esau, both firstborns, in bringing Messiah to Israel and a Saviour the world.

Thirdly, there is "hatred" that flows from the holiness of God and has to do primarily with sin. It is neither subjective nor objective, but integral to the very person of a Holy God. The old adage "God hates sin, but loves the sinner" is absolutely true. The scripture admonishes the believer: "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 1:21-23). This abhorrence of sin is rooted in the indwelling Spirit of God. In fact, the verse makes this divine disdain for sin a motivating factor for true evangelism.

In considering these three types of biblical hatred, we conclude that only one is negative, the fleshly one. The other two types of biblical hatred are totally legitimate and requisite to a life committed to serving Christ and saving men! We should NEVER expect a politically-correct world EVER to buy into the biblical view of hatred for same-sex sin as a reflection of the mind of God.

Classroom on the Sea

For most of us, at least twelve years of our lives are spent in the classroom. For those seeking graduate degrees, medical degrees, Ph.D.'s and others, tack on an additional four years or more. A man in pursuit of a Th.D., for example, can expect to spend ten classroom years beyond high school. In the Christian life, God has classrooms for his children. They're not made with typical building materials, like brick, mortar, carpet, etc. They're seldom air-conditioned. God's classrooms can be church services, one's job, heavy rush-hour traffic, athletic contests, doctor's offices, hospital beds and funeral homes. They defy conventionality. But they are both practical and strategic. When God desires to teach his children a lesson or provide a refresher course, he knows exactly how to set up the classroom to achieve his aim.

In Mark 4:35-41, we find a classroom on the sea. The context demands we see this text as a classroom setting. Jesus had been teaching a multitude from a ship for most the day while his audience crowded the shoreline. He taught them in parables (4:33-34). After the multitude dispersed, he expounded these parables to his disciples. "Expounded" is **epiluo** (**epi** = upon, **luo** = to loose). It means (1) to unloose or untie that which is knotted, bound, or sealed up; (2) to explain (what is obscure, hard to understand). The verb is imperfect. Literal translation: "Jesus kept on explaining to his disciples the meanings that were knotted up in his parables." Class may have been over for the multitude, but not for the disciples. They were simply changing classroom venues for a different kind of class. Let's call it a 'Pop Quiz' to test their response to truth in the context of trouble.

We can make at least four observations about this classroom experience. The first is demonstration. The demonstration of which we speak involves a great storm in contrast with a great calm and great power to make that transition. If you can visualize a three-linked chain with great storm on one end and great calm on the other, the connecting link would be great power. The force of nature was subservient to the word of the Creator. Fundamental to discipleship is gaining full appreciation of exactly WHO Jesus is, not merely WHAT he says and does.

Faith in the Lord Jesus based on 'What' he does is inferior to faith based on 'Who' he is. John 2:23-25 says: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." Jesus was unimpressed with miracle-based (what-based) faith. But believing on Jesus as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29), is who-based faith. With such faith God is well-pleased. This massive demonstration of power was designed to teach the disciples eternal truth about their Lord.

The second is that of accusation. It's rather difficult to imagine anyone accusing Jesus of unconcern or indifference to the troubles of his children. Nevertheless it happened. "Carest thou not that we perish?" was the accusation the disciples leveled at Jesus. Humanly speaking, their fear was understandable. The boat was filling with water. The water was ballast. Ballast is the prime enemy of a ship in rough seas. It allows waves to inflict greater damage as they pound on the sides of a ship. There might have been as many as fifteen men on board, including Jesus.

Jesus was sleeping (catching a well-deserved nap) after a long and exhausting day of preaching and teaching. He was literally 'redeeming the time', taking the occasion to rest a little before the next encounter with the multitudes, but was accused of unconcern.

With this false accusation, we see the utter shortsightedness and selfishness of the faithless life. In the story, Mark gives us an instructive detail in his account of the event. There were "other little ships" (4:36) in the floatilla that followed Jesus. If the disciples felt themselves in grave danger because of the storm, how much more were those other little ships in peril? Yet there was no mention made of "others" when they awoke the Lord. No one said: "Lord, we know we're OK because you're on board OUR ship. But those OTHER little ships have no such protection." The lesson learned is those who dare accuse the Lord of unconcern are themselves totally void of concern for others.

For you and me, who have the benefit of hindsight and our Lord's passion and suffering on our behalf, the accusation of unconcern ought NEVER to be a consideration when trouble comes. The cross is the ultimate proof of God's everlasting love and compassion for mankind. Even so, the Lord is still on the receiving end of false accusations.

The third is that of revelation. "How is it that ye have no faith?" That's quite a revelation coming from Jesus. These men had heard the word all day. Since faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17), the absence of faith on their part cannot be attributed to a lack of truth on our Lord's part. To what then shall we attribute this 'no faith' condition? This where the context provides the answer.

Our Lord's first parable was about the sower and soils. There was wayside (hard, fallow) ground, stony ground, thorn-ridden ground and good soil. The revelation was there was not one heart on board that ship that constituted good soil. One could argue the storm choked out the word or that the word had no root. The bottom line, according to Jesus, was NO FAITH. No faith meant no fruit. No fruit meant no good soil. That's the bad news. The good news is that fallow ground, stony ground and thorny ground do NOT have to stay in that condition. All the men in that ship three years down the road would be full of faith, Spirit-filled and abundantly fruitful men. Post-Pentecostal fruit meant good soil that had to go through a three-year process of being broken up and prepared to yield much fruit. Another truth not to be overlooked is that all good soil is not the same. Some good ground is more fruitful than other good ground.

If there had been just one good-soil heart aboard that ship, what would faith (fruit) have looked like? Well, we might have seen that disciple say to his fearful comrades: "Hey guys, don't you realize we have the Son of God on board? We are in no more peril than he is despite indications to the contrary! As long as he's OK, we're OK! Let him sleep!" Perhaps we might have seen that individual stand up and command the storm, saying: "Cease and desist in the name of Jesus!" I am inclined to think Jesus had this second scenario in mind. But either response would have been a faith response.

The fourth is that of fascination. Upon hearing Jesus rebuke the wind and still the storm, their response was: "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" While the storm raged, they were "fearful" (4:40). After the great calm, they "feared exceedingly"

(4:41). The disciple's fear of the supernatural now overshadowed their fear of the natural. This is exactly the kind of fascinating effect all demonstrations of our Lord's power should have on his disciples! Their focus went from the peril of the storm to the person of Christ. Now that's a healthy fascination for all of God's people!

The phrase "what manner of" is from the Greek particle **ara**, which comes from a verbal root with the sense of "to join, to be fitted." The particle itself conveys the idea of drawing a conclusion as to what is being inferred. The disciples were literally wondering what conclusion they might draw from what they had seen Jesus do? What kind of man could fit or join with this display of supernatural power?

We've all heard the adage about "the punishment fitting the crime!" After this classroom episode, the disciples were contemplating "the kind of man fitting the miracle!" This unique, one-of-kind man, sleeping in the ship's hinder parts while the storm was raging, whose word stilled the storm, was none other than the God-Man, God in the flesh, the God of creation. This is the ONLY manner of man that could possibly fit the miracle he performed. It's a classroom lesson worth learning, both for them and for us.

Classroom on the Sea: The Sequel

Since the last classroom episode on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41), wherein the disciples were left scratching their heads, wondering what manner of man could command obedience from both the wind and sea, the apostles have experienced (1) the deliverance of a demon-possessed man, (2) the healing of a woman with a twelve-year blood issue, (3) the resurrection of Jairus' daughter from the dead, (4) the power to cast out demons and heal physical infirmities, and (5) the feeding of five thousand men plus women and children using just five loaves of bread and two fishes with twelve baskets of leftovers. You would think by now that the "what manner of man?" question would have been long since answered.

In 6:45-53, Mark records a second classroom on the sea episode. There are similarities and differences. What remained exactly the same after all that had transpired in the disciples' lives was a heart problem, a hardening of their hearts. Mark sets up this second classroom by telling us Jesus "constrained" them to enter the ship and head for Bethsaida on the other side while he sent a satiated crowd away (6:45). As they embarked upon the voyage, he departed into a mountain to pray (6:46). After darkness had set in, Jesus returned to the shore while the disciples were in "the midst of the sea" (6:47).

I would love to have been a bug on a blade of mountain grass and heard Jesus talking with the Father. It was no doubt a time of sweet fellowship, a spiritual respite from the rigors of the day. But I'm certain the disciples were also part of his prayer time. It might have gone something like: "Father, I've got just a few short years to prepare these twelve men for ministry. Right now they're struggling to get it in their heads exactly who I am. Any advice on next steps?" The Father responds, "Son, let's give them another dose of the supernatural. Their future usefulness depends on whether the supernatural becomes second nature to them!" So Jesus descends back to the seashore after nightfall to re-engage the Twelve.

This second classroom episode involves three distinct themes: focus, fear and failure. Notice first of all the focus of our Lord on his disciples. He saw THEM toiling in rowing against a contrary wind (6:48). He cometh unto THEM about the fourth watch of the night walking on the water (6:48). He would have passed THEM by had they not seen him and cried out (6:48-49). This episode was all about THEM and preparing THEM for ministry. It reminds us that being in the perfect will of God, which the disciples were, can sometimes involve "toiling" under tough conditions. Being in the center of God's perfect will does NOT always mean smooth sailing. The verb "toiling" is **basavizo** ("to vex with grievous pain, to torment). The verb is a present passive participle. Literal translation: "Ones being continuously tortured (vexed) in rowing." This was not a fun cruise. These guys were hurting! The "fourth watch" suggests to us they had been at this for hours!

It's important for us to note that while we may lose focus from time to time and have our spiritual goals obscured by rough sailing, our Lord NEVER loses his focus on those he loves. Whether he's sleeping in the ship or watching from the shore, his people are ALWAYS the apple of his eye. Remember that Jesus did a little toiling of his own in ascending and descending the prayer mountain. As gym rats might say, the Lord was engaged in a serious cardiovascular workout of

his own on behalf of his men. That same spirit of toil was prevalent as he walked up Calvary's hill a few years later.

The second theme is fear. Jesus walked close enough to the ship to be seen of the disciples. The fact that he "would have passed by them" is no indication he was unconcerned about or dismissive of their plight. He was there to help. He needed only to be summoned by the helpless. When they all saw him walking upon the sea, they were "troubled." They were not elated, thrilled or relieved, which is what faith would have produced. "Troubled" is **tarasso** (to agitate, cause inward commotion, to strike one's spirit with fear and dread). They thought they had seen a "spirit" (lit., a phantom) There was NEVER a thought that the One who turned a 'great storm' into a 'great calm' with a word could also command the sea to provide supernatural bouyancy for its Creator's feet. The "what manner of man?" question that ended the first classroom episode seems to have remained unanswered. There were no dots connected, no faith conclusions drawn. The words "sore amazed", "beyond measure" and "wondered" describe the overwhelming shock value of our Lord's supernatural walk on water on these men. It should have been, by this time, second nature to them.

Another point of comparison between the two classrooms is our Lord's words. In the first, he spoke to the wind first, which brought the calm. In the second, he spoke to the disciples first. When he stepped into the ship, the sea calmed of its own accord, In BOTH episodes, he spoke to a storm. There is NO storm so great as fear that has gripped the heart of a follower of Christ. And to this storm of fear, the Lord said: "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid" (6:50). The verb "Be of good cheer" is **tharseo** ("to be encouraged, to have courage"). The phrase "It is I" is **ego eimi** (lit., "I AM"). It is the same phrase Jesus used in telling the Pharisees: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). It's the same two words Jesus used often to identify himself as Jehovah, the Great I AM, the eternally existing One. According to Jesus, when a disciple takes encouragement from his presence, there is no place for fear to hide. It's one thing to be toiling in the will of God and hurting because of it. It's quite another to experience the vexation of soul that fear can bring to a disciple's heart, in whom the supernatural is not, or has ceased to be, second nature.

The third theme is failure. According to Mark, the failure suffered by these men was a hardening of the heart (6:52). Fear always produces spiritual failure. Spiritual failure is rooted in the lack of proper consideration of things supernatural. "Considered" is **suniami** (sun="together" + iemi="to bring or place"). It refers to the mental exercise of bringing together in one's mind certain facts that produce sound conclusions. In this case, it was "the loaves" the disciples had failed to consider. In the hands of Jesus, the five loaves supernaturally fed five thousand. The disciples were first-hand witnesses to the supernatural proliferation of those loaves as Jesus broke them, a supernatural wonder that should have stuck in their minds and caused serious reflection. While toiling in rowing, they should have reflected upon the miracle of the loaves and drawn conclusions about the Christ who performed it. If they had done so, they would NOT have been shocked to see his supernatural water walk. After all, which is harder? Turning five loaves into vittles for five thousand or taking an evening stroll on his own sea?

The word "heart" is singular. Mark views the individual hearts of these men as a collective unit. It

tells us something very important about influence. It reminds us of the twelve Israeli spies, ten of whom had a single heart of unbelief, united in their evil report. Joshua and Caleb had one heart as well, united in a good report of faith. It makes me think that if just one of those disciples had struck up a dialogue about their Lord's supernatural work with the five loaves, it might have made all the difference. Folks whose minds are FIXED on the supernatural when they SEE the supernatural have a tendency to EMBRACE the supernatural. If you're one who's toiling, allowing life's difficulties to raise calluses upon (harden) your heart, the supernatural will likely come as a complete surprise and throw you for a spiritual loop.

The word "hardened" is **poroo** ("to cover with a thick skin, to callus"). The picture is that of a callus that renders one calloused, insensitive. The verb tense is a perfect passive participle. Literal translation: "Their heart, one that had been hardened with a residual callousness." Mark's use of the perfect tense is profound. It bids us ask: How could their heart become calloused after witnessing so many supernatural events, including a feeding of five thousand with five loaves less than a day ago? The prophet Jeremiah well stated: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (17:9). Is our heart any less wicked or any less susceptible to callusing? If you, as a member of XYZ Baptist Church, on a given Sunday, witnessed a supernatural resurrection, a supernatural demon exorcism and a supernatural healing, would it be possible for your heart to become hardened (callused over) before the next Lord's Day? According to this second classroom episode, it is entirely possible if you failed to give the proper consideration to the supernatural events you had witnessed a week earlier!

This classroom on the sea sequel should stir our hearts and minds to consider (reflect upon) what God HAS done as an indication of what he CAN do! The supernatural should never take a child of God by surprise, or elicit fear. The Lord Jesus is the great I AM, the all-powerful, self-existing One. Therefore his supernatural presence and power should always be second nature to us. It's impossible for good cheer and great fear to inhabit the same heart at the same time!

Expository Preaching: A Dying Craft

The seven churches of Revelation, to which Jesus through John delivered both individual and personal messages, represent seven literal churches. Most Bible scholars see these messages as representing (1) seven types of churches that would manifest themselves during the Church Age at any given time, and (2) the seven consecutive eras of Church history, culminating in the coming of Christ. The Laodicean church is the era in which we live. The most remarkable trait of the Laodicean church is the Lord Jesus himself on the outside, standing and knocking at the door, desiring entry into his own church. One reason why Jesus, the embodiment of truth, is on the outside is the virtual absence of truth on the inside. Pulpits in this nation have all but abandoned the exposition of truth. Expository preaching is a dying craft.

How did this dearth of exegetical-expository preaching become the norm? First, the proliferation of watered-down Bible translations has managed to eviscerate the venerable King James of its theological and doctrinal themes. The KJV, with an almost slavish faithfulness to the original text, demands some discipline while doing the excavation work of researching etymologies, grammar, syntax, verb tenses et al. Such painstaking study rewards a student with interpretive gems. But serendipitous translations and paraphrases that 'dumb down' scripture for 'easy reading' often sacrifice key theological concepts in the process.

Secondly, seminaries and Bible colleges often fail to teach young preachers expository skills. During a three- or four-year course, students usually get their OT and NT survey courses along with a handful of electives. Professors typically teach from a course outline, discuss content from 30,000 feet and then require students to reproduce course notes on exams. When the graduate gets to his first church, he is often dependent on commentaries written by other men for his 'insights' and illustrations. It may be that there was a mentor in his past to serve as an example of the expository craft. But such men are the exception rather than the rule. It is even possible for a KJV loyalist to be virtually exposition-free and think he's actually 'preaching the word' by embellishing KJV text with a plethora of illustrations and stories. Even sheep in a KJV church can starve spiritually for a lack of Bible exposition.

Paul's admonition to Timothy, as a pastor-preacher, is encapsulated in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word; be instant, in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." The Word Timothy had at his disposal consisted primarily of OT scriptures – the Torah, Historical books, Psalms, Proverbs and Prophets – and what Paul taught him concerning the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore the content of Timothy's preaching would have consisted of OT texts as a platform to preach Christ and godly living. As NT books were penned, copied, circulated and accepted as part of the canon of inspired text, so would the boundaries of that Word expand.

The essence of expository preaching has roots in the OT. Nehemiah took this responsibility seriously, as revealed in Nehemiah 8:8: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." The adverb "distinctly" means "to distinguish or define, to separate." Nehemiah provided, in addition to reading the text of scripture, an analysis that broke down the law into its individual components, distinguished

them. He “gave the sense” of those things he defined. The word “sense” means “understanding, insight.” As he broke down and separated out the elements of the inspired text along with insights, he “caused them to understand the reading.” In other words, the people learned from Nehemiah WHAT the word meant and HOW to apply it to their daily lives, both as a nation and as individuals. In expository preaching, it is NEVER enough to impart mere knowledge of a text. That knowledge MUST be accompanied by an element of wisdom – insight on how truth learned translates into truth obeyed. This is what Nehemiah did.

Another biblical word that supports the expository concept is “expound.” We find the first usage of this word, and the only OT usage, in Judges 14. Samson told this riddle to thirty Philistine men: “Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness” (14:14). The scripture says that after three days of effort, they could not “expound” the riddle. The Hebrew **nagad** means “to front, expose, make known.” Think of a student sitting in the back of a classroom being asked by the teacher to come to the ‘front’ of the class to read something. In ‘front’ of the class, the student can now be seen easily by other students. The thirty Philistine men were unable to bring the enigmatic meaning of the riddle to the forefront of their thinking. Expository preaching does just that – brings the underlying truths of the biblical text to the forefront of a congregation's thinking.

The Lord Jesus himself is said to have “expounded” the scriptures as well as his own parables (Mark 4:34; Luke 24:7). The word “expounded” in Mark 4:34 is **epiluo**, “to unlose or untie what is knotted or sealed up, to explain.” The verb is imperfect tense, signifying ongoing activity. It suggests that perhaps the disciples needed more than a one-time explanation before ‘getting’ it. So must expository preachers be persistent, repetitious if needed, to ensure the sheep ‘get’ what God is saying through the scriptures.

On the road to Emaeus, Jesus employed Moses (Torah), the prophets et al and “expounded” to two of his disciples things concerning himself (Luke 24:27). The word is **dierneneuo**, a combination of **dia** (“through”) and **hermeneuo** (“to expound, interpret, translate what has been spoken or written in a foreign language into the vernacular”). Our Eng. ‘hermeneutics’ (science of interpretation) comes from this root. The verb is imperfect, signifying an ongoing interpretive session during the long walk to Emaeus. Like his Lord, the expository preacher is tasked with taking the language of scripture and breaking it down, thoroughly interpreting it, so the people of God can consume it. How long has it been since you heard a truly interpretive message from the Word of God?

After Jesus parted from the two disciples, they said to one another: “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened up to us the scriptures?” (24:32). Here is yet another dynamic in genuine expository preaching. The ‘burn’ was the result of Holy Ghost power that mingled itself with our Lord's interpretive content. When true expository preaching takes place, hearers will feel a burning while they're learning. The mandate for expository preaching is literally ‘learn and burn’. When was the last time you sat in a church pew that was a learning and burning environment?

The book of Acts tells us Aquila and Priscilla “expounded” the way of the Lord more perfectly unto a Jew named Apollos (18:26). The apostle Paul “expounded” to Jews at Rome things

concerning “the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning to evening” (28:23). The verb in both instances is **ektithemi**, a combination of **ek** (“out of”) and **tithemi** (“to place, put”). It is imperfect tense. For twelve hours, Paul kept on 'putting out' in open view the meaning of scripture that confirmed Jesus was Messiah. Here we see two more characteristics of 'learn and burn' expository preaching. First, it is meant to persuade. Secondly, Paul's audience was willing to give a whole day of their time to soak it up. This is not a proof-text to justify long-winded preaching (see Acts 20:7, where Paul preached till midnight). But it's a poor reflection on both pulpit and pew in the modern era when a 30-minute ditty is about all a congregation can endure.

Expository preaching is legitimate work. The man of God who gives himself to the study of the Word and prayer, attends to the flock and does the work of an evangelist, making full proof of his ministry, is worth his salt and earns his keep (2 Timothy 4:5). His congregation will be blessed, fed and grown as he digs up and exposes spiritual nuggets week-by-week in 'learn and burn' fashion. I wish I could say most churches have this kind of pulpit ministry. But, alas, expository preaching is a dying craft!

The Goliath in Your Life

Journey far enough down the road of life and you will encounter obstacles or challenges that appear to be insurmountable—mountains that are just too steep to climb. Israel encountered one of those roadblocks while under the leadership of Saul, its defunct king (1 Samuel 17:1-54). The challenge was embodied in Goliath, a champion in the Philistine army (17:4). We all remember well how young David rose to the challenge and destroyed that God-defying heathen.

The apostle Paul told us that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Our learning may not be the sole purpose of the OT scriptures, but it is certainly a solemn purpose! A reading and ingesting of the OT writings promotes patience (an abiding under the loads of life) and comfort (a lending of encouragement from a God who is close at hand). These two virtues in turn bring hope (a confident expectation) to the heart.

Since the episode involving Goliath was made part of the biblical record, we can therefore assume he represents or symbolizes an obstacle or challenge from which the people of God can learn and be encouraged. If there is a Goliath in you life, dear friend, there is much to be learned from this Philistine giant.

So, what does Goliath represent to you and me? First, it goes without saying that Goliath represents the mortal enemy who sets himself against all that is God-related. He is the opposition—formidable opposition! In fact, his very name means “one who treads down” other men. It is noteworthy that Goliath touched upon two distinct themes while addressing the armies of Israel—death and servitude (17:8-10). Goliath was asking for one man to fight him to the death. When he said, “Give me a man, that we may fight together” (17:10), he was saying in essence, “Send out Saul!” Saul turned out to be a no show. The proposed outcome of this one-on-one battle would be servitude (17:9). The death of one would result in the servitude of many. Goliath teaches us that Satan—our mortal enemy and that of the gospel—is perfectly willing to bring into servitude that which he does not (or cannot) ultimately destroy.

Secondly, he represents intimidation. The scriptures paint for us the picture of a colossus. At “six cubits and a span” he stood between nine and ten feet in height. The plethora of protective brass armor from head to foot created the illusion of invincibility. For offensive weaponry, his six-hundred-shekel iron spearhead was a sledgehammer on steroids, equating to roughly fifteen pounds! The reaction of Saul and all Israel to the words that proceeded from the giant’s mouth is recorded for us: “They were dismayed, and greatly afraid” (17:11). Total intimidation was indeed the order of the day.

But consider this question: Was intimidation in and of itself the real problem? I think not! At various points in our Christian walk, each of us has encountered some challenge or form of opposition that has caused feelings of intimidation at first blush. No, the real problem with Saul and his army was prolonged intimidation. We are told that Goliath issued his challenge twice a day (morning and evening) for forty days (17:11). Basic math tells me this infidel issued eighty challenges over the course of a month and a half. And not once during this time is there the first

mention of prayer or praise being directed toward the living God by the people of God. Intimidation can be our friend if it drives us to the throne of grace. It can, however, wreck our lives if all we do is prolong our focus on the magnitude of our problem.

Thirdly, Goliath represents revelation. God often designs tough situations to reveal something of his own power and glory through his servants. In the previous chapter, Samuel had anointed David to be the next king of Israel, so that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David” and “departed from Saul” (16:13-14). God had now set the providential stage to reveal to all Israel the favor with which he had graced this young man, and to demonstrate for the ages to come what a man filled with faith and the Holy Ghost can accomplish against insurmountable odds! David was simply a man who understood the God-honoring cause at hand (17:29), and gave himself to it.

Is there a Goliath in your life? Has the enemy raised his ugly head to create fear and intimidation within you? If so, remember that the real danger is prolonged intimidation that can ultimately destroy our resolve to fight the good fight of faith. Consider also that the Author and Finisher of our faith may have set the stage to reveal his power and glory through you as you trust him and continue to walk in obedience. The Goliath in your life may well be the steppingstone to the next level of your experience with the living God.

The Importance of Hearing and Being Heard

One of fundamental needs of the human psyche is the desire to be heard. When a divorce filing cites irreconcilable differences as the cause, quite often one or both partners believe the other simply does not listen to them. When a plaintiff files a civil suit against another, from whom they believe they've incurred harm, there's a desire to have their complaint heard and an appropriate remedy applied. They want to have their day in court. When the Supreme Court hears a watershed case, litigants for both sides of an argument want to be heard by the Justices with the hope a ruling will come down in their favor. All of us would agree that there's nothing quite like being heard when it matters.

Hearing involves more than just auditory function. It means the mind is creating word pictures as the listening process takes place. When a listener becomes a hearer, there arises an expectation that action is forthcoming on behalf of the one heard. Hearing can be direct or indirect, first hand or second hand. The critical factor is that hearing takes place with an appropriate response to the thing heard.

The scriptures have a lot to say about hearing and being heard. The word "hear" is used 550 times in the KJV. The past tense "heard" is used 641 times. In biblical terms, hearing occurs on five distinct levels. First, the scripture speaks of men hearing other men. Secondly, it speaks of God hearing men. Thirdly, it addresses perhaps the most fundamental form of hearing: men hearing God. A man who makes the appropriate spiritual adjustments to hear the voice of God will most likely get the first two hearing functions right. Fourthly, God the Father hears God the Son. Lastly, God the Father hears God the Spirit, who resides in every believer, as an integral part of a believer's prayer life. These last two hearing levels are absolutely essential because the entire plan of eternal redemption rests upon them.

Let's consider first the hearing of men by other men. The third biblical use of "heard" tells of Abram when he heard that his brother's son Lot and all his goods were captured (Genesis 14:14). Abram's reaction to hearing this bad news was to arm and train three-hundred eighteen of his servants, pursue the captors to Dan, defeat them, recover Lot and all his goods (14:15-16). Fortunately for Lot, uncle Abram did far more than merely listen to the bad news. He heard Lot's plight and took action necessary to mount a rescue.

Another poignant instance of hearing took place Ezra heard reports that the people of Israel, after God had graciously turned their captivity and returned them to their homeland, had intermarried with the heathen in surrounding countries and adopted their idolatrous customs. Ezra 9:3 records his response: "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished." This evil news of unequal yoking did far more than impact Ezra's eardrums. It impacted his heart inasmuch as he understood how much it must have impacted the heart of God. Oh that news of ungodliness in our fellow man could evoke a similar response from us!

Then there are references to God hearing men. Perhaps no biblical character was more aware of God hearing him than David. References abound. "I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and

he heard me out of his holy hill” (Psalm 3:4). “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer” (6:8-9). “In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears” (18:6). “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles” (34:6). John revealed a vital key to prayer when he wrote: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing 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” (1 John 5:14-15). The fundamental effectiveness of a man’s walk with God is dependent upon God hearing him when he prays.

Before a man can expect God to hear him, he must first tune his spiritual ears to hear God. The first two instances of “heard” occur in a context describing the reaction of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden upon hearing the voice of God walking in the cool of the day after they disobeyed him (Genesis 3:8-10). Their reaction was one of fear and aversion for God’s presence, the sine qua non of spiritual depravity. Depravity, contrary to the thinking of some, does not signify the inability to hear the words of God. It is rather the distaste for them, a reluctance to abide them. The first couple indeed heard the voice of God, but found it unwelcome, unpalatable due to their fallen state. God’s plan of reconciliation through his Son, the Second Adam, was designed to restore broken communion and turn an aversion for the words of God back into fellowship. It would take nothing less than the blood of God Incarnate to bridge that gap.

The phrase “Hear, O Israel” is found five times in the scripture (Deuteronomy 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; Mark 12:29). Every hardship and affliction God’s people Israel endured was due primarily to a failure to heed this admonition, hear the words of God and obey them. On numerous occasions, Jesus followed up an instruction or admonition with these words: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:43). On the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father spoke these words to the disciples of Christ: “This is my beloved Son: hear him” (Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). To all seven churches Jesus addressed in Revelation, he included the following admonition in each message: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22). An individual or church whose ears are indifferent toward God has no expectation of securing the ear of God!

When it comes to men hearing God, the young Samuel, whose mother Hannah had committed him to the tutelage of Eli, serves as the perfect model (1 Samuel 3:1-10). When the Lord began to call Samuel by name, he thought Eli had called him, and said to his mentor, “Here am I.” After three of these calls, Eli finally figured out it was the Lord who called Samuel. He instructed Samuel that, upon hearing his name called again, to say, “Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.” Samuel did exactly that upon hearing the Lord’s voice again (3:10). That submissive response launched Samuel’s ministry and usability as a prophet of God. It seems to me that every youth ministry in every local church should aspire to infuse this kind of attitude in its young people. Such a vision presupposes the same attitude is operative in its adults, beginning with its pastor. Show me a church growing in holiness, obedience and the salvation of sinners, and I’ll show you a church with a core of Samuel-like members!

The fourth and fifth levels of hearing are perhaps the most critical because the whole of our redemption rests upon them. The fourth level pertains to God the Father hearing God the Son. The fact that the Son was heard by the Father on EVERY single occasion of prayer secured the vicarious value of his death for sinners. After the friends of deceased Lazarus had removed the stone from his four-day old tomb, Jesus lifted up eyes toward heaven and said: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always..." (John 11:41-42). In another text, we read this of Christ, who was made a priest after the order of Melchisedec: "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). It is important to note that although Jesus was heard by the Father, the Father did not deliver him from the suffering of the Cross. What the Father hearing the Son DID provide was supernatural grace to endure his suffering and accomplish the Father's will. You and I are the benefactors of that hearing.

The fifth level of hearing is a subset of the fourth. It involves God the Father hearing God the Son and God the Spirit on behalf of believers. John wrote: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). An advocate is an attorney for the defense, one who pleads the cause of another. While a believer in Jesus is justified by faith, he or she will NEVER live a sin-free life as a child of God. If and when the believer misses the mark, his Advocate pleads his cause before the Father. When the Son defends one of his own before the Father, who is the Finder of fact, the Father finds in favor of the Defense EVERY time because he is heard EVERY time as the Satisfaction for our sins. Jesus Christ, who IS righteous, makes the case for our eternal security on behalf of those he MADE righteous by faith.

One of the vital roles of the Spirit of God is intercession on the part of believers. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27). This text accentuates the infinite holiness of God. Crude illustrations of the Spirit's intercession might be a signal booster for a TV antenna and a final filter in any number of applications. In our prayer lives, the Spirit performs both these functions, filtering the heart desires of a believer and delivering, with appropriate divine strength, our petitions in accord with the will of God. When the Father hears the prayers of believers, it's because he hears both the Son and Spirit, who are advocating and interceding their behalf.

Hearing and being heard are fundamentals of life. There are none so miserable as those who will not hear or cannot be heard. When was the last time you knew you were heard, either by your fellow man or by God himself. Moreover, when was the last time you knew you heard God speaking to you? The first stanza of an old Fanny J. Crosby hymn comes to mind: "Pass me not, O gentle Savior, Hear my humble cry; While on others Thou art calling, Do not pass me by."

The Irrelevant Preacher

The New Testament pastor-preacher, whom the scripture admonishes to ""speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), has become a less and less relevant commodity in the local church. Christian apologist Josh McDowell, a number of years ago, aired some opinions about truth and relationships with regard to youth, parents, and the church. One of his profound insights, in my opinion, had to do with the subjective approach to the study of Scripture.

In making his point, Josh began with this statement: "I would say that roughly half of the Bible preachers in America today are culturally irrelevant to their congregations." That is, the pulpit has lost its influence upon the pew! God's men are preaching, but the people are indifferent to the message. He further pointed out that the "me" culture of our day, and its effect on how we study the Scriptures, was a major contributing factor.

The goal of true Bible study is the discovery of truth and the application thereof to the life. Every effort is made to determine exactly what the inspired writer meant to say by examining the historical context, word meanings and usage, grammar, and other related Scriptures. Having established the clear intent of the writer, and thus the mind of God, the truth discovered can be declared with authority, and applied to the life. This is true Bible study. This is how disciples are made!

The dangerous alternative to discovering the truth is creating it! This is a subtle phenomenon that has infiltrated modern-day churches. It takes place when God's people gather together, a passage is read, and the leader asks, "What does this mean to you?" The matter is then open for discussion. The objective process of diligent study, discovery, and exposition is tabled in favor of the more subjective method of opinion. Each individual thus determines for themselves what the truth is, and what is relevant. One opinion is as good as another. There is no need for a teacher of doctrine, only a facilitator of discussion.

The potential for such subjectivism lies within the increasingly popular 'Home Group' approach. While many churches now use Home Groups as an alleged means for growing disciples, the exact opposite could very well be the outcome IF the teacher of objective truth, discovered and applied, is supplanted by the facilitator of subjective opinion.

This method is fast becoming the modus operandi among Baptists and other denominations. One of the largest SBC churches in Florida is currently replacing long-time teachers with facilitators. Biblical discussion is a healthy exercise, as long as it involves the application of discovered truth. An extraction of subjective opinion, without the discipline of discovery, puts the truth up for grabs.

This is why, according to Josh McDowell, Biblical preaching in our culture is in serious trouble. "Thus saith the Lord!" leaves little room for "I feel that God is saying..." In many cases the pew believes that its opinion is as viable as that of the pulpit. It is this subjective mind-set that renders the pastor-preacher of objective truth virtually irrelevant, both culturally and practically, in our present society.

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!

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!

The Simplicity in Christ Jesus

Most of us like things that are simple, easy to understand, easy to use. Inventors and entrepreneurs have made billions of dollars developing products that make simple the complex. The Microsoft empire, for example, was built upon an Excel program, which allowed corporations and small businesses alike to develop spreadsheets with built-in formulas that could perform complex financial computations with the simple entry of numerical data into a spreadsheet. The Excel program itself is extremely complex, requiring years of development by software engineers. On the user side, that complexity is harnessed by a simple act of data entry. The WD40 product is another example. 'WD' stands for 'Water Displacement'. It took forty attempts by its developers to get the formula right; hence WD40. The complex chemical formula of WD40, which displaces moisture and applies penetrating lubricant in its place, is harnessed by the user with the simple push of a spray nozzle.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul wrote: "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." One of the prime objectives of Satan is to complicate gospel simplicity in the minds of sinners. He successfully corrupts a mind when he convinces a sinner that something more than Christ is required for salvation. Satan is not primarily about ALTERNATIVES to Christ, even though he'll gladly take it. Satan is all about ADDITIVES to Christ (i.e., 'Jesus plus something'). The word "simplicity" is haplotēs ("singleness, sincerity, mental honesty"). The name 'Jesus' means salvation. Salvation is in Christ alone, plus nothing, minus nothing! Satan corrupts this simplicity by adding something to Christ (e.g., baptism, works, church membership and attendance; OT Law, Ordinances and Covenants; sacraments, etc.). Satan really doesn't care WHAT he gets men to add to Christ as long as he adds something. In doing so, he corrupts the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus.

The verb "beguiled" is **exapatao** (**ek**=out + **hapatao**=to seduce). The prefix **ek** intensifies the verb. The first temptation was out-and-out seduction. The word "subtilty" signifies cleverness, craftiness. The point of Satan's pitch to Eve was: "There's more to the simple 'Thou shalt not eat!' prohibition than meets the eye. There is something good to be gained from violating the prohibition. God is withholding that good thing from you!" The devil uses the same cleverness with sinners today, not only where the pleasures of sin are concerned, but where the gospel is concerned as well. He convinces them there's got to be MORE to full salvation than Christ alone through faith alone. Once he corrupts the mind of a man, he cares not what 'something' a man adds to Christ to blur the simplicity of the gospel.

As with our Microsoft and WD40 examples, the simplicity of salvation in Christ on the sinner's side is based on an infinitely complex operation on God's part. Consider the many genealogical requirements and the providential preservation of life from Abraham to David, culminating with Joseph and Mary. In the womb of that virgin maiden, the Spirit of God fused the eternal Son of God with an embryo, which began the process of Incarnation. From his miraculous birth to vicarious death, the God-Man traversed this earth in sinless perfection. His resurrection from the grave validated every word he ever uttered as true and every promise he ever made as certain

of fulfillment. Perhaps the greatest promise where the sinner is concerned is the promise of forgiveness and eternal life for a simple look of faith to the One who died for them and rose again (John 3:14-15). All the complexity of the gospel took place on God's part. On the sinner's part, it is as simple as "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Let's lay a little groundwork. At the root of gospel simplicity is the role of God as Creator. "All things were MADE by him; and without him was not any thing MADE that was MADE" (John 1:3). John attributes the creation to Christ. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, MADE of a woman, MADE under the law" (Galatians 4:4). "For he hath MADE him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be MADE the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). We believers are MADE the righteousness of God because Christ was MADE sin for us. The righteousness of God is NEVER earned. "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath MADE us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is MADE unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Even David of old understood this truth: "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath MADE us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100:3). Can you see the pattern?

For the believer in Jesus Christ, God reckons to his account the merits of Christ, including complete compliance to EVERY OT law, sacrifice and ordinance. God nailed them ALL to the Cross of Christ. We are therefore COMPLETE in him (Colossians 2:10, 14). That's why there's not a single NT scripture requiring a believer in Christ to obey OT ordinances of any kind. Christ is the believer's wisdom. Christ is the believer's righteousness. Christ is the believer's sanctification and redemption. Christ is become the believer's Sabbath rest! The corruption of the mind that Satan seeks is 'Christ plus something' to make a believer wise, righteous, sanctified, redeemed and accepted. Satan corrupts the mind when he successfully convinces a man of salvation's complexity (i.e., 'Christ plus something'). But salvation, in all its biblical simplicity, is 'Christ plus nothing'. When a man adds ANYTHING to Christ and simple faith in him as the way of salvation and acceptance, his mind is corrupted.

Paul wrote two inspired epistles, Galatians and Colossians, to combat this error. In almost every place where he planted a church, Paul and the congregations he established were harassed by Judaizers who insisted that faith in Jesus did not preclude obedience to Moses. Paul claimed it did! According to Paul, Christ was the END of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believes (Romans 10:4). Whether one prefers the word 'Covenant' to 'Law' is irrelevant. If it's OT in nature, Christ fulfilled it. A believer needs nothing more than Christ to be reckoned 'complete' in the sight of God! When the believer embellishes his life with OT ordinances to attain what he thinks is a greater degree of righteousness, he insults the Christ whose righteousness is sufficient! Paul wrote to Timothy regarding such teachers who had "swerved" from the faith unto "vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Timothy 1:6-7). Even so today there are articulate false teachers who corrupt the minds of believers with persuasive arguments about mixing the grace in Christ Jesus with some level of OT covenant compliance. These modern-day Judaizers are NOT the ministers of Christ. For why would an all-sufficient Christ need to add anything to himself?

In Galatians 5:4, Paul wrote these words: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Many have misinterpreted Paul's words here to teach that a believer would-could lose salvation by reverting back to OT Law with a view to being justified. A believer, once justified, can NEVER be unjustified! The phrase "fallen from grace" means to remove oneself from grace as an operating principle. For the lost man who seeks to be justified by keeping the Law, it means he will never experience the saving grace of God. He will remain lost. For a saved man, whose mind Satan has corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, it means he has forfeited grace as an operational principle in his spiritual life and growth. Nothing quenches and grieves the Spirit of God in a believer's life more than the embrace (or 're-embrace') of 'Christ plus something' as the means of finding favor with the Father. That's why Paul wrote to the Colossians: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (2:6).

The simplicity that is in Christ Jesus is apostolic doctrine. The early church embraced it as did EVERY local church Paul ever planted. The Catholic church corrupted it, but the Reformation rediscovered it. Every church I have ever belonged to or pastored has believed it. The colleges and seminary I attended taught that simplicity. The church we now attend believes it in like fashion as did the Jerusalem church of Acts 2. Such is the gospel simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. Please do not complicate it!

Subjection to Ordinances

Have you ever found yourself in violation of or in conflict with a city ordinance? An ordinance is any law, regulation or directive put in place by a municipality for compliance by both government officials and citizens. An ordinance can cover anything from using parking meters to wearing seat belts to hiring practices for city contracts to posted speed limits. Ordinances are enacted for the public welfare. Those who live in compliance with local ordinances are considered good citizens.

Ordinances were and are part of God's kingdom with both Israel and the Church. In the Old Testament, the word "ordinance" is the Hebrew **choq**, meaning "statute, limit, something prescribed." In the KJV, it is variously translated, the most common being "statute" (87x). Its first usage is Exodus 18:20: "And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do." These were the words of Moses' father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, which he spoke to Moses regarding his leadership of Israel.

The Mosaic Law is an amalgam of ordinances, consisting of the Ten Commandments, the Passover and prescribed sacrifices, Sabbath days, feast days, festivals et al. The Lord directed Israel, custodians of that Law, as follows: "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 18:4). These ordinances applied as well to divine service rendered in the Tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1). They were also "carnal" ordinances (Hebrews 9:10), which means they were fleshly, earthly, natural as opposed to supernatural.

It was the Lord's sovereign prerogative as Israel's Redeemer to demand compliance to his ordinances. When Israel was in compliance, they experienced God's blessing and protection. When they deviated from and forsook the ordinances, God brought his chastening hand. Every OT prophet brought stern and often cataclysmic messages for a non-compliant Israel. God's last prophet delivered these words: "Even from the days of your fathers ye have gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:7).

No matter how bad things got on a national level, there was always a fellowship of the compliant. Four hundred years after Malachi concluded OT prophecy, Luke said this about Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist: "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, who would bear Jesus the Christ. It's safe to say that Mary and Joseph were in that compliant fellowship as well. It's not within the scope of this article to discuss parenthood. But suffice it to say that parents who desire for their children to walk in God's paths must first walk aright themselves. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph were justified by faith as was Abraham. God imputed righteousness to them in response to faith. Compliance to God's ordinances was an outgrowth of that faith.

This distinction is critical because the Mosaic Law could bestow neither forgiveness nor life

(Galatians 3:21). Even if we assume that the natural man could one day achieve perfect compliance to the Law, he would still be spiritually dead and in need of forgiveness for sins past. The Law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). Its divine design is to expose our spiritual destitution, prompt us to look outside ourselves, come to Jesus Christ by faith with empty hands and trust the Lord to save us. This is the lawful use of the Law (1 Timothy 1:8). The Law is holy, just and good (Romans 7:12).

Jesus came into this world to fulfill the Law. He lived a life of perfect righteousness and compliance to every ordinance. As the God-Man, he went to the Cross as the perfect satisfaction (propitiation) for our sins. In Ephesians 2:15, the apostle Paul wrote: "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace." The word "ordinances" is the Greek **dogma** (Eng. 'dogma', a degree, doctrine, judgment). The 'dogma' of the Law was abolished by Jesus in the process of bringing Jew and Gentile into one body. The verb "having abolished" is an aorist active participle of **katargeo**, meaning "to render useless, to cause a person or thing to have no further efficacy, abolish"). Literal translation: "One having rendered the Law useless."

The theme of the epistle to the Colossians is the total sufficiency of Christ for the believer. As Paul traveled throughout Asia Minor, he constantly encountered Judaizers, some of whom followed him from city to city, who sought to ill-affect the minds of believers regarding salvation. Their contention was that the Law was still binding, that faith in Jesus was not enough for a righteous standing before God. While Paul encountered these loyalists to Moses in nearly every place, he took the occasion of writing to the Colossians to address the problem directly with inspired text.

In Colossians 2:16, we find some clues about what the Judaizers thought were essential ordinances that believers at Colosse were NOT observing (ordinances concerning food, drink, holy days, new moons and Sabbaths). An alarming trend in Christendom today is a renewed compliance to Torah ordinances by some as an expression of righteousness. It's Colosse all over again. God nailed every OT ordinance to the Cross of Jesus Christ, including Sabbaths (2:14). The trio of verbs is instructive. "Took it out of the way" is a perfect tense, indicating permanent results. It's modified by two past participles: "Having blotted out (erased) the handwriting of ordinances" and (2) "having nailed it to his cross." Notice the "it" is singular. The "it" represents the totality of Mosaic Law as one unit. Paul said all the ordinances as outlined in the Torah are a "shadow" or mere shade (2:17). Spiritual nourishment and increase come as a result of "holding the Head" (2:19), NOT the shadow. There is neither spiritual substance nor sustenance to be found in Torah shadows. Paul NEVER intended a co-mingling of Christ and shadows.

In Colossians 2:20, Paul asks a rhetorical question: "Why are you subject to ordinances when you died with Christ and to everything God nailed to his Cross?" This is the relevant question for every person who tries to make Torah compliance ancillary to Christ. The believer is "complete" in Christ (2:10), his head. This was Paul's whole purpose in writing this epistle. Interpreting the judgment of 2:16 as proof that the Colossian believers were being criticized for observing shadows is a total misread of the verse in its context. The Colossians, in accordance with Paul's

teaching, left the shadow (Torah) on the Cross, where God nailed it. Judaizers criticized them for it. Why then resurrect what God erased in Christ, and call it righteousness? Being subject to Christ and subject to ordinances (shadows) at the same time is spiritual duplicity and a departure from apostolic doctrine. What is a Torah follower expecting to get from a shadow that he cannot get from Christ?

Another verse needs clarification. In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul wrote: "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." "Ordinances" here is the Greek *paradosis* (a giving over, tradition handed over from one person to another, either orally or in writing). What were these ordinances delivered by Paul? In comparing scripture with scripture, we can conclude with certainty that NONE of them pertained to the Torah. They probably included water baptism by immersion, the Lord's Supper (11:23-31), use of spiritual gifts (12:1-31) and the gathering of offerings on the first day of the week, the post-Pentecostal standard for Church worship (16:1-2).

A false doctrine floating around these days is Replacement Theology, which teaches that the Church inherited from Israel all its privileges because of its rejection of Christ. This may or may not be a factor in worship driven by the Torah. That doctrine is false on its face. God has two distinct programs: Israel and the Church. When the Church Age ends with Christ catching away his Church, his program with Israel will resume (Daniel's Seventieth Week). One of God's major purposes for the Great Tribulation will be to draw Israel to himself in advance of his kingdom on earth. Failure to make this distinction between Israel and the Church opens the door to all manner of biblical error.

Consider Hebrews 10:19, which reads: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Entrance into the holiest, the very presence of God once reserved for the high priest alone behind the veil of the tabernacle/temple, is now the reality for every believer by the blood of Jesus Christ. This is the highest and holiest privilege for a believer, and ONLY the blood of Jesus makes this access possible. It's what the Cross of Christ was all about. Question: Does reaching back into the Torah and augmenting the Christian experience with OT Sabbaths and holy days (shadows) improve or better facilitate entry into the holiest? Absolutely not! What then does a believer think he or she gains by adherence to OT ordinances? When a believer adopts the shadows that God nailed to the Cross of Christ as part of their Christian experience, he or she is like the owner of a Rolls Royce with gold-plated bumpers purchasing a \$1.00 bumper sticker, affixing it to gold plating and thinking the bumper sticker has enhanced the value of their Rolls Royce. It's an insult to the blood of Christ.

Finally, the scripture proclaims: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4). The word "end" is **telos** ("termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be, that by which a thing is finished"). As far as scripture is concerned, at the moment God clothes a believer with the righteousness of Christ, the law ceases to have ANY relevance whatsoever other than for instructive purposes. For a believer to add Torah-based practices (Sabbaths, feasts, et al) to his or her life as a way of 'fulfilling righteousness' is in fact a practical denial of Christ's sufficiency.

For the believer who thinks he or she is really on to something with compliance to Torah

ordinances, including worship on the Sabbath, they MUST be prepared to answer the following questions: (1) Why are you subjecting yourself to the ordinances that God nailed to the Cross? (2) What do you as a believer expect to get from a shadow that you cannot get from the blood and righteousness of Christ? (3) What part of "end" don't you understand?

The Two Sides of Reconciliation

The gospel of Jesus Christ, as we have painstakingly pointed out, is a coin with two sides. One side of the gospel coin is the PROVISION side, the good news that God in Christ has provided a remedy for our sin. The other side of the gospel coin is the APPROPRIATION side, the good news that God in Christ has provided for sinners the means to appropriate the sin remedy by a simple look of faith to the One Who died for them and rose again the third day. The provision side is encapsulated in: "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). Those scriptures would most certainly include Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

We have also pointed out that Calvinism, in gospel-deficient fashion, is philosophically bound to limit the gospel to one side of that coin, the appropriation side. For the Calvinist, the gospel essentially consists in one scripture: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Now there's absolutely nothing wrong with declaring that promise of appropriation to a sinner. Here's the problem: A sinner CANNOT appropriate what God has not provided! If Calvinism's theory of Limited Atonement (or Particular Redemption) is true, then there are some for whom God made no provision for sin in the death of his Son. Therefore the promise of appropriation given in Acts 16:31 CANNOT apply to them. If Jesus did not die for your sins, God CANNOT save you despite ANY attempt on your part to appropriate salvation. No provision, no appropriation...period. This is not rocket science.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, the apostle Paul wrote in eloquent terms about the two sides of reconciliation. In this passage we find yet again another truth that totally destroys the entire system of Calvinism. Paul writes: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (5:14). With the phrase "we thus judge", Paul employs basic yet unassailable logic pertaining to the death of Christ. His argument is based on an Unlimited or Universal Atonement. "If one died for all, then were all dead." Can we agree that the first "all" and the second "all" both refer to the same group of people? Paul certainly thought so. Intellectual honesty demands it. If the Calvinist chooses to limit the first "all" to "all of the elect", then he must also argue that the second "all" does as well. In other words, if Christ died for the elect only, then only the elect were spiritually dead. It is clear that Paul did NOT subscribe to a Limited Atonement. He was NOT a five-pointer, as I have heard some Calvinists ludicrously argue.

The verb "constraineth" means "to hold together" (so that nothing falls away from the whole). The idea of compression or pressure is in view. The verb was used to describe the constraint that farmers would apply to their animals in order to administer medications. Paul uses the present tense to convey continuous, ongoing action. The love that constantly motivated the apostle and his co-laborers was that shown by Christ in his death for ALL, for EVERY sinner, for ALL who fell with Adam when he sinned.

The phrase "we thus judge" is an aorist active participle; literally translated, "ones having judged" or "ones having come to a reasoned conclusion." There was no theological debate

among the apostles about the scope of Christ's death. That issue was settled. It was fundamental to the gospel. One cannot limit the atonement without limiting the gospel, which is why Calvinism, or Reformed Theology, is gospel-deficient. No preacher of a Limited Atonement has any right to call himself a gospel preacher. He is, in fact, a half-gospel preacher – bidding lost men to appropriate a salvation for which God may or may not have made provision. But this is exactly what many seminary Presidents and professors are training their students to do. Why not call them half-gospel seminaries and thus become theologically consistent and intellectually honest?

The verbs “one died” and “all were dead” are both aorist active in tense. The aorist tense is punctiliar and signifies a point in time. A literal translation of “then were all dead” is “then all died.” It is a reference to the point in time at which humanity died spiritually, not necessarily to their subsequent spiritual state. That point in time is determinable by Romans 5:12: “Wherefore as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.” The verbs “death passed” and “all have sinned” are both aorist active tenses. The phrase “all have sinned” is literally “all sinned” at a point in time. When Adam disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, ALL of humanity sinned with him. As a consequence, death passed, at the same point in time, upon ALL of humanity. All men sinned and all men died in Adam. Christ died for all of them.

Paul's entire gospel enterprise was driven by the reasoned conclusion that Christ had died for ALL who died in Adam. In order for the Calvinist to argue for a Limited Atonement, he must of necessity argue that only the elect sinned with Adam. You'd have to question the rightmindedness of any man that would attempt to make that argument. Expositor R. C. H. Lenski is spot when he writes: "The Calvinistic efforts to limit this word to 'all of the elect' constitute one of the saddest chapters in exegesis. The scriptures shine with the 'all' of universality, but Calvinists do not see it. Their one effort is to find something that would justify them to reduce 'all' to 'some'." Lenski adds: "The real assurance for me that Christ died for me is this alone, that he died for absolutely all" (Interpretation of I & II Corinthians, p. 1029).

Reconcile is the verb **katallasso**, meaning “to bring into equal value or exchange two entities that were at variance.” The word was used of coin exchanges where equal value was in view. Paul said: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (5:19). That is, on the PROVISION side of the gospel, God did his part in dealing with our trespasses. The atoning blood of Christ was the propitiation (satisfaction) for the sins of humanity. Our sins were dealt with in full.

Sinful men are admonished: “Be ye reconciled to God” (5:20). The verb is passive voice, which signifies that sinners must allow themselves to BE reconciled by God. God does all the reconciling. Man does not and cannot reconcile himself to God. Sinners must be MADE the righteousness of God in Christ (5:21). It takes God's perfect righteousness to reconcile a sinful man who is at variance with God. When a man submits himself to the gospel, which is the APPROPRIATION side, he simply comes to the Father through the Son with empty hands, confessing that Christ is Lord and trusting Jesus to perform the work of salvation, doing for the sinner what he cannot do for himself. Faith is NOT a work. Saving faith is the appropriation of the

great reconciliatory work that God performed in Christ on the sinner's behalf. If God didn't PROVIDE it, the sinner can't APPROPRIATE it!

Under the Influence

One of the big problems on our national highways is drivers who get behind the wheel while under the influence of alcohol. While the phrase 'under the influence' typically has alcohol in mind, there are any number of drugs whose influence upon a driver could impair their ability to drive. The current national DUI standard is a blood-alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08. Members of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) are lobbying many states to reduce that threshold to 0.05. In technical terms, intoxication and impairment begin with one drink. In legal terms, the number of drinks required to reach the drunk driving threshold varies according to body mass. For example, a 160-pound man is considered 'under the influence' with just one 12-ounce beer. The same 160-pound man, after consuming four beers, will reach the 0.08 BAC threshold, at which point the law considers him 'legally drunk'.

The purpose for setting forth these statistics is to establish a secular baseline for a discussion about the consumption of alcohol and Christianity. In my early twenties, I developed an addiction to alcohol. I occasionally drank wine and hard liquor, but beer was my beverage of choice. It became a daily habit that I found myself unable to break. I don't know if I was alcoholic, but I sure felt like one. On January 5, 1971 the Lord delivered me from drink in response to my surrender to him. After God called me to the ministry, I preached 'Total Abstinence' as my position on alcohol. Since then I've modified my stance a bit. Rather than advocating total abstinence, I believe the Bible teaches total temperance (self-control) as a fruit of the Spirit.

The first mention of wine in scripture is not a pretty one. It involves Noah, who drank wine to a state of drunkenness and was naked ("uncovered") in his tent (Genesis 9:21-24). It's safe to say that Noah was 'under the influence' to the point of impairment. The word "wine" is the Hebrew **yayin**, from a root meaning "to effervesce." The picture is a 'bubbling up' or fermentation. The wine that Noah drank had a level of alcohol content. In the third mention of wine, the two virgin daughters of Lot gave him wine to drink for the express purpose of producing an intoxicated state so he could impregnate them by means of incestuous sex (Genesis 19:32-35). The scripture provides us with multiple examples of the dangers of wine consumed in excess. Proverbs 20:1 is classic: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Proverbs 31:4 says: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink." Kings and princes, in their positions of authority with corresponding duties, need to maintain unimpaired judgment at all times. The biblical warnings against the influence of alcohol as it pertains to wine and strong drink are unmistakable and irrefutable.

The second mention of wine adds another perspective. Melchizedek king of Salem "brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Genesis 14:17-20). In context, Abram had just finished rescuing his nephew Lot. Melchizedek provided Abram and his men with food and something to drink. The beverage was wine. While on the surface this may appear to be a contradiction, it is clear that the wine served by Melchizedek was in no way intended to produce intoxication. Abram consumed wine in moderation with the bread. It never

produced intoxication or impairment of judgment in Abram or his men. We must remind ourselves that the final arbiter as to the meaning of a text is the context in which a word is found. While the word 'yayin' may suggest fermentation, its context with Melchizedek could very well mean the king of Salem served Abraham and his men freshly squeezed, unfermented wine to go with their bread.

The matter of intoxication (impaired judgment) is a gravely serious business with God, who instructed Aaron and his priestly descendants: "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die" (Leviticus 10:9). God expected priests to have ALL their wits about them, unimpaired, in the business of Tabernacle service. A priest entering the tabernacle 'under the influence' of as much as a single cup of wine was struck dead by God. This OT prohibition has particular significance to Jesus as he hung on the cross. The scripture says: "And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not" (Mark 15:23). Some say Jesus refused the wine so as not to diminish his suffering. The primary reason he refused it is linked to what he was doing at the time. He was performing his duty as our High Priest. On his cross, Jesus literally became the mercy seat upon which divine blood was sprinkled. In refusing the wine, Jesus complied with Leviticus 10:9.

The New Testament uses two different Greek words translated "wine." The first is **oinos**. It appears to be the more general word for wine. The context in which it's used, as with **yayin**, determines whether it refers to new wine (unfermented) or to wine that has intoxicating qualities (fermented). It is used 33 times in the NT. The second is **gleukos** (Eng. "glucose"). It refers to sweet juice freshly pressed from grapes. Again, its context can demand "the more saccharine (and therefore highly inebriating) fermented win" (Strong's). It is used only 1 time in the NT.

The single NT use of 'gleukos' is in Acts 2:13. The context is Pentecost. The Holy Ghost had fallen upon the disciples (Galilaeans). They were speaking in foreign languages (tongues) unknown to them. Some observers of this phenomenon mocked, and said: "These men are full of new wine." The mockers saw the disciples operating under a heavenly influence. But they could only assign an earthly cause, that of wine. The context here demands the meaning of gleukos to be fermented wine. Assigning a meaning of freshly squeezed grape juice would insult the intelligence.

Now for a few usages of 'oinos'. Of John the Baptist, the Bible says: "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). The link with "strong drink" demands a fermented meaning of oinos. There would never be as much as a moment in John's life wherein he would experience impaired judgment or intoxication. He would have his wits about him at all times.

John 2:1-10 records for us the first miracle performed by Jesus in his earthly ministry. At a wedding feast he turned six waterpots of 2-3 firkins apiece into wine. Let's round off these numbers. A firkin is about 9 gallons. If the average size of those waterpots was 20 gallons, Jesus miraculously created 120 gallons of wine (oinos). The context demands a meaning of new (fresh) wine that has not undergone fermentation. The 120 gallons of wine produced by Jesus had NO alcoholic content whatsoever. At no time were the wedding guests at risk for

intoxication or judgment impairment. Arguing that Jesus made alcoholic or fermented wine in violation of OT precepts is an exercise in futility.

A key scripture is found in Ephesians 5:18-21: "And be not drunk with wine [oinos], wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." In this passage, Paul juxtaposes wine and the Spirit. The admonition has to do with the influence or control to which a man yields himself. The word "drunk" is **methusko** (to intoxicate, to become intoxicated). No specific level or degree of intoxication is implied. But we are told that intoxication due to wine is a breeding ground for excess.

The word "excess" is **asotia** (**a** = without + **sotia** = savability; lit., "without savability." Thayer's Lexicon adds a meaning of "incorrigibleness" (incapable of being corrected). The Bible does NOT teach here that a man intoxicated with wine (fermented drink) is unsaved or unsavable. What it DOES teach is that habitual intoxication lends itself to incorrigibility of spirit. That is, a regular coming 'under the influence' of wine (beer, strong drink) may be indicative of an underlying stubbornness that makes one unsavable, incapable of bending or yielding to Christ's authority.

An incorrigible spirit manifests itself when a professing Christian seeks to justify his drinking. Whereas a man 'under the influence' of wine is prone to incorrigibility, a man 'under the influence' of the Spirit is prone to engage in scripture, singing, melody making, thanksgiving and submission to the proper authorities in his life. The logical deduction is that one cannot be 'under the influence' of (intoxicated with) both wine and the Spirit at the same time. In Paul's juxtaposition, the two conditions are mutually exclusive. We know for a biblical fact that ANY behavior by a Christian, including intoxication, that grieves or quenches the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19) is SIN! The lost man who refuses to let go of his wine may one day find himself unsavable, incapable of yielding to and being corrected by Christ. The saved man who gives himself to wine and intoxication is certain to endure the corrective discipline of his heavenly Father.

The proper biblical question then for a Christian who insists that it's no sin to drink should be: "How many drinks can I consume before I'm considered 'under the influence' of or 'intoxicated' with whatever it is I'm drinking?" According to NTSB standards, the answer is: "One beer!" For our aforementioned 160-pound man, he'd be 'legally drunk' after four beers. Do you think God's standards are stricter or more lenient than man's standards? Do you think God's OK with you being "buzzed" as long as you're not driving a motor vehicle? If you knew Jesus considered you to be 'intoxicated' after a single beer and 'legally drunk' after four, how would that knowledge affect your view of a six-pack? If an 'under the influence' or 'legally drunk' condition fails to meet YOUR 'sin' threshold, how drunk (intoxicated) would you have to be before it became sin for YOU? Remember, for the OT priest, entering the Tabernacle 'under the influence' of just one dose of wine was enough for God to strike him dead!

One of the many qualifications for a bishop (pastor) is that he is "not given to wine" (1 Timothy

3:3; Titus 1:7). The phrase “given to wine” is the translation of **paroinos** (**para** = to the side of, **oinos** = wine). It literally means one who keeps wine alongside, one who lingers with his wine and is thus given to wine. The man 'given to wine' comes 'under the influence' of wine and thus suffers from impaired judgment. Such a man is disqualified from being a pastor. Questions arise: (1) “Does coming 'under the influence' of wine mean one is given to wine?” (2) Is it possible for a man to consume wine and still meet the biblical qualification for pastor?” Some might say the time taken to consume as much as one glass of wine constitutes lingering time. If it IS possible for a man to drink a little wine without coming 'under the influence' of wine and having one's judgment impaired, then yes, that man is still qualified to serve as pastor. After all, Paul instructed Timothy to “use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23). As it pertains to deacons, Paul specified they likewise should be men “not given to much wine” (3:8).

The references here are clearly to fermented wine. No man, whether pastor or deacon, would be in any jeopardy of intoxication for consuming a gallon of fresh, unfermented grape juice. It's worth noting that the medicinal value of wine lies in the grape itself, not alcohol content. The oinos to which Paul refers in these contexts may very well refer to unfermented wine. But for the sake of argument, if Paul had fermented wine in mind, we can be certain Timothy would not have become intoxicated by using the 'little' amount Paul recommended. I know of pastors who have a glass of wine with their meals but never become intoxicated. There are churches around the world that use fermented wine in observance of the Lord's Supper where participants never become intoxicated. It is an exercise in futility to use these pastoral passages to justify general wine (alcohol) consumption. We're talking about fermented drink in the neighborhood of a few ounces, maybe a shot of NyQuil, not a six-pack of Miller Lite.

The preponderance of biblical testimony warns against wine and strong drink. By extrapolation, we can include any fermented beverage. The Bible may not yield itself to a doctrine of total abstinence. But it DOES make an ironclad case for no 'intoxication' and no 'under the influence' drinking. A Christian, to whom God has given a NT priesthood, who seeks to justify his or her drinking, social or otherwise, is mired in deception. Fortunately, the God of all grace and longsuffering gives addicted saints the opportunity to be delivered from addiction to drink. God's OT priests, on the other hand, never got a second chance!

Here's the bottom line: The man who regularly, habitually yields himself to the influence of alcoholic beverages CANNOT yield himself to the control of the Spirit. Any man who claims he can do both at the same time is deceived. Such a man is headed for 'excess', unsavability or incorrigibility, the mark of a lost man!

What Must I Do to Be Lost?

This is a question worthy of a response from a theological perspective. The world often gets caught up in discussions about what sins will send a man to hell. Drinking alcohol and getting drunk typically top the list, along with adultery, fornication, smoking, lying, stealing, cursing and lusting over material things. In short, violations of God's Law, whether overt or covert, are enough to send a man into everlasting damnation. While there's an element of truth to that, it fails theologically to provide the proper view.

The natural man needs do NOTHING to be lost. He's lost already inasmuch as he/she is born into a state of spiritual death and remains in a state of unbelief. Jesus said: "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). So the question, "What must I do to be lost?" is more correctly posed as, "What must I do to STAY lost?" A man or woman who lives in total rebellion against God's Law does not get MORE lost for doing so.

The Law of God is the natural man's friend, but not in the way he might think. The natural man has three great needs: (1) the forgiveness of his sins, (2) a righteousness that God will accept, and (3) spiritual life. The Law is NOT able to meet any of these three needs (Galatians 3:21). So while the natural man may consider the Law to be a measuring stick, the degree of compliance to which will determine his eternal destiny, he is deluded in so thinking. For the Law CANNOT give eternal life. Even if we assume (hypothetically so) that the natural man could one day achieve perfect compliance to the Law, he would STILL be spiritually dead and in need of forgiveness for past sins.

How then is the Law the natural man's friend? The Law exposes the sinfulness of the man, so that sin becomes exceeding sinful (Romans 7:13). The Law is a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24-25). Its divine design is to expose the natural man's spiritual destitution, prompt him to look outside of himself, come to Jesus Christ by faith with empty hands and trust the Lord to save him. This is the lawful use of the Law (1 Timothy 1:8).

Misgivings about what sins can send a person to hell stem primarily from a gross misunderstanding of grace. When Adam sinned and died spiritually, the entire human race, by God's reckoning, sinned and died with him (Romans 5:12). In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul set forth this theological truth: "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Paul argued that all who died with Adam were died for by Jesus Christ. God's grace to sinners, who are dead in trespasses and sins, flows from the Gospel, the death of Jesus Christ for our sins and his resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). If one argues that Christ did not die for ALL, he must also argue that ALL did not die with Adam. If one is dull enough to attempt either one of those two arguments, he must also cede that there is NO Gospel and NO saving grace available to those for whom Christ did not die.

The first two offspring of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, were born spiritually dead. The events of Genesis 4 confirm that Adam taught the principle of blood sacrifice (forfeiture of life by a

substitute) to his sons. Acceptance by God was contingent upon a proper approach by blood. Abel sought and found acceptance by compliance to this principle. But Cain sought acceptance by his own self-styled method, which God rejected. A loving God reasoned with Cain – the first human to breach the womb of a woman – to do the right thing and find acceptance. But Cain rejected the divine appeal of grace and subsequently murdered his brother. Cain was not lost because he killed his brother. He STAYED lost because he rejected God's revelation and remained in a state of unbelief and spiritual death.

Unbelief is what sends a man to hell, keeps him lost and separated from God. While it's true that God will judge lost and saved men alike according to their works done in the flesh, those works are not ultimately determinative of their eternal destiny. Again, Jesus said: "He that believeth is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already...He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:18, 36).

The apostle Paul, in response to a lost jailer's query, "What must I do to be saved?" answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!" (Acts 16:31). The salvation in view was first a matter of justification (the forgiveness of sins, imputation of Christ's righteousness), then sanctification (growth in grace and conformity to the Christ's image) and ultimately glorification (final perfection in God's presence). All of this comes from God's grace, God doing for sinners that which they CANNOT do for themselves.

Since there is NOTHING a natural man can do outside of faith in Jesus to save himself, it follows that there is NOTHING a natural man can do outside of Christ to lose himself. He is lost already. The answer then to the question, "What must I do to be lost?" can be stated with a single word: NOTHING!"

The Wilderness and the Will of God

There are few occurrences in the life of a believer more perplexing than a wilderness experience, an unexpected hardship or trial, that comes as they walk in the perfect will of God. Wilderness episodes usually involve some degree of deprivation, whether finances, health, friends or comforts of life. But for the child of God, there is one valuable possession that no wilderness can deprive him of, and that is the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). That doesn't mean that believers don't experience 'perceptions' of love deprivation from time to time. But the believer must learn to allow the truth of God, divine reality, to bring into subjection any and all of his or her perceptions.

Wilderness experiences have no set time frame. They can last a few days, a week or so, months, years and perhaps a lifetime if the loss of a loved one is involved. Joseph, for example, spent a over a decade in prison and was deprived of his freedom for maintaining sexual purity. John was banished to the isle of Patmos for his faithfulness to Christ. The prophet Jeremiah spent hard time in a miry dungeon for his faithfulness in preaching the truth to Israel. Then there was the wilderness experience Jesus endured on the Cross, feeling 'forsaken' by his God and Father, while he became sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Those six agonizing hours of pain for the Lord Jesus translated to an eternity of bliss in the very presence of God for all who would come to the Father by him. For Joseph, John, Jeremiah and Jesus, all endured wilderness experiences as they walked in the perfect will of God.

Our Lord's earthly ministry came to an end in a wilderness of suffering. But it began in a wilderness of testing. As soon as Jesus exited the baptismal waters and received a word of divine approval from his Father, Mark says: "And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him" (Mark 1:12-13). The verb "driveth" is instructive. Mark could have used a simple aorist (or past) to describe the action of the Spirit (i.e., "drove" him). He might have used the imperfect to add a linear or continuous action (i.e., "kept on driving" him). But Mark used the present, as if he is watching the Spirit in real time driving the Lord Jesus into the wilderness (i.e., "is driving" him).

The verb "driveth" is the Greek **ekballo** (**ek** = "out", **ballo** = "to throw, cast"). The Spirit literally took Jesus and threw him out into the wilderness, almost violently. For over four thousand years of human history, Satan had had his way with mankind. The first man, Adam, went down in defeat to the wiles of Satan while enjoying pristine Garden conditions. The second Adam, the Lord Jesus, was on a mission to destroy the devil. He would meet Satan in the worst of conditions, and exit the wilderness victorious. In my mind, the Spirit was excited to set up this encounter and nail man's archenemy to the proverbial wall. The wilderness (desolate place) Jesus endured consisted of three elements: temptation, wild beasts and angelic help. When God's people endure a wilderness experience, they should expect to experience the same three elements.

The verb "tempted" is a present passive participle (lit., "the one being continually tempted") from

the Greek **peirazo**, “to try or test, to assay” (good or bad sense). From the perspective of Satan, he may have indeed solicited Jesus to succumb to his wiles. But from God's perspective, he was there to reveal, bring to the fore, the spotless, divine character of Christ. Jesus told his disciples: “For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30). Jesus said this anticipating the second wilderness, the Cross, in his immediate future. In this first wilderness experience, Satan may have solicited Jesus to commit sin, but there was no basis in Jesus from which sin could come. For you and me, a wilderness may come with temptation. Satan DOES have something in us to which he can appeal. But there is no solicitation involved on God's part; only Satan's. From God's perspective, a wilderness is a time of refinement, to assay our faith, to show it off, to build it. Can you say Job?

The phrase “wild beasts” sounds a note of hostility. Although Jesus was WITH them, he was in no way intimidated BY them. Those wild beasts were no more a threat to Jesus than the lions were to Daniel or the fiery furnace was to the three Hebrew children – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Likewise the wild beasts (metaphorically speaking) have no power to harm the child of God UNLESS a sovereign God, for his own purposes, allows harm to come. The biggest danger to a child of God who undergoes pain and suffering while in the perfect will of God is NOT what might be lost in the process, but the resultant spirit that harbors resentment, bitterness, and blames God for the loss, questions whether God really loves them. Job is the classic example of a believer who loses it all and STILL blesses the name of the Lord, refusing to curse his God.

The verb “ministered” is from **diakoneo**, (**dia** = “through”, **koneo** = “to serve.” Our word “deacon” is a derivative of this root. The prefix denotes thoroughness of service. In other words, the angels gave to Jesus everything he needed, everything they could give him, to help him endure his wilderness ordeal. The verb is imperfect, meaning they kept on providing succor and assistance. The angels knew Jesus in his pre-incarnation splendor. I'd say they were especially motivated to help. But we shouldn't think they would be any less motivated to assist us. Concerning the work of angels, the writer of Hebrews asked this question: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). The heirs of salvation are joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). As joint-heirs, the angels for Jesus' sake have every bit as much interest in our success as they did in that of the Lord Jesus! If that doesn't encourage you, then what will?

The wilderness and the will of God often find themselves as fellow travelers in the Christian life. We as believers should not be unduly alarmed to find ourselves from time to time simultaneously in both. But be forearmed. Just know that (1) God is up to something that transcends satanic wiles, (2) nothing you confront in your wilderness can harm you without God's express permission, and (3) heavenly help is abundantly available to you as an heir of salvation and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ!

Witness for the Defense

When someone becomes a 'person of interest' in a criminal investigation, there is no greater asset for that individual than to have a witness who can provide an iron-clad alibi regarding one's whereabouts at the time and place the crime was committed. If you're being considered a 'person of interest' in a bank robbery, for example, that took place on the east side of town at 10 a.m., and a witness, spouse or good friend, can place you on the west side of town at the time of the robbery, police authorities would likely start looking elsewhere for the perpetrator. Every person of interest in a criminal investigation desires nothing more than a defense witness who can provide exculpatory evidence of innocence.

Criminal activity is not limited to the physical realm. From the first century A.D., infidels operating in the spiritual realm have assaulted the gospel of Jesus Christ. In some cases, they portray Jesus as a mere man whose impeccable character and martyrdom earned him an elevated status of Godhood. For these false teachers, the gospel is the good news that sinful men who follow the example of Christ may also achieve the status. Others who affirm the Deity of Christ alter the conditions upon which God saves man: namely, to some measure based on one's works or meritorious acts. Yet others seek to limit the scope of Christ's death to some rather than all. By limiting the scope of Christ's death, these false teachers unwittingly limit the gospel itself. For if Jesus died for some, and not all, there is no gospel for those excluded from the atonement.

The apostle Paul affirmed that he was "set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). The word "defence" is **apologia** (**apo**=from, **logia**=verbal word). The word signifies a verbal defence, speech offered in defence of something. The English words 'apology' and 'apologetics' have their roots in this word. Apologetics is not the art of saying "I'm sorry", but the art of crafting and verbalizing arguments to make the case for a position. Paul was perhaps the first real Christian apologist. Defending (making a case for) the gospel was job one for Paul. Luke's record of Paul's travels in Acts and all his epistles, especially those we call prison epistles, are replete with examples of Paul making a case for the gospel, both verbally and in writing. He was therefore able to declare unequivocally: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16).

The word "set" is **keimai**, "to put or place in a particular location." Its use here is metaphorical. The verb is present tense, passive voice. Literal translation: "God is continually placing me in locations of his choosing wherein his gospel and supporting arguments might take center stage." That's quite a perspective, is it not? Whether it was Mars Hill in Athens, Jewish synagogues, jail at Philippi, Mediterranean shipwreck or Roman prison, Paul envisioned them all as opportunities to make the case for Christ and his gospel. How does that mindset stack up with what we perceive when a little trouble comes our way? Do we accept the fact that God so located us for his gospel's sake? Or do we take the occasion to lament our circumstances with little or no thought of a greater gospel purpose?

The obvious question: "What does a Christian need to defend when he defends the gospel? From a high level, he needs to defend the following: (1) The bad news that sin and death

passed through the loins of Adam to ALL his descendants. ALL men are born into this world spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. (2) In order to provide a redemptive remedy, God incarnated himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, lived a sinless life, died a vicarious death for ALL who died in Adam, and arose from the dead the third day. (3) Jesus saves to the uttermost ALL those who believe on him, trust him to save them from their sins. In every age, there are those who downplay the peril of sin, attack the deity of Christ, attack the nature of the atonement, limit the scope of Christ's atonement and or alter the basis upon which God grants salvation (i.e., faith plus this or that). One who sets himself for the defense of the gospel will become an apologist for all of these gospel tenets.

An apologist for Christ's deity typically does so against gainsayers outside of Christianity. An apologist for grace alone by faith alone can find detractors among both the saved and lost. Sometimes genuinely saved individuals are confused about the basis of salvation because of past erroneous influences. An apologist for Christ's atonement will likewise find opposition coming from within their own ranks as well as the lost. Many believe Christ died as an example, an influence, a model of the righteous, selfless life. They believe that if one follows the example of Christ and lives a selfless life, he too can be saved and resurrected victoriously at the last day.

Others believe Christ died as a substitute for SOME but not ALL sinners. The gospel problem with limited-atonement doctrine is there is NO gospel to those for whom Jesus did NOT die. If Jesus did not atone FOR your sins, neither can God save you FROM your sins. Inviting Jim to believe on Jesus for salvation IF Jesus did not atone for Jim's sins is a matter of evangelistic fraud. For it represents God as offering what he cannot provide.

If you, like the apostle Paul, are SET for the defense of the gospel, be prepared to set yourself against those who gainsay the deity of Christ, those who mix works with faith as the basis for grace and those who pervert the nature of the atonement or limit its scope. You'll encounter members of the last group in Presidents' offices at Baptist seminaries, college professorships, pulpits and Sunday School lecterns, church pews, among Christian friends and perhaps at your own family dinner table.